



**OHIO
CHILDREN'S
BUDGET**
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ISSUE BRIEF

ISSUE: School Safety Funding

Tragic, high-profile school shootings nationally and in Ohio have made school safety issues a priority. However, the majority of school safety investments fund ineffective, punitive approaches to stop violence as it occurs (e.g. metal detectors) and invest too little in research-based interventions to detect, intervene in, or prevent incidents early. Further, these punitive measures increase the likelihood of violence and stoke student fear and isolation. Ohio must spend school safety funds on proven approaches to keep our state's students, teachers, and schools truly safe.

Policy

In 1999, the Columbine High School shooting changed the way students, teachers, parents, and communities thought about school safety. Although several high profile incidents have occurred, data shows that schools continue to be the safest place for children.

In July 2018, the Ohio legislature passed HB 318, which allocated \$12 million to school safety funding which can be used for 1) School Resource Officer certification and training, 2) active shooter/school safety training, 3) educational resources, and 4) training to identify and assist students with mental health issues. HB 318 also includes \$2 million in grants for schools to improve school climates and support social-emotional learning.

Challenge

While physical security is a necessary part of school safety, punitive safety approaches can negatively impact students and schools. Research shows that increasing security personnel and hardware can increase school crime, disruption, and disorder while making some students feel more afraid. In addition, increased law enforcement or security in schools has not prevented – and will not prevent – all school violence and can result in more arrests, charges, and referrals of students (particularly students of color) to courts for relatively minor behaviors. Finally, the FBI has recognized that using out-of-school suspensions and expulsions to respond to negative behaviors can further alienate students and may increase the possibility of a violent incident occurring.



Opportunity

There are many data- and research-driven, effective approaches to school safety that improve not only safety outcomes, but also improve overall school functioning. These include:

- Focusing on building a positive school climate by implementing Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS). Creating a positive school climate helps students feel safe, supported, and more connected. Further, students who are more connected and develop trusting relationships with teachers and staff are less likely to engage in negative behaviors and more likely to succeed academically. As mentioned above, HB 318 included \$2 million in grants to improve school climates by implementing PBIS or supporting social-emotional learning.
- Increasing routine access for students to support staff – including psychologists, school nurses, social workers, and counselors – to identify students who may be showing signs of threatening behavior or school disengagement. These trained professionals can work with students either in schools or communities. To create routine access, Ohio must increase the number of these professionals – who ideally would reflect student demographics – and place them in easy-to-access locations.
- As recommended by the FBI and Secret Service, developing a threat assessment approach to school safety that includes: 1) an individual trained to evaluate threats and 2) a protocol with clear policies and a designated staff person who can call together a multidisciplinary team to respond. Ohio recently received federal funding to help implement threat assessment protocols.

Support Child Well-Being: Recommendations

To truly invest in safety in Ohio schools, Ohio's next budget must follow the recommendations put forward by Ohio's teachers, students, and organizations, including:

- Appropriating funds for schools to meaningfully implement PBIS and social-emotional learning.
- Increasing student access to trained staff who can provide social-emotional support for and interventions with students, including psychologists, school nurses, counselors, and social workers.
- Developing, implementing, and training staff on nuanced, multi-disciplinary threat assessment protocols that identify and respond appropriately to threats.
- Eliminating investments in punitive school safety approaches, including increased daily presence of security personnel and law enforcement in schools. Further, eliminate funding for additional security hardware that make schools feel more prison-like. Instead, require schools to use research-based practices, such as developing emergency protocols with law enforcement officials.

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