Guide to K-12 Emergency Management

Proven Strategies to Protect Your School

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T E C H N O L O G I E S

THE **GOLD STANDARD** IN SCHOOL SAFETY

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Chapter 1:

Preventing Incidents through Early Behavioral Threat Assessment

Schools must act fast to get ahead of and prevent violent incidents. Early behavioral threat assessment can empower schools to do just that.

The Early Warning Signs

Staff, school resource officers (SROs), and teachers must understand the warning signs of a student who may be struggling. If they can recognize these signs and get them support, it can help prevent the situation from escalating into intentional school violence.

In an *analysis of targeted acts of school violence*, the U.S. Secret Service focused on 41 attacks that occurred in K-12 schools from 2008 to 2017. While there is no profile for a school attacker, the majority of attackers displayed common behaviors in the months—sometimes years—prior to the discovery of their plots or attacks.

1. Indicating an Intent to Attack

Most plotters communicate—whether through conversations, social media posts, writings, or in drawings—their plans prior to the event.

2. Showing an Interest in Violence

Two-thirds of the plotters showed an interest in violence, including "expressing white supremacists views and watching animal cruelty videos."

3. Showing an Interest in Weapons

A student who has an unusual interest in weapons may brag about their weapons either online or in-person, depict weapons in drawings, write about weapons, or ask friends to store weapons for them.

4. Harassing Others

Many plotters threaten or harass others; this behavior includes "physical altercations with family members, making threats, name-calling, and making incessant phone calls."

5. Displaying Concerning Mental Status

Some of the plotters studied in the report talked about or showed behavior related to suicide or self-harm. Many also experienced emotional issues, showed signs of depression, and/or asked to see a therapist.

6. Changing Behaviors

Another red flag is when a student engages in "increasingly rebellious behavior [and has] increased instances of anger." This is especially concerning if the student also has a decline in academic performance or attendance. All attackers in the analysis exhibited concerning behaviors. This is why threat assessment has become such a powerful and necessary component to school safety.

SROs: Trusted Resources for Students & Staff

"Our job is not merely to make arrests," Chief Craig Miller, Retired Chief of Police for the Dallas ISD Police Department, explains. "[Our job] is to develop relationships with the students." These relationships can help SROs recognize warning signs and resolve concerns before they escalate into violence or suicidal acts.
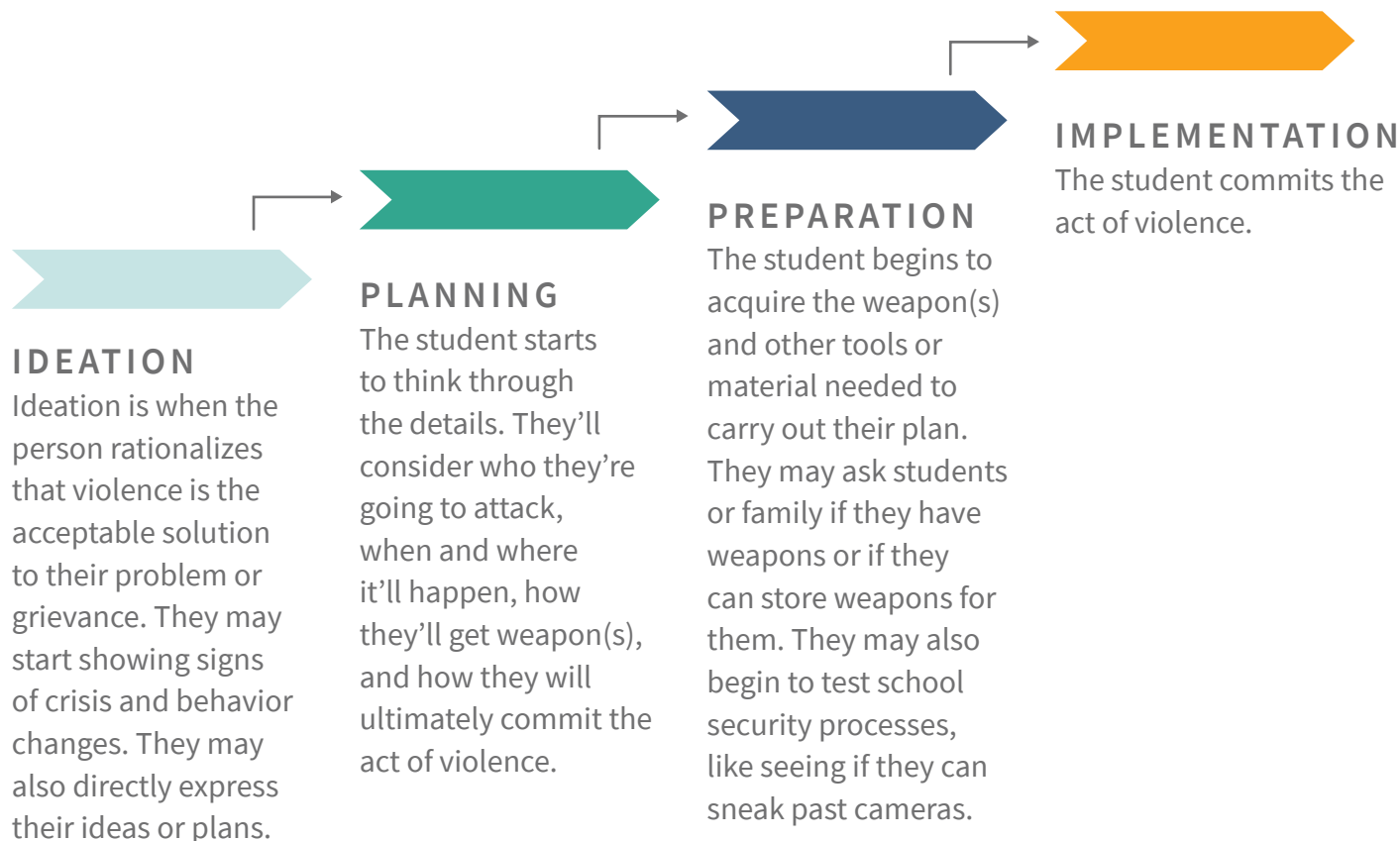
SROs are also educators, and of course, law enforcement officers. As educators, they can lead school safety discussions with staff, students, and guardians, as well as help build safety protocols and make sure the school community is thoroughly trained.

As law enforcement officers, they _bridge the gap between public safety and schools_. Contrary to popular belief, SROs do not handle disciplinary issues that should be handled by school staff and teachers. Instead, they focus on helping troubled students avoid entering the juvenile justice system and getting a criminal record.

Pathway to Violence

"For the most part, the folks that are going to commit catastrophic events at schools work their way up what is called a pathway to violence," says Chief Frank Kitzerow, President of the National Association of School and Campus Police Chiefs. Most targeted acts of violence begin with a grievance, but not everyone who has a grievance will continue down the pathway of violence.

The graphic below illustrates the typical pathway students who commit acts of targeted violence against schools take. Note that it's not always a linear process. Students may move forward and then recede to a previous step multiple times before an attack takes place.

IDEATION
Ideation is when the person rationalizes that violence is the acceptable solution to their problem or grievance. They may start showing signs of crisis and behavior changes. They may also directly express their ideas or plans.

PLANNING
The student starts to think through the details. They'll consider who they're going to attack, when and where it'll happen, how they'll get weapon(s), and how they will ultimately commit the act of violence.

PREPARATION
The student begins to acquire the weapon(s) and other tools or material needed to carry out their plan. They may ask students or family if they have weapons or if they can store weapons for them. They may also begin to test school security processes, like seeing if they can sneak past cameras.

IMPLEMENTATION
The student commits the act of violence.

Early Identification is Key and Potentially Life Saving

The student can escalate quickly down this pathway of violence. Schools must keep an eye out for red flags and be ready to move fast. Early identification is key to getting the student mental health support, resolving the grievance before it potentially escalates, determining the threat, and keeping the entire school safe. Consistent monitoring and understanding who is on the pathway to violence are two of the tenants of behavioral threat assessment.

The Role of Behavioral Threat Assessment

Research shows that most violent incidents can be prevented. This violence, as we saw above, is typically planned in advance and the student shows many warning signs, from their behavior changing to directly sharing their plans with others.

Behavioral threat assessment is an evidence-based approach that helps schools identify students who may pose a threat, intervene with the right resources, and ultimately stop threats from becoming reality. Below we discuss the four step process.

Four Step, Evidence-Based Process

Identify Students of Concern	Gather Information	Assess the Situation	Manage the Situation
Is a student behaving differently? Are they expressing thoughts of self-harm or harm of others? What is concerning about the student?	Start asking questions about the person and the situation. Understand the situation and how you can keep it from escalating.	Working with the threat assessment team, determine whether the student and the situation are actual threats to themselves or others.	Collaborate with others and put the right resources in place (mental health support, supervision, law enforcement) to prevent the violent situation.

Threat assessment programs:

✔ address student behavior that signals the student may be a threat to themselves or others in your school community

✔ helps schools identify potentially violent situations early so that they can intervene and prevent the situation from escalating

✔ involve looking at the entire picture and situation, not just a single incident

Threat assessment is not:

✖ predictive, adversarial, or static

✖ the same as profiling

✖ the same as a disciplinary process

✖ a panacea for safe schools

✖ the same as a behavioral assessment

Build a Threat Assessment Program: Checklist

Determine Program Structure

☐ Determine how to configure your team(s):

  ☐ One district-wide team to serve all schools

  ☐ Area-based teams per school or group of schools

  ☐ District-level team and area-based teams, where the district team is the central team that provides oversight to the individual (school- or area-based) teams

Multidisciplinary Team

☐ Include district and school administrators, law enforcement officers/school resource officer, mental health professionals, school teachers, staff, coaches, etc.

☐ Identify local resources, like mental health organizations, law enforcement, etc.

☐ Determine individual responsible for leading the team

☐ Train the team and ensure everyone understands their roles and responsibilities

☐ Establish relationships and meet regularly

Define Behaviors

☐ Create a low threshold to help identify students early in the pathway of violence

☐ Focus on behaviors that indicate the student may pose a threat, instead of just behavior that prove the student is a threat

☐ Create policies that define threats and other dangerous behavior, such as decline in academic performance, behavior changes like being withdrawn, bringing a weapon to school, posting threats on social media, etc.

Central Reporting System

☐ Define multiple reporting options that are easily accessible to everyone, making sure to include an anonymous reporting option

☐ Determine the process (step-by-step) of how the team will review and investigate each report

☐ Document the entire timeline of the investigation

Develop Risk Management Options

☐ Create individualized management plans designed to reduce the student's risk for engaging in violence

☐ Leverage internal and community resources, like law enforcement, mental health, and community agencies

☐ Create a situation that is less prone to violence by implementing school safety programs (anti-bullying, Safe School Ambassadors, etc.) and security measurements

☐ Provide students with tools, like coaching on conflict resolution and anger management to help students resolve anger or grievances

Polices & Procedures

- [ ] Define the policies and procedures the threat assessment team(s) will follow
- [ ] Consider school district legal counsel actions, such as how you will notify parents, document reports and investigations, share information with relevant parties
- [ ] Determine team leadership and reporting structures
- [ ] Define scope of team's jurisdiction
- [ ] Define authority to collect, maintain, and share student information

Create a Culture of School Safety

- [ ] Reduce the idea of the cone of silence and encourage community to become involved
- [ ] Create a culture and environment where students and staff feel comfortable sharing concerns
- [ ] Connect students with other resources, like mentors or school resource officers, who can be their 'go-to' person in the school

What is at the Core of the Student's Situation?

One of the goals of behavioral threat assessment is understanding what is causing the student's distress. Is it a situation at home or with friends? Was there a death in the family? What is influencing the student to believe violence is the answer to their problem? Once the school safety team understands the root cause, they can then make sure the student receives the appropriate help to resolve the issue.

Mental health services and the school should work together. When a student makes a threat, SROs and law enforcement investigate and determine if there should be charges. Mental health professionals focus on the individual student and help law enforcement better understand what challenges the student is facing and where they are on the pathway to violence.

"In reality, it takes both [SROs and mental health professionals] working hand-in-hand to really get to the bottom of what's happening with our students and being able to keep them safe," Dr. Amy Grosso, Director of Behavioral Health at Round Rock ISD in Texas says. Watch our on-demand webinar to learn more.

Watch the Webinar ➔

Chapter 2:
Prepare, Respond, and Recover

We've organized emergency management around three central themes: prepare, respond, and recover.

These stages roughly correspond to before, during, and after an incident, but they all reinforce each other and rely on many of the same principles. During an actual crisis, these practices can help you to expedite awareness, respond to the situation, and ultimately save lives.

Prepare

It is virtually impossible to predict every emergency, but schools still have the opportunity—and responsibility—to accomplish a lot by preparing for any type of crisis. When every second counts, being prepared is imperative.

Emergency Operations Plan

Your emergency operations plan (EOP) is the first major step in effective school safety. It covers the entire timeline of different possible incidents, whether they are caused by humans or nature. Examples include shootings, playground injuries, COVID-19 outbreak, _severe weather_, student fights, and bus accidents, just to name a few. The EOP needs to account for this wide range of possible threats and hazards while addressing safety for before, during, and after an incident.

Your EOP must consider all settings and times during and outside the school day as well as on and off campus (such as sporting events, assemblies, or field trips). It needs to accommodate the functional needs of the whole school community, including individuals with disabilities and from culturally diverse backgrounds. We'll learn more about inclusive safety planning in a following section.

While thinking through your EOP, concentrate on these five objectives:

1. **Prevent** incidents

2. **Protect** against violence and natural disasters

3. **Mitigate** loss of life, physical injury, mental trauma, and property damage

4. **Respond** to unexpected or unpreventable scenarios

5. **Recover** your safe and healthy school environment

School safety cannot be done in a silo.

Schools need to collaborate with local emergency responders, community organizations, public safety groups, and their students, staff, and community members. Their expertise and perceptions can help you develop, implement, and refine your EOP.

**"The more people you bring to the table, the more comprehensive your plan is going to be,"** Dr. CJ Huff, former Superintendent of Joplin Schools in Missouri, shared in a Raptor webinar while recalling how the district's relationship with their local organizations drastically helped when a devastating tornado tore through their schools.

Watch the Webinar ➜

Developing Emergency Operations Plans Checklist

The U.S. Department of Education's (ED) *Guide for Developing High-Quality School Emergency Operations Plan* can help you design and implement your EOP. The checklist below is based on their six-step framework.

Step 1: Form a Planning Team

- ☐ Identify core planning team
- ☐ Form a common framework
- ☐ Define and assign roles/responsibilities
- ☐ Set regularly scheduled meetings

Step 2: Understand the Situation

- ☐ Identify threats and hazards
- ☐ Assess risk
- ☐ Prioritize threats and hazards

Step 3: Determine Goals and Objectives

- ☐ Develop goals
- ☐ Develop objectives

Step 4: Plan Development

- ☐ Identify courses of action

Step 5: Finalize Plan

- ☐ Format and write the plan
- ☐ Review the plan
- ☐ Share with appropriate stakeholders for approval

Step 6: Implement and Maintain

- ☐ Train stakeholders
- ☐ Practice the plan through drills and exercises
- ☐ Review, revise, and maintain the plan

Any framework you use should help you accomplish the following:

- ✔ Customize plans according to your district's unique circumstances and resources (down to the building level)
- ✔ Account for a wide range of possible threats and hazards while addressing safety needs before, during, and after an incident
- ✔ Accommodate the functional needs of the whole school community including individuals with disabilities and from culturally diverse backgrounds
- ✔ Consider all settings and times during and outside the school day as well as on and off campus (such as sporting events, assemblies, or field trips)
- ✔ Collaborate throughout the entire process of creating and revising your EOP
- ✔ Practice and update your EOP regularly according to legislation and public health considerations so that your plan remains responsive and relevant

Defining protocols—the designated actions everyone should take in the event of an incident—is a necessary step in developing your EOP. Protocols provide consistent and clear shared instructions for students, staff, and first responders. They also provide a shared language—a common understanding of what everyone is referring to—that allows for quick and coordinated action. These instructions and vocabulary also act as training tools to develop muscle memory for quick action in a crisis. A set of protocols should be action-based, flexible, and easy to learn. When protocols align with people, it enables a swift and coordinated response.

The "I Love U Guys" Foundation®, a well-known school safety organization, has designed an extensive set of such protocols, including the Standard Response Protocol® (SRP) and the Standard Reunification Method™ (SRM). For more information about these protocols as well as other documentation and training materials, *visit their website.*

Inclusive School Safety Planning: How to Build a Safer School for All

Inclusive school safety considers everyone, including students, staff, visitors, volunteers, and contractors. This means having policies for people with temporary disabilities and physical conditions—like pregnant individuals or those with broken bones—as well as policies for those with ongoing needs like PTSD or autism. Inclusive school safety also considers students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). Each of these individuals—whether they have short-term or ongoing needs—must have a crisis plan that is specifically designed for them.

Michele Gay and Alissa Parker founded Safe and Sound Schools after losing their daughters in the Sandy Hook tragedy. The non-profit organization is dedicated to providing parents and school communities the tools and resources necessary to ensure school safety. Their program, *Especially Safe,* focuses on inclusive emergency planning. The aim of the program is to move individuals with special needs from afterthought to the forefront of emergency planning and preparation.

Download the Program Guides →

Document Your EOP

Here is a brief checklist of some key information you should have "on paper" that informs how you train staff and revise your plan over time:

- ☐ Who is responsible for initiating an emergency
- ☐ Procedures for evacuation, lockdown, shelter-in-place, and reunification
- ☐ Protocols to account for students
- ☐ Roles and responsibilities of school personnel (such as what a teacher needs to do as soon an emergency is declared)
- ☐ Which authorities are alerted for specific emergencies and how they should be contacted
- ☐ What information needs to be collected and distributed before, during, and after an incident (for example weather reports or law enforcement bulletins)

Implement Your EOP

When drafting your EOP, circulate copies throughout the team for their review. Stakeholders should determine if the plan has adequately determined threats, hazards, functions, and courses of action. They should also consider whether the plan is feasible and within the limits of time and cost. It is also imperative that the team reviews the draft for compliance with laws and regulations. Once everyone on your team has finished reviewing the plan, and before sharing it with others, it should be sent to the appropriate leadership for their final approval.

When your EOP is approved, share the plan and make sure everyone involved knows their roles and responsibilities. Conduct regular trainings to refresh the team on their commitments. Key training components include consistently practicing the EOP and meeting at least once per year to review it.

Delayed emergency response is more likely to happen when the school and its first responders are unfamiliar with one another and don't have the tools needed for an aligned response.

Watch our on-demand webinar to learn how to partner with law enforcement for better school safety.

Watch the Webinar →

Practice

"In an actual emergency, things are very stressful, and the first thing that goes is our cognitive functioning," Dr. Jaclyn Schildkraut, Associate Professor of Criminal Justice at the State University of New York Oswego, stated in a _Raptor webinar_. _**"Our minds go blank and our bodies do what they're trained to do… it's like we go on autopilot."**_

An EOP is only valuable if the policies are routinely practiced. The more students, staff, and your community members practice through drills and exercises, the more they can get into the habit of automatically and correctly responding to the incident. It's also important to involve first responders in your drills and ask them for feedback on how you can improve. It also helps law enforcement and responders become familiar with your campuses and, on the other hand, for school staff and students to become familiar with law enforcement. This is critical when an actual crisis occurs, as it makes the response go smoother and safer.

Scheduling

Drills require a lot of upfront planning, like deciding what scenario to perform and when. Think about the location, duration, time, and frequency. Let stakeholders—including guardians—know about drills well in advance so no one is caught off guard. Schedule them to ensure everyone is on the same page and can get the most out of each drill. Make sure you comply with your district and state requirements.

Actual emergencies can happen at any time, so practice at different times of the day. Map out every scenario someone may be in when a crisis strikes. For instance, if a student is in the bathroom or on the baseball field when an active threat arises, they need to know what to do and where to go.

Types of Drills and Exercises

There are many different types of drills and exercises schools can conduct, including:

- → **Tabletops:** allow small groups to assign each of its members distinct roles in safety scenarios, so they can communicate their ideas and develop solutions to later share with a larger group.

- → **Walk-through drills:** slowed down drills that allow students to practice how they would respond to an emergency.

- → **Preannounced drills:** these are discussed beforehand, so participants know that the drill is scheduled and there is no real emergency.

- → **Unannounced drills:** these are not discussed with all participants before. However, once the drill is initiated, participants are immediately told it is just a drill and not a real emergency.

- → **Simulation drills:** involve modifying the environment to resemble different emergency scenarios. This makes them ideal for emergency responders, as they will likely be put in similar conditions if they respond to an incident at the school.

- → **Full-Scale (advanced) simulation exercises:** require the collaboration of schools with emergency response teams. Multiple different emergency scenarios are typically presented.

Considering Student Developmental Level

Schools should consider this guidance to determine what drills are appropriate for each grade level. Read the blog for more information.

Pre-K through Early Elementary	Upper Elementary	Intermediate, Junior High, and Middle	High School
Although these students typically have a basic understanding of danger, they ultimately need an adult to tell them what is dangerous or safe.	These students can determine what is dangerous but may still have difficulty knowing the difference between probable dangers and real dangers.	The students have a proficient awareness of danger and know the difference between probable dangers and real dangers.	These students can typically determine what is safe or dangerous and understand what response is needed for each situation.

Read the Blog →

Executing

It can be easy to fall into the routine of each drill and continue to use the same emergency response plans every year, but that is dangerous. Drills are conducted to test the procedures and policies your school has in place.

Your school community should treat every drill—whether it's for a hypothetical fire or a violent intruder—as if it's a real emergency. Taking shortcuts, allowing staff or students to sit out and not participate, or not taking the drill seriously will lead to your school not being able to respond well in an actual situation. Every drill should also strictly follow your emergency operations plan, so your school community gains more familiarity with the plan and becomes more confident with each drill.

All staff need to participate because students can be anywhere—including the lunch line or in the cafeteria—when a lockdown is called. These staff members will have to know what steps are needed to keep these students safe, and they can only know this if they are actively practicing with the school.

"An emergency is not going to discriminate based on what role you have or what task you're trying to get done," Dr. Schildkraut says.

Her research found that some staff, particularly janitorial and kitchen staff, would continue to work through the drills instead of participate. All staff need to participate because students can be anywhere—including the lunch line or in the cafeteria—when an emergency is initiated.

Watch the Webinar ➔

Assessing

Safety hinges not just on how well you conduct your drills but what you learn from them. Your safety team should immediately debrief after every drill. Teachers and students should be encouraged to provide feedback. It's also imperative for law enforcement and other public safety officials who participated to share their feedback and to discuss lessons learned and areas that need improvement.

"It's amazing what you can learn from both sides [during these conversations]," Kevin Burd, a 23-year police veteran and owner of Priority of Life Training and Consulting said in a *Raptor webinar.* "I've seen situations where first responders don't know what schools are doing and then vice versa" where schools have not considered what response looks like from a first responder's point of view.

The best assessment requires a method to *track data and create comprehensive reports.* Technology collects performance data to show what is working and how you can better protect your students and staff. Reports enable you to demonstrate compliance with state and district requirements. Later on in the guide, we'll look at how to select the right solution to assess and empower every aspect of emergency management.

"It's one thing to say you conducted a drill; it's another to prove it with documentation and to have that documentation at your fingertips."

Director of the Duval County School Police Department

Culture of Safety

Students, teachers, and staff, including substitute teachers, must all be comfortable with your EOP. Given the variety of threats, students need to be confident in several different situations. The right approach builds their decision-making skills and the ability to respond to incidents in school or at home. It's important to tailor drills to your specific school environment, participants' developmental levels, and students with disabilities.

It's crucial to empower everyone to feel confident in the face of any kind of violence. Research shows that teachers' demeanors directly impact students' physical and psychological safety. If a teacher lacks confidence, it makes it nearly impossible for them to stay calm or be viewed as a trusted leader. The more a teacher or staff member remains calm, the more the students stay calm—and the more likely they will follow your emergency operations plan.

Student and Staff Training

Training, including active shooter training, can teach students, teachers, and other staff how to prevent and survive these incidents and other violent threats. Training should include evidence-based lessons and drills that give everyone the confidence to respond to any kind of violence.

These programs should also be tailored according to the age of students. Some programs use realistic simulations that invoke fear or stress such as firing blank rounds of ammunition or using special effects like smoke and fake blood. These programs can trigger past traumas or develop new ones in young people and adults. _The Partner Alliance for Safer Schools (PASS)_ recommends conducting drills and exercises in an educational way—without violent simulations—to avoid causing trauma. Schools should also announce drills ahead of time and clearly announce that "this is not an actual emergency."

The best programs are teacher-led, interactive, adaptable, problem-based, and developed by both school safety and mental health professionals. The curriculum should also be reviewed and updated annually to incorporate the latest best practices and have easy-to-remember strategies.

One such example is _Safe Kids Inc.'s H.E.R.O. Program_, designed by experts from law enforcement, education, and school psychology. It emphasizes empowerment based on successful outcomes.

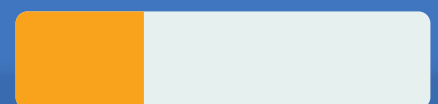## A national school safety report revealed:

44% of students think their school does not have a proactive approach to safety awareness

40% of students think their school is unable to address school violence

50% of guardians think their child's school has a false sense of security

30% of guardians think their child's school is not prepared to handle safety issues

Download the Report ➡

Respond

In the event of an actual emergency, you'll need the right people, actions, and tools in the field to keep people safe and resolve the issue as soon as possible.

Expedite Awareness

Schools need a reliable way to alert students, staff, and first responders. Best practice is for teachers, staff, and SROs to have a mobile panic button that they can initiate from wherever they are on campus.

The most *powerful panic button systems* are customized to your emergency response protocols and enable users to directly call or text 9-1-1 and automatically share critical details, such as caller name and precise location on campus, with dispatchers. The system should be customized to the school's emergency response protocols and allow staff, first responders, and incident commanders to communicate through group messaging and access your EOP. Systems with geolocation capabilities allow users to switch between campuses without having to worry about updating settings.

It is also key that first responders can immediately access detailed school maps. These maps ideally combine floor plans, high-resolution imagery, and a gridded overlay. This allows first responders to better react to emergencies in unfamiliar locations. Having detailed maps like these (such as the ones created by *Critical Response Group*) will reduce response time and ultimately save lives.

Automatically Share Critical Emergency Details with 9-1-1

Successful response—and the number of lives saved—depends on how fast first responders receive accurate, specific information about the emergency. Your panic button system should be RapidSOS Ready to deliver critical, real-time data to a Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP). This automatically connects the caller to 9-1-1 and instantly shares additional information with the dispatcher, including:

→ **Caller Name and Information (e.g. Job role)**

→ **Dispatchable Address**

→ **Callback Number**

→ **School Name and Precise On-Campus Details (e.g. Building name)**

→ **Real-Time Status of the Emergency**

→ **Type of Emergency (e.g. Lockdown)**

Don't Forget Everyday Incidents

Everyday situations can quickly escalate without the presence of the appropriate personnel to identify and resolve the issue. Here are eight incidents most likely to occur in schools:

- ➡ Medical incidents such as an allergic reaction or injury
- ➡ Fights between students in common spaces
- ➡ Suspicious activity like an unknown person on campus
- ➡ Spills/flooding due to a plumbing or cafeteria accident
- ➡ Disruptive activity, for example from an irate parent
- ➡ Foul odor that may be a mistake in the lab or a prank
- ➡ Vandalism such as graffiti or property damage
- ➡ Other personal incidents requiring an administrator

Staff must have the proper communication tools—ideally the same mobile panic button used for large incidents—that enables them to instantly request help from the appropriate responder, like the principal or school resource officer (SRO), to resolve localized incidents before they escalate.

Read the Blog ➡

Account for Everyone

Empowering teachers and staff to _account for themselves as well as everyone else on campus_—including students, visitors, guardians, and contractors—immediately after an alert goes out is critical.

Teachers and staff should be able to account for anyone, not necessarily just the students on their rosters. If an emergency begins when students and visitors are dispersed, an accountability solution—ideally one that is integrated with the panic alert system—enables teachers and staff to quickly see their class rosters, search for others by name, and share statuses with first responders and incident commanders.

Incident commanders also need a clear, real-time line of sight for every person on campus. The best solutions allow first responders to see details of each individual, including their location, status, medical conditions, and allergies. If they are students, it should also list their guardians' contact information.

Recover

An evacuation, especially one due to an extreme crisis, can cause physical reactions and strong emotions like terror, fear, and helplessness. Alongside how to respond to an incident, you also need a robust plan for every component of reunifying students with their guardian.

According to the *National Association of School Psychologists*, the more time it takes to reunify a student with their guardian, the more likely they are to suffer from traumatic stress that can trigger anxiety, behavioral changes, and substance usage that can have long-term effects.

A solid reunification plan will include:

- → recovery teams and their responsibilities

- → reunification site locations and staging

- → transportation to the site for students, staff, and emergency supplies

- → roles for law enforcement and mental health professionals

- → protocols for confirming students are reunified with approved guardians

Practice makes progress.

Just like any aspect of emergency management, you should rehearse reunification multiple times to test your process and ensure the entire school community understands their roles and responsibilities.

See how a Texas district collaborated with district and school staff, city staff, first responders, and K-12 safety experts for a reunification exercise. The exercise helped the district understand what resources are available and how to improve emergency preparedness, response, and recovery.

Watch the Video →

Reunification Sites

When picking a site, consider a nearby facility that is unoccupied during the school day and is large enough to hold your school population, guardians, and volunteers. The facility should have large rooms where you can divide your students into groups. A place of worship or recreation center is typically an ideal size.

The chosen reunification site should be as centrally located as possible to allow easy access for schools. A geographically widespread district can plan for more than one reunification site. Regardless of location, there is usually still one district reunification team dispatched to the site.

The school's reunification procedure also needs to specify predetermined routes for getting students, staff, security, first responders, and other personnel to and from the site. Ideally, faculty will walk students to the facility. If the facility is not within walking distance, other means of transportation will be necessary to safely evacuate your school.

It's best to direct students to an area that is out of view; you do not want guardians to spot their children as they are entering the facility. Outline how faculty should communicate information to guardians about the reunification process. It is important, however, to keep the location of reunification sites confidential until the district chooses to notify guardians. Otherwise, they may arrive before the students get to the site and complicate an already difficult situation. Make sure to include information on nearby hospitals and fire stations for quick reference.

What to Do Before the School Year Starts

Verify and visit all locations included in your reunification plan

Confirm that the locations' staff are aware that their facility may be used as part of your plan

Check that they are aligned with your procedures

Make sure that you have access whenever it might be needed during an emergency

Learn more considerations for an effective reunification after a school crisis in our on-demand webinar.

Watch the Webinar ➔

Recovery Teams

We recommend having two teams in place for reunification: the reunification team and the transport team.

The reunification team should immediately go to the reunification site to stage the site, including hanging signage to direct guardians, and prepare for reunification. This team is responsible for reunification of students with their guardian and transportation for teachers and staff to return to the school. It is imperative that this team has supplies and resources readily available at the site. They should create an "evacuation go-kit" and multiple "reunification go-kits." These kits can include floor plans, emergency contact information, writing utensils, flashlights with batteries, and other necessary materials that won't be readily available at the reunification site.

The transport team facilitates transportation and initiates accountability processing in off-site reunifications. Their main responsibilities are to identify a reunification site and safely transport students and staff to the site. They should also select two back-up facilities. Ideally this happens over the summer, long before any incidents can occur.

Some designated team members may be unavailable to assist in the emergency response. This could be because they are out sick for the day or injured in the crisis. When choosing team members, _Burd recommends thinking about who will most likely be available_ for each position. For example, a teacher will probably be with their students so they may not be the right individual for a reunification role.

Keep Everyone Calm

Being involved in an emergency can be scary for everyone. Although it is nearly impossible to keep an anxiety-free environment during a crisis, schools can do a lot to help everyone cope with their emotions and keep the reunification process on track.

District security and/or law enforcement personnel should be present to help as students, faculty, and guardians arrive at the reunification site. Their presence will foster a sense of safety and minimize chaos. If media representatives show up, security and law enforcement officials can also ensure reporters won't interfere with reunification and (if authorized) address their questions.

You should also have school-employed mental health professionals at the reunification site to help with any immediate crisis-related needs. Written materials on mental health support, typical crisis reactions, and how to cope with traumatic situations should be available. If the crisis is extreme, mental health professionals can also provide training on how to best support children as they heal from the crisis.

Reunification Team:

→ Greeters

→ Student Runners

→ Guardian Runners

→ Guardian Monitors

→ Reunification Facilitators

Everyone gets cross-trained in all roles!
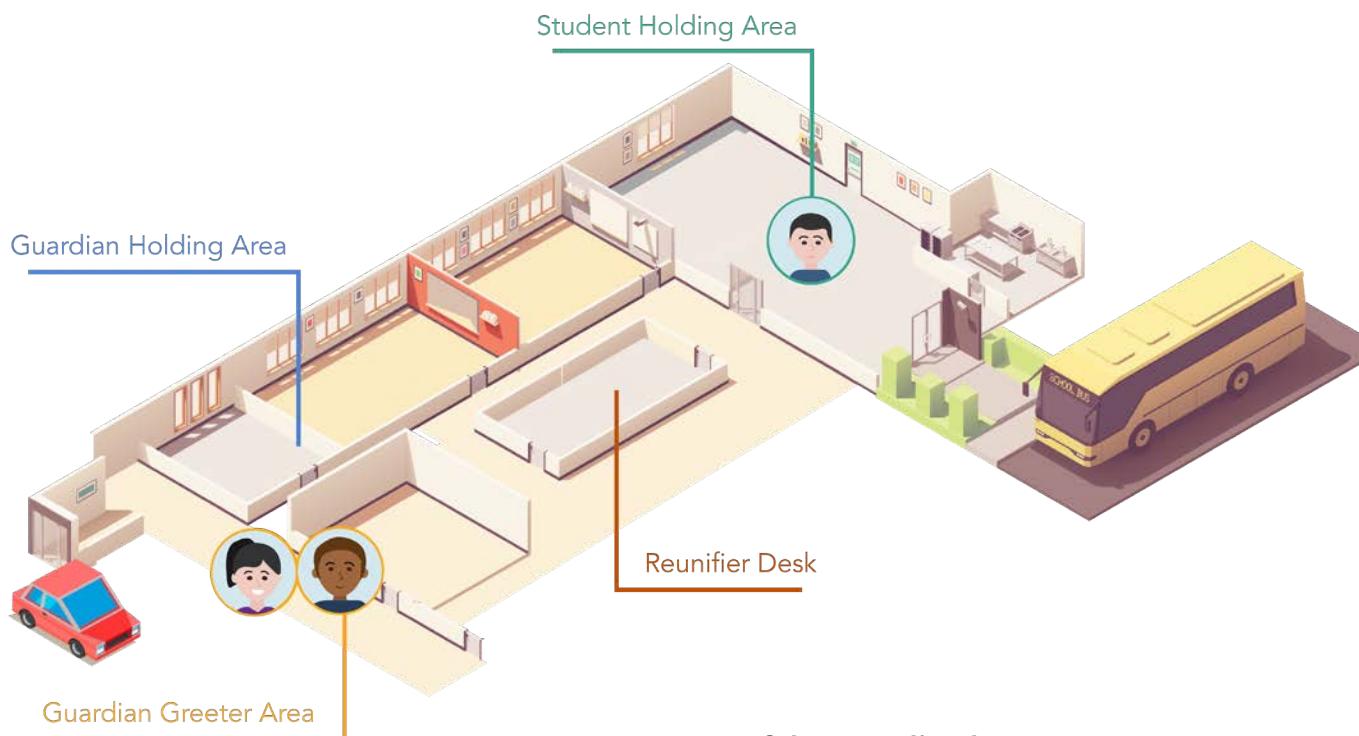
Streamline Reunification

As you are developing or reviewing your reunification protocols, consider how to help guardians reunite with their children even faster and reduce the already ample stress of the situation.

Technology can improve your process and eliminate inaccuracy. Knowing student status—including if the student is missing or injured—is critical. This information can easily be lost in the chaos of a reunification that relies on pen-and-paper methods. Best practice is to give teachers, staff, first responders, and incident commanders instant access to real-time student data, status, and location.

When a guardian checks in to the reunification site, the greeter can quickly confirm if the student is safely at the site and that they can continue the reunification process. If a student is marked missing or injured, the greeter will immediately know to escort the guardian to a private waiting area for further information (and not have to break the news out in the open in front of everyone).

It's also imperative that personnel can confirm the guardian's identity, check for sex offender status, check for custodial restrictions, and capture their signature at reunification. This eliminates inaccuracy, reduces liability, and ensures students are only reunified with approved guardians.

The most _advanced reunification solutions_ are tested and part of a comprehensive emergency management platform that gives schools full line of sight to everyone and every incident.

Student Holding Area

Guardian Holding Area

Reunifier Desk

Guardian Greeter Area

A successful, streamlined reunification requires schools to implement tangible plans.

Read the Blog →

Chapter 3:
Movements and Changes in K-12 Emergency Management

Emergency management is not a static set of ideas or actions. New s as well as political and legal developments impact our world and make us reevaluate how we can continue to keep students safe.

This chapter covers an example of legislation, "Alyssa's Law", as well as the COVID-19 pandemic, and the impact they have had on how schools implement emergency management. Alignment with the aims and practices covered below further enables strong emergency management approaches and empowers your stakeholders.

Alyssa's Law

Alyssa's Law is _legislation requiring public and charter schools to have silent panic alert systems_ linked directly to first responder and law enforcement agencies. A mobile panic button can instantly alert these authorities so they can quickly get on scene, resolve the threat, and triage victims.

The law is named after Alyssa Alhadeff, a 14-year-old victim of the 2018 tragedy at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida. Alyssa's Law requirements vary by state, and it's always best to check for exactly what you need to do. At the time of writing, Alyssa's Law has passed in New Jersey and Florida. You can look at _Make Our Schools Safe_ for the most updated information about its passage.

Here are a few examples, based on legislation passed at the time of writing, of how Alyssa's Law aims to keep your school safer and how to implement it at your school.

Alyssa's Law is one specific and excellent example of legislation that captures solid emergency management practices. Even if you're not legally obligated to comply with Alyssa's Law in your region, following its guidelines is part of well-rounded, comprehensive emergency management approach.

ALYSSA'S LAW OBJECTIVE	RECOMMENDED SOLUTION
Have at least one mobile panic alert system in each school building	Allow any authorized user to initiate a silent alert from their mobile device or desktop by manually pressing a digital button. Alerts should provide the type, location, time of emergency, and who initiated the emergency in real time.
Ensure real-time coordination between multiple first responder agencies	Allow staff to initiate an emergency response that instantly notifies first responders and requests assistance from a tailored list of personnel. Directly call or text 9-1-1 and automatically share critical details, such as caller name and precise location on campus, with dispatchers. Give first responders and other users access to detailed school maps and floorplans. Enable users to communicate via instant messaging to other authorized users across all devices.
Customize according to each district/governing board's local emergency codes and naming conventions	Configure technology to fully support any safety protocol districts might decide to implement, including a preset list of emergency response protocols such as The "I Love U Guys" Foundation Standard Response Protocol.
Provide two-way communications	Enable users to stay in touch through real-time two-way messaging across all devices, including: smartphones, tablets, Chromebooks, laptops, and desktop computers.

The COVID-19 Pandemic

While many people may have only associated emergencies with manmade or even natural disasters, health concerns on a previously unimagined scale are now on everyone's mind.

Maintaining Safety and Updating Your EOP

Many schools have had to adjust typical set-ups. As one example, some schools have used exterior tents and kiosks to reduce traffic in hallways. That can result in crowds of students waiting outside. Even the most expansive EOPs may not have accounted for this set-up.

Paul Timm, author, board-certified Physical Security Professional (PSP), and nationally acclaimed school safety expert, _suggests schools conduct a safety assessment_, giving special attention to anything implemented during the pandemic to confirm that it is safe and necessary. School leaders, in collaboration with stakeholders and first responders, should then update their EOP based on the findings.

Supporting Mental Health Needs

Students need mental health services more than ever before, according to Dr. Scott Poland, Professor and Co-Director of the Suicide and Violence Prevention Office at Nova Southeastern University in Florida. Before COVID-19, suicide was the second leading cause of death in children over 10 years old. "We're seeing increasing numbers of children even under the age of 10 threatening suicide now," Dr. Poland shared on _School Safety Today,_ a Raptor Technologies podcast. Dr. Poland advises schools to complete comprehensive suicide prevention training annually. Everyone—staff, SROs, teachers, bus drivers, and janitors, to name a few—should attend the trainings to learn the warning signs and how to respond.

Be Prepared for Increased Violence

Schools have faced increased behavioral issues since returning to the classroom. Teachers across the country have reported that students of all ages are pushing others, throwing things, jumping on furniture, and making inappropriate comments without worrying about the consequences of their actions. Students are also fighting more than ever before.

Resolve Incidents Before They Escalate

At a Texas high school, a student shot another student during a fight in a classroom. Just a week prior in a Tennessee school, one student shot another during a fight in the stairwell. Before that incident, a student in a Virginia school fired multiple shots during a fight in a hallway.

These are just some of the worst-case scenarios that made headlines this school year. But localized incidents and behavioral issues, such as when a teacher has lost control of the classroom, can also quickly escalate.

All school staff should have _a mobile panic button with Team Assist._ This enables staff to initiate incidents from wherever they are located and instantly alert others—like the principal or SRO—about the type of incident and what assistance is needed. If a situation escalates, the mobile panic button should enable users to directly call or text 9-1-1 and automatically share critical details, such as caller name and precise location on campus, with dispatchers.

Learn more in our blog.

Read the Blog ➜

Chapter 4:
Implement an End-to-End Emergency Management System

This chapter focuses on how you can turn everything discussed into actual practices: tangible and actionable steps for you and your stakeholders.

Implementation begins with your team, brings in trusted partners, and uses robust solutions. You, your partners, and your tools create the conditions to catalyze the best emergency management practices.

The Right Partners

Addressing your complex school safety needs does not have to be daunting. You don't have to—nor should you—do this alone. Knowledgeable and trustworthy partners make all the difference.

You want a knowledgeable and proactive partner involved every step of the way. You should also seek partners already aligned with some of the best practices discussed here. For example, are they familiar with Alyssa's Law and The "I Love U Guys" Foundation's methods? The right partner will keep pace with industry leaders. Ideally, they will have an active affiliation with these movements and organizations.

In addition to looking for the best app or platform and seeing how different products align with your needs, consider technology in terms of a relationship with the software provider. They have to be more than just a software vendor. They should be a true collaborator with know-how and empathy who puts your goals first.

Successful implementation is just one of the many pillars that define true success. The right partner will demonstrate a commitment to your success from the outset. For example, look for someone who asks you questions to tailor your emergency management implementation and solution rather than simply presents a menu of their products.

Beyond implementation, you need a partner that makes themselves available and provides resources to encourage your continued success for years to come. This may include opportunities for development sessions, data analysis and business reviews, webinars, and other events.

Chances are your own school or district may encounter changes to staff, protocols, requirements, and expectations once your emergency management solution is in place, so you need a partner dedicated to your continued success, from strategy to implementation to maintenance and updates.

Technology Solutions

An integrated emergency management platform does just that: it integrates all aspects of emergency management into one platform shared among all stakeholders in real time. The right platform will empower you to:

- [ ] Practice and analyze drills
- [ ] Initiate an emergency through a mobile panic button
- [ ] Send instant, detailed alerts and connect with 9-1-1 via text and/or call
- [ ] Automatically share details, such as caller's name, callback number, and precise location on campus, with 9-1-1 dispatchers
- [ ] Share critical information with staff and first responders, including your EOP, building floor plans, and your location on a map
- [ ] Stay up to date with all users through real-time group messaging
- [ ] Account for each individual on campus
- [ ] Reunify students with guardians
- [ ] Create instantaneous and updated status reports and after-incident reports
- [ ] Summon help for localized incidents
- [ ] Integrate with your visitor and volunteer management systems

Customization

Generic off-the-shelf solutions may seem appetizing based on their often low cost, but they likely won't meet your needs. In the long run, they may even cost more if you require customization or need to eventually replace them with a more suitable product. More importantly, if the system cannot be customized according to your EOP, it won't be the safest option.

Ease of Use

When evaluating solutions, also consider if it is an intuitive system. How long will it take to train everyone? Will each staff member need to be trained by the vendor on every aspect of the technology, or does it empower you to train your own people to do exactly what they need to?

Integration

Consider an integrated technology that incorporates _visitor management_ and _volunteer management_ alongside emergency management. Visitor solutions account for guardians, contractors, temporary support, and others conducting specific time-bound business on campus. Linking your visitor, volunteer, and _emergency management systems_ ensures that everyone on campus at any given time is logged into a unified system and will be included in incident alerts and procedures.

The solution should also support single sign on and active directory integration to create a single point of user authentication and authorization. This integration streamlines sign in and user account creation while ensuring authorized personnel have the appropriate system access.

Implementation Services

When selecting a school safety partner, ask about their portfolio of services. It should encompass more than installation and configuration. Their services show that the people at this company are focused on ensuring your staff is thoroughly familiar with the system and with providing support as your needs evolve. The best providers are available live 24/7 to answer questions and provide troubleshooting. They're also thought leaders who have a library of resources such as online videos, how-to documentation, and training. Here is a quick checklist of what a top provider should offer you:

Set-Up and Training

☐ Tailored system configuration that fits your needs including custom categories, settings, and notifications

☐ Training and overview sessions that demo the system's functionality and answer questions

☐ Interactive workshops and tabletop exercises that provide actual hands-on experience using system tools

☐ Flexibility to help you implement an emergency management solution at any time of the school year

Maintenance and Support

☐ Ongoing drill review and evaluation of data such as usage of the emergency management system with action-oriented recommendations

☐ 24/7 support and guidance through readily accessible videos and documents

Knowledge Expansion

☐ Regular live learning and development such as webinars and interactive Q&A

☐ Networking events that let you hear about changes in the industry, innovative practices, and new solutions

Implementation Best Practices

Executive Support: From making decisions on policies and procedures to collaborating with the rest of the team and vendors on a training plan, an executive sponsor is the person within the district responsible for the overall success of the project.

Clear Communication: Clear, regular communication across all departments ensures that everybody is aware and comfortable with the project. Clearly defined roles and responsibilities help keep things on track and form the foundation on which the entire implementation is built.

Dedicated Implementation Team: While each district is unique, we recommend the team has an executive sponsor and a project manager. The team should also have an implementation specialist to work with the vendor to customize and manage implementation. A technical liaison helps facilitate data and authentication integrations, and an internal long-term support contact handles basic questions, maintenance, and general support after implementation.

Overview of Funding Sources

COVID-19 ESSER FUNDS

The U.S. government has set aside over $190 billion in stimulus funding for schools in the form of federal COVID-19 relief funds. Three bills—CARES, CRRSA, and ARP—include the "Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund" (ESSER) that targets K-12 school districts. The funding allows for schools to implement emergency management systems to respond to and mitigate COVID-19's impacts. Learn how to apply and maximize your ESSER funding in *Guide to K-12 Safe Reopening: Using ESSER Funding to Protect Your School.*

Click the map to see the latest funding available for your district

FEDERAL

The *Department of Homeland Security's State Homeland Security Program (SHSP)* supports state, tribal, territorial, and local preparedness activities that address gaps in terrorism preparedness, including risk management for protection programs and activities.

The *School Emergency Response to Violence (SERV)* grant through the U.S. Department of Education funds short-term and long-term education-related services to help schools recover from violent or traumatic events in which learning environments have been disrupted.
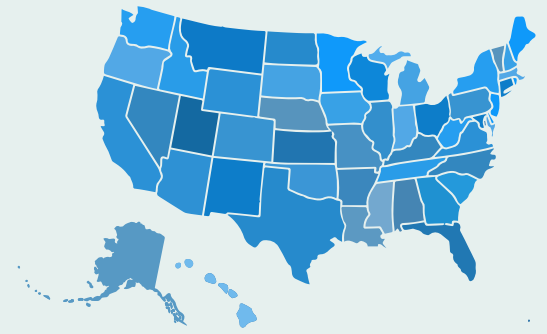
The *Rural and Low-Income School Program* provides rural and low-income districts with funding to improve student achievement, including improving school safety.

The *School Violence Prevention Program (SVPP)* from the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office) within the U.S. Department of Justice provides funds for technology that expedites notification of local law enforcement during an emergency, as well as other school safety solutions.

The *Students, Teachers, and Officers Preventing (STOP) School Violence program* that is offered through the Bureau of Justice Assistance provides funding for solutions that help prevent and/or respond to school violence.

STATE

There are 28 state education departments that offer school safety program grants to fund safety technologies. Examples of these include Tennessee's Safe Schools Act, the Pennsylvania Safe Schools Grant, and the Indiana Secured School Safety Grant (SSSG) Program. For more information on the funding available in your state, contact your state education department.

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West Aurora School District 129, IL

About the Author

Raptor is driven by our mission to protect every child, every school, every day.

Founded in 2002, Raptor provides *integrated school safety software* enabling schools to safeguard students and staff, screen visitors, track volunteers, report on drills, respond to emergencies, and reunite families.

Raptor is trusted by *over 50,000 schools worldwide* to keep staff and children safe.

Learn more about Raptor's school safety software solutions on our website, or visit: *raptortech.com/EM*

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Request a demo and see why Raptor is the leading provider in integrated school safety software solutions, or visit: *raptortech.com/request*

Schedule a Demo ➜

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