

ACTION: The New York State Legislature can:

- *Establish a new, expense-driven categorical state aid designation, “School Security Aid” to partially reimburse school districts for expenditures related to school security in a wealth-sensitive manner.*
- *Expedite the review period for submission of Smart Schools funding to assist districts in making essential upgrades to safety-related items within districts.*
- *Allow expenditures for school safety to be included as expenses that are exempt from the tax levy limit calculation.*

CONCLUSION

A recent survey of school superintendents statewide indicates that half of respondents have rising concerns about the needs of our students in nonacademic areas, including health, safety and mental health. The Suffolk County School Superintendents Association is committed to continue working with partners at the federal, state, county, municipal, private and nonprofit levels. The need to ensure safe and secure school environments for all cannot be met without robust cooperation.

ABOUT THE SCSSA

In 1954, several school superintendents formed what is now the Suffolk County School Superintendents Association, an organization dedicated to supporting school superintendents and students across Suffolk County. The primary goals of building camaraderie and improving communication among superintendents were the cornerstones of their efforts and are as relevant today as they were more than 60 years ago. The membership of the association includes the chief school administrator of every school district and educational service agency (71) in the county, enrolling a total of 242,000 pre-K-12 students.

OUR VISION AND MISSION

The purpose of the SCSSA is summarized in our vision statement, “Informing and supporting school superintendents for the benefit of public education.”

The association’s mission statement expands upon this as follows: “The mission of the Suffolk County School Superintendents Association is to promote and support the superintendency as a profession for the benefit of public education. Toward this end, the organization will practice and foster the highest level of professional ethics.”

For more information about the SCSSA, visit www.suffolksuperintendents.org.



**SUFFOLK COUNTY
SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS ASSOCIATION
BLUEPRINT FOR ACTION TO ENHANCE SCHOOL SAFETY**

Noblesville West Middle School, Santa Fe High School and Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School are now on the list of American public schools that may be better known as crime scenes rather than as educational institutions. These are just three of the 23 school shootings that have occurred in the first five months of 2018.

For members of the Suffolk County School Superintendents Association (SCSSA), these events recall horrific memories of the Newtown tragedy and represent an unacceptable reality for American schools. We reflect on the heightened level of interdependence between our public schools, often the cornerstone of Long Island’s communities, and our law enforcement and mental health agencies. This relationship has evolved and intensified over the years due to both legislative intervention and the increased complexity of societal and community issues. The incident that first changed the nature of the relationship occurred 20 years ago when two Columbine H.S. students massacred their classmates in Colorado. Prior to Columbine, interactions between schools and police on Long Island, for the most part, centered on matters such as vandalism, graffiti, the assignment of crossing guards, bomb scares and an occasional drug-related arrest. These incidents were handled on a “case-by-case” basis and practices varied among districts and departments.

Appropriately, that changed with New York State’s legislative response to Columbine. The Safe Schools Against Violence in Education Act (SAVE) was signed into law in 2000. SAVE, which has since been supplemented, required school districts to implement a number of measures, but most prominently, safety plans at the building and district levels and to adopt Codes of Conduct for the maintenance of order. The importance of the relationship between the police, mental health providers and schools grew as the stakes were raised and as we worked together to implement SAVE. The unthinkable required stakeholders to plan for eventualities that seemed impossible just a few months earlier. The problems of the past paled in comparison to the concerns about the future.

Today, the partnership among schools, law enforcement and state, local and federal governments is more important than ever to deal with issues of national prominence, school security, the opioid crisis and gang violence. There is a mutual benefit to this partnership; working together is the only way to address these complex problems. With this partnership in mind, the SCSSA has developed “A Blueprint for Action to Enhance School Security,” a five-point plan identifying actionable next steps. The Blueprint includes the following:

1. INVEST IN THE SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICER (SRO) PROGRAM.
2. ADOPT LEGISLATION THAT ENHANCES CAMPUS SAFETY.
3. MAKE “SAFE” THE LAW OF THE LAND.
4. SUPPORT THE SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL AND MENTAL HEALTH OF CHILDREN.
5. PROVIDE INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT TO FINANCE SCHOOL SAFETY.

Any questions regarding this document should be directed to scssaexecdirector@gmail.com.

ENHANCING SCHOOL SAFETY – A BLUEPRINT FOR ACTION

Addressing the national priority of school safety demands bold action. Our national response must evolve beyond messages of “thoughts and prayers” and handwringing about our inability to stop incidents of school violence, shootings and social isolation from taking place. This issue must galvanize our elected officials in Washington, state capitals and local communities as a call to action. By rejecting school violence as the new normal, we have the chance to seize the grief and the anger of this overwhelming moment and act now – in meaningful ways.

A primary objective of the Suffolk County School Superintendents Association is to assure a safe, secure educational environment in the delivery of high-quality programs for all students in Suffolk County. This longstanding goal of the association occurs through the dissemination of information related to state initiatives, school safety and professional opportunities for members and other school leaders. To that end, we provide the following Blueprint for Action to promote sensible school safety measures.

We look forward to working with our elected officials at the federal, state and local levels as well as our law enforcement partners and mental health providers to fully implement this blueprint.

I. INVEST IN THE SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICER (SRO) PROGRAM

Clearly, coordination between law enforcement and schools is more important than ever. We have worked closely in addressing a range of school and student safety issues. Using SROs as a school safety liaison for matters such as emergency planning and emerging issues like opioid abuse and gang-related concerns has proven successful.

We support an expansion of the current SRO program to continue this valuable partnership at the county, town and village levels. SRO Liaison Officers should be available to schools countywide. While we understand that embedding School Resource Officers in each and every school building daily is not feasible, expanding access to this resource as broadly as possible throughout our school system is a worthy objective that we support and continue to work toward.

ACTION: The SCSSA, SCPD and TOWN and VILLAGE PDs can:

- *Develop a “Roles and Responsibilities” statement for SROs.*
- *Establish consistent best practices in lockdown, sheltering and school hardening protocols.*
- *Coordinate training and educational activities for SROs.*
- *Ensure SROs work with existing school safety officers to increase training opportunities.*
- *Establish communication protocols between SROs and school districts.*
- *Involve SROs in the annual review of school and district safety plans.*
- *Establish guidelines to integrate the SRO into the school community.*
- *Expand technological access to schools through CCTV and one-button lockdown abilities.*
- *Expand technological solutions that expedite emergency response in crisis.*

II. ADOPT LEGISLATION THAT ENHANCES CAMPUS SAFETY

Legislative action in two key areas can make school campuses physically safer. Judges must have the power to set bail at their discretion when facing a threat to school safety and school districts must have the ability to appeal their designation as a polling location.

Limiting a judge’s ability to set bail in cases related to a threat against school safety could jeopardize student safety pending the defendant’s court date. Prosecutors must be able to argue to a judge that bail should be set higher or denied altogether when a threat to school safety is a factor. In Hampton Bays, a man was charged with stalking and criminal possession of a semi-automatic weapon on school grounds. In Oceanside, a man was arrested after telling school employees he would return from his car with a gun. In both instances, the judge could not consider the threat to school safety when setting bail.

When school buildings are used as polling locations, they are open to the public and schools are unable to track or control the access to their facilities. Election Law prohibits the ability of a district to appeal the designation as a polling location, especially in instances where the district has a concern about safety. As the law stands, other public buildings do have the right to an appeal process.

ACTION: The New York State Legislature can:

- *Amend the relevant sections of NYS Criminal Procedure Law dealing with setting bail, including Sections 510 and 530, to include “red-flag” provisions.*
- *Amend Election Law Section 4-104(3) to add public school buildings to the list of groups that can file written requests of cancellation.*

III. MAKE “SAFE” THE LAW OF THE LAND

New York State passed sensible gun laws in the aftermath of the horrific Sandy Hook School shooting. This bipartisan measure includes many of the provisions that our national leaders can legislate today, including assault weapons prohibition, background checks, ammunition sales, mental health screenings and more. While imperfect when passed, a series of amendments have strengthened and improved the law. We are certain that critics can identify several concerns about the law, but none that cannot be resolved.

ACTION: The United States Congress can:

- *Use the NYS SAFE Act as a template for federal action.*

IV. SUPPORT THE SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL AND MENTAL HEALTH OF CHILDREN

Strong and consistent responses to violent incidents and crises are critical, but there are many proactive steps that can be taken to support students, families and schools with tools necessary to identify risk, provide early intervention services for kids and families, and act. To that end, we propose the establishment of a resource guide and funding plan that will connect best-practice programs to school districts and community organizations.

ACTION: The county, state and local school districts should work together to:

- *Provide Mental Health Education Literacy initiatives to successfully integrate the state requirements for mental health education in schools.*
- *Require the use of social-emotional screening programs to help identify emotional instability and apply appropriate interventions at an early stage.*
- *Incorporate Sandy Hook Promise Training Programs to address gun violence.*
- *Replicate Suffolk County’s G.R.E.A.T. Program (Gang Resistance Education and Training) to empower students to make healthy associations.*
- *Pursue research-based programs that address substance abuse disorder and addiction to address the county’s opioid crisis.*
- *Explore the concept of social media monitoring to identify at-risk behaviors and flags for individuals who need support and intervention.*
- *Pursue advocacy to address “red-flag” provisions related to gun access in the home.*

V. PROVIDE INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT TO FINANCE SCHOOL SAFETY

In 2017-18, financial support for public schools came from three sources: the federal government (roughly 4 percent), state aid (roughly 42 percent), and locally raised revenue (roughly 55 percent). The property tax levy cap restricts the amount by which locally raised revenues can increase from year to year.

At the same time, with each issue of school violence, schools take additional steps to improve school security. Often, we have seen that the most innovative and substantial improvements to school safety – both in program and in structure – happen in districts with the financial means to do so.