

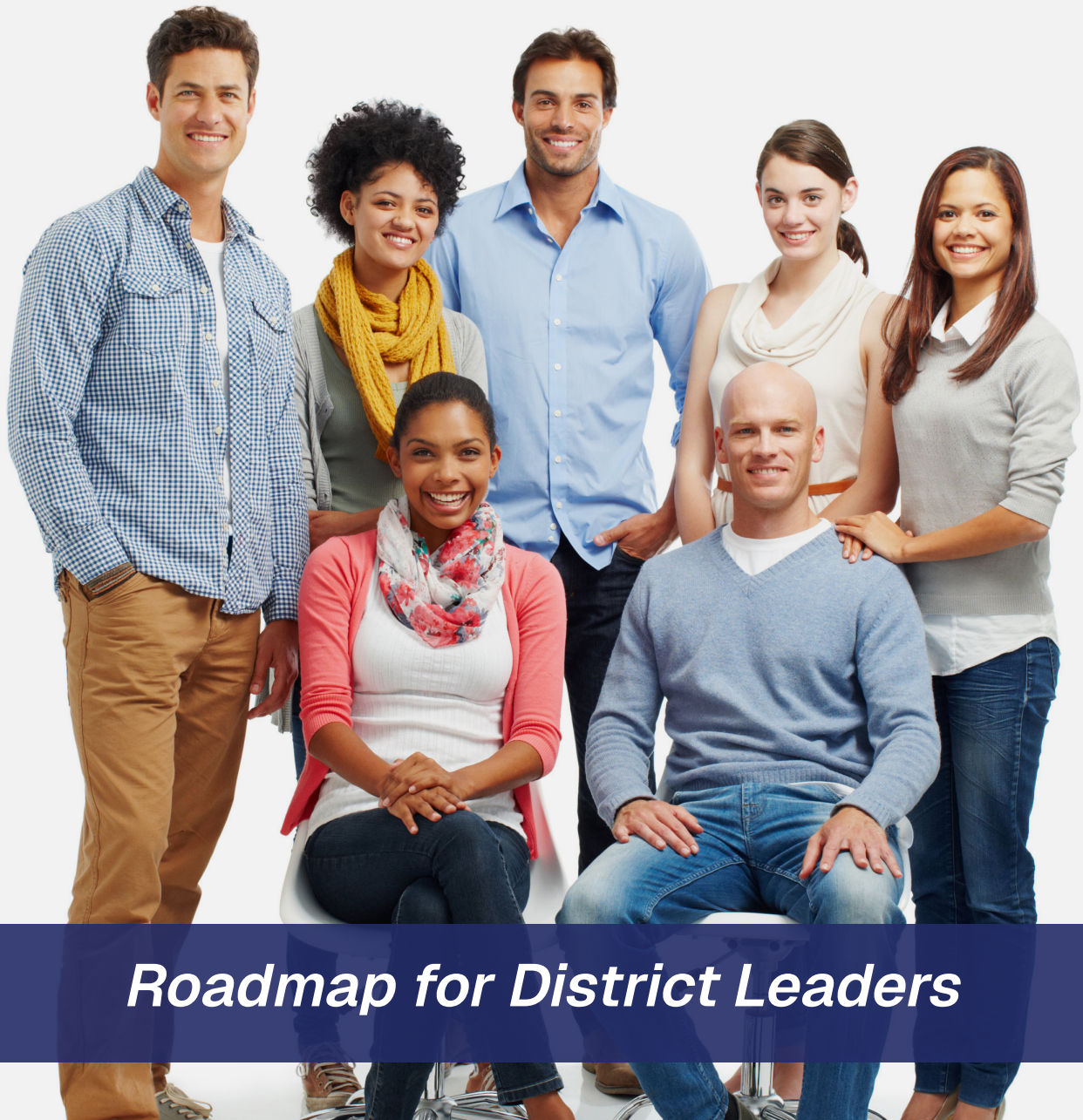


COLORADO
Office of School Safety
Department of Public Safety



CONFLUENCE
POLICY & STRATEGY
GROUP

EDUCATOR SAFETY TASK FORCE




Roadmap for District Leaders



Educator Safety Task Force: *Roadmap for District 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 culture in the school;



Training, particularly de-escalation and 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 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.

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.

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 District 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 DISTRICT 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 educators 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. The two highest priority categories of actions by district leaders are those that support educators and building leaders with the training, knowledge and conditions likely to reduce the number or severity of these incidents and be prepared for those incidents do occur.

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

Pre-Incident	
Element	District Leaders Roles & Responsibilities
Training	<p>District leaders should work with and empower building leaders to ensure appropriate training is available to all staff who interact with students. At a minimum, all staff should be provided comprehensive de-escalation training. District 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.</p> <p>In addition to de-escalation training, district leaders should ensure training on all school specific, or school system developed incident response procedures include training components for all staff.</p>



Pre-Incident

Element

District Leaders Roles & Responsibilities

Classroom Incident Response Team

The ESTF Roadmap for Action recommends that all schools have a trained group of responders including security and mental or behavioral health experts.

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. District leaders should be familiar with co-responder models and work with their internal security and mental or behavioral health providers and with their local providers or partners to develop such structures that are tailored to their local context and resources.

Some school and system leaders have been successful utilizing Medicaid and other state or federal funding streams to support aspects of their co-responder models. District leaders should explore all available response partnership structures and funding sources.

Staffing

District 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.

As part of their efforts, district leaders should undertake all possible efforts to increase the number and ratio of mental health professionals to the ratios recommended by professional associations. The [National Association of School Psychologists \(NASP\)](#) recommends a 1:500 student-to-school psychologist ratio, while the [American School Counselor Association \(ASCA\)](#) recommends 1:250 student-to-counselor. The [School Social Work Association of America](#) also recommends a 1 to 250 ratio.

Space to Recalibrate and Recharge

District leaders should establish system-wide policies or expectations to empower building leaders to 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.

More guidance on the use of these systems is provided in the Roadmap for Building Leaders and the Roadmap for Educators.

Conditions

School leaders are responsible for both the physical conditions of a school and the school's culture, climate and environment. District leaders should include this expectation in their consideration of building leader placement, promotion, hiring and job descriptions. District leaders should expect every building leader to create and foster a healthy and welcoming school climate and to ensure all staff are trained in trauma-informed practices. 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.



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, district leaders should have clear expectations of their building leaders, system-wide standards, protocols or systems and competent, empowered building level leaders and teams who can quickly respond to the incident. Much of the role of district leaders is ensuring appropriate training and resources are provided to the building leader and that those local leaders have building-specific plans and protocols in place.

Roles for district leaders in supporting those managing incident response are listed in the table below.

Incident Response	
Element	District Leaders Roles & Responsibilities
Technical & Communications	<p>District leaders are ultimately responsible for ensuring there are immediate and operational means for educators to call for help including back-up systems. These may include phones, radios, call-buttons or other always-on 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>District leaders must ensure that every school has 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.</p> <p>District leaders should expect their building leaders to schedule training regularly in table-top and situational exercises that periodically involve school staff to familiarize all with the response protocols. District leaders should consider system-wide training benefits and opportunities.</p>
Physical Space	<p>Managing the physical space during an incident is primarily the role of the CIRT, building leader and involved educator or staff member. District leaders should consider system-wide expectations, trainings or standards.</p>
School Community Management	<p>Managing the school community including staff and students is the responsibility of the building leader. District leaders should ensure and expect the establishment of appropriate policies by the building leader and may consider the district role in setting policies or supporting the building leader.</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 district leaders in supporting the needs of all involved as part of the post-incident recovery are largely limited to ensuring resources and systems in place as is listed in the table below.

Post-Incident	
Element	District Leaders Roles & Responsibilities
Educator Supports	<p>District leaders should develop policies, systems and procedures at the system level to ensure all affected and involved educators or staff have access to an appropriate and full range of supports following an incident. In addition to immediate resources for medical or mental health needs, a dedicated point of contact should be established to advise educators and staff of all available resources and their rights. Services such as the CU Anchutz Colorado Educator Support should be actively promoted.</p> <p>District leaders should support building leaders to provide affected educators or staff 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>
Processes to Support All Affected	<p>District leaders should establish and ensure implementation at the building level of 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>District leaders should identify opportunities for continuous learning at the system level from incidents in all schools to improve supports.</p>



Post-Incident

Element	District Leaders Roles & Responsibilities
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>District leaders should work with the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) to provide this information and with their building leaders to ensure the timely and accurate collection of information. District leaders must also foster an environment that instills comfort among building leaders and 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 or building leader reporting the incident.</p>
Communications	<p>District leaders should establish clear guidance for their system level communications teams and for building leaders relating to communication of information about any incident within the school, school system or to the school community and general public</p>





OTHER



System & Partners

There are a number of issues or factors that can affect educator safety and a school or school system’s ability to respond to incidents of aggressive or violent behavior by a student toward an educator. System-level issues and actions also have the potential to drive change at scale and need to be part of a strategy that includes short-term actions and long-term system change.

The ESTF identified actions and opportunities listed below that exist beyond the continuum of pre to pos-incident.

Post-Incident	
Element	District Leaders Roles & Responsibilities
Public Awareness	<p>To garner greater support for the resources, training and systems necessary to minimize the risk of injury to an educator by a student, local elected officials, school boards, state leaders and the public need to be fully informed. This awareness should include both the scope of the problem as identified in the educator 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.</p> <p>District leaders can support this awareness through discussions with their school boards, public communications, advocacy or lobbying efforts and general communications.</p>
Alternative Placements	<p>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.</p> <p>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. District leaders should call on state elected officials to 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.</p>



Post-Incident

Element

District Leaders Roles & Responsibilities

Affective Needs Centers

In the absence of an appropriate AEC and to complement the educational environments offered within schools, district 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.

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. At a minimum, district officials should expect their education preparation and administrator training programs to provide training in de-escalation and in issues relating to school culture and climate.

Continuous Learning & Improvement

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 district supports for schools, revisions to incident response protocols and supports provided to educators.

Districts should ensure policies are in place and aligned with regulations and procedures at the school level to support systemic school safety coherence.

Each district should have a clearly articulated vision for school and educator safety that contains and follows a continuous improvement cycle through strategic planning that helps them align their goals and key strategies. This strategic vision should be designed with local factors and context in mind to leverage all available resources or assets including human capital, funding, partnerships and community assets.



ESTF Membership List

Legislatively Designated Appointees

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<i>Luke Yoder</i>	<i>Certified Restorative Justice Professional</i>
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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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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.