



COLORADO
Office of School Safety
Department of Public Safety



CONFLUENCE
POLICY & STRATEGY
GROUP

EDUCATOR SAFETY TASK FORCE



Roadmap for Action



Educator Safety Task Force: *Roadmap for Action*

The **Colorado Educator Safety Task Force** (ESTF) was formed by the state legislature to explore system level issues relating to educator safety. [HB24-1320](#) directed the ESTF to examine issues of aggressive or violent behavior by a student directed toward an educator or any member of school staff. The seventeen members of the Task Force met monthly from September of 2024 through June of 2025. To support the ESTF’s work, four subcommittees were formed that met monthly and included dozens more individuals with a diversity of subject matter expertise, lived experience and direct professional knowledge.

ESTF Subcommittees:



Incident Response Models



School Culture and Community Relations



Alternative Placements



Educator Perspectives, Supports & Training

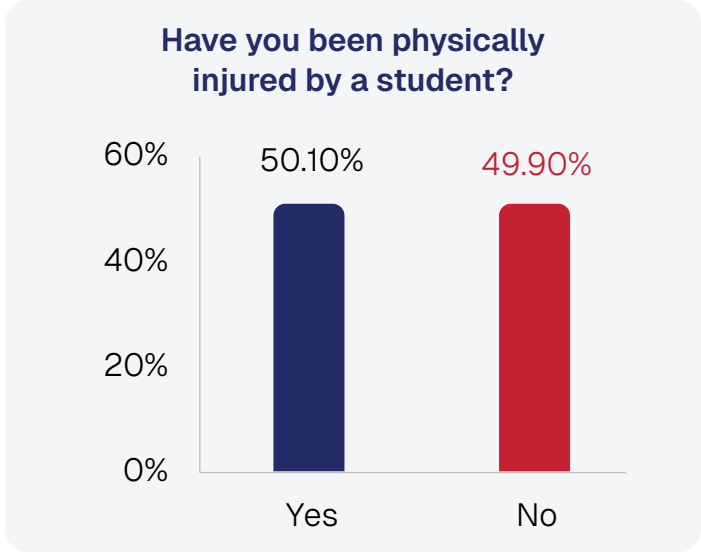
To gather broad input on the experience of educators and school staff, a survey was conducted and over 1,100 responses analyzed.¹ Quantitative, qualitative and anecdotal data points and perspectives gathered through the survey and the lived experiences shared by ESTF and subcommittee participants surprised many members. These points of input were in stark contrast to the limited data available

¹ Breakdown of responses: Additional survey data, respondent breakdown available in ESTF Survey Summary



that suggested a limited problem with only a few, isolated incidents. The findings of the ESTF survey conducted by Confluence Policy and Strategy Group track with [research from the American Psychological Association](#) (APA) which found incidents of violent behavior had increased since the post-COVID return to in-person learning.

With input of the subcommittees, the data from the survey and the insights gained through the robust discussions at each Task Force meeting, the ESTF members aligned on a four category framework for action developed with several key guiding beliefs:



Action is needed at multiple levels including the individual staff member, building, district, state and educator preparation programs with communities and key partners having a role in each;



School climate and culture are critical to reducing, managing and post-incident response. This includes a culture of belonging for all students and a trauma-informed philosophy in the school;



Training, particularly de-escalation and individual classroom crisis response, should be provided on a continuous basis beginning during preparation or role-specific training and should be part of both onboarding and annual continuous education or development for all staff;



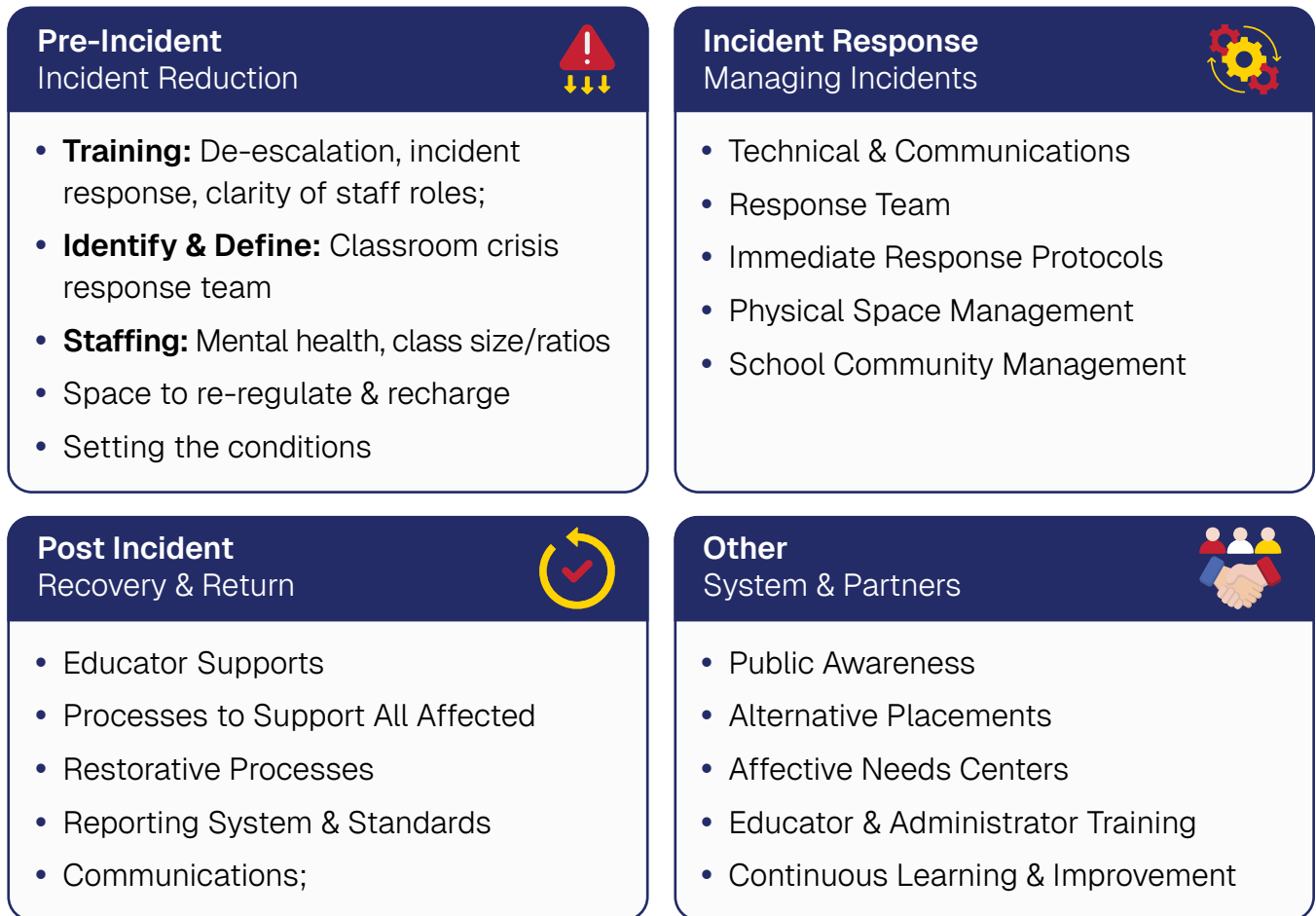
School funding and resource allocation has a direct effect on educator safety including the adult to student ration in classrooms, number of mental or behavioral health experts available and the options available for alternative placement within or outside of the home school;



Additional funding is needed and while the greatest and ideal impact will be achieved with substantial funding, **actions can be taken on all identified levers by all identified partners with limited new resources.**

The ESTF members and contributors aligned on a roadmap for action addressing needs and opportunities at four levels or points along a continuum with the goals of:

1. Reducing the number of incidents of aggressive or violent behavior by a student toward a educator or staff member; *and*



2. Minimizing the disruption, harm, effect, cost and effect on staff retention of any incidents; *and*
3. Ensuring the wellness of all involved with or affected by such incidents.

As is further detailed on the following pages of this Roadmap for Action and in each role specific roadmap, all of the items above have multiple elements and need to be considered through the unique context of each school or school system. The ESTF members also emphasize the importance of the different roles or actions needed by educators or staff members, building leaders, district leaders, state agencies and partners including educator prep programs, professional development providers, community members and partners. Roadmaps for each of these are part of the ESTF's findings. Each of these is available from the Office of School Safety.



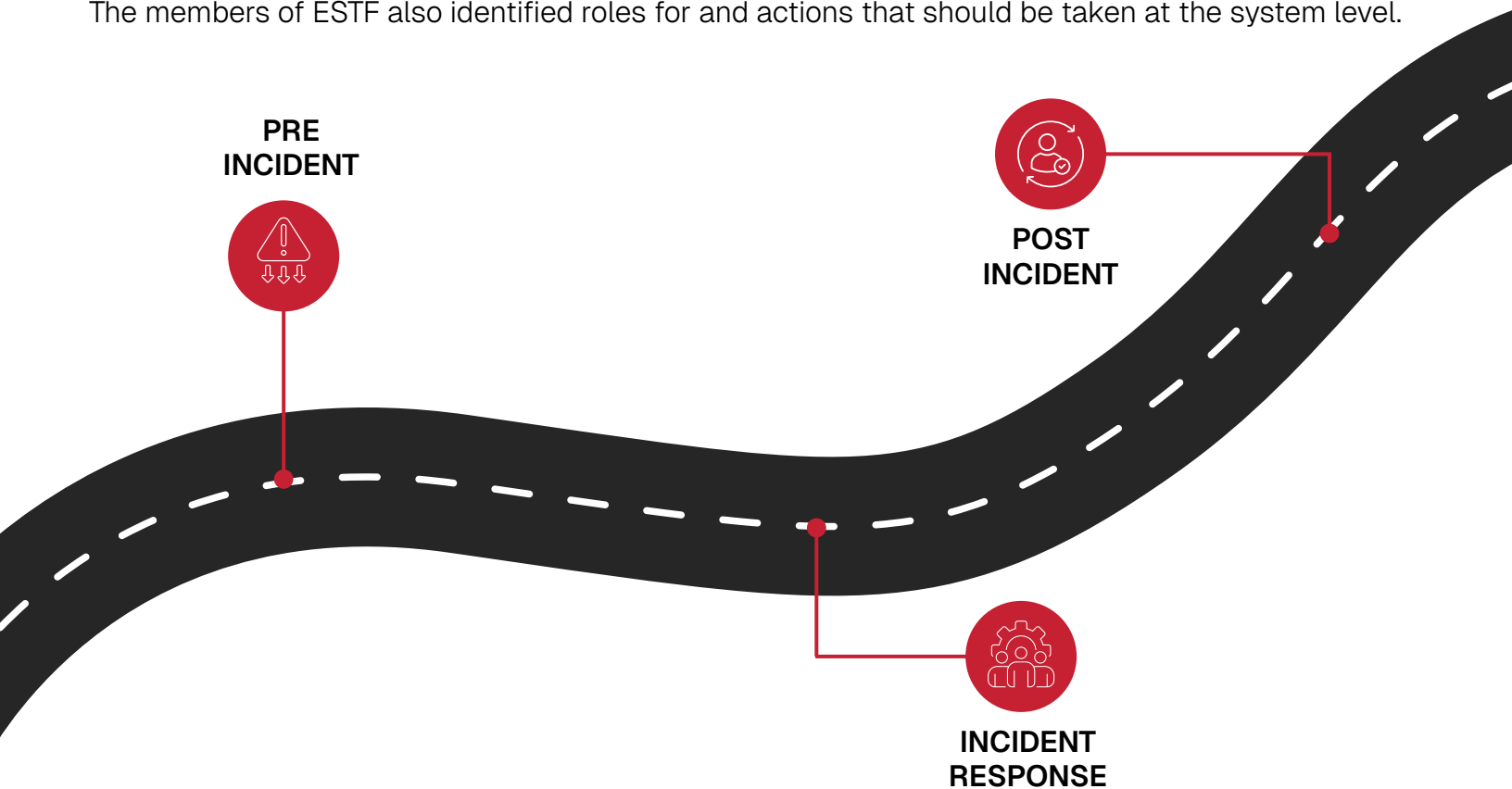
Throughout this Roadmap for Action, the term incident is used to refer to an act of physical violence by a student against an educator or staff member at a school or school facility. While cases of verbal assaults, outbursts or events involving a parent or other adult are critical for schools to address, these Roadmaps and the work of the ESTF are narrowly focused on aggressive behavior involving an act of assault or physical violence directed toward an educator or staff member.

Members of the ESTF all agreed that a multi-faceted approach to reducing the number of incidents should be a cornerstone of state and local efforts. This includes attention and focus to those items mentioned above including school climate and culture, staff de-escalation skills and staffing structures that maximize the ability to identify future risks and intervene before they reach the level of aggressive behavior.

While recognizing that no efforts can completely eliminate all incidents of aggressive student behavior toward educators and staff, the ESTF has developed this Roadmap for Action that includes steps to be taken at three points along a continuum:

- **Pre Incident** Actions and Systems to Reduce and Prepare for Incidents;
- Actions and Systems for **Incident Response** and Management;
- **Post Incident** Actions, Systems and Restorative Practices to Support All Involved.

The members of ESTF also identified roles for and actions that should be taken at the system level.





PRE-INCIDENT

Incident Reduction & Preparation



Training:

All school staff including teachers, paraprofessionals, front-office staff, transportation, custodial or maintenance and others should receive de-escalation training. Educators, paraprofessionals and other classroom or extracurricular instructors should be trained in de-escalation as part of their pre-employment training and these skills should be reinforced during onboarding and periodic professional development. All other staff should be trained in and familiar with at least basic de-escalation skills. Each school should have a clear incident response plan that is part of onboarding and regular training. These response plans should ensure every adult in the school building is clear on their roles, the role of others in or outside the school and the protocols for responding to and managing incidents.

Identify Crisis Response Team:

School systems should clearly identify the Classroom Incident Response Team (CIRT) for their schools including who comprises the team, how the team composition and roles should be adjusted depending on the student age, incident type or other factors. School leaders should ensure that the CIRT is identified clearly to all staff and that their role is clearly defined.

Staffing:

State, school system and school leaders should look for opportunities to increase student access to mental and behavioral health services, to reduce adult to student ratios in classrooms and, where possible, to provide small learning environments. These issues should be addressed through short-term and long-term strategies that consider available funding and resource allocation options.

Space to Recalibrate and Recharge:

To support both educators and students by providing opportunity for them to take a short break when needed to physically or emotionally step away from a situation, a “Tap-In/Tap-Out” system should be implemented. These systems allow a student or teacher to request a short break and, for teachers, coverage from another teacher. For teachers, this should be implemented through texting, radio, push-button or other school-wide communication.



Systems:

Districts should establish systems that can be adopted or tailored to individual school contexts to ensure all adults in the building are prepared to respond to incidents and are familiar with all resources, protocols and systems for responding. As is addressed in subsequent sections, this includes technical resources, response protocols and communication means and standards.

Conditions:

Every school leader should be trained in and supported by district leaders and school staff to create a positive school climate and culture in which every student feels welcome, safe and has at least one adult with whom they feel comfortable engaging. Building leaders, educators and staff should all be knowledgeable in the use of trauma-informed practices and care. Conditions should also include physical space that provides room and permission for students to re-regulate or be otherwise separated when necessary.





INCIDENT RESPONSE

Managing Incidents



Technical & Communications:

Every school should have the systems and equipment necessary to enable instant communications between every classroom and response teams, the central office and where appropriate, emergency services. Schools and school systems should consider their unique situations to determine whether radios, cellular or internet based communications will have the greatest reliability. System outage risk and range of communication should be a factor in selection. In addition to the equipment itself, all staff should be thoroughly trained on multiple means of communications and school or district protocols for requesting different levels or types of responses.

Classroom Incident Response Team (CIRT):

Every school should have a trained group of responders who are available for rapid response to an incident of escalating behavior that could or does lead to violence toward an educator or staff member. Whenever possible, a co-responder model should be employed that combines a member of the district security or local law enforcement and a mental or behavioral health specialist. These teams should have clarity within their team and the school on the role of each in responding to an incident. All response teams should train regularly in table-top and situational exercises that periodically involve school staff to familiarize all with the response protocols.

Prioritizing training is critical. In high-pressure situations, leaders should not simply hope that teams will rise to the occasion but should plan for them to fall to their level of training.

Immediate Response Protocols:

All staff should be familiar with their role and responsibilities during response to an incident. This includes the response team, front office staff, the involved educator or staff member, other adults in the room and those in neighboring rooms. Response protocols should be developed on a tiered system depending on the severity or nature of the incident with the first priority on safety for all



involved, situation de-escalation and preparing to quickly transition from incident response to post-incident management. Protocols should include when and how additional school or outside personnel are engaged in the response, immediate steps to support the educator and other students in the impacted classroom and providing space for the involved student and staff member to re-regulate or otherwise be separated from the situation.

Physical Space:

Managing situations, moving quickly to provide a safe environment and begin transitioning to recovery requires awareness of and strategic utilization of space. Response teams, educators and all staff should be aware of options for using different physical spaces to separate the aggressive student from the classroom environment and, when appropriate, to provide separated, safe and secure space for other students in the classroom and the involved educator or staff member. In some buildings, this may mean using empty classrooms or spaces while in others, it may mean using sections of common areas like hallways, lounges, offices or gymnasiums.

School Community Management:

Schools should have plans in place to ensure any disruptions are contained and there is limited impact on those who were not directly involved with or present for these incidents. Priority should be ensuring the safety of all in the school and providing adequate space for those responding to fully contain and resolve the situation without additional distractions or disruptions.





POST INCIDENT

Recovery & Return



Educator Supports:

Districts should establish research and trauma-informed practices in partnership with their staff for ensuring full and adequate supports are provided to a staff member who has been physically assaulted by a student. Where possible, an appropriate state agency or office should provide technical assistance or partner with providers, subject matter experts and others to develop such plans. At a minimum, based on the nature of the incident, this should include adequate time and coverage for the staff member to fully remove themselves from the situation, tend to their immediate wellness needs and ensure they are prepared to bring their full attention to the classroom before returning to regular duties. Supports should include clear explanation of rights and resources available to the educator or staff member, access to counseling, peer support teams and clear information about how to access workers compensation coverage, medical, mental health or other coverage and supports provided under the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) or otherwise. In future revisions to school safety and accountability frameworks required by the state, the existence of these plans should be an included element.

Processes to Support All Affected:

District and schools should have a formal process for documenting, debriefing and learning from any incident of violence by a student against an educator or staff member. This process should also include strategies for supporting others in the building who may be affected by the incident including other staff members or students.

Restorative Processes:

As part of a holistic response to these incidents, schools and school systems should examine the role of restorative processes where appropriate. These may include the involved student, adult or both or may focus on the classroom or school community and its return to learning through a restorative examination and discussion of the events.



Reporting System & Standards:

There is currently very limited data available at the local or state level about incidents of violence against an educator or school staff member by students. The absence of this data makes it difficult to fully understand the scope of the problem, to determine when or if interventions are necessary or where additional supports may be needed. Additionally, many educators reported being reluctant to report incidents out of fear of retaliation against themselves or the student or because they lacked confidence that appropriate responsive action would be taken. The state should direct school systems to log and report to the Colorado Department of Education through updates to an existing report, a minimal set of facts about any incident including, at least, the role of the staff member, injuries sustained, supports provided to the staff member and consequences for the student.

Communications:

Not every incident warrants district-wide or school community and family communication but each incident likely requires some communications. Policies and procedures should be in place to share, in a timely manner and while recognizing privacy requirements, information with the families of students directly impacted. School systems should establish standards of when and what information is shared beyond those directly involved including whether and how to communicate with families about an incident and when the incident should be addressed to school-wide or district-wide staff. These decisions should be guided by a focus on maintaining a safe environment for all students and adults, the rights to privacy of those involved and the benefit or damage of sharing or withholding information.

There are currently no statewide standards and few, if any, local standards and processes for providing supports to an educator who was physically assaulted by a student. In a survey completed by more than 1,100 educators and school staff members, over 50% who reported having been injured, shared a widely varying range of supports provided following the incident. Most of those respondents identified the need for greater mental health, well-being and post-incident resolution practices.



OTHER

System & Partners



Public Awareness:

To garner greater support for the resources, training and systems necessary to minimize the risk of injury to an educator by a student, state and local education leaders, elected officials and the general public should be fully informed. This awareness should include both the scope of the problem as identified in the Confluence PSG survey and in the national APA research as well as the effect it has on educator job satisfaction, general retention and willingness to serve in high-needs environments.

Alternative Placements:

The number of alternative placement options in Colorado has reduced dramatically over the past twenty years. As a result, many students with behavioral or learning needs who might otherwise be educated in an alternative education campus (AEC) are unable to be provided with such an environment that might better meet their needs. We are instead asking educators, at times without the necessary knowledge and skills, to provide services to these students, and in many cases, to the detriment of other students in their classes. Many districts in Colorado do not have any AECs other than vocational campuses and this situation is particularly true in smaller and rural districts where the nearest option can be an hour away with limited transportation options. State leaders should consider all avenues possible to increase the number of AECs and increasing support for staffing of and transportation to existing campuses to expand the number of students served.

Affective Needs Centers:

In the absence of an appropriate AEC and to complement the educational environments offered within schools, school system leaders and state leaders should examine opportunities to expand the number of affective needs centers (ANCs). These in-school programs are specialized programs designed to support students with significant social, emotional, and behavioral challenges that impact their ability to function in a general education setting. These centers, often part of special education services, provide structured environments where students can develop school-ready behaviors, emotional regulation and social skills while maintaining access to academic instruction. They cater to students with disabilities such as serious emotional disability or other conditions outlined in Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), as defined by frameworks like the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and state regulations (e.g., Colorado's ECEA).



Educator & Administrator Training:

Addressing student violence against an educator or staff member should be a topic addressed in all educator and administrator preparation and training programs. This should include training for all educators and school professionals in de-escalation skills. For administrators, courses should be provided on incident response frameworks and creating positive cultures of belonging within their school. Providers of professional development and appropriate state agencies should examine opportunities to develop and offer courses in de-escalation, crisis response and restorative processes.

Continuous Learning & Improvement:

State and district leaders should undertake an intentional effort to continuously learn from the experiences and perspectives of educators, the school climate dynamics' correlation with student behavior and the effectiveness of different strategies to both reduce incidents of violence against educators and for responding to such incidents. These learnings should inform state and district supports for schools, revisions to incident response protocols and supports provided to educators.

Every person in the education ecosystem has a role to play increasing educator safety as do state and local leaders. While each may not have a role in every element, there are important actions each should take along the pre-incident, incident response and post-incident continuum. These roles and actions are further detailed in Roadmaps for Action specific to each role that can be found on the Office of School Safety website. Below are highlights of some items contained in those Roadmaps.

Educator and School Staff:

Those in classrooms are most likely to encounter aggressive or violent behavior by a student. Much of their role is working to identify potential risks before they escalate, de-escalating when the behavior is moving toward outbursts or violence and managing the situation in real-time. To support this range of responsibilities, educators should advocate for and actively participate in appropriate training beginning in educator preparation and continuing throughout their career. These professionals also have an important role establishing a culture of belonging, creating connections with families and helping students develop healthy coping mechanisms. Educators and staff need to be





familiar with incident response protocols including communication systems and physical space management. Following an incident, educators and staff need to make sure they are aware of their rights and available resources and they need to seek, advocate for and participate in their own care and treatment following an incident.

Building Leaders:

School leaders must own the school culture and the comprehensive plan to respond to incidents of violence by a student against an educator or staff member. On one side of this, they must be able to clearly articulate their vision for a healthy, welcoming school culture and engage every member of the school community in advancing that vision. On the other side, they must prepare for all scenarios including violent actions by students by having comprehensive plans for responding to and managing a wide range of situations. They must also utilize existing resources to ensure appropriate training for all staff members including response teams and prepare themselves to be effective advocates for additional resources, system changes or shifts in staffing and response models.

District Leaders:

Like building leaders, district leaders must set a high standard for the utilization of existing resources and be champions in their communities and at the state level for additional resources. District leaders need to set system-wide standards, systems and protocols for responding to incidents, hold building leaders accountable for implementing those systems and be responsive to feedback from school leaders. District leaders will need to facilitate and support third party partnerships such as mental or behavioral health experts for co-responder teams and ensure local law enforcement and emergency services are familiar with district systems, policies and strategies for incident response.

State Agencies:

Certain state agencies, particularly the Colorado Department of Education, the Office of School Safety, should work closely together to draw on the respective strengths of each agency to provide training or other technical assistance to district and school officials. These agencies may also need to play a role in requiring the collection and reporting of certain data. Other agencies may also serve a role including the Behavioral Health Administration and other offices of the Department of Human Services.

Educator Preparation:

Each educator or administrator preparation program and provider of professional development should work closely with schools to ensure the inclusion of critical skills such as de-escalation training, crisis response, trauma training, restorative practices and broader issues like promoting a culture of belonging in the school.



ESTF Membership List

Legislatively Designated Appointees

<i>Chris Harms</i>	<i>Director, Colorado Office of School Safety, Department of Public Safety</i>
<i>Susana Córdova</i>	<i>Commissioner of Education</i>
<i>Brent Reckman</i>	<i>Administrator from a district charter school</i>
<i>Laura Carno</i>	<i>Individual that works for a nonprofit entity that focuses on school safety</i>
<i>Jamie Montoya-De Smidt</i>	<i>Educational support professional</i>
<i>Lisa Humberd</i>	<i>Representative of a statewide organization that represents students with disabilities</i>
<i>Rottwa Ivestor</i>	<i>Educational support professional</i>
<i>Darren Joiner</i>	<i>Administrator from a charter school</i>
<i>Elsa Bañuelos-Lindsay</i>	<i>Representative from an organization that receives Title I funding</i>
<i>Melissa Mahlke</i>	<i>Teacher from a rural district</i>
<i>Suzie McGhghy</i>	<i>Educational Support Professional</i>
<i>Jim Plott</i>	<i>Teacher from a charter school</i>
<i>Susan Rayburn</i>	<i>Teacher from an urban district</i>
<i>Marsia Ronyak</i>	<i>Teacher from a suburban district</i>
<i>Faith Schmeling</i>	<i>Student</i>
<i>Danette Smith</i>	<i>Commissioner of Behavioral Health Administration</i>
<i>Luke Yoder</i>	<i>Certified Restorative Justice Professional</i>
<i>Chris Zimmerman</i>	<i>Administrator from a public school</i>



Honorary Members

<i>Margaret Ochoa</i>	<i>Manager, Colorado School Safety Resource Center, Office of School Safety</i>
<i>Ali DeCaro</i>	<i>Special education teacher, St. Vrain Valley Schools</i>
<i>Finessa Ferrell</i>	<i>Senior Learning and Engagement Strategist, Colorado Education Initiative</i>
<i>Dustin Geist</i>	<i>Board Certified Behavior Analyst</i>
<i>Christina Monaco</i>	<i>Executive Director, Field Services and Supports, Colorado Department of Education</i>
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<i>Robin Singer</i>	<i>Supervisor of Student Services and Support, Office of Facility Schools</i>
<i>Chris Slobodnik Assistant</i>	<i>Director of Student Services, Pueblo County School District 70</i>
<i>Brandon Smith</i>	<i>LCSW, Elementary School Counselor, Senior CPI District Crisis Intervention Trainer, Brighton 27J</i>



Statement from ESTF Chair

Thanks to the legislative sponsors of SB24-1320 for recognizing the need for the Educator Safety Task Force (Task Force/ESTF). With both national and statewide research, along with the stories shared at task force meetings, the enormity of the issue became increasingly apparent.

The individual stories were heartbreaking both for the educators injured, the students who witnessed the attacks and also the student perpetrators. Tears were shed as committee members listened to school professionals recount their experiences. **As these roadmaps outline, changes are needed.**

Thanks to all the members of the Educator Safety Task Force for their dedication to this work. Many task force members joined one or more subcommittees necessitating their attendance at multiple meetings each month. These meetings were conducted after school hours and participants gave freely of their time.

Task force members also encouraged other colleagues to join the working committees, and it was obvious from the subsequent discussions that the issue of educator safety was a major concern for many in Colorado schools. We thank them all for their contributions.

Thanks to the Confluence staff whose sensitively and professionally facilitated the meetings and carefully consolidated the feedback and recommendations from all participants to create these roadmaps.

We challenge everyone invested in our schools to review these roadmaps and watch the brief video clips so that together we can acknowledge the problem of educator safety, and make changes to further protect, support and retain everyone in Colorado schools.

Thank you!

Christine R. Harms MS,

Director, Colorado Office of School Safety



**Companion Documents Available
on [Office of School Safety website](#)**

01

ESTF Roadmap
Educators & School Staff

02

ESTF Roadmap
Building Leaders

03

ESTF Roadmap
District Leaders

04

ESTF Roadmap
State Agencies

05

ESTF Roadmap
Prep Programs

06

ESTF Educator
Survey



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While the Educator Safety Task Force was managed by the Office of School Safety (OSS) in the Colorado Department of Public Safety (CDPS), this report is strictly representative of the Task Force’s considerations and should not to be construed as the recommendations or legislative priorities of OSS or CDPS. Furthermore, the recommendations have not been subject to legal or fiscal analysis.