



COLORADO
Office of School Safety
Department of Public Safety



CONFLUENCE
POLICY & STRATEGY
GROUP

EDUCATOR SAFETY TASK FORCE



Roadmap for Educators



Educator Safety Task Force: *Roadmap for Educators*

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.




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.

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 Educators 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. Recognizing that there are factors fully outside of educators’ control, the two highest priority categories of actions by educators are those intended to reduce the number or severity of these incidents and be prepared for those incidents do occur.

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

Pre-Incident	
Element	Educator & Staff Roles & Responsibilities
Training	<p>De-escalation Training. All educators and school staff should insist on de-escalation training as part of their preparation, onboarding and regular professional development or continuing education. These trainings should include classroom and situation based components. Training should begin during professional preparation and should be refreshed regularly to keep up with development or learnings from the field and to keep skills current.</p> <p>Educators and their representatives should advocate for these trainings for classroom teachers, paraprofessionals and all education staff who interact with students which may include transportation, maintenance or other staff.</p>



Pre-Incident

Element

Educator & Staff Roles & Responsibilities

Classroom Incident Response Team (CIRT)

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

To ensure their preparedness to partner with these responders, educators should advocate for and participate in scenario-based training with the teams. Whenever possible, this should include annual full-scale trainings and micro-learning opportunities throughout the year.

Staffing

The need for expanded student access to mental and behavioral health professionals and improved adult to student classroom ratios is addressed in the ESTF Roadmap for Action. While this is not an issue that can be directly addressed or changed by educators, they should consider and explore opportunities to advocate for these issues with their professional associations, within their school, school system, community and with state leaders.

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.

Educators should advocate for these systems if not already in place and if they do exist, should be familiar with and make use of these where appropriate. The role of educators includes being familiar with the technical or procedural side of them such as how to signal for their need and it should include the personal and professional comfort and confidence to encourage or embrace their use.

Conditions

Educators and school staff all have a critical and front-line role to play in establishing the conditions that will reduce incidents of violent behavior toward educators, prepare the school community to respond when they do occur and empower the community to quickly recover following an incident. These roles include but are not limited to:

- 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, educators need 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 educators in managing incident response are listed in the table below.

Incident Response	
Element	Educator & Staff Roles & Responsibilities
Technical & Communications	<p>Educators and school staff should be familiar with and comfortable following communication protocols at the time of the incident and under high-stress situations. This should be reinforced through regular training.</p> <p>Communication knowledge of each educator must include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Awareness of what system and back-up system can be used to communicate (e.g. push button, radio, text etc.); What information to communicate and to whom. <p>Educators should also be fully familiar with any safety features or protocols within the classroom or other location of the incident intended to prevent further harm or damage, provide a safe environment for other students and protect the safety of themselves, other educators and the student who is the aggressor.</p>
Classroom Incident Response Team (CIRT)	<p>Acting with the knowledge described in the pre-incident table, educators and staff should be prepared to engage appropriately with the CIRT or other responding individuals. This includes what information to provide, how to relay information, what information to convey, how to support the responders and if or how they should create space for the responders. Educators and staff will also need to be familiar with responder protocols including when additional help should be sought.</p>



Incident Response

Element	Educator & Staff Roles & Responsibilities
Physical Space	Educators and staff should be prepared to use the physical environment to de-escalate tensions, provide safe environments for other students and minimize the threat of the physical space. This can include a range of tactics including “cozy corners” within the classroom for other students, fidget toys, securing or avoiding the presence of any items that could be used to cause harm and ensuring all students know where they can go within or outside the classroom during an incident.
School Community Management	During an incident, educators should lean on their training and school systems to provide for the safety of others in the school including students and staff in other classrooms.

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. Educators will often be torn between the needs of their students, including the offending student, and their own needs. They should give attention to the needs of all involved and recognize the effects may extend beyond their own classroom into the school, district or even the community.

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

Post-Incident

Element	Educator & Staff Roles & Responsibilities
Educator Supports	<p>Beginning immediately after an incident, educators or staff who have been the target of aggressive, violent behavior by a student should ensure their own well-being is a priority. This includes advocating for and seeking appropriate professional support and self-care.</p> <p>Educators should advocate for and access all available resources including medical care, mental health supports, time off if needed and where appropriate, access to workers compensation benefits.</p>



Post-Incident

Element

Educator & Staff Roles & Responsibilities

Processes to Support All Affected

As is discussed in all of the Roadmaps, schools and school systems should have in place clear processes to support all involved with or affected by an incident. In addition to advocating for and being knowledgeable of these processes, there are important active roles for educators to take including:

- Pro-active participation in the de-briefing, recovery and other processes;
- Ensuring students, paraprofessionals and others know their roles, rights and available resources;
- Making time for students, paraprofessionals and others to engage in these post-incident processes.

In most schools, educators will have an important role organizing and participating in 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.

Reporting System & Standards

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.

Educators should be familiar with and should actively participate in the collection or providing of needed information for these reports. If, as some suggested in the educator survey, there is hesitation by a school or system leader to report all information, educators should seek support and ensure the incident is appropriately documented.

Communications

Each school and school system should have a clear process for determining what information about any incident should be communicated within the school, school system or to the school community. Educators should be familiar with the general guidelines, know who to contact with questions and know if there is any information they should or are authorized to communicate.



ESTF Membership List

Legislatively Designated Appointees

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Honorary Members

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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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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.