



Report Highlights

Safety Planning in Louisiana’s Elementary and Secondary Public Schools

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Why We Conducted This Review

This report provides information about school safety and emergency preparedness in Louisiana’s elementary and secondary public schools, with an emphasis on Emergency Operations Plans (EOP). We conducted this review in response to legislative interest including Senate Bill 207 of the 2023 Regular Legislative Session. Given the risk posed to students and staff during general emergencies, such as weather events, as well as the increasing prevalence and concern related to school violence, it is important that schools have adequate EOPs and other safety measures in place.

What We Found

- **Since 2001, state law has required that each public school develop an EOP but has not required any state entity to track or monitor whether schools met this requirement. Recent surveys of schools show that not all schools had EOPs that met best practices and legal requirements.** For example, a November 2022 Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE) survey found that an average of 348 (27.7%) of responding schools were noncompliant with EOP requirements in law, such as preparing EOPs jointly with appropriate emergency response officials, including and focusing on the prevention of loss of life, submission of EOPs to the appropriate local governing authorities, and updating staff on EOP revisions. The exhibit below summarizes the results from LDOE’s survey.

Examples of EOP Criteria Tested	Percent of Noncompliance
Focuses on preventing the loss of life and the injury of students and teachers and other school employees	14.9%
Details the roles and responsibilities of each school employee	17.3%
The school’s principal submitted their EOP in writing to the local superintendent or governing authority for approval at least annually, including upon revision	17.8%
Includes the provision that classroom doors with locks comply with all fire safety standards and remain locked during instructional time and that a locked door shall not obstruct egress	21.0%
The school’s principal has a copy of the approved EOP in their office	15.0%

Source: Prepared by legislative auditor’s staff using information from LDOE Survey.

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What We Found (Cont.)

- **Louisiana has received approximately \$26 million in grant funding to address school safety, including approximately \$3.7 million to develop, improve, and implement EOPs. However, not all Louisiana schools have taken advantage of these resources.** For example, due in part to low program participation levels, grant administrators allowed the \$3.7 million grant to expire with \$1.6 million in unspent funds. In addition, despite available funding to schools to implement required emergency notification and anonymous reporting systems, not all schools have taken part in state provided systems nor implemented alternative systems.
- **Unlike other states, Louisiana does not require periodic site assessments of school campuses to ensure that physical security measures comply with state law and best practices.** According to the Louisiana State Police (LSP), findings of noncompliance with state law and best practices are commonly detected during site assessments.
- **Although the benefit of School Resource Officers (SROs) are debated by some national stakeholders, school safety officials in Louisiana recommend the presence of SROs in all schools. However, unlike other states, including Florida and Texas, Louisiana does not require each public school to have SROs.** As a result, according to LDOE survey data, at least 418 (33.3%) of 1,257 responding public schools did not have at least one SRO as of November 2022.

According to LSP, schools forgo some low-cost updates or no-cost practices because complying with these requirements creates inconvenience for staff. However, LSP stated that these measures also inconvenience those considering or attempting to attack a school. For example, requiring authorized access for visitors or locking doors.