



COLORADO
Office of School Safety
Department of Public Safety



CONFLUENCE
POLICY & STRATEGY
GROUP

EDUCATOR SAFETY TASK FORCE



Roadmap for Building Leaders





Educator Safety Task Force: *Roadmap for Building Leaders*

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. 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



With input of the subcommittees, the data from a survey of over 1,100 educators 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;



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 guide 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 an educator or staff member; **and**
2. Minimizing the disruption, harm and effect of any incidents; **and**
3. Ensuring the wellness of all involved with or affected by such incidents.

Throughout their discussions, the ESTF members agreed that every person in the education ecosystem has a role to play increasing educator safety as do state and local leaders. While every person, office or agency may not have a role in every element, there are important actions each should take along

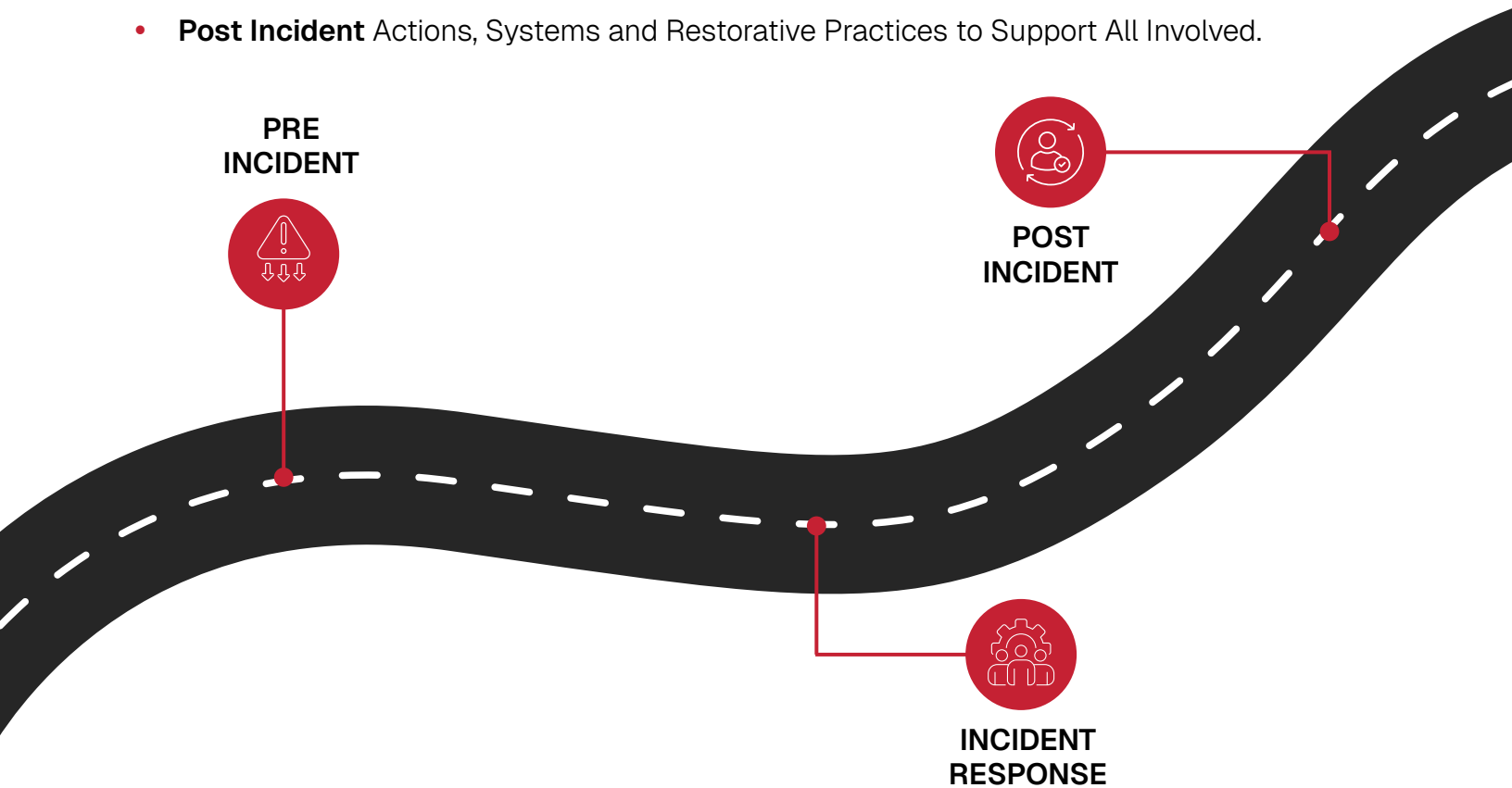
the pre-incident, incident response and post-incident continuum. These roles and actions are further detailed in Roadmaps for Action specific to each role that can be found on the Office of School Safety website.

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.

While recognizing that no efforts can completely eliminate all incidents of aggressive student behavior toward educators and staff, the ESTF has developed a 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.





Pre-Incident
Incident Reduction



- **Training:** De-escalation, incident response, clarity of staff roles;
- **Identify & Define:** Classroom crisis response team
- **Staffing:** Mental health, class size/ratios
- Space to re-regulate & recharge
- Setting the conditions

Incident Response
Managing Incidents



- Technical & Communications
- Response Team
- Immediate Response Protocols
- Physical Space Management
- School Community Management

Post Incident
Recovery & Return



- Educator Supports
- Processes to Support All Affected
- Restorative Processes
- Reporting System & Standards
- Communications;

Other
System & Partners



- Public Awareness
- Alternative Placements
- Affective Needs Centers
- Educator & Administrator Training
- Continuous Learning & Improvement

As is further detailed on the following pages of this Roadmap for Building Leaders and in each role specific guide, there are actions to be taken in each of these verticals or categories by individuals at each level but no one individual is or should be responsible for every action. The broadest effects and improvements will occur through a comprehensive approach and continuous cycle of monitoring, training, reinforcing, examining and improving practices and policies at each level.

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.





A ROADMAP FOR BUILDING LEADERS

As is discussed here and in the ESTF Roadmap for Action, there are critical roles, responsibilities and opportunities for all involved in the education system at each level to take actions that will improve educator safety. The following tables describe the role, responsibility or opportunity for building leaders identified by the ESTF along the continuum from pre-incident to post-incident. These range from awareness of systems and participation in training to advocacy for supports, actions prior to during or after incidents and the continuous fostering of conditions or connections within the school community.

PRE-INCIDENT



Incident Reduction & Preparation

The North Star for educator safety strategies is to prevent injury to any education staff member as a result of aggressive or violent behavior by a student. Building leaders should prioritize trainings, strategies and school community conditions are those that are likely to reduce the number or severity of these incidents and be prepared for those incidents do occur.

Roles for building leaders in the pre-incident category identified by the ESTF are listed in the table below.

Pre-Incident	
Element	Building Leaders Roles & Responsibilities
Training	<p>Building leaders should ensure appropriate training is available to all staff who interact with students. At a minimum, all staff should be provided comprehensive de-escalation training. For educators, building leaders should work with their preparation or teacher training partners to ensure it is incorporated into training for educators. For all staff, de-escalation training should be part of onboarding and regular professional development or continuing education. These trainings should include classroom and situation based components. Training should be refreshed regularly to keep up with development or learnings from the field and to keep skills current.</p> <p>In addition to de-escalation training, building leaders should work with district leaders to ensure training on all school specific or school system developed incident response procedures include training components for all staff.</p>



Pre-Incident

Element	Building Leaders Roles & Responsibilities
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Classroom Incident Response Team	<p>The ESTF Roadmap for Action recommends that all schools have a trained group of responders including security and mental or behavioral health experts. Building leaders should ensure all staff are familiar with the CIRT or other professionals who will respond to incidents in their classroom and should be clear on their role in contacting, communicating, working with and supporting these individuals.</p> <p>To ensure their preparedness to partner with these responders, building leaders should provide opportunities for all staff to participate in scenario-based training with the teams. Whenever possible, this should include annual full-scale trainings and micro-learning opportunities throughout the year.</p> <p>The ESTF also recommends the use of co-responder models that partner security professionals with mental or behavioral health experts as part of the CIRT or other response team. Building leaders should be familiar with co-responder models and work with district leaders to develop such structures that are tailored to their local context and resources.</p> <p>In developing their building level response protocols, building leaders should prepare for multiple incidents including how to prioritize or otherwise deploy limited resources in such situations and who responds if multiple incidents occur simultaneously.</p>
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Staffing	<p>As is discussed in the Roadmap for Action, staffing is a complex issue and one that is directly connected to educator safety. Building 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. This does not always require only addressing class size but can include utilization of smaller group learning environments, differentiated supports within the space and prioritizing lower adult to student ratios for high-need or risk groups of students.</p> <p>In advocating for expanded staffing, resources or alternate resource use, building leaders should consider the behavioral trends or intensity of different students or student groups. Building leaders should also engage educators and school staff to gather input to inform their decisions, requests or recommendations.</p>
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Space to Recalibrate and Recharge	<p>Building leaders should develop systems and spaces that provide both educators and students an opportunity to take a short break when needed to physically or emotionally step away from a situation, a “Tap-In/Tap-Out” system. For educators needing to avail themselves, building leaders should have established standards and expectations as well as the technical means for educators to call for support while they step away. For students, a system should be established and educators trained on that system that allows a student to request or an educator to offer (or require) a student to step away from a situation. When a student needs this opportunity, it should be provided in a place and manner that is physically safe and emotionally comfortable for the student.</p>
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Pre-Incident

Element	Building Leaders Roles & Responsibilities
Conditions	<p>School leaders are responsible for both the physical conditions of a school and the school’s culture, climate and environment. Every school leader should insist on district support for their creation of a healthy and welcoming school climate. These leaders should also actively solicit the input and support of 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.</p> <p>Among the strategies that should be considered by all building leaders, they should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Time for building relationships and connections among staff;• Mentoring programs for new staff;• Ensuring students have time to be outside or decompress;• Prioritizing physical space for students or staff to re-regulate. <p>Building leaders should also expect and support their educators to be active contributors to the conditions in their building. These expectations should be reinforced through onboarding, annual orientations or professional development, inclusion in formal or informal feedback discussions and job descriptions when possible. Educator and staff roles that should be reinforced by building leaders include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Creating a culture of collaboration around student success with assistants, teachers, administrators and district all owning the success of the student;• Fostering an environment in which every student feels welcome and has at least one adult they trust and will confide in about challenges;• Creating connections with families including parents, grandparents, guardians, siblings and others;• Recognizing behavior as communication and engaging appropriately;• Modeling and teaching healthy relationships and social media habits.





INCIDENT RESPONSE



Managing Incidents

Even with the best training, preparation and healthy school cultures, not every aggressive or violent behavior by a student toward an educator can be prevented. When such incidents do occur, building leaders need to ensure they and all staff are prepared to take appropriate, decisive and swift action to operationalize their training, communicate about the situation and contain or minimize the disruption, all with the goal of ensuring their own safety and that of the students.

Roles for building leaders in managing incident response are listed in the table below.

Incident Response	
Element	Building Leaders Roles & Responsibilities
Technical & Communications	<p>Building leaders must ensure there are immediate means for educators to call for help including back-up systems. Staff should be trained on these systems and should know what back-up systems are available. These may include phones, radios, call-buttons or other always-on communication systems.</p> <p>Building leaders should have in place a system for regular training on and testing of all communication systems.</p> <p>Emergency response systems such as RedBag, Raptor and others should be studied as options or exemplars of possible components for communications.</p>
Classroom Incident Response Team (CIRT)	<p>As is described in the Roadmap for Action, 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. The building leader must ensure these teams have clarity within their team and among all staff on the role of each in responding to an incident. Building leaders should schedule training regularly in table-top and situational exercises that periodically involve school staff to familiarize all with the response protocols.</p>



Incident Response

Element	Building Leaders Roles & Responsibilities
Physical Space	<p>Building leaders should work with their educators and CIRT members to create and maintain physical space that maximizes the ability of the educators and incident responders to de-escalate, separate and provide safety to all involved or in direct proximity of an incident.</p> <p>Educators and staff should be instructed on ways to use the physical environment to de-escalate tensions, provide safe environments for other students and minimize the threat of the physical space.</p>
School Community Management	<p>Building leaders should have systems, procedures and protocols in place for managing the school community during an incident with a priority on maintaining safety and minimizing the spread of any disruptions beyond the classroom or space where the incident occurred. This may include things like holding students and staff in place while an incident is resolved, having dedicated corridors or spaces to create buffer zones and clear expectations for students and staff during an incident.</p>





POST INCIDENT



Recovery & Return

Following an incident of violent behavior by a student toward an educator or staff member, the return to comfort and learning for all affected will be different depending on the nature of the incident. There will be immediate, short-term and longer-term effects and steps to be taken to advance that cycle of recovery. All of the adults in a school will often be torn between the needs of their students, including the offending student, and those of the involved or affected adults. Building leaders should be sure to give attention to the needs of all involved.

Roles for building leaders in supporting the needs of all involved as part of the post-incident recovery are listed in the table below.

Post-Incident	
Element	Building Leaders Roles & Responsibilities
Educator Supports	<p>Building leaders must fully consider the emotional trauma that results for an adult from being in a violent situation with a student. Even if the educator or staff member’s physical injuries are minimal, the incident may still be traumatic. The attempted assault or student intent to cause physical harm can have a real, psychological effect that requires thoughtful actions and time for recovery.</p> <p>Building leaders should first ensure the immediate physical or medical needs of the educator or staff member are addressed and, depending on the situation, their mental wellness. Once these are addressed, building leaders should provide them with the space they need to recover and make sure they are fully aware of all of their rights and any available resources including medical care, mental health supports, time off if needed and where appropriate, access to workers compensation benefits.</p>



Post-Incident

Element	Building Leaders Roles & Responsibilities
Processes to Support All Affected	<p>Building leaders should work with their cross-system colleagues and system leaders to ensure they have in place clear processes to support all involved with or affected by an incident. They should also insist that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The affected educator is active in the de-briefing and other processes;• Time is provided for students, paraprofessionals and others to engage in post-incident processes. <p>Building leaders must ensure they have in place the systems and resources for intentionally structured debriefs with the students affected by the incident. These conversations may be led by a member of the CIRT or another professional to provide a neutral facilitator for the discussion, allowing the involved educator to either participate as an affected individual or to separate from the discussion.</p>
Reporting System & Standards	<p>The ESTF has recommended the creation of a standardized reporting process and set of facts about each incident. The Roadmap for Action recommends that these be created at the school system level with support from the State and that the State require a minimal set of facts about each incident.</p> <p>Building leaders must foster an environment that instills comfort among any affected educators or staff members to participate in the reporting process and confidence both that the incident will be accurately documented and that there will not be repercussions for the educator reporting the incident.</p>
Communications	<p>Acting in partnership with district leaders, building leaders should oversee a clear process for determining the scope and means for dissemination of information about any incident within the school, school system or to the school community.</p>



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>
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<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>
<i>Amy Schamberg</i>	<i>Mental health professional</i>
<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](#)**

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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.