# Safety and Security Practices at Public Schools

The percentage of public schools that had a written plan in place for procedures to be performed in the event of an active shooter increased over time, from 79 percent in 2003–04 to 92 percent in 2017–18.

Schools use a variety of practices and procedures to promote the safety of students, faculty, and staff. The School Survey on Crime and Safety (SSOCS) collects data on school safety and security practices by asking public school principals about their school's use of safety and security measures, as well as whether their school had written procedures for responding to selected scenarios and whether it had emergency drills for students. SSOCS also asked schools about the presence of security staff and the availability of trainings for classroom teachers or aides on school safety and discipline provided by the school or school district.[1]

In the 2017-18 school year, 95 percent of public schools reported that they controlled access to school buildings by locking or monitoring doors during school hours. Other safety and security measures reported by public schools included the use of security cameras to monitor the school (83 percent), a requirement that faculty and staff wear badges or picture IDs (70 percent), and the enforcement of a strict dress code (49 percent). In addition, 27 percent of public schools reported the use of random sweeps for contraband, 20 percent required that students wear uniforms, 9 percent required students to wear badges or picture IDs, and 5 percent used random metal detector checks.

Figure 1.   Percentage of public schools that used selected safety and security measures, by school level: School year 2017–18

Safety and security measure
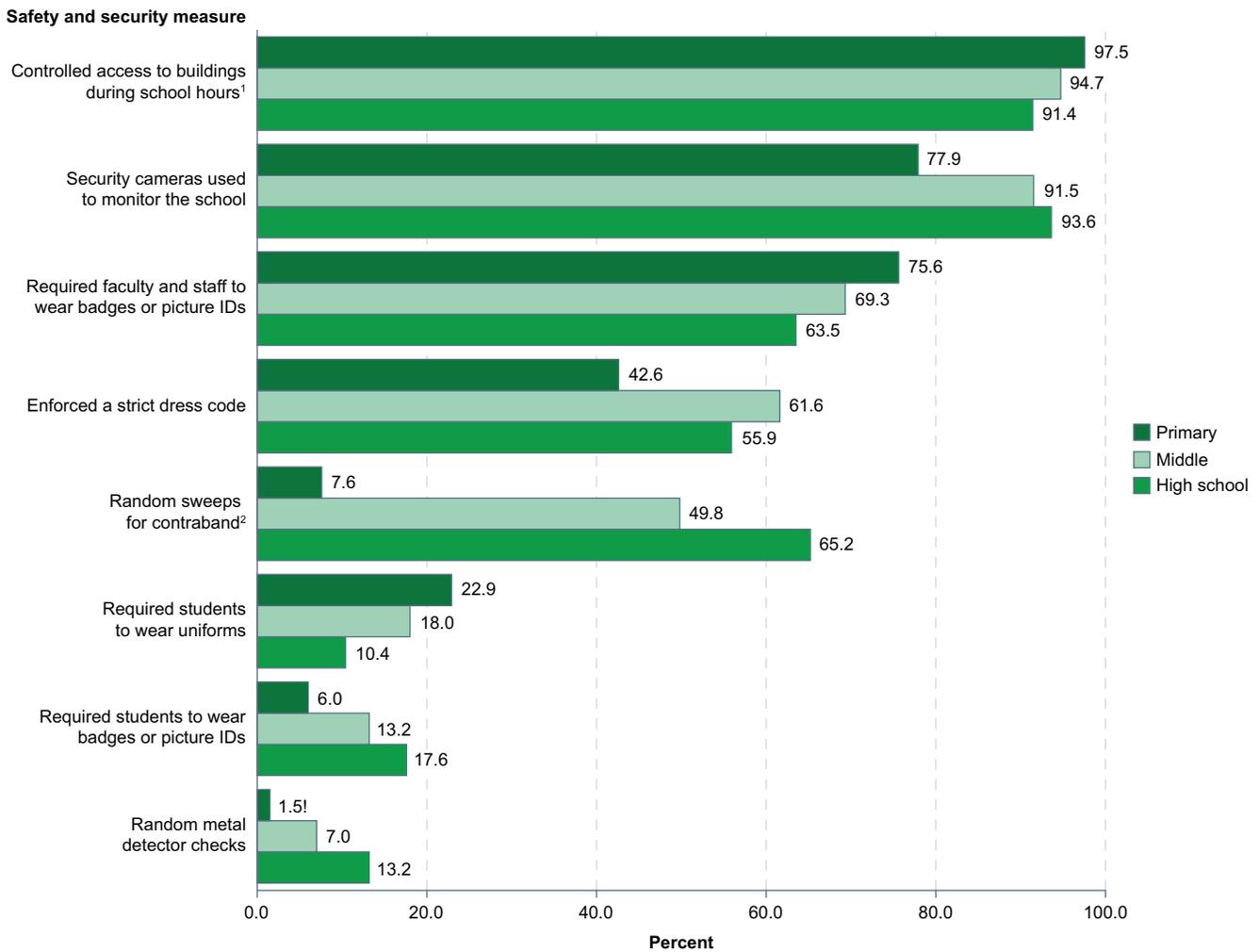
! Interpret data with caution. The coefficient of variation (CV) for this estimate is between 30 and 50 percent.
[1] For example, locked or monitored doors or loading docks.
[2] Examples of random sweeps include locker checks and dog sniffs. Examples of contraband include drugs and weapons.
NOTE: Responses were provided by the principal or the person most knowledgeable about crime and safety issues at the school. Primary schools are defined as schools in which the lowest grade is not higher than grade 3 and the highest grade is not higher than grade 8. Middle schools are defined as schools in which the lowest grade is not lower than grade 4 and the highest grade is not higher than grade 9. High schools are defined as schools in which the lowest grade is not lower than grade 9.
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2017–18 School Survey on Crime and Safety (SSOCS), 2018. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2019*, table 233.60.

Public schools' use of various safety and security measures differed by school characteristics during the 2017-18 school year. For example, a greater percentage of primary schools than of middle schools required students to wear uniforms (23 vs. 18 percent), and both percentages were greater than the percentage of high schools requiring uniforms (10 percent); for schools that used the measures of controlling access to school buildings and requiring faculty and staff to wear badges or picture IDs, the same pattern of percentages by school level can be observed. In contrast, greater percentages of high schools and middle schools than of primary schools reported the use of security cameras to monitor the school, the use of random sweeps for contraband, a requirement that students wear badges or picture IDs, and the use of random metal detector checks. For instance, 65 percent of high schools and 50 percent of middle schools reported the use of random sweeps for contraband, compared with 8 percent of primary schools. The percentage of schools reporting the enforcement of a strict dress code was greater for middle schools (62 percent) than for high schools (56 percent), and both percentages were greater than the percentage of primary schools enforcing a strict dress code (43 percent).

A greater percentage of public schools in cities than of those in suburban areas, towns, and rural areas reported in 2017-18 that they enforced strict dress code, required students to wear uniforms, and used random metal detector checks on students. The percentage of schools in suburban areas requiring faculty or staff to wear badges or picture IDs (83 percent) was greater than the percentages of schools in towns (71 percent), cities (66 percent), and rural areas (56 percent) having this requirement. In addition, the percentage of schools that reported requiring students to wear badges or picture IDs was greater for schools in cities (12 percent) and suburban areas (10 percent) than for those in rural areas (6 percent). In contrast, higher percentages of schools in rural areas (39 percent) and towns (38 percent) reported the use of random sweeps for contraband, compared with schools in suburban areas (21 percent) and cities (19 percent). In addition, the percentage of schools that reported using security cameras was greater for schools in rural areas and in towns (88 percent each) than for those in cities (78 percent).

A greater percentage of schools where 76 percent or more of the students were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (FRPL) than of schools where lower percentages of the students were eligible reported that they enforced a strict dress code, required school uniforms, required students to wear badges or picture IDs, and used random metal detector checks. In contrast, a greater percentage of schools where 25 percent or less of the students were eligible for FRPL reported requiring faculty and staff to wear badges or picture IDs (79 percent), compared with schools where higher percentages of the students were eligible (64 to 71 percent). The percentage of schools that reported the use of random sweeps for contraband was greater for those where 26 to 50 percent of the students and 51 to 75 percent of the students were eligible for FRPL (35 and 30 percent, respectively) than for those where 76 percent or more of the students and 25 percent or less of the students were eligible (23 and 21 percent, respectively). In addition, greater percentages of schools where 26 to 50 percent of the students and 51 to 75 percent of the students were eligible for FRPL (89 percent and 86 percent, respectively) reported using security cameras, compared with schools where 76 percent or more of the students were eligible (78 percent).

Figure 2.   Percentage of public schools that used selected safety and security measures: School years 1999–2000, 2015–16, and 2017–18

Safety and security measure
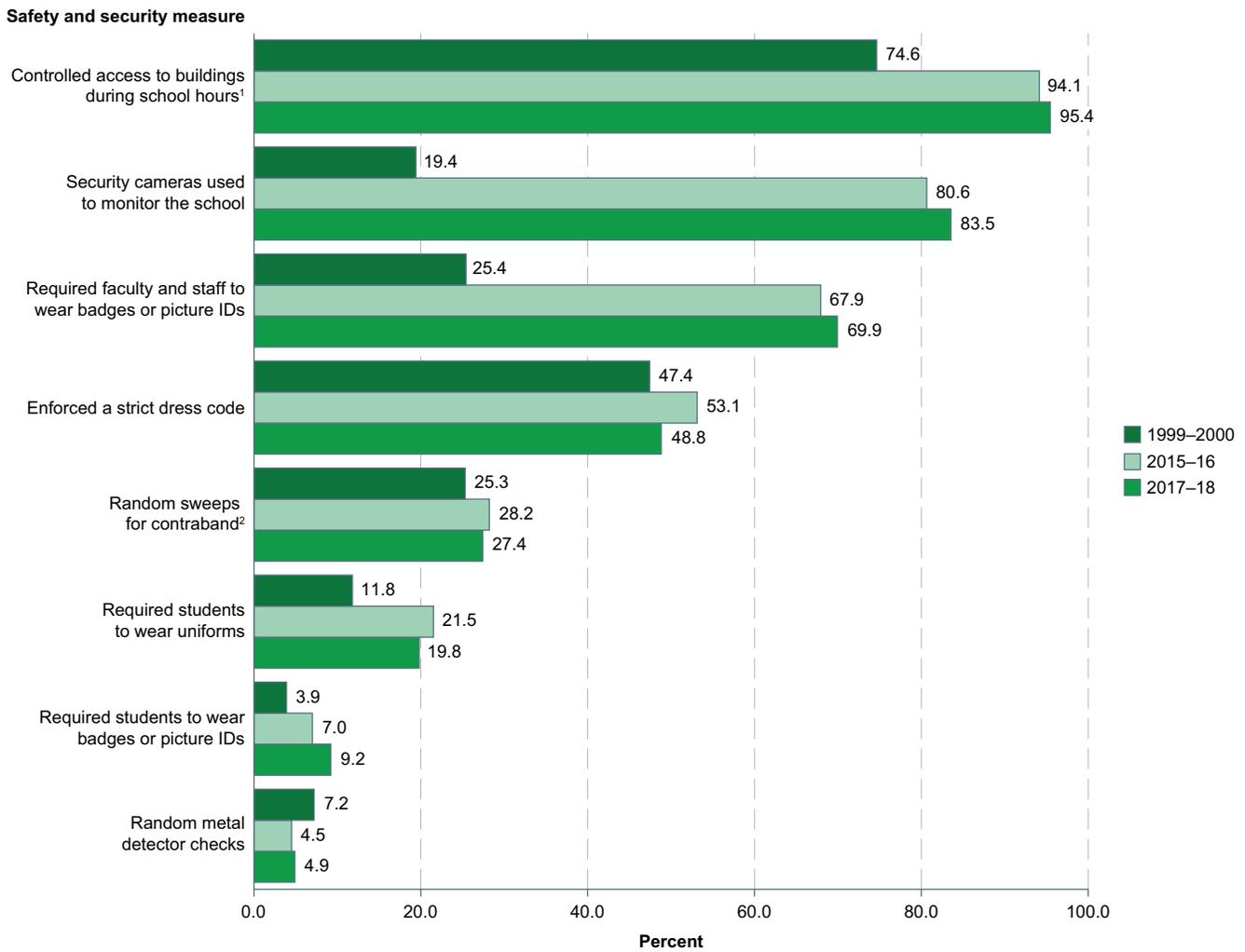
[1] Prior to 2017–18, the examples of controlled access to buildings included only "locked or monitored doors" and did not include loading docks.
[2] The 2017–18 questionnaire included only a single item about random sweeps for contraband, and it provided locker checks and dog sniffs as examples of types of sweeps. Prior to 2017–18, the questionnaire included one item about dog sniffs for drugs, followed by a separate item about sweeps not including dog sniffs. For years prior to 2017–18, schools are treated as using random sweeps for contraband if they answered "yes" to either or both of these items; each school is counted only once, even if it answered "yes" to both items.
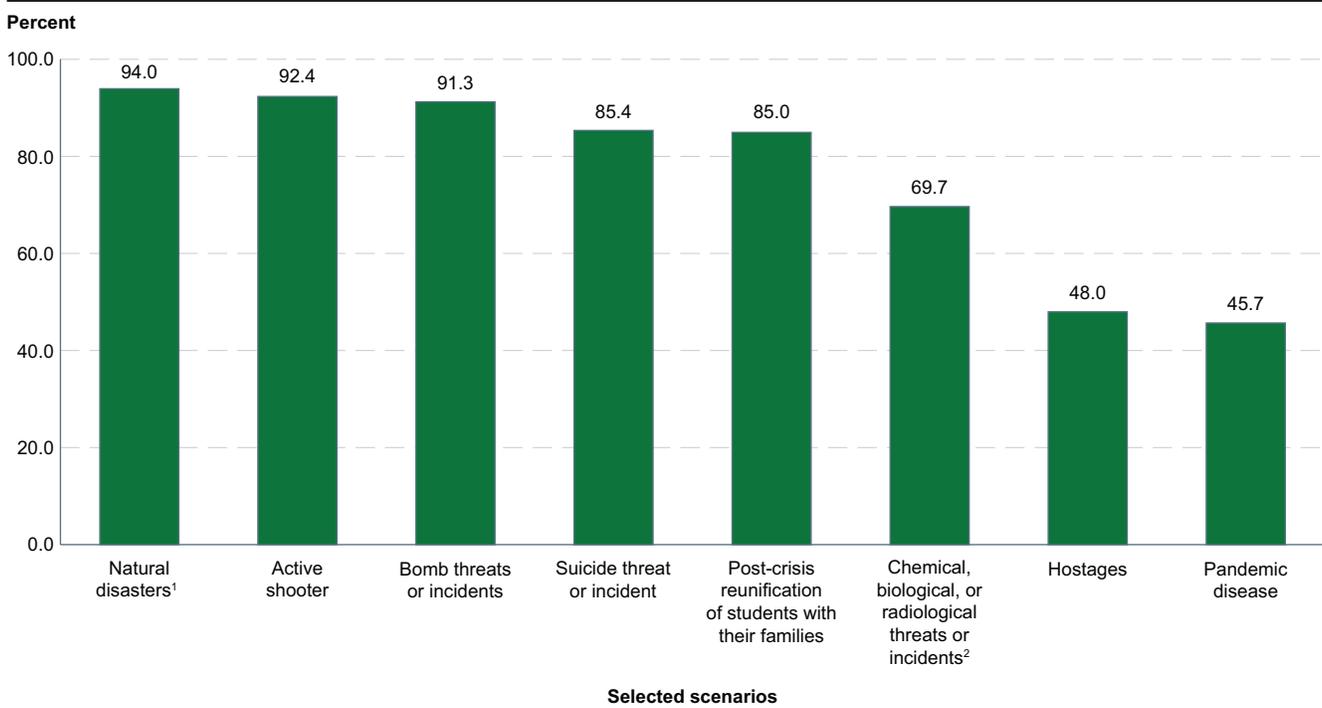NOTE: Responses were provided by the principal or the person most knowledgeable about crime and safety issues at the school.
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 1999–2000, 2015–16, and 2017–18 School Survey on Crime and Safety (SSOCS), 2000, 2016, and 2018. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2019*, table 233.50.

The percentage of public schools reporting the use of security cameras increased from 19 percent in 1999-2000 to 83 percent in 2017-18. During this period, the percentage of public schools reporting the use of the following safety and security measures also increased: controlling access to school buildings (from 75 to 95 percent), requiring faculty and staff to wear badges or picture IDs (from 25 to 70 percent), requiring school uniforms (from 12 to 20 percent), and requiring students to wear badges or picture IDs (from 4 to 9 percent). Conversely, the percentage of schools that reported using random metal detector checks decreased from 7 percent in 1999-2000 to 5 percent in 2017-18. There were no measurable differences between 1999-2000 and 2017-18 in the percentages of public schools that reported enforcing a strict dress code or using random sweeps for contraband.[2]

Figure 3. **Percentage of public schools with a written plan for procedures to be performed in selected scenarios: School year 2017–18**

Percent

[1] For example, earthquakes or tornadoes.
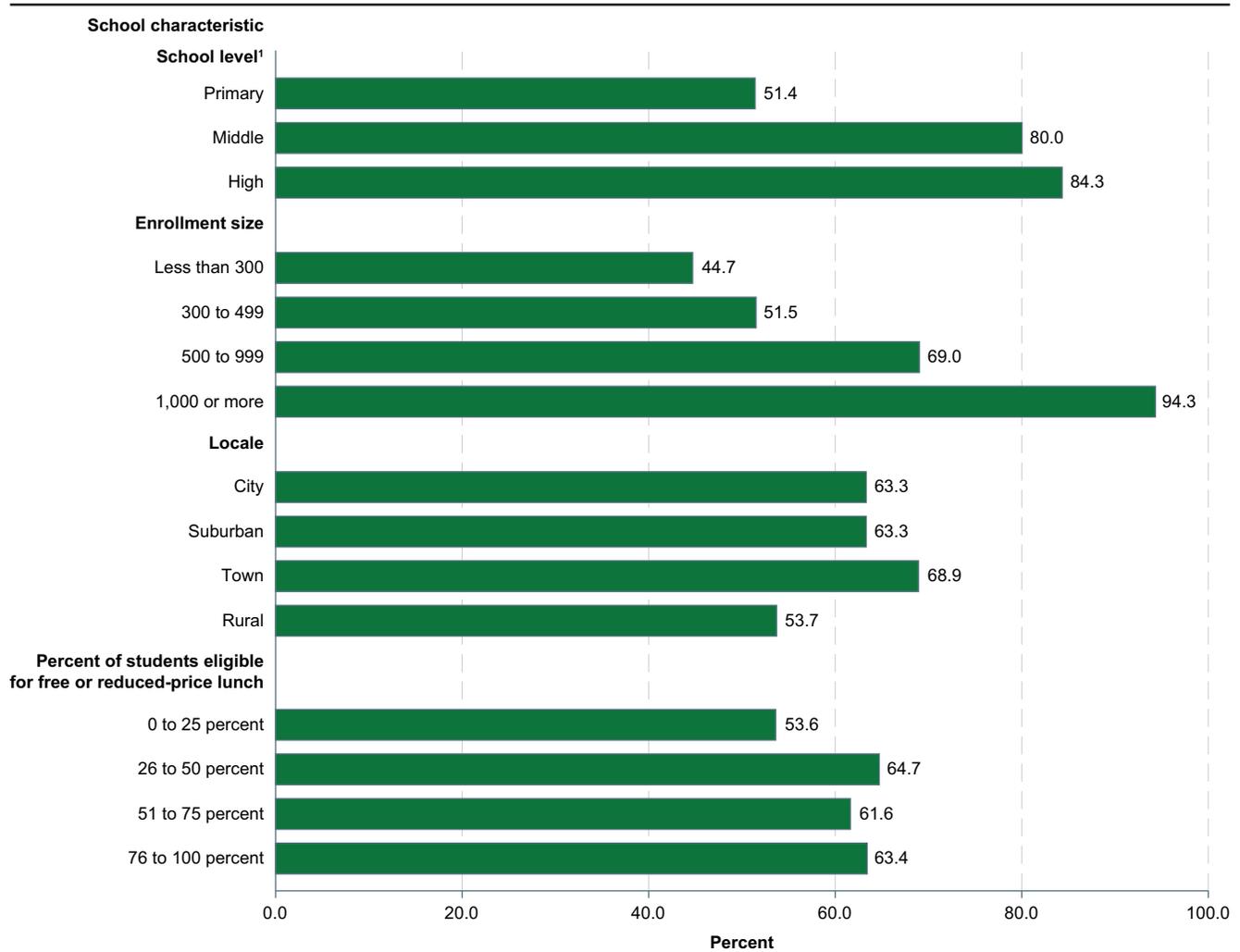[2] For example, release of mustard gas, anthrax, smallpox, or radioactive materials.
NOTE: Responses were provided by the principal or the person most knowledgeable about crime and safety issues at the school.
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2017–18 School Survey on Crime and Safety (SSOCS), 2018. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2019*, table 233.65.

Another aspect of school safety and security is ensuring that plans are in place to be enacted in the event of specific scenarios. In 2017-18, about 94 percent of public schools reported they had a written plan for procedures to be performed in the event of a natural disaster.[3] Ninety-one percent of public schools reported they had a plan for procedures to be performed in the event of bomb threats or incidents. The percentage of schools that had a plan in place for procedures to be performed in the event of an active shooter increased over time, from 79 percent in 2003-04 to 92 percent in 2017-18.[4]

In 2017-18, schools were also asked whether they had drilled students during the current school year on the use of selected emergency procedures. About 96 percent of public schools had drilled students on a lockdown procedure,[5] 93 percent had drilled students on evacuation procedures,[6] and 83 percent had drilled students on shelter-in-place procedures.[7]

Figure 4.   Percentage of public schools with one or more security staff present at least once a week, by selected school characteristics: School year 2017–18
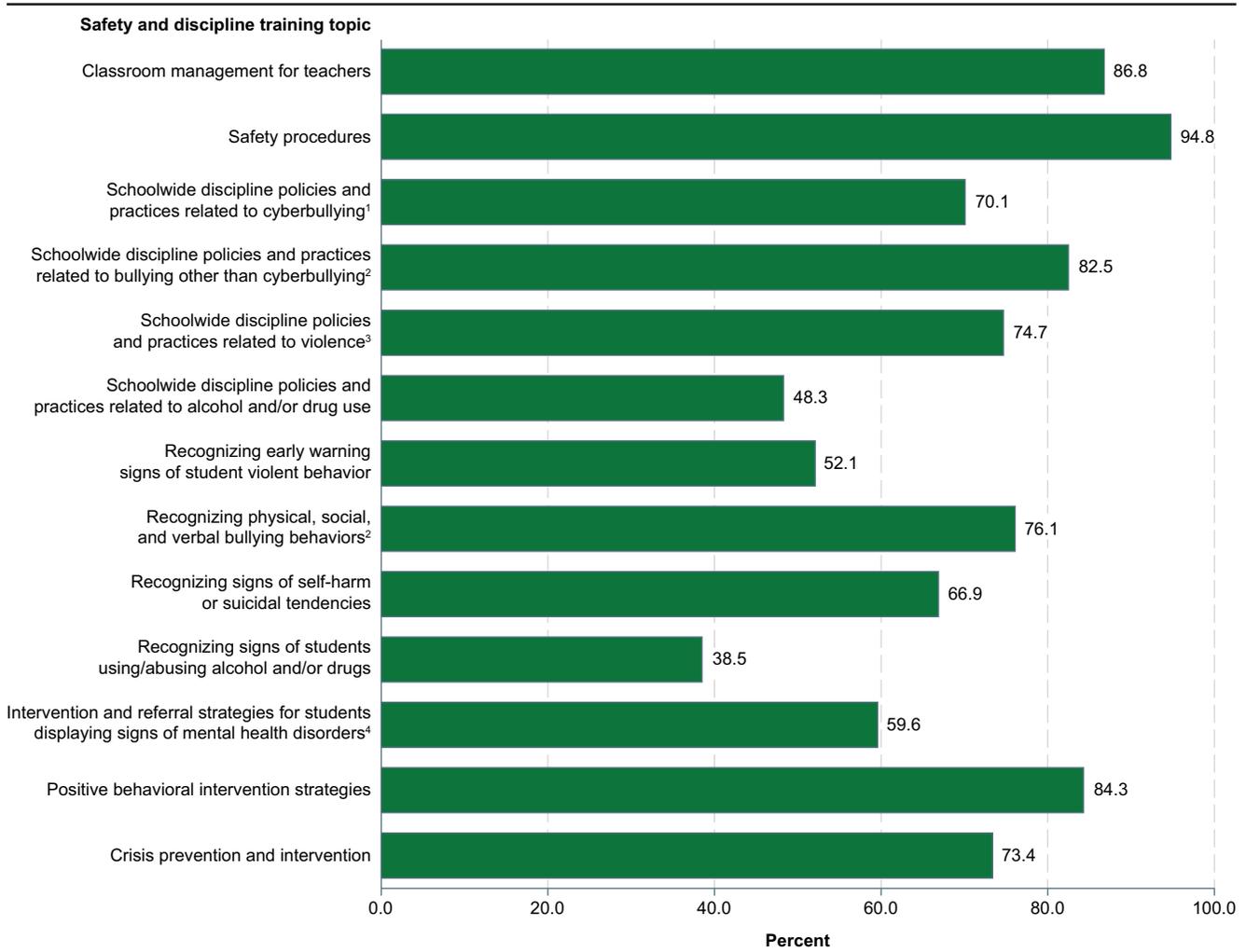

[1] Primary schools are defined as schools in which the lowest grade is not higher than grade 3 and the highest grade is not higher than grade 8. Middle schools are defined as schools in which the lowest grade is not lower than grade 4 and the highest grade is not higher than grade 9. High schools are defined as schools in which the lowest grade is not lower than grade 9.

NOTE: Responses were provided by the principal or the person most knowledgeable about crime and safety issues at the school. Security staff include security guards, security personnel, School Resource Officers (SROs), and sworn law enforcement officers who are not SROs. "Security guards" and "security personnel" do not include law enforcement. SROs include all career law enforcement officers with arrest authority who have specialized training and are assigned to work in collaboration with school organizations.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2017–18 School Survey on Crime and Safety (SSOCS), 2018. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2019*, table 233.70.

Schools were asked to report whether they had any security staff–including security guards, security personnel, School Resource Officers (SROs), and sworn law enforcement officers who are not SROs–present at their school at least once a week.[8] Between 2005-06 and 2017-18, the percentage of public schools that reported having one or more security staff present at school at least once a week increased from 42 to 61 percent. In 2017-18, greater percentages of high schools (84 percent) and middle schools (80 percent) reported having any security staff, compared with primary schools (51 percent). The percentage of schools reporting the presence of any security staff was generally greater for schools with higher enrollment sizes; for instance, 94 percent of schools with 1,000 or more students enrolled reported having one or more security staff present, compared with 45 percent of schools with less than 300 students enrolled. In addition, the percentage of schools reporting any security staff was lower for schools in rural areas (54 percent) than for schools in cities (63 percent), suburban areas (63 percent), and towns (69 percent). This percentage was also lower for schools where 25 percent or less of the students were eligible for FRPL (54 percent) than for schools where higher percentages of the students were eligible (62 to 65 percent).

Figure 5.   Percentage of public schools providing training for classroom teachers or aides in specific safety and discipline topics: School year 2017–18

Safety and discipline training topic

Safety and discipline training topic	Percent
Classroom management for teachers	86.8
Safety procedures	94.8
Schoolwide discipline policies and practices related to cyberbullying[1]	70.1
Schoolwide discipline policies and practices related to bullying other than cyberbullying[2]	82.5
Schoolwide discipline policies and practices related to violence[3]	74.7
Schoolwide discipline policies and practices related to alcohol and/or drug use	48.3
Recognizing early warning signs of student violent behavior	52.1
Recognizing physical, social, and verbal bullying behaviors[2]	76.1
Recognizing signs of self-harm or suicidal tendencies	66.9
Recognizing signs of students using/abusing alcohol and/or drugs	38.5
Intervention and referral strategies for students displaying signs of mental health disorders[4]	59.6
Positive behavioral intervention strategies	84.3
Crisis prevention and intervention	73.4

[1] The questionnaire defined cyberbullying as "bullying that occurs when willful and repeated harm is inflicted through the use of computers, cell phones, or other electronic devices."
[2] The questionnaire defined bullying as "any unwanted aggressive behavior(s) by another youth or group of youths that involves an observed or perceived power imbalance and is repeated multiple times or is highly likely to be repeated. Bullying occurs among youth who are not siblings or current dating partners."
[3] The questionnaire defined violence as "actual, attempted, or threatened fight or assault."
[4] This item on the questionnaire provided the following examples of mental health disorders: depression, mood disorders, and ADHD. The questionnaire defined mental health disorders as "collectively, all diagnosable mental health disorders or health conditions that are characterized by alterations in thinking, mood, or behavior (or some combination thereof) associated with distress and/or impaired functioning."
NOTE: Includes trainings provided by the school or school district. Responses were provided by the principal or the person most knowledgeable about crime and safety issues at the school.
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2017–18 School Survey on Crime and Safety (SSOCS), 2018. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2019*, table 233.67b.

Most schools and school districts provide training on school safety and security to classroom teachers and aides. During the 2017-18 school year, about 95 percent of public schools reported that they provided training on safety procedures (e.g., how to handle emergencies) for classroom teachers or aides, and 87 percent of schools

reported providing training on classroom management. Schools also reported providing training to classroom teachers or aides on schoolwide discipline policies and practices related to cyberbullying[9] (70 percent), bullying other than cyberbullying[10] (82 percent), violence[11] (75 percent), and alcohol and/or drug use (48 percent).

Schools were also asked whether they provided trainings on recognizing warnings signs of potential safety or discipline problems. About 76 percent of public schools reported providing training for classroom teachers or aides on recognizing physical, social, and verbal bullying behaviors; 67 percent reported providing training on recognizing signs of self-harm or suicidal tendencies; 52 percent reported providing training on recognizing early warning signs of student violent behavior; and 39 percent reported providing training on recognizing signs of students using/abusing alcohol and/or drugs. Additionally, intervention strategies can help inform teachers on how to appropriately intervene in various safety-related scenarios involving students. About 84 percent of schools reported providing training on positive behavioral intervention strategies, 73 percent reported providing training on crisis prevention and intervention, and 60 percent reported providing training on intervention and referral strategies for students displaying signs of mental health disorders.[12]

Endnotes:

[1] In 2013-14, data on many of these items were collected from the Fast Response Survey System (FRSS) "School Safety and Discipline" survey. In this indicator, data for 2013-14 were collected using FRSS, while data for all other years were collected using SSOCS. The 2013-14 FRSS survey was designed to allow comparisons with SSOCS data. However, all respondents to the 2013-14 survey could choose either to complete the survey on paper (and mail it back) or to complete the survey online, whereas all respondents to SSOCS had only the option of completing a paper survey prior to 2017-18, when SSOCS experimented with offering an online option to some respondents. The 2013-14 FRSS survey also relied on a smaller sample than SSOCS. The FRSS survey's smaller sample size and difference in survey administration may have impacted the 2013-14 results.

[2] The 2017-18 questionnaire included only a single item about random sweeps for contraband, and it provided locker checks and dog sniffs as examples of types of sweeps. Prior to 2017-18, the questionnaire included one item about dog sniffs for drugs, followed by a separate item about sweeps not including dog sniffs. For years prior to 2017-18, schools are treated as using random sweeps for contraband if they answered "yes" to either or both of these items; each school is counted only once, even if it answered "yes" to both items.

[3] For example, earthquakes or tornadoes.

[4] Prior to 2015-16, "active shooter" was described in the questionnaire as "shootings."

[5] Defined for respondents as "a procedure that involves occupants of a school building being directed to remain confined to a room or area within a building with specific procedures to follow. A lockdown may be used when a crisis occurs outside of the school and an evacuation would be dangerous. A lockdown may also be called for when there is a crisis inside and movement within the school will put students in jeopardy. All exterior doors are locked and students and staff stay in their classrooms."

[6] Defined for respondents as "a procedure that requires all students and staff to leave the building. While evacuating to the school's field makes sense for a fire drill that only lasts a few minutes, it may not be an appropriate location for a longer period of time. The evacuation plan should encompass relocation procedures and include backup buildings to serve as emergency shelters, such as nearby community centers, religious institutions, businesses, or other schools. Evacuation also includes 'reverse evacuation,' a procedure for schools to return students to the building quickly if an incident occurs while students are outside."

[7] Defined for respondents as "a procedure similar to a lockdown in that the occupants are to remain on the premises; however, shelter-in-place is designed to use a facility and its indoor atmosphere to temporarily separate people from a hazardous outdoor environment. Everyone would be brought indoors and building personnel would close all windows and doors and shut down the heating, ventilation, and air conditioning system (HVAC). This would create a neutral pressure in the building, meaning the contaminated air would not be drawn into the building."

[8] "Security guards" and "security personnel" do not include law enforcement. SROs include all career law enforcement officers with arrest authority who have specialized training and are assigned to work in collaboration with school organizations.

[9] The questionnaire defined cyberbullying as "bullying that occurs when willful and repeated harm is inflicted through the use of computers, cell phones, or other electronic devices."

[10] The questionnaire defined bullying as "any unwanted aggressive behavior(s) by another youth or group of youths that involves an observed or perceived power imbalance and is repeated multiple times or is highly likely to be repeated. Bullying occurs among youth who are not siblings or current dating partners."

[11] The questionnaire defined violence as "actual, attempted, or threatened fight or assault."

[12] This item on the questionnaire provided the following examples of mental health disorders: depression, mood disorders, and ADHD. The questionnaire defined mental health disorders as "collectively, all diagnosable mental health disorders or health conditions that are characterized by alterations in thinking, mood, or behavior (or some combination thereof) associated with distress and/or impaired functioning."

Reference tables: *Digest of Education Statistics 2019*, tables 233.50, 233.60, 233.65, 233.67b, and 233.70

Related indicators and resources: Students' Reports of Safety and Security Measures Observed at School

Glossary: Bullying (School Survey on Crime and Safety); Cyberbullying; Free or reduced-price lunch; Locale codes; Mental health disorder (School Survey on Crime and Safety); Public school or institution; School Resource Officer (SRO)