# Safety and Security Practices at Public Schools

In 2019–20, about 52 percent of public schools reported having a written plan for procedures to be performed in the event of a pandemic disease. This percentage was higher than the percentage reported in 2017–18 (46 percent).

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,[1] 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.

Figure 1. Percentage of public schools that used selected safety and security measures: School years 2009–10, 2017–18, and 2019–20
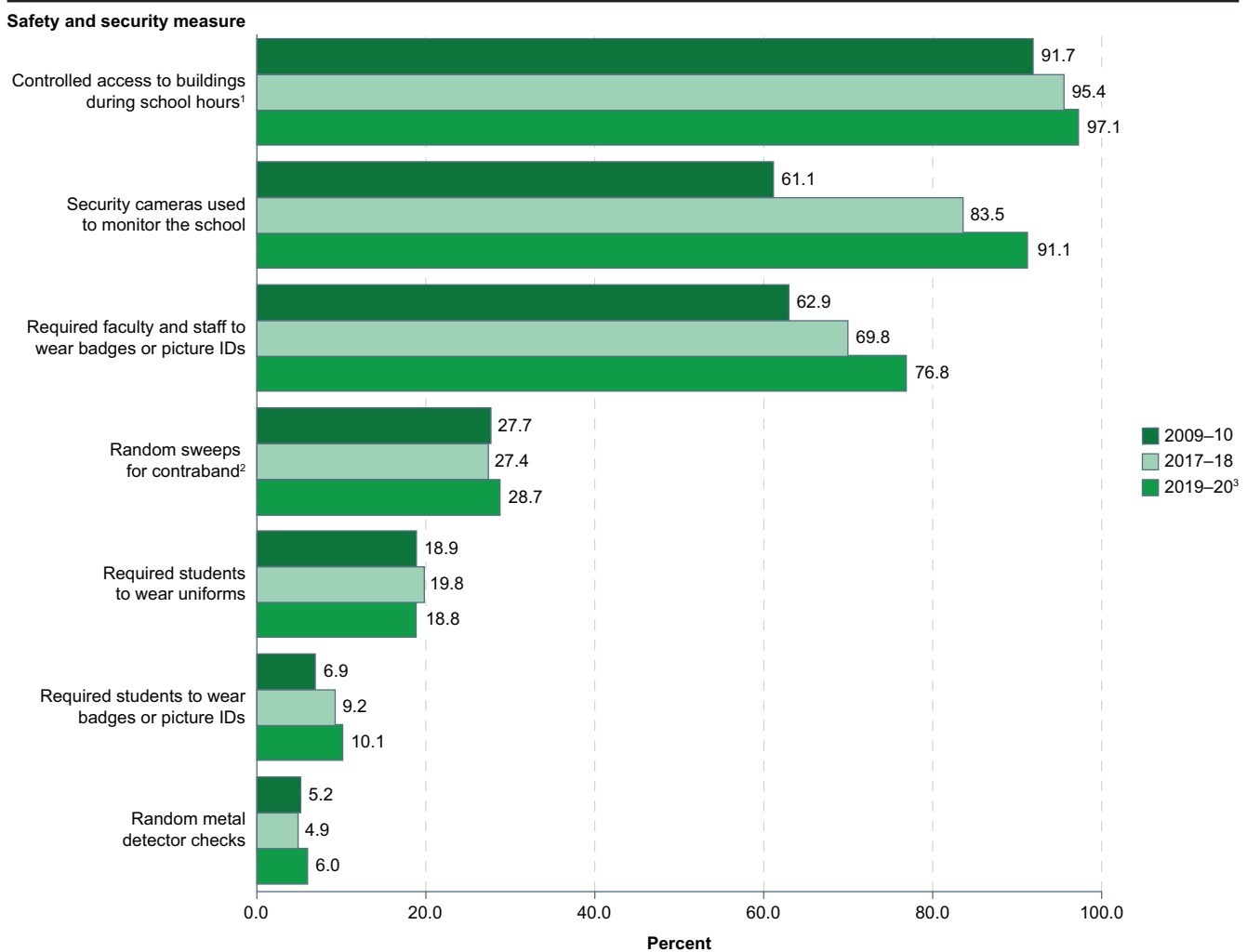
[1] Prior to 2017–18, the examples of controlled access to buildings included only "locked or monitored doors" and did not include loading docks.
[2] The 2017–18 and 2019–20 questionnaires included only a single item about random sweeps for contraband, and they provided locker checks and dog sniffs as 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] The coronavirus pandemic affected the 2019–20 data collection activities. The change to virtual schooling and the adjusted school year may have impacted the data collected by the School Survey on Crime and Safety. Readers should use caution when comparing 2019–20 estimates with those from earlier years. For more information, see *Crime, Violence, Discipline, and Safety in U.S. Public Schools in 2019–20: Findings From the School Survey on Crime and Safety* (NCES 2022-029; forthcoming).
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, 2009–10, 2017–18, and 2019–20 School Survey on Crime and Safety (SSOCS), 2010, 2018, and 2020. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2021*, table 233.50.
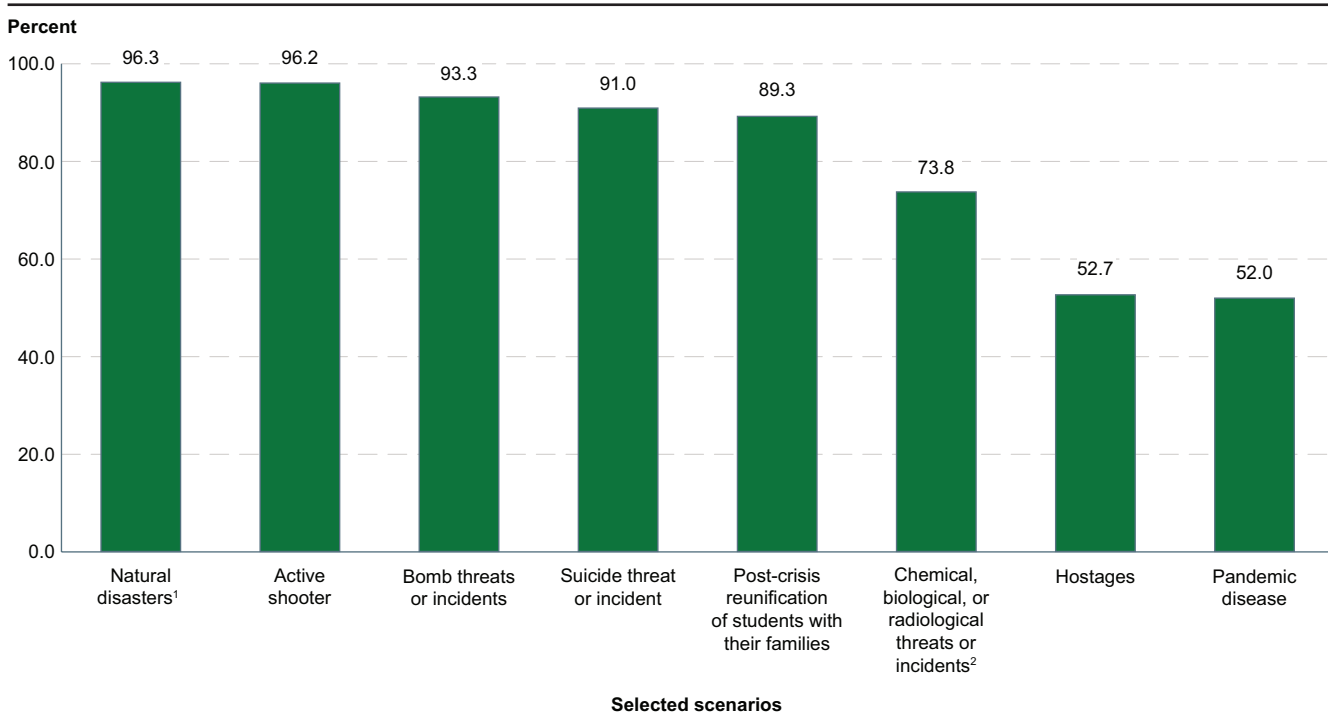
The use of certain safety and security measures in public schools has become more prevalent over time. Between 2009-10 and 2019-20,[2] the percentage of public schools reporting the use of the following safety and security measures increased: controlling access to school buildings (from 92 to 97 percent), using security cameras (from 61 to 91 percent), and requiring faculty and staff to wear badges or picture IDs (from 63 to 77 percent). The percentage of public schools that reported requiring students to wear badges or picture IDs was also higher in 2019-20 than in 2009-10 (10 vs. 7 percent), although there was no consistent pattern of change throughout the period. However, there were no measurable differences between 2009-10 and 2019-20 in the percentages of public schools that reported using random sweeps for contraband,[3] requiring school uniforms, or using random metal detector checks on students.

Public schools' use of various safety and security measures differed by school characteristics during the 2019-20 school year. For example, greater percentages of elementary schools and middle schools than of secondary/high schools reported a requirement that faculty and staff wear badges or picture IDs (83 and 78 percent vs. 65 percent), as well as a requirement that students wear uniforms (21 and 18 percent vs. 12 percent; not shown in the figure).[4] In contrast, greater percentages of secondary/high schools and middle schools than of elementary schools reported the use of security cameras to monitor the school (97 and 94 percent vs. 88 percent), the use of random sweeps for contraband (66 and 48 percent vs. 8 percent), a requirement that students wear badges or picture IDs (21 and 19 percent vs. 4 percent), and the use of random metal detector checks (15 and 10 percent vs. 2 percent).

Public schools' use of various safety and security measures also differed by their racial composition. For instance, schools where 25 percent or less of the students were students of color[5] reported the lowest instance of two safety and security measures: a requirement that students wear uniforms and a requirement that students wear badges or picture IDs. However, these schools reported the highest usage of random sweeps for contraband and of security cameras to monitor the school.

Figure 2. Percentage of public schools with a written plan for procedures to be performed in selected scenarios: School year 2019–20

Percent

Scenario	Percent
Natural disasters[1]	96.3
Active shooter	96.2
Bomb threats or incidents	93.3
Suicide threat or incident	91.0
Post-crisis reunification of students with their families	89.3
Chemical, biological, or radiological threats or incidents[2]	73.8
Hostages	52.7
Pandemic disease	52.0

Selected scenarios

[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, 2019–20 School Survey on Crime and Safety (SSOCS), 2020. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2021*, table 233.65.
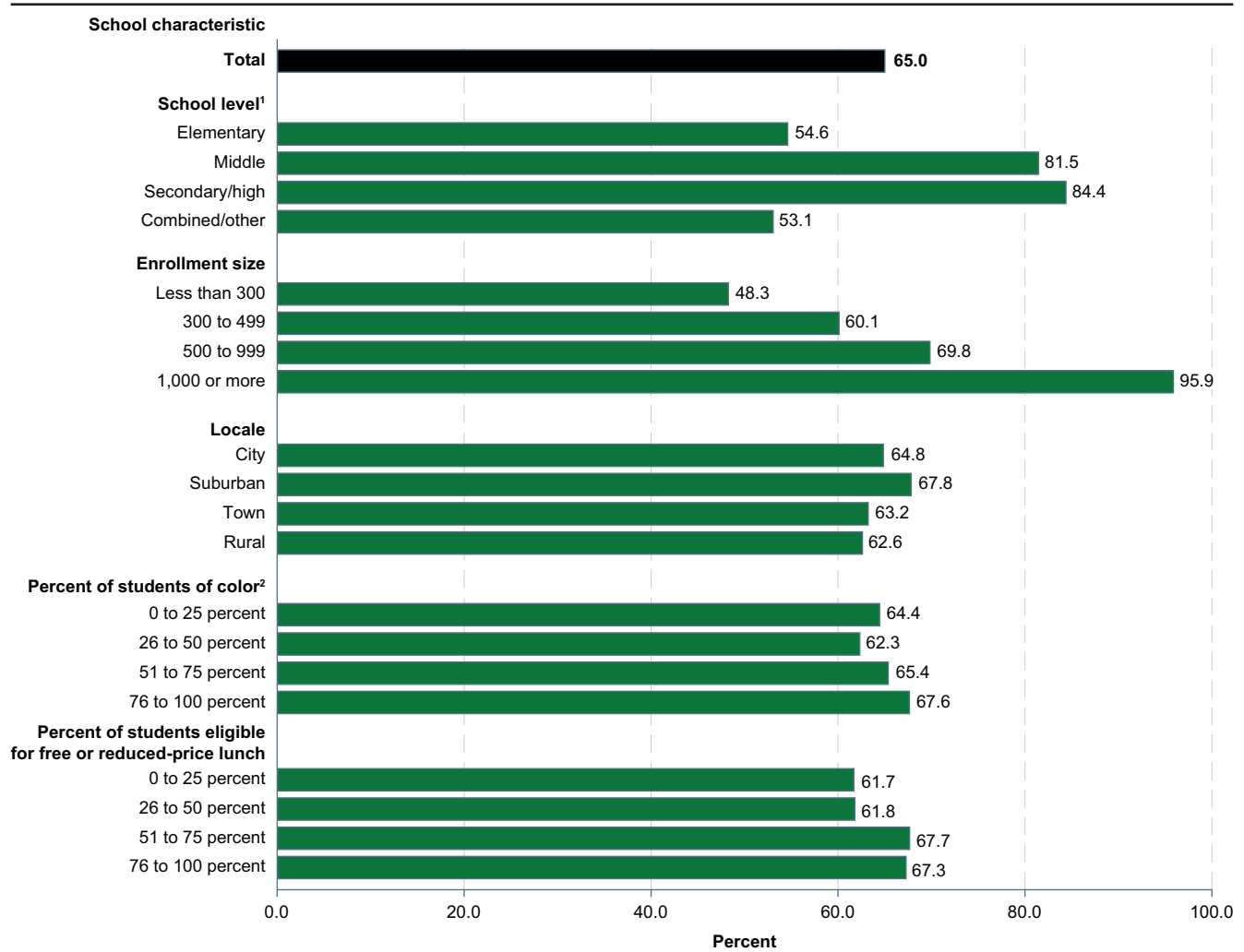
Another aspect of school safety and security is ensuring that plans are in place to be enacted in the event of specific scenarios. In 2019-20, over 90 percent of public schools had a written plan for procedures to be performed in the event of each of the following events: a natural disaster,[6] an active shooter, bomb threats or incidents, and a suicide threat or incident. These percentages were higher in 2019-20 than in 2009-10 for procedures in the event of an active shooter (96 vs. 84 percent) and of a suicide threat or incident (91 vs. 75 percent).

In 2019-20, about 52 percent of public schools reported having a written plan for procedures to be performed

in the event of a pandemic disease. This percentage was higher than the percentage reported in 2017-18 (46 percent).[7]

In 2019-20, schools were also asked whether they had drilled students during the current school year on the use of selected emergency procedures. About 98 percent of public schools had drilled students on a lockdown procedure,[8] 94 percent on evacuation procedures,[9] and 92 percent on shelter-in-place procedures.[10]

Figure 3. **Percentage of public schools with one or more security staff present at least once a week, by selected school characteristics: School year 2019–20**

School characteristic	Percent
Total	65.0
School level[1]	
Elementary	54.6
Middle	81.5
Secondary/high	84.4
Combined/other	53.1
Enrollment size	
Less than 300	48.3
300 to 499	60.1
500 to 999	69.8
1,000 or more	95.9
Locale	
City	64.8
Suburban	67.8
Town	63.2
Rural	62.6
Percent of students of color[2]	
0 to 25 percent	64.4
26 to 50 percent	62.3
51 to 75 percent	65.4
76 to 100 percent	67.6
Percent of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch	
0 to 25 percent	61.7
26 to 50 percent	61.8
51 to 75 percent	67.7
76 to 100 percent	67.3

[1] Elementary schools are defined as schools that enroll students in more of grades K through 4 than in higher grades. Middle schools are defined as schools that enroll students in more of grades 5 through 8 than in higher or lower grades. Secondary/high schools are defined as schools that enroll students in more of grades 9 through 12 than in lower grades. Combined/other schools include all other combinations of grades, including K–12 schools.
[2] The term "students of color" is being used synonymously with "minority students" in *Digest* table 233.70. Students of color include those who are Black, Hispanic, Asian, Pacific Islander, American Indian/Alaska Native, and of Two or more races.
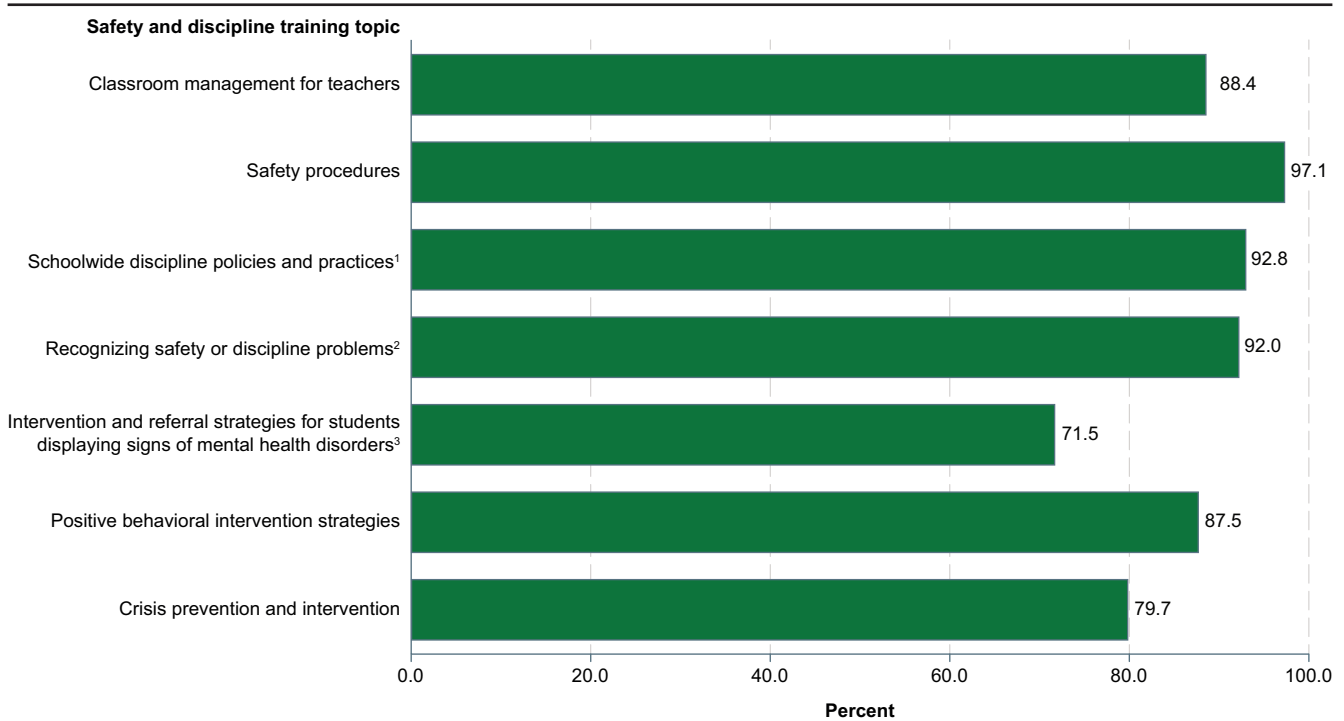NOTE: Responses were provided by the principal or the person most knowledgeable about crime and safety issues at the school. Security staff include security officers, security personnel, School Resource Officers (SROs), and sworn law enforcement officers who are not SROs. "Security officers" and "security 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, 2019–20 School Survey on Crime and Safety (SSOCS), 2020. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2021*, table 233.70.

Schools were asked to report whether they had any security staff–including security officers, security personnel, School Resource Officers (SROs), and sworn law enforcement officers who are not SROs–present at their school at least once a week.[11] Between 2009-10 and 2019-20, the percentage of public schools that reported having one or more security staff present at school at least once a week increased from 43 to 65 percent. In 2019-20, greater percentages of secondary/high schools (84 percent) and middle schools (81 percent) reported having any security staff, compared with elementary schools (55 percent) and combined/other schools (53 percent). The percentage of schools reporting the presence of any security staff was greater for schools with higher enrollment sizes; for instance, 96 percent of schools with 1,000 or more students enrolled reported having one or more security staff present, compared with 48 percent of schools with less than 300 students enrolled. There were no measurable differences by locale, by percent of students of color, or by percent of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch[12] in the percentages of public schools reporting the presence of any security staff.

Figure 4. Percentage of public schools providing training for classroom teachers or aides in specific safety and discipline topics: School year 2019–20

Safety and discipline training topic

Safety and discipline training topic	Percent
Classroom management for teachers	88.4
Safety procedures	97.1
Schoolwide discipline policies and practices[1]	92.8
Recognizing safety or discipline problems[2]	92.0
Intervention and referral strategies for students displaying signs of mental health disorders[3]	71.5
Positive behavioral intervention strategies	87.5
Crisis prevention and intervention	79.7

[1] Includes those related to cyberbullying, bullying, violence, and alcohol and/or drug use. Schools that reported providing two or more types of trainings were counted once.
[2] Includes early warning signs of student violent behavior; physical, social, and verbal bullying behaviors; signs of self-harm or suicidal tendencies; and signs of students using/abusing alcohol and/or drugs. Schools that reported providing two or more types of trainings were counted once.
[3] 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, 2019–20 School Survey on Crime and Safety (SSOCS), 2020. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2021*, table 233.67b.

Most schools and school districts provide training on school safety and security to classroom teachers and aides. During the 2019-20 school year, the most common topic for such trainings was safety procedures (e.g., how to handle emergencies), reported by 97 percent of schools. Ninety-three percent of schools reported providing trainings on schoolwide discipline policies and practices related to at least one of the following issues: cyberbullying, bullying, violence, and alcohol and/or drug use. In addition, 92 percent reported providing trainings on recognizing at least one of the types of student behaviors or tendencies related to potential safety or discipline problems.[13] In terms of intervention strategies that can help inform teachers on how to appropriately intervene in various safety-related scenarios involving students, about 88 percent of schools reported providing training on positive behavioral intervention strategies, 80 percent reported providing training on crisis prevention and intervention, and 72 percent reported providing training on intervention and referral strategies for students displaying signs of mental health disorders.[14] Additionally, 88 percent of schools reported providing trainings on classroom management.

Endnotes:

[1] In 2013-14, data on many of these items were collected using 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 the School Survey on Crime and Safety (SSOCS). The 2013-14 FRSS survey was designed to allow comparisons with SSOCS data. However, the mode of the 2013-14 FRSS survey differed from that of SSOCS, which evolved over time. Specifically, 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. All respondents to SSOCS had only the option of completing a paper survey prior to 2017-18. In 2017-18, SSOCS experimented with offering an online option to some respondents. In 2019-20, SSOCS switched to using primarily an online survey instrument. 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 coronavirus pandemic affected the 2019-20 data collection activities. The change to virtual schooling and the adjusted school year may have impacted the data collected by the School Survey on Crime and Safety. Readers should use caution when comparing 2019-20 estimates with those from earlier years. For more information, see *Crime, Violence, Discipline, and Safety in U.S. Public Schools in 2019-20: Findings From the School Survey on Crime and Safety* (NCES 2022-029; forthcoming).

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[5] The term "students of color" is being used synonymously with "minority students" in *Digest* table 233.70. Students of color include those who are Black, Hispanic, Asian, Pacific Islander, American Indian/Alaska Native, and of Two or more races.

[6] For example, earthquakes or tornadoes.

[7] 2017-18 is the first year in which this item was collected in SSOCS.

[8] Defined for respondents as "a procedure that involves securing school buildings and grounds during incidents that pose an immediate threat of violence in or around the school."

[9] Defined for respondents as "a procedure that requires all students and staff to leave the building. The evacuation plan may encompass relocation procedures and include backup buildings to serve as emergency shelters. Evacuation also includes 'reverse evacuation,' a procedure for schools to return students to the building quickly if an incident occurs while students are outside."

[10] Defined for respondents as "a procedure that requires all students and staff to remain indoors because it is safer inside the building or a room than outside. Depending on the threat or hazard, students and staff may be required to move to rooms that can be sealed (such as in the event of a chemical or biological hazard) or that are without windows, or to a weather shelter (such as in the event of a tornado)."

[11] "Security officers" 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.

[12] The percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (FRPL) programs is a proxy measure for school poverty. For more information on eligibility for FRPL and its relationship to poverty, see the NCES blog post "Free or reduced price lunch: A proxy for poverty?"

[13] Includes early warning signs of student violent behavior; physical, social, and verbal bullying behaviors; signs of self-harm or suicidal tendencies; and signs of students using/abusing alcohol and/or drugs.

[14] 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 2021*, 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)