

Safety and Security Practices at Public Schools

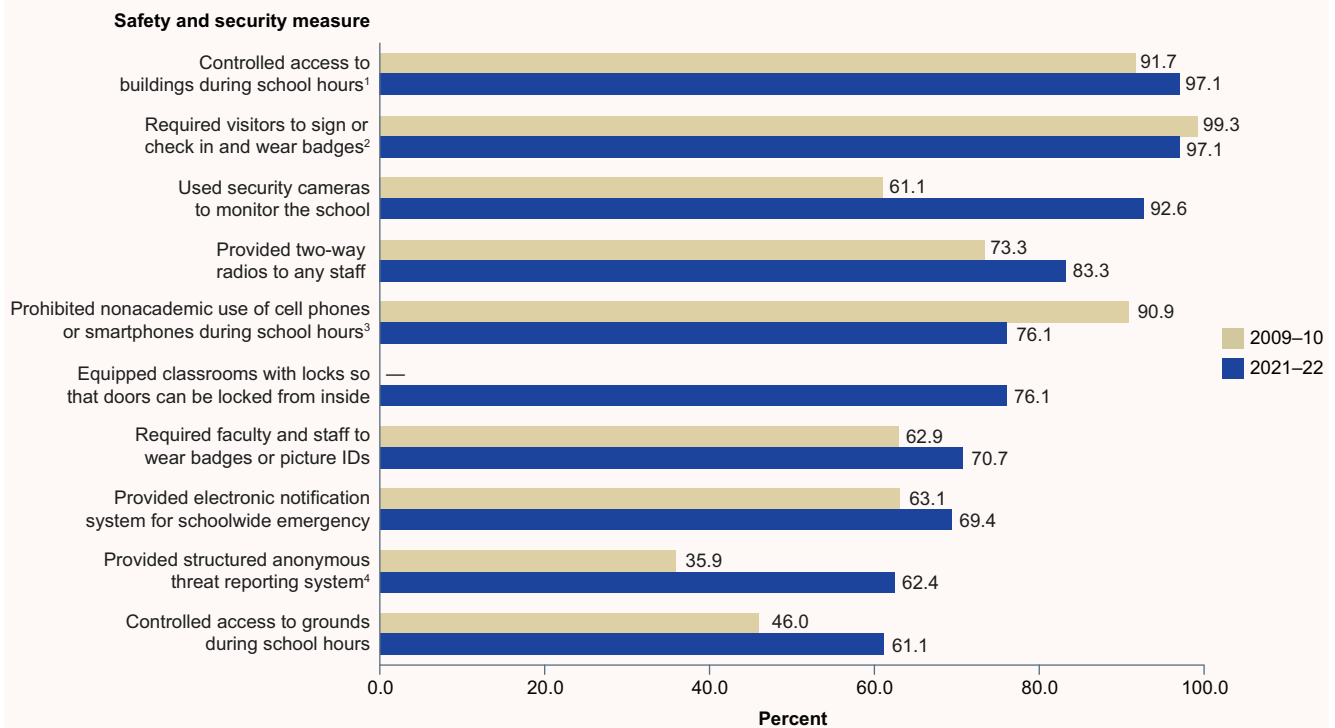
Between 2009–10 and 2019–20, the percentage of public schools that reported having one or more security staff present at school at least once a week increased from 43 to 65 percent, although the percentage in 2021–22 (61 percent) was lower than in 2019–20.

Schools use a variety of practices and procedures to promote the safety of students, faculty, and staff.¹ 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,² as well as whether their school had written procedures for responding to selected scenarios and whether it had emergency drills for students. SSOCS also asks 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.

Safety and Security Measures

FIGURE 1.

Percentage of public schools that used selected safety and security measures: School years 2009–10 and 2021–22



— Not available.

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 Prior to 2015–16, the questionnaire asked only if visitors were required “to sign or check in” and did not include the requirement to wear badges.

³ Prior to 2017–18, the questionnaire asked about prohibiting the “use of cell phones and text messaging devices during school hours.” It did not refer to “nonacademic” use or “smartphones.”

⁴ For example, a system for reporting threats through online submission, telephone hotline, or written submission via drop box.

NOTE: Responses were provided by the principal or the person most knowledgeable about crime and safety issues at the school. This figure only includes the safety and security measures that more than 50 percent of public schools reported using in 2021–22. Figures are plotted based on unrounded data.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2009–10 and 2021–22 School Survey on Crime and Safety (SSOCS), 2010 and 2022. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2023*, table 233.50.

In 2021-22, SSOCS asked public schools about 20 safety and security measures. Of these, 10 were reported as being used by more than half of schools. These commonly used measures were generally related to either controlling access to the school during school hours or using communication systems and technology. The most commonly reported safety and security measures (reported by more than 90 percent of schools) were

- controlling access to school buildings during school hours (97 percent);
- requiring visitors to sign or check in and wear badges (97 percent); and
- using security cameras to monitor the school (93 percent).

The 10 safety measures reported in SSOCS by less than half of schools tended to focus on student conduct (for more information, see *Digest of Education Statistics*, [table 233.65](#)). For example, the least commonly reported measures (reported by less than 10 percent of schools) were

- metal detector checks on students every day (2 percent);
- requiring clear book bags or banning book bags on school grounds (4 percent); and
- random metal detector checks on students (6 percent).

Of the 20 safety and security measures asked about in 2021-22, all but 2 were also asked about in 2009-10. Of the measures asked about in both survey years, 10 were reported by a higher percentage of public schools in 2021-22 than in 2009-10 (including 7 of the 10 measures reported by more than half of schools). The largest increases over this period were for

- using security cameras to monitor the school (from 61 to 93 percent); and
- providing a structured anonymous threat reporting system³ (from 36 to 62 percent).

Of the 18 measures with data for both 2009-10 and 2021-22, six were reported by a lower percentage of public schools in 2021-22 than in 2009-10 (including 2 of the 10 measures reported by more than half of schools). The largest reductions over this period were for

- enforcing a strict dress code (decreased from 57 to 37 percent); and
- prohibiting nonacademic use of cell phones or smartphones⁴ (from 91 to 76 percent), although there was no consistent trend throughout the period.

Public schools' use of various safety and security measures differed by school characteristics during the 2021-22 school year. For example, greater percentages of elementary schools and middle schools than of secondary/high schools reported

- controlling access to school buildings (98 and 97 percent vs. 94 percent);
- requiring faculty and staff to wear badges or picture IDs (75 and 71 percent vs. 60 percent); and
- requiring students to wear uniforms (18 and 16 percent vs. 9 percent).

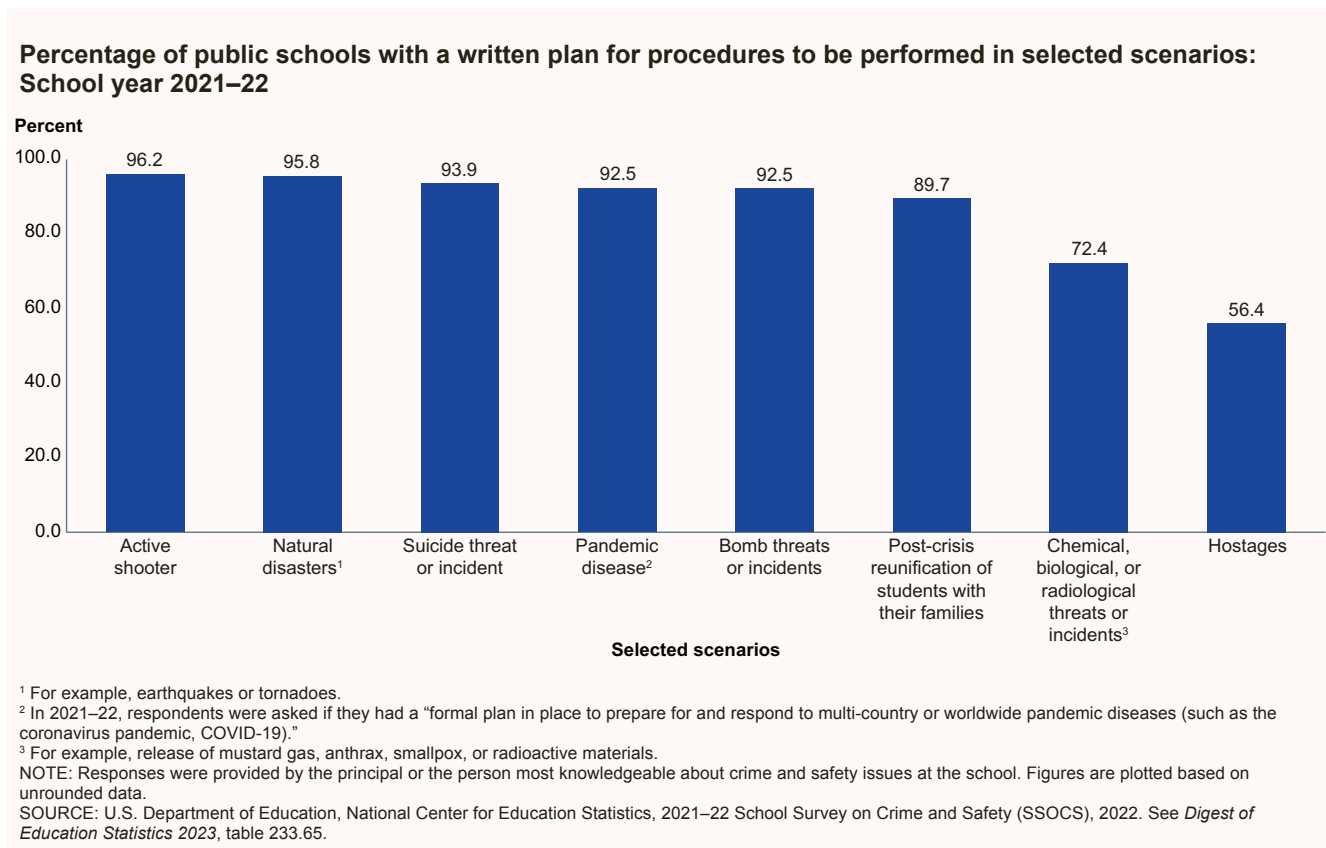
In contrast, greater percentages of secondary/high schools and middle schools than of elementary schools reported

- using security cameras to monitor the school (97 and 96 percent vs. 91 percent);
- conducting random sweeps for contraband (54 and 39 percent vs. 8 percent);
- enforcing a strict dress code (38 and 49 percent vs. 32 percent);
- requiring students to wear badges or picture IDs (15 and 14 percent vs. 6 percent);
- conducting random metal detector checks (14 and 10 percent vs. 2 percent);
- conducting daily metal detector checks (6 and 4 percent vs. less than 1 percent); and
- requiring book bags to be clear or banning them (5 and 6 percent vs. 2 percent).

Public schools' use of various safety and security measures also differed by the racial/ethnic composition of their student body. For instance, schools where 25 percent or less of the students were students of color⁵ reported the following safety and security measures at lower rates than did schools with higher percentages of students of color (26 to 50 percent, 51 to 75 percent, or 76 to 100 percent):

- controlling access to school grounds (47 percent vs. 60, 60, and 79 percent, respectively)
- requiring students to wear badges or picture IDs (3 percent vs. 8, 14, and 15 percent, respectively)
- requiring students to wear uniforms (2 percent vs. 8, 12, and 43 percent, respectively)

In contrast, schools where 25 percent or less of the students were students of color reported conducting random sweeps for contraband (30 percent) at a higher rate than did schools with higher percentages of students of color (18, 21, and 20 percent, respectively).

Crisis Planning and Drills**FIGURE 2.**

Another aspect of school safety and security is ensuring that plans are in place to be enacted in the event of specific scenarios. In 2021–22, more than 90 percent of public schools had a written plan for procedures to be performed in the event of each of the following scenarios:

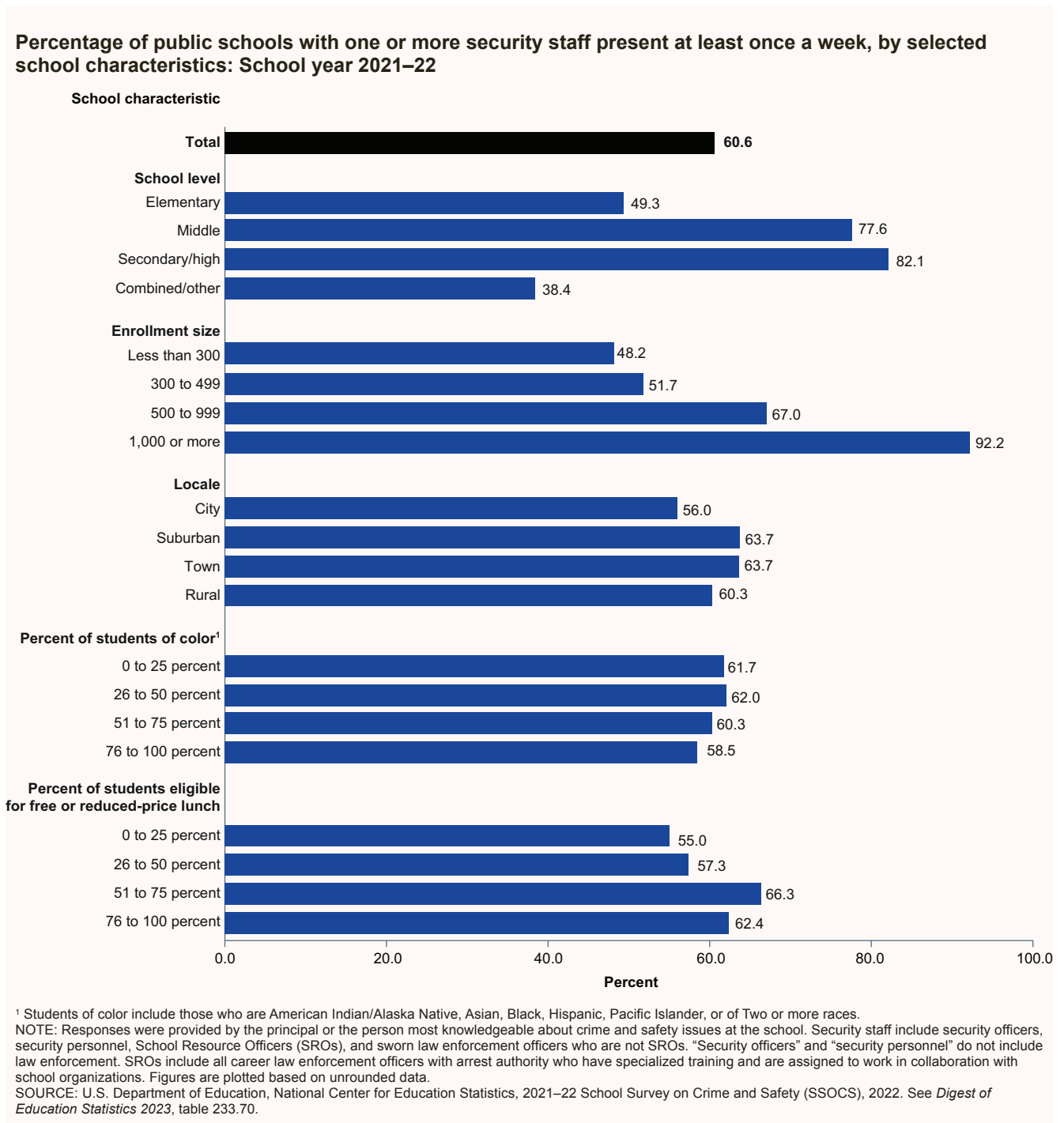
- active shooter (96 percent)
- natural disasters⁶ (96 percent)
- suicide threat or incident (94 percent)
- pandemic disease (92 percent)
- bomb threats or incidents (92 percent)

From 2009–10 to 2021–22, the percentage of schools that had written plans increased for active shooter scenarios (from 84 to 96 percent) and suicide threats or incidents (from 75 to 94 percent). There was no consistent trend in the percentage of public schools that had a written plan for pandemic disease from 2009–10 to 2021–22, but the percentage was higher in 2021–22 (92 percent) than in 2019–20 (52 percent), the first school year impacted by the coronavirus pandemic.^{7, 8}

In 2021–22, 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,⁹ 93 percent had drilled students on a shelter-in-place procedure,¹⁰ and 93 percent had drilled students on an evacuation procedure.¹¹

Presence of Security Staff and Officers Carrying Firearms

FIGURE 3.



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.¹² 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, although the percentage in 2021–22 (61 percent) was lower than in 2019–20.

In 2021-22, the percentage of public schools that reported having one or more security staff present at least once a week was

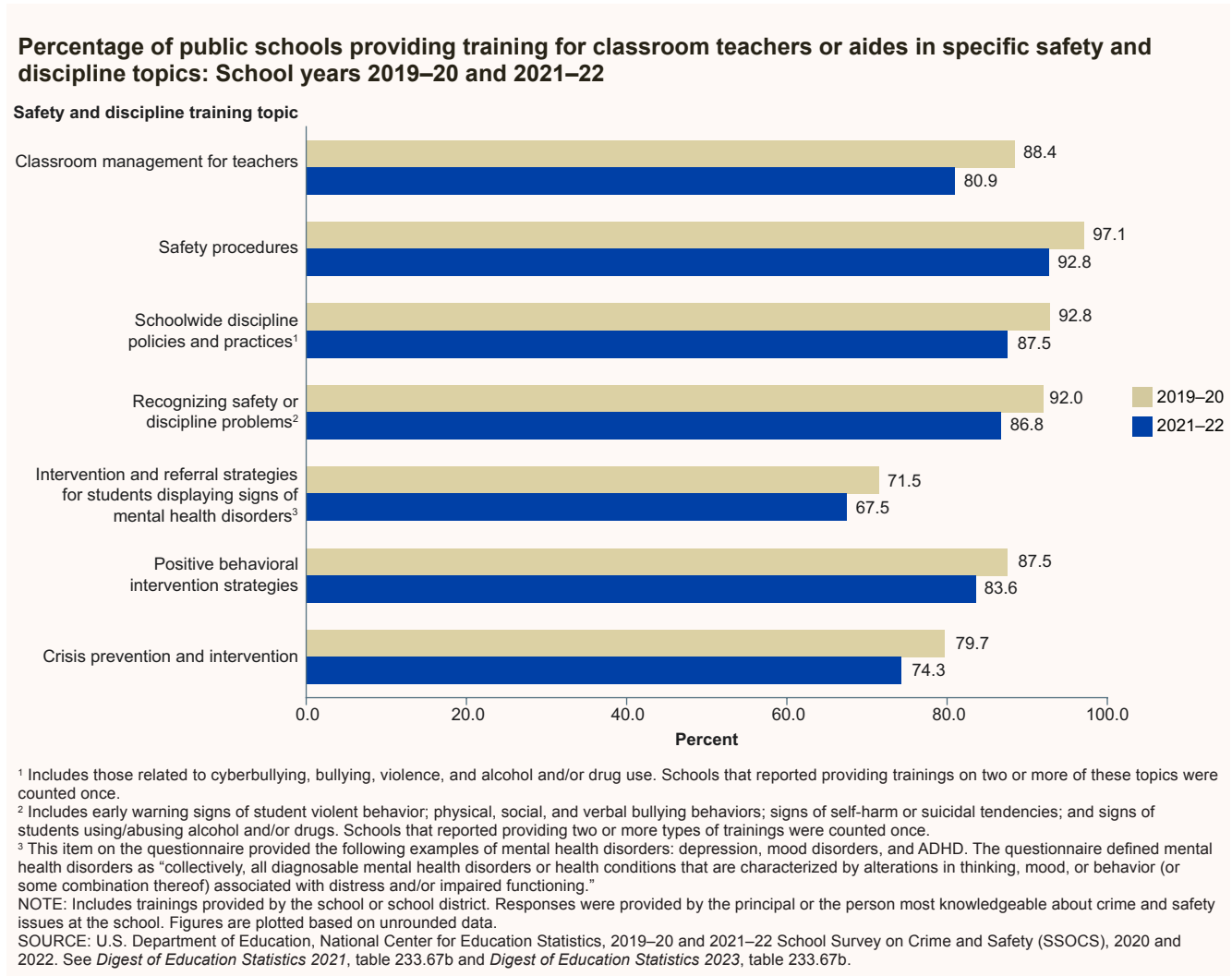
- higher for secondary/high schools (82 percent) and middle schools (78 percent) than for elementary schools (49 percent) and combined/other schools (38 percent);
- generally higher for schools with larger enrollment sizes, ranging from 92 percent for schools with 1,000 or more students enrolled to 48 percent for schools with fewer than 300 students enrolled;
- higher for schools in suburban areas than for schools in cities (64 vs. 56 percent); and
- higher for schools where 51 to 75 percent of their students were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch¹³ (66 percent) and 76 percent or more of their students were eligible (62 percent) than for schools where 25 percent or less of their students were eligible (55 percent).

In 2021-22, about 45 percent of public schools reported having sworn law enforcement officers who routinely carried a firearm. This percentage was lower than the percentage in 2019-20 (51 percent). The percentage of schools that reported having sworn law enforcement officers who routinely carried a firearm differed by school characteristics. For example, in 2021-22, this percentage was

- higher for secondary/high schools (63 percent) and middle schools (62 percent) than for elementary schools (34 percent) and combined/other schools (24 percent);
- higher for schools in rural areas (55 percent) and towns (54 percent) than for schools in suburban areas (45 percent) and cities (30 percent); and
- lower for schools where 76 percent or more of their students were students of color (29 percent) than for schools with lower percentages of students of color (ranging from 46 to 55 percent).

Safety and Security Training for Teachers

FIGURE 4.



In 2021-22, most public schools and school districts provided training on school safety and security to classroom teachers and aides:

- 93 percent provided trainings on safety procedures (e.g., how to handle emergencies).
- 88 percent provided 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.
- 87 percent provided trainings on recognizing at least one of the types of student behaviors or tendencies related to potential safety or discipline problems.¹⁴
- 81 percent provided trainings on classroom management for teachers.

In addition to these trainings on procedures, policies, and recognizing risks, a majority of schools also reported providing trainings on intervention strategies to help inform teachers about how to appropriately intervene in various safety-related scenarios involving students. Specifically,

- 84 percent of schools reported providing training on positive behavioral intervention strategies;
- 74 percent reported providing training on crisis prevention and intervention; and
- 67 percent reported providing training on intervention and referral strategies for students displaying signs of mental health disorders.¹⁵

The percentage of public schools that reported each of these various trainings on school safety and security were lower in 2021-22 than in 2019-20. For example, 67 percent of schools reported providing training on intervention and referral strategies for students displaying signs of mental health disorders in 2021-22, compared with 72 percent in 2019-20.

Endnotes:

¹ For general technical notes related to data analysis, data interpretation, rounding, and other considerations, please refer to the [Reader's Guide](#).

² In addition to data from the School Survey on Crime and Safety (SSOCS), this indicator uses 2013-14 data from the Fast Response Survey System (FRSS) for select trend analyses. 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 and 2021-22, 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.

³ For example, a system for reporting threats through online submission, telephone hotline, or written submission via drop box.

⁴ Prior to 2017-18, the questionnaire asked about prohibiting the "use of cell phones and text messaging devices during school hours." It did not refer to "nonacademic" use or "smartphones."

⁵ Students of color include those who are American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian, Black, Hispanic, Pacific Islander, or of Two or more races.

⁶ For example, earthquakes or tornadoes.

⁷ Prior to 2017-18, respondents were asked if they had a written plan that describes procedures to be performed in the event of a "pandemic flu." In 2017-18 and 2019-20, respondents were asked if they had a written plan that describes procedures to be performed in the event of a "pandemic disease." In 2021-22, respondents were asked if they had a "formal plan in place to prepare for and respond to multi-country or worldwide pandemic diseases (such as the coronavirus pandemic, COVID-19)."

⁸ 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 other 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 \(NCES 2022-029\)](#).

⁹ 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."

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 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."

¹² "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.

¹³ 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?](#)"

¹⁴ 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.

¹⁵ 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 2023*, tables [233.50](#), [233.60](#), [233.65](#), [233.67b](#), and [233.70](#); *Digest of Education Statistics 2021*, table [233.67b](#)

Related indicators and resources: [Crime, Violence, Discipline, and Safety in U.S. Public Schools: Findings From the School Survey on Crime and Safety: 2021-22 \(NCES 2024-043\)](#); [Students' Reports of Safety and Security Measures Observed at School](#)

Glossary: [Bullying \(School Survey on Crime and Safety\)](#); [Combined/other school](#); [Cyberbullying](#); [Elementary school](#); [Free or reduced-price lunch](#); [Locale codes](#); [Mental health disorder \(School Survey on Crime and Safety\)](#); [Middle school](#); [Public school or institution](#); [School Resource Officer \(SRO\)](#); [Secondary/high school](#)