



Welcome to *Question of the Week*. Each week the Montana School Boards Association will provide a briefing on a matter facing Montana's school districts. If you would like to submit a question, [please contact MTSBA](#).

Question: What resources are available to school districts in Montana to improve school and student safety security?

Response:

This week's Question of the Week is written in the aftermath of the recent school shooting at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas. The Directors and Staff of the Montana School Boards Association mourn with the rest of the Nation in the tragic loss of human life, the impact on families of the victims, and the widespread grief that reverberates in communities throughout our Nation at a time like this. As the name Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas, joins others that have become added to our collective consciousness along with Columbine, Sandy Hook, Parkland, and others, we find ourselves again confronting the significant challenges in ensuring safe learning environments in the Nation's public schools and wondering what we can do to support those efforts.

While Montana has been more fortunate than most by the numbers, we have not remained untouched by this unfortunate trend. According to the Center for Homeland Defense and Security, there have been 8 school shootings in Montana since 1970 with at least nine people injured or killed. Among these tragedies, some occurred on the campus immediately before, during or following school. In 1986, for example, a student displeased with a grade went to his classroom at Fergus County High School with an intent of shooting his teacher. Instead, he shot and killed the teacher's substitute and then wounded two students and a principal as he fled the building. In 1994, Jeremy Bullock (former Governor Bullock's nephew) became the unintended victim of a school shooting at Margaret Leary Elementary in Butte.

The Montana School Boards Association and our members have successfully spearheaded efforts over the years to ensure adequate resources and flexibility to support school and student safety and security. We have made substantial progress, particularly over the last decade. The lasting changes to the law that we have passed beginning in the 2013 Legislative Session and continuing from session to session thereafter provide school boards and communities with more options to ensure school and student safety and security than ever before.

As our members begin to revisit this issue and initiate discussions in their communities regarding how best to ensure safe and effective learning environments, the starting point for any renewed discussions regarding school and student safety and security in Montana's public schools should include a thorough knowledge of these changes in the law and the full range of options to which schools have access in addressing issues of school and student safety and security.

Legislation in Montana

2013 Legislature

In the wake of the Sandy Hook tragedy, which took place the month before the 2013 Session began, MTSBA went to work to improve school board access to resources and authority over school and student safety and security. We made substantial gains through passage of Senate Bill 348 (Senator Fred Thomas). That bill:

1. First introduced the concept of school board authority to transfer any state or local funds needed to improve school and student safety and security.
2. Expanded school leader access to information in the hands of law enforcement regarding threats to school safety.
3. Created and required counties to form interdisciplinary child information and school safety teams, including membership by the superintendent in each school district in each county.
4. Required the youth court to provide notice to a school regarding students who are youth offenders.
5. Added public school building designs and safety plans to the list of documents exempt from disclosure under public record laws.

2017 Legislature

Senate Bill 348 was originally created as a temporary law, but MTSBA later drafted and helped pass successor legislation (Senate Bill 307, Senator Jones), that made its provisions permanent. MTSBA passed Senate Bill 307 in the 2017 Session. In addition to making provisions of SB 348 permanent, SB 307 first introducing allowed use of major maintenance funds (a newly created revenue stream of over \$23 million annually) to improve school and student safety and security.

2019 Legislature

In the 2019 Legislature, MTSBA drafted and helped pass Senate Bill 92 (Senator Salomon), broadening the definition of school and student safety and security to move beyond simply "hardening the facility" and allowing schools to use funds for school and student safety and security to address some of the root causes of school violence. SB 92 also created a new voted levy for school safety and security, allowing communities to provide additional resources to meet the challenge of safety and security in our public schools. The new expanded definition allowed expenditures on school resource officers, counselors, and other staff and consultants assisting the district with improvements to school and student safety and security. SB 92 also specifically added permissible expenditures for "programs to support school and student safety and security, including but not limited to active shooter training, threat assessments, and restorative justice."

MTSBA also drafted and helped pass Senate Bill 35 in the 2019 Session. SB 35 added school boards in each county as mandatory, standing members of the county and regional interdisciplinary child information and school safety teams, ensuring elected school board access to information regarding potential threats to school safety throughout Montana.

2021 Legislature

In the 2021 Legislature, MTSBA drafted and helped pass House Bill 572 (Representative Skees), authorizing schools to employ school marshals to help address school and student safety and security.

It is notable that MTSBA has always worked on a nonpartisan/bipartisan basis when it comes to school and student safety and security. As significant as these bills were, we achieved strong, bipartisan passage rates in each instance over the years:

1. Senate Bill 348, 2013 Session – Passed 79-21 and 45-5
2. Senate Bill 307, 2017 Session – Passed 78-21 and 44-4
3. Senate Bill 92, 2019 Session – Passed 71-26 and 48-2
4. Senate Bill 35, 2019 Session – Passed 80-18 and 48-2
5. House Bill 572, 2021 Session – Passed 69-29 and 33-17

In spite of the passage of the legislation outlined above, there is no panacea. The difficulty in finding solutions to this issue does not relieve us of the obligation to try and makes it even more important that school board members revisit and reconvene communities in ongoing strategic discussions regarding what we can do together to ensure the safest and most effective learning environments possible in Montana's public schools.

MTSBA Resources

In addition to the summaries of legislation above, MTSBA has annually presented on topics related to school and student safety and security, including through our School Safety Symposiums. Although our school safety symposiums have been fee-based events, we are changing that today, both as to access to video archives of past trainings and to future School Safety Symposiums. You can now access these resources without charge. We have set up a dedicated community with links to videos, presentations, summaries of model policies, and checklists. The community, [School and Student Safety and Security](#) can be found by [clicking here](#) (you will need to be logged into [mtsba.org](#)).

Other Resources

In addition to MTSBA resources above, below are additional resources that may help you as you initiate discussions in each of your communities.

1. The American School Counselor Association has put together a comprehensive list of resources that can be found here: [After a School Shooting Resources - American School Counselor Association \(ASCA\)](#)
2. Resources from the National Center for School Crisis and Bereavement
 1. [Guidelines for Responding to the Death of a Student or School Staff](#)
 2. [Talking to Children About School Shootings](#)
 3. [Talking to Children About Terrorist Attacks and School and Community Shootings in the News](#)
3. National Association of School Psychologists: [Culturally Competent Crisis Response: Information for Crisis Teams](#)
4. National Association of State Boards of Education: [Student Safety and Wellness](#)
5. Resources from the American Psychological Association
 1. [Managing Your Distress in the Aftermath of a Shooting](#)
 2. [Helping Your Child Manage Distress in the Aftermath of a Shooting](#)
6. Resources from the United States Department of Education
 1. [Tips for Helping Students Recovering From Traumatic Events](#)
 2. [Creating Emergency Management Plans](#)
 3. [Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools Technical Assistance Center](#)
 4. [Practical Information on Crisis Planning: A Guide for Schools and Communities](#)
7. National PTA: [Discussing Hate and Violence with Your Children](#)

Conclusion

It is important to point out that despite the best efforts of our public schools to keep students and staff safe, threats of violence may still occur. Human error, communication gaps, and inconsistencies in responding to threats can have a devastating impact. No matter what one may believe is the right solution to violence in public schools, school and community leaders must coordinate their efforts to promote school safety.

There are many factors that impact a school district's ability to minimize threats of violence, including but not limited to:

- Prioritizing regular reviews and updates of the District's Safety Plan
- Taking measures to secure access points to school buildings
- Taking all threats seriously
- Reporting threats to and collaborating with law enforcement
- Ensuring that the District and other officials are acting on correct information
- Preparing our students and staff on what to do in the event of an act of violence at school, and as noted above
- Creating a culture and expectation for students and staff that if they "see something, say something"

Each student needs Montana's public schools to be safe for learning, growing, playing, and exploring. School districts meet that need. There are measures school leaders can take to maximize the resources for school security. Additionally, there are legal options for schools to coordinate with law enforcement to ensure students in need of assistance receive the early intervention and care that they need. Finally, there are policies and procedures that, when adopted, implemented, and reviewed, can help a school district identify and mitigate potential threats to student safety. If you have questions about school safety or security, [please contact MTSBA](#).

Thank you for reading the MTSBA Question of the Week.

Montana School Boards Association (MTSBA) has designed these materials to provide helpful information regarding topics and best practices on issues concerning the administration and governance of Montana K-12 public schools. These materials are for informational purposes only and not for the purpose of providing legal advice. Should the recipient of these materials desire legal advice on any of the topics or information contained herein, MTSBA recommends that the recipient make a specific request for legal advice.

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