



Testimony  
*presented to the*  
Senate Education Committee  
Matthew Stem, Deputy Secretary Elementary and Secondary Education  
Friday, March 2, 2018

Good morning, Chairman Eichelberger, Chairman Dinniman and members of the Senate Education Committee. Thank you for your interest in working with the Pennsylvania Department of Education to keep Pennsylvania's school communities safe.

My name is Matthew Stem and I am the Deputy Secretary of the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education for the Pennsylvania Department of Education. Our agency performs many functions in support of teaching and learning in the Commonwealth and paramount among them is ensuring the safety of the 1.74 million students we serve.

Like others, the Department is saddened by the tragic events that have occurred in schools across the country. As a Department of former educators, administrators, and parents, many of us reflect after each tragedy about our time in schools and what measures can be implemented to protect our students from harm. Student safety is at the heart of everything we do, because without a feeling of security, students cannot thrive academically, socially, or emotionally.

Schools safety is a shared endeavor between schools, communities, and state agencies, and we appreciate the support and collaboration of our partners at the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency and the Pennsylvania State Police.

As an educator for over 20 years, I have witnessed the evolution of school safety. These conversations have significantly changed in both scope and intensity as we are now discussing tragic events such as the one that recently occurred in Florida. Of great importance in these plans is that schools collaborate with local law enforcement, county officials and other emergency responders to ensure everyone is prepared and understands their tasks and responses in the case of such an event.

Schools are also providing annual professional development workshops and trainings for all members of their staffs. In some cases, these trainings include table-top exercises in which law enforcement officers act as an intruder and staff members rehearse their planned reactions to the intruder with a focus of getting students to safety. These same drills are then carried out with students to develop their understanding of how to react and respond in case of an actual event.

Some schools are also investing in new safety measures to secure school facilities. Ensuring single entry points during the school day to avoid unwelcome visitors walking into our schools, checking visitors' identities and signing them into the schools, investing in surveillance equipment, and purchasing many other types of hardware and resources to provide for safety nets and barriers within the schools are some of the actions that are taking place in districts around the commonwealth.

Some of the most important efforts in which schools are engaging, however, are preventative practices; creating a culture within the school that promotes school safety. This includes building positive relationships with all students and staff, including those who may be at a higher-risk for an emotional outburst or those that threaten harm to self and others. Open communication and reporting between and among students, staff, and administrators help to identify potential concerns before they escalate.

PDE's responsibilities lie in providing support, guidance and resources to assist our schools in both preventative schoolwide practices as well as responsive practice such as the development of their emergency response plans.

One way that the Office for Safe Schools provides this support and technical assistance is through a team of nine safe schools' regional coordinators. These coordinators, located in Intermediate Units throughout the commonwealth, work directly with schools to provide current resources and education. For example, in recent years, Lancaster-Lebanon IU13, performed approximately 150 ALICE trainings (Alert, Lockdown, Inform, Counter, Evacuate). This program prepares individuals and organizations to handle the threat of an aggressive intruder or active shooter event. The Intermediate Unit also created programs to meet the needs a wider range of school staff. These programs include "Responding to Violent Intruders" which was delivered to approximately 400 people and "Frontline" for front office staff that over 500 people across the state attended. Other regions have provided similar trainings and have worked with the Pennsylvania State Police (PSP) to include their expertise.

The Office for Safe Schools also provides guidance documents to schools to assist them with emergency response planning, including an Emergency Management Virtual Toolkit and an All-Hazards School Safety Planning Toolkit.

Schools also can apply for funding through PDE for the training and compensation of school resource or school police officers, as well as safety equipment and programs, through a \$6.5 million annual targeted grant program. Nonpublic and private school entities may also apply for a school police officer grant.

Applicants may apply for a maximum individual grant of \$60,000 a year for a School Resource Officer (two-year grant) or a maximum individual grant of \$40,000 a year for a School Police Officer (two-year grant).

Applicants may also apply for targeted equipment grants up to \$25,000 which may include the purchase of student, staff and visitor identification systems; metal detectors; protective lighting; surveillance equipment; special emergency communications equipment; electronic locksets;

deadbolts and theft control devices; and training in the use of security-related technology. They may also apply for targeted program grants up to \$20,000 which include programs that address school safety and violence in areas of conflict resolution, positive behavior support, risk assessment or violence prevention curricula, classroom management, development of Student Codes of Conduct and training to undertake a district-wide assessment of risk factors that increase the likelihood of problem behaviors among students.

Parents and guardians throughout the state entrust our schools with their children and there is nothing more important than their well-being while in their school's care. PDE continues to support school administrators who must work closely with their local authorities and agencies, school boards, parents, students and teachers to review and refine their comprehensive disaster response and emergency preparedness plans. We encourage administrators to continue to express the importance of safe, supportive, and meaningful relationships with students as the most important foundational element of school safety prevention activities.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you this morning. I'm happy to take questions from the committee.