

TASK FORCE ON SCHOOL AND CAMPUS SECURITY
Minutes of the First Meeting of the 2023 Interim
July 18, 2023

Call to Order and Roll Call

The first meeting of the Task Force on School and Campus Security was held on July 18, 2023, at 2:00 p.m. in Room 131 of the Capitol Annex. Senator Max Wise, Chair, called the meeting to order, and the secretary called the roll.

Present were:

Members: Representative Scott Lewis, Co-Chair; Senator Max Wise, Co-Chair; Senator Matthew Deneen, Senator Reginald Thomas, Representative Savannah Maddox, Representative Scott Sharp, Representative James Tipton, Representative Lisa Willner.

Guests: Senator Max Wise.

LRC Staff: Yvette Perry and Maurya Allen.

Presentation of 2019 Senate Bill 1

Co-Chair Wise said the deadly school shooting at Marshall County High School in 2018 was the impetus to begin crafting legislation that eventually became 2019 Senate Bill 1. A working group was created to hold discussions throughout the 2018 interim. The group was comprised of many stakeholders and experts including mental health professionals, law enforcement, school personnel, and students.

There were three key components to Senate Bill 1: personnel, systems and structures, and a culture of student connection. In terms of personnel, the bill established that a certified school resource officer (SRO) be assigned to each school within a district. Additional changes were included in 2020 Senate Bill 8 to clarify that SROs were assigned one per campus versus one per school. It also clarified that SROs be armed with a firearm. In 2022, House Bill 63 removed the condition that SROs be hired “as funds and qualified personnel become available” and set a deadline of August 1, 2022, for all schools to comply with the law. That legislation also allowed local school districts to establish their own police department.

2019 Senate Bill 1 created the position of the State School Security Marshal within the Department of Criminal Justice Training. The Kentucky Center for School Safety and assessors from the Office of the Security Marshal set the standards for school facility security and ensure compliance through onsite investigations. Schools are also required to hire a school safety coordinator at the district-level. This individual prepares and conducts risk assessments, responds to threats, and provides training to principals and staff.

2019 Senate Bill 1 amended existing language to enhance security through electronically locking doors, cameras, and intercom systems. Other enhanced measures included requirements for doors to be locked at all times, with some exceptions carved out in 2020 Senate Bill 8, and window coverings for use during lockdowns. Schools worked diligently to comply with the law with a goal of full compliance by July 2022.

Safety and security measures included suicide prevention awareness information being provided to all students in grades 6 through 12 as well as for staff. Active shooter training was incorporated into the professional development requirements for teachers and staff. The statute on terroristic threatening

was amended in regards to false statements and enhancing penalties to deter the disruptions that false reports can cause.

To develop a culture of student connection, districts were required to employ at least one school counselor in each school. The goal is to employ one school counselor for every 250 students and for counselors to spend at least 60 percent of their time in direct services to students. There was a caveat that this would be done “as funds and qualified personnel become available.” This has been difficult as there are not enough candidates entering counselor training programs and funds need to be allocated for schools to be able to hire counselors. Telehealth and other contracting options have been used to address the needs of some districts. Taking a trauma-informed approach, as recommended by the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, was encouraged to create an environment of safety and stability for all students. The Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) has provided a toolkit of strategies and guidance for schools to utilize when incorporating a trauma-informed approach in local policies. Over 5,000 notifications have been made from law enforcement to school districts to inform them of a trauma event experienced by a student prior to their arrival in the classroom to better prepare staff and support the students.

Current funding levels for each area of school safety were briefly highlighted, with Co-Chair Wise stating additional funding may be required to achieve the goals of the bill going forward. The legislation has become a national model with approximately 28 states incorporating elements of the bill into their own statutes addressing school security.

Representative Tipton spoke to his experience with the working group that developed the legislation. He spoke on many things that compounded school shooting tragedies in other states have been addressed in the legislation. Hardening the target was a key feature of the bill, and Representative Tipton said he had questions regarding door locks to ask in the future discussion with Marshal Wilcox. He also said the state may need to consider additional technologies and strategies to secure schools as well as even more investment in mental health instruction and mental wellness before things are allowed to deteriorate to a state of needing intervention.

Co-Chair Wise said that looking at mental health is a major concern, especially coming out of the pandemic, and there is not currently an understanding of what that could cost. The state may also need to investigate the best way to increase the number of qualified SROs and mental health professionals so that every school has adequate coverage.

Senator Deneen encouraged members to have conversations with local law enforcement agencies to increase collaborations and better distribute personnel and finances to ensure every school has its needs met.

Representative Willner said approximately \$7.4 million is being appropriated from the state for mental health, which comes to just over \$40,000 per district for mental health services, which is inadequate. The trauma-informed approaches are not simply for individual children, but to address the entire student body within a school and create a supportive environment for all students to be allowed to thrive. More investment needs to be made to ensure that all students, not just those in crisis, are supported.

Senator Thomas applauded the work done with Senate Bill 1 and with subsequent legislation, but they do not go far enough. Access to firearms is an issue throughout the country and a reality that needs to

be addressed through red flag laws. Military style weapons should also be addressed and access to those limited in order to secure schools and communities, even if that is unpopular with some individuals.

Other Business

Co-Chair Wise said the primary focus of the group will be finance, but may also reach into other topics. He encouraged anyone who has suggestions for topics to be considered by the task force to reach out to him or Co-Chair Lewis.

Adjournment

With no further business to come before the task force, the meeting adjourned at 2:42 p.m. The next meeting of the task force will be Tuesday, August 1, 2023.