



**COLORADO**  
Office of School Safety  
Department of Public Safety



CONFLUENCE  
POLICY & STRATEGY  
GROUP

# EDUCATOR SAFETY TASK FORCE



*Roadmap for State Leaders*



# Educator Safety Task Force: *Roadmap for State 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.

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




Certain state agencies, particularly the Colorado Department of Education (CDE), the Office of School Safety (OSS), 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.


State 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 Department of Regulatory Affairs (DORA) the Behavioral Health Administration (BHA) and other offices of the Colorado Department of Human Services (CDHS).

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. u

**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 State 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 STATE AGENCIES & STATE 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 role of state agencies includes setting state standards, establishing standardized or model systems, providing technical assistance to local leaders, creating and delivering trainings and identifying resources for district leaders. State elected officials also have important roles that span from State Board of Education adoption of rules and collaboration with CDE leadership to legislative actions to provide resources, establish minimum requirements, authorize data collection, support specific programs like co-responder models, support workforce strategies for recruiting and retaining educators and mental health experts.

The following tables describe the role, responsibility or opportunity for educators identified by the ESTF along the continuum from pre-incident to post-incident.





**PRE-INCIDENT**



# Incident Reduction & Preparation

State leaders should prioritize requiring or providing resources, training, technical assistance and guidance to educators, building leaders and district leaders to empower them to take the actions likely to reduce the number or severity of these incidents and be prepared for those incidents do occur.

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

Pre-Incident	
Element	State Agencies & Leaders Roles & Responsibilities
<b>Training</b>	<p>State officials should explore requiring certain trainings, particularly de-escalation as part of the professional preparation or licensing of classroom teachers and administrators. Consideration should also be given to the role of the state establishing requirements for this or other training for all adults who work regularly with students in a school environment which may include paraprofessionals and others.</p> <p>The state should direct the Office of School Safety to provide de-escalation training and to engage with education stakeholders to identify other related trainings discussed or inferred in any of the ESTF Roadmaps for Action.</p> <p>All state agencies should collaborate to ensure district leaders, building leaders, educators, professional associations and others are fully aware of the trainings and courses available through the OSS and other agencies including de-escalation, crisis response, Integrated Emergency Preparedness and others.</p>
<b>Classroom Incident Response Team (CIRT)</b>	<p>The appropriate state agencies should make available overviews and documentation describing multiple models of Classroom Incident Response Teams that can be implemented in different geographic, staffing, population and resource condition contexts. Co-responder models should be encouraged.</p> <p>State leaders should establish programs to assist district and building leaders in establishing, growing and maintaining co-responder models. This should include funding when possible and technical assistance to support the design, piloting and scaling of co-responder models.</p>



## Pre-Incident

### Element

### State Agencies & Leaders Roles & Responsibilities

#### Staffing

The state should continue its commitment to improving the funding available to all schools. As it relates to the safety of educators, particular attention should be given to the educator, paraprofessional and mental health professionals. The goal of these efforts should be 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, state 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.

In addressing the educator workforce pipeline and student to adult ratios in classrooms, state leaders should examine all opportunities to leverage, expand and support the paraprofessional career pipelines including recruitment into these roles and the para-to-teacher pipeline.

#### Space to Recalibrate and Recharge

State leaders should engage with BOCES, district leaders and other stakeholders to determine the technical assistance needs in establishing these spaces.

#### Conditions

State leaders should continue to reinforce the importance and complexity of creating positive school conditions as part of overall school safety and specifically, educator safety strategies.



# 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, classroom, building and district staff and leaders need to be fully equipped, prepared and supported to respond. State leaders’ role is to maximize the preparedness by setting clear expectations, providing technical assistance in system design and identifying or providing resources where possible.*

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

Incident Response	
Element	State Agencies & Leaders Roles & Responsibilities
<b>Technical &amp; Communications</b>	<p>State leaders should explore providing guidance and technical assistance to district or building leaders evaluating their communication systems and procedures to ensure efficacy and multi-system compatibility, particularly with local emergency officials or other partners. State agencies should identify any additional grant programs that may be available to support purchases of communication systems.</p> <p>The Office of School Safety and the Division of Homeland Security &amp; Emergency Management should continue to engage with stakeholders to determine the potential need for training or technical assistance with communication protocols and procedures. This may include direct trainings and assistance or the creation of exemplar systems and materials to guide local action.</p>
<b>Classroom Incident Response Team (CIRT)</b>	In addition to the previously mentioned direct support of co-responder models, state officials should remain responsive to the needs of district and building leaders regarding the training of CIRTs or other responders.
<b>Physical Space</b>	State agency leaders should engage with district and building leaders to provide technical assistance when or if needed in training on space utilization.
<b>School Community Management</b>	State agencies should remain responsive to district or school leader requests or needs for expertise and training on managing the in-school community during an incident of aggressive behavior by a student toward an educator.

**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.

Roles for state 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	State Agencies & Leaders Roles & Responsibilities
<b>Educator Supports</b>	<p>State agency leaders and legislators should carefully review each Roadmap for Action and determine where additional rules, regulations, guidance or technical support may be needed to ensure comprehensive support for educators.</p> <p>Support for educators who have been assaulted by a student cannot be left to arbitrary decisions at the building level. The rights and expectations should be established 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 as should the benefits of services provided by an Employee Assistance Program (EAP).</p> <p>State leaders should determine how best to ensure affected educators or staff are fully aware of all of their rights and any available resources including medical care, mental health supports, time off if needed and access to workers compensation benefits where appropriate.</p>



## Post-Incident

### Element

### State Agencies & Leaders Roles & Responsibilities

#### Processes to Support All Affected

State agency leaders should work with district leaders and other education stakeholders including educators and staff to ensure the establishment and implementation at the building level of clear processes to support all involved with or affected by an incident. An appropriate state agency should develop and provide to district leaders a post-incident toolkit to help guide conversations, ensure appropriate follow-ups and help navigate supports. This guide should be made available for local use or tailoring to specific needs or contexts.

#### 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. The collection of this data should be done by CDE as part of an existing report or system. The ESTF members discussed and explicitly recommend this data collection be mandatory but that guardrails be put in place to ensure it cannot be used punitively which could have a negative effect on the likelihood of valid reporting.

#### Communications

State agencies should be responsive to district or building needs for technical assistance establishing communication standards.

#### Other

State agencies and legislators should explore whether any resources or programs available to frontline workers and emergency responders may be available to educators, staff or incident response team members.



**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	State Agencies & Leaders Roles & Responsibilities
<b>Public Awareness</b>	<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>State leaders should broadly disseminate the ESTF Roadmaps for Action and Educator Survey to all legislators, superintendents, district school boards and appropriate agencies of state government including CDE, CDHE, CDHS, HCPF, DORA and the BHA. In addition to state agencies, the Roadmaps should be provided directly to education organizations and associations including CASE, CASB, CEA, Teach.org and others with opportunities for discussions if and where there is interest.</p> <p>CDE should explore the potential of using bright spots, The Spark, discussions within the Commissioner’s Teacher Cabinet and all other means to elevate stories on what educators are doing to overcome challenges relating to violent behavior by students toward educators and staff.</p> <p>CDE should integrate questions from the ESTF, Confluence PSG administered educator survey into the TLCC survey to collect more frequent data about incidents and continue finding additional ways to share TLCC data.</p>



## Post-Incident

Element	State Agencies & Leaders Roles & Responsibilities
<p><b>Alternative Placements</b></p>	<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. 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.</p> <p>State legislative leaders should direct an appropriate state agency to collect information or undertake a study on the statewide impact of the reduced AECs, identify high areas of need and develop recommendations. Based on those findings and the state budget, elected officials 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.</p>
<p><b>Affective Needs Centers</b></p>	<p>In the absence of an appropriate AEC and to complement the educational environments offered within schools, state leaders should partner with BOCES and district leaders to 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.</p>
<p><b>Educator &amp; Administrator Training</b></p>	<p>As is noted elsewhere in this Roadmap, CDE should take necessary steps to ensure that appropriate training, including de-escalation training, is provided as part of educator preparation and administrator training programs.</p>
<p><b>Continuous Learning &amp; Improvement</b></p>	<p>As part of their ongoing collaboration, the OSS and CDE should undertake an intentional examination of existing rubrics, reports and accountability reports to determine the best way to both support educators, building leaders and district leaders and to continue learning from their experiences. Attention should be given to opportunities to improve assessment of both physical and cultural safety indicators.</p>
<p><b>Other</b></p>	<p>The ESTF members and contributors identified several additional needs or opportunities for state leadership. These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased cross-agency collaboration and alignment of resources and assistance relating to educator safety, school culture and climate and mental health for educators and students;</li> <li>• Support for increased collaboration among outside organizations (public, private, non-profit) to support school and district efforts;</li> </ul>



## 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>
<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



## QR Codes to link to ESTF on OSS website & to

**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.