



87th Legislative Session

# Texas PTA Legislative Priority

## SCHOOL SAFETY

Monitor school safety legislation, both implementation of laws enacted in 2019 and legislation filed in the 87th legislative session.

### BACKGROUND

In the wake of two shootings in Texas – including one at a public high school, state legislators in 2019 sought to address what could be done to create a safer environment for students. Texas PTA will advocate to maintain policies adopted in 2019 and support legislation that further increases safety in our schools.

Several school safety bills were signed into law that, among other things:

- Increased mental health training for educators and other school professionals and improved students' access to mental and behavioral health services;
- Allocated money to school districts and charter schools that can go toward “hardening” their campuses;
- Gave the Texas School Safety Center (TxSSC) more authority to guide the development of and to review school district and charter school multi-hazard emergency operations plans;
- Required ISDs and charter schools to:
  - Establish behavioral threat assessment teams (BTAT) to help identify potentially dangerous students and determine the best ways to intervene before they become violent. A BTAT assesses and reports individuals who make threats of violence or exhibit harmful, threatening, or violent behavior, and analyzes data to determine the level of risk and appropriate intervention. The team serves as a safety net for the community and school by conducting a fact-based, investigative approach to determining how likely a person is to carry out a threat of violence; identifying, assessing and managing appropriate interventions of individuals who are at risk for violence against themselves or others; and providing guidance to students and school employees on recognizing harmful, threatening, or violent behavior that may pose a threat to the community, school, or individual.
  - Establish safe and supportive school programs that use multilevel systems of supports to address school climate, social and emotional development, and behavioral and mental health among students; and
  - Adopt policies to implement trauma-informed practices and staff training.
  - Train employees - including substitute teachers - to respond to emergencies;
  - Ensure training for school resource officers;

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- Established a Texas Mental Health Consortium, aimed at bringing together psychiatric professionals from Texas medical schools and other health care providers to connect children to mental health services.
- Strengthened communication between school and parents by:
  - Requiring school officials to notify parents about risks involving their children and to seek consent from parents before students undergo mental health screenings or receive mental health services;
  - Allowing ISDs and charter schools to provide all parents and families information on identifying risk factors, accessing resources for treatment or support provided on or off campus, and accessing available student accommodations.
  - Increasing the information that must be shared with parents about available counseling in and out of school.

### BACKGROUND: LAW ENFORCEMENT ON SCHOOL CAMPUSES

- Many school districts and charter schools utilize law enforcement on their campuses. There are several models of law enforcement available to a school district.
  - As of 2018, Texas has the largest number of police officers on school campuses in the country. There are over 207 ISD police departments with 2,987 officers, in addition to the 117 school districts and charter schools that allow school personnel to carry firearms. 24% of school districts and charter schools also employ school resource officers.
  - School Resource Officers (SROs) are generally peace officers who are employees of a municipality or sheriff's office, who are assigned to a school district or charter school on a full or part time basis, through the local municipality or sheriff's office.
  - School District Police Departments are created by commissioning school district peace officers who are employees of the school district. Charter schools may also have police departments.
  - School Marshal Program can be established by the school board of trustees of a school district or the governing body of an open-enrollment charter school, by appointing one or more school marshals for each campus. The marshal must have appropriate licensing and certification by the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement.
  - School Guardian Program allows a school district or charter school to authorize anyone, including designated school employees, to carry firearms on campus.
  - All officers, regardless of the model utilized by the ISD or charter school, carry weapons.

Source: <https://txssc.txstate.edu>

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