

# SAFETY PLANNING IN LOUISIANA'S ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

PERFORMANCE AUDIT SERVICES

**Informational Report**  
**February 7, 2024**

**LOUISIANA LEGISLATIVE AUDITOR  
1600 NORTH THIRD STREET  
POST OFFICE BOX 94397  
BATON ROUGE, LOUISIANA 70804-9397**

**LEGISLATIVE AUDITOR**  
MICHAEL J. "MIKE" WAGUESPACK, CPA

**FIRST ASSISTANT LEGISLATIVE AUDITOR**  
BETH Q. DAVIS, CPA

**DIRECTOR OF PERFORMANCE AUDIT SERVICES**  
KAREN LEBLANC, CIA, CGAP, MSW

**PERFORMANCE AUDIT MANAGER**  
KRISTA BAKER-HERNANDEZ, CIA, CGAP, CRMA, MPP

**AUDIT TEAM**  
ASHLEY BRECHEEN, MA  
RACHEL KELLY, MBA

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February 7, 2024

The Honorable J. Cameron Henry, Jr.,  
President of the Senate  
The Honorable Phillip R. DeVillier,  
Speaker of the House of Representatives

Dear Senator Henry and Representative DeVillier:

This informational report provides the results of our review of school safety and emergency preparedness in Louisiana's elementary and secondary public schools, with an emphasis on Emergency Operations Plans (EOP). This report is intended to provide timely information related to an area of interest to the legislature or based on a legislative request. I hope this report will benefit you in your legislative decision-making process.

We would like to express our appreciation to the Louisiana Department of Education, Governor's Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness, Louisiana State Police, and Louisiana State University for their assistance during this audit.

Respectfully submitted,



Michael J. "Mike" Waguespack, CPA  
Legislative Auditor

MJW/aa

SCHOOL SAFETY





# Louisiana Legislative Auditor

Michael J. "Mike" Waguespack, CPA



## Safety Planning in Louisiana’s Elementary and Secondary Public Schools

February 2024

Audit Control # 40230021

### Introduction

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).<sup>1</sup> We conducted this review in response to legislative interest including Senate Bill 207 of the 2023 Regular Legislative Session. In addition, according to statistics compiled by the Governmental Accountability Office (GAO), school violence across the U.S. has increased in recent years. In Louisiana, the Louisiana State Analytical and Fusion Exchange (LA-SAFE)<sup>2</sup> received reports of 109 threats of school violence in calendar year 2022, with the majority related to shooting and bomb threats.<sup>3</sup> 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.

**An EOP is a document that outlines how a school will prepare for, respond to, and recover from an emergency. Types of emergencies include, but are not limited to, flooding, toxic chemical releases, and acts of violence.**

**Source:** Federal School Safety Clearinghouse

**Legal Requirements.** Since 2001, state law requires that all schools develop a crisis and response plan. Since then, Louisiana has passed multiple laws to address school safety. According to the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), Louisiana passed 62.5% of school safety legislation introduced during calendar years 2018 through 2022 which is significantly higher than the national average pass rate of 19.41% for school safety legislation. Examples of legislation include additional EOP and drill requirements, provisions related to suicide prevention in schools, suicide prevention training for school staff, and policies for elementary carpool and bus lines. Appendix C summarizes school safety legislation passed during fiscal years 2019 through 2023.

<sup>1</sup> EOPs are also commonly referred to as crisis management and response plans in Louisiana.  
<sup>2</sup> LA-SAFE collects, analyzes, and disseminates information and intelligence data regarding criminal and terrorist activity in Louisiana to support public safety, homeland security, and governmental agencies.  
<sup>3</sup> This only includes reports received by LA-SAFE. Additional threats may have been made but not reported to LA-SAFE.

**Entities Involved in School Safety.** Multiple entities play a role in school safety, including local schools, school districts, Louisiana State Police (LSP), the Governor’s Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness (GOHSEP), the Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE), local law enforcement, and emergency response agencies. However, prior to 2023, there was no single entity responsible for coordinating school safety resources and monitoring at the state level. In June 2023, the Louisiana Center for Safe Schools (LCSS) was established within GOHSEP to serve as a centralized school safety resource to connect local stakeholders for emergency preparedness planning, training, execution, recovery, and reporting.<sup>4</sup> Exhibit 1 summarizes the responsibilities of entities involved in school safety that we have included in this report.

| <b>Exhibit 1</b>   |  |
|--|--|
| <b>Entities Involved in Louisiana School Safety</b>  |  |
| Entity   | Description of Involvement   |
| Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE)   | LDOE hosts annual Louisiana School Safety Summits which aim to bring school system leaders, local and state law enforcement, governmental agencies, and mental health providers together for an opportunity to share and learn best practices around school safety and emergency preparedness. |
| Louisiana Center for Safe Schools (LCSS) (Governor's Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness) | LCSS provides school communities and their school safety partners with quality information and resources by identifying and promoting strategies, practices, and programs that support safe schools for all as part of the total academic mission.   |
| National Center for Biomedical Research and Training (NCBRT) (Louisiana State University)                    | NCBRT provided training and technical assistance to Local Education Agencies (LEAs) for the development and implementation of high-quality school EOPs from 2018 through 2023.   |
| Louisiana State Police (LSP)   | LSP performs site assessments for Louisiana primary and secondary schools upon request to evaluate whether physical security measures comply with state law and best practices.  |
| Louisiana State Analytical and Fusion Exchange (LA-SAFE)   | LA-SAFE supports federal, state, and local agencies by collecting, analyzing, and disseminating information and intelligence data regarding criminal and terrorist activity, including data on Louisiana K-12 school threats.  |
| Local Emergency Response Entities  | Local entities such as local law enforcement, fire, public safety, and emergency preparedness officials are responsible for preparing and reviewing EOPs jointly with public school principals and presenting in-service school safety training with public school principals.                 |
| <b>Source:</b> Prepared by legislative auditor’s staff using information provided by each entity.            |  |

To conduct this review, we obtained information related to school safety planning from stakeholders, including LCSS, LSP, and LDOE and researched best practices from organizations such as the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). We analyzed survey results from an EOP survey administered by LDOE and administered a separate survey to obtain additional information on the status of EOPs across a selection of Louisiana public primary and secondary schools. In addition, we analyzed schools’ use of available school safety resources. We also

<sup>4</sup> (Louisiana Revised Statute) LA R.S. 29:726.5.1

reviewed school safety monitoring efforts at the state level as well as additional measures for preventing school violence. Finally, we provided our preliminary results and methodology to agency staff and incorporated their feedback throughout the report.

The objective of this audit was:

**To provide information related to the status and quality of emergency operations plans and other security measures in Louisiana’s elementary and secondary public schools.**

Our results are summarized on the next page and discussed in detail throughout the remainder of the report. Appendix A contains management responses, Appendix B contains our scope and methodology, Appendix C contains a list of Louisiana school safety legislation for 2019 through 2023, and Appendix D contains results of the November 2022 EOP survey by LDOE.

**Informational reports are intended to provide more timely information than standards-based performance audits. While these informational reports do not follow *Governmental Auditing Standards*, we conduct quality assurance activities to ensure the information presented is accurate. We incorporated LDOE’s, LCSS’, LSU’s, and LSP’s feedback throughout this informational report.**

## Objective: To provide information related to the status and quality of emergency operations plans and other security measures in Louisiana's elementary and secondary public schools.

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Overall, we found the following:

- **Since 2001, state law has required that each public school develop an Emergency Operations Plan (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 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.
- **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, 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.

This information is discussed in more detail on the pages that follow.

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**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.**

EOPs are required in at least 45 states, including Louisiana. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) provides best practices for EOP development. These best practices recommend that EOPs include procedures for schools to follow in the event of an evacuation, lock down, etc. and that such procedures be created based on specific threats or hazards that a school may face. For example, protocol for severe weather events would differ from protocol for an active shooter scenario. If a school is located near a chemical plant, then the EOP for that school should include protocols in case of a chemical spill, etc. State law includes many of these same best practices, including provisions relating to the prevention of loss of life, assignment of roles and responsibilities, and counseling of students by mental health professionals in the event of an emergency situation.

According to FEMA, having school EOPs in place to keep students and staff safe plays a key role in taking preventative and protective measures to stop an emergency from occurring or reduce the impact of an incident. In addition to EOPs, FEMA recommends that schools evaluate risks posed to a given school. Security risks to schools include factors such as the accessibility of a school campus and whether the school is located near hazardous sites such as chemical plants. According to FEMA, understanding risks can help inform the development or improvement of EOPs.

**Source:** [FEMA Guide for Developing High-Quality School Emergency Operations Plans](#)

**Since 2001, state law has required each public school to develop an EOP but has not required any state entity to track or monitor whether schools met this requirement.**<sup>5</sup> Prior to June 2023, state law<sup>5</sup> only required schools to annually submit EOPs to the local superintendent, who was then required to submit the status of the EOP to the school's governing authority.<sup>6</sup> As of June 2023, state law requires the local school superintendent to submit a copy of the EOP to the school's governing authority, LDOE, and LCSS annually. According to

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<sup>5</sup> LA R.S. 17.416.16

<sup>6</sup> Most public schools are governed by school boards. However, charter schools are governed by not-for-profit organizations.

LCSS, although state law does not specifically require LCSS to do so, it plans to track the status and assess the quality of school's EOPs. LCSS is required by state law to perform the following:

- Identify and prioritize resources available to improve the safety of Louisiana's schools
- Facilitate the collection and dissemination of information on school safety, school safety vulnerabilities, school safety needs, training standards, best practices, and available funding programs
- Assist schools in developing and revising their school crisis and management response plans
- Coordinate with LDOE to ensure schools are aware of LCSS resources and that school safety rules are incorporating best practices

**Surveys conducted by both LDOE and LLA found that not all schools had EOPs and that EOPs did not contain all required or recommended components.** In May 2022, the House Committee on Education requested and urged LDOE to study the topic of school safety.<sup>7</sup> In response, LDOE administered a survey in November 2022 to all public-school districts in Louisiana and received responses from 79 districts<sup>8</sup> covering 1,257 (72.7%) of Louisiana's 1,729 public schools.<sup>9</sup> According to LDOE, the purpose of the survey was to assess state-wide EOP status and school resource officer (SRO) utilization. Results indicated 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. Exhibit 2 summarizes results from LDOE's survey.

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<sup>7</sup> House Resolution 218 of the Louisiana 2022 Regular Session

<sup>8</sup> These districts include 68 Local Education Agencies (LEA), the Special School District (SSD), and 10 charter schools.

<sup>9</sup> According to LDOE's November 2022 report. The number of schools in the state fluctuates from year to year.

| <b>Exhibit 2<br/>LDOE EOP Survey Results<br/>November 2022</b>  |                                 |
|---|---------------------------------|
| <b>Examples of EOP Criteria Tested*</b>   | <b>Percent of Noncompliance</b> |
| 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%                           |
| * See Appendix D for complete results of LDOE survey.<br><b>Source:</b> Prepared by legislative auditor’s staff using information from LDOE Survey.                                       |                                 |

We also surveyed a selection of 45 school districts, including districts that did not respond to the LDOE survey, and found the following:

- 6 of 345 (1.7%) schools included in these districts did not have formal EOPs as required for the 2022-2023 school year.
- Districts could not confirm whether 27 (7.8%) schools had EOPs for the 2022-2023 school year.<sup>10</sup>

We also obtained and reviewed 49 EOPs<sup>11</sup> and found that plans submitted for 18 (36.7%) of 49 schools did not meet the criteria of a formally developed school EOP. These plans were as short as three pages long or were styled as a template of an EOP with placeholders for where information was intended to be placed. One district provided a single district level plan that was not tailored to the location, school layout, personnel, or ages of students at each given school. In addition, 23 (46.9%) plans did not meet at least half of the tested best practices and legal requirements in effect during the 2022-2023 school year.<sup>12</sup> For example,

- 26 (53.1%) plans did not include provisions for active shooter scenarios as recommended by FEMA and mandated by state law since 2001<sup>13</sup> and
- 47 (95.9%) plans did not provide that classroom doors should be locked during instructional time.

<sup>10</sup> We administered a survey to 45 districts, including 612 schools and received 345 responses. See Appendix B to understand how we selected these districts.

<sup>11</sup> We requested EOPs from approximately five schools from each district that were indicated by survey respondents as having EOPs for the 2022-2023 school year.

<sup>12</sup> It is important to note that a school may still be well-prepared to prevent injury and loss of life posed by emergency events regardless of the quality or status of its EOP.

<sup>13</sup> ACT 313 of the 2001 Regular Legislative Session

Exhibit 3 summarizes EOP deficiencies identified during our review.

| <b>Exhibit 3<br/>Compliance with EOP Best Practices and State Law*<br/>2022-2023 School Year</b>  |                                     |
|---|-------------------------------------|
| <b>Tested Provisions</b>  | <b>Percent of<br/>Noncompliance</b> |
| Addresses the needs of special education students and those with access and functional needs  | 85.7%                               |
| Provides information pertaining to who to contact in case of an emergency   | 34.7%                               |
| Includes a table of contents that is a logically ordered and clearly identifies the layout of major sections and subsections of the plan                      | 42.9%                               |
| Provides procedures for the evacuation of the building in the event of an emergency situation   | 28.6%                               |
| Provides procedures for accounting for the whereabouts and wellbeing of students, staff, and visitors, and identifying those who may be missing               | 55.1%                               |
| Addresses active shooter scenarios*   | 53.1%                               |
| Addresses the management of emergency situations such as natural disasters*   | 28.6%                               |
| Includes school floor plans   | 65.3%                               |
| Focuses on preventing the loss of life and the injury of students and teachers and other school employees*  | 51.0 %                              |
| Details the roles and responsibilities of each school employee*   | 10.2%                               |
| Details procedures for the counseling of students by mental health professionals in the event of a shooting or other violent incident or emergency situation* | 51.0%                               |
| Provides that classroom doors with locks shall remain locked during instructional time*   | 95.9%                               |
| * These provisions are required by state law.<br><b>Source:</b> Prepared by legislative auditor’s staff using information from Louisiana public schools.      |                                     |

**Designating a safety coordinator at the district level to assist schools with developing quality EOPs may help schools better comply with state law.** State law requires that each public-school principal develop EOPs in collaboration with emergency personnel such as local law enforcement, fire, and emergency preparedness officials. However, according to multiple stakeholders, creating quality plans can be overwhelming for principals who are short on time and personnel and may not have expertise in emergency planning. Best practices recommend designating staff responsible for emergency management and implementation of safety and security policies, programs, directives, and training within their district. For example, Virginia has emergency manager designees who direct safety and emergency-preparedness plans for all schools within the public-school districts. According to the Education Commission of the States,<sup>14</sup> 33 states place EOP responsibility on a local entity<sup>15</sup> or school safety entity, while only eight states, including Louisiana, place responsibility at the school level.

<sup>14</sup> The Education Commission of the States provides information on education policies to help state policymakers make informed decisions.

<sup>15</sup> Local entities can include local, regional or district boards, agencies or offices such as local boards of education, district boards of trustees or school system committees.

Several stakeholders identified one district as being the leader in Louisiana school safety. This district's superintendent took initiative to partner with LSU's Stephenson Disaster Management Institute (SDMI) in creating EOPs for each school in the district, as well as a district-wide EOP using a grant from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and COVID funding. According to SDMI, creating the EOPs for the district worked well because of their whole community approach and strong district leadership. School administrators, district staff, law enforcement, and first responders all worked together to design the EOPs.

**Even with increased monitoring and school safety coordination requirements, a lack of consequences may contribute to continued noncompliance with legal requirements related to school safety measures including, but not limited to, EOP development.** Louisiana schools have received additional school safety guidance through increased legislation and resources and Louisiana has joined 31 other states by creating a state-level entity for school safety (LCSS). However, stakeholders including LCSS, LSP, and LSU's NCBRT have expressed concerns that there are no mechanisms in place to hold local school districts accountable if noncompliance is detected. For example, according to LDOE's November 2022 survey, at least 224 (17.8%) of 1,257 responding schools disclosed that EOPs were not submitted to local superintendents as required. As a result, these schools may not comply with additional requirements such as submitting EOPs to state entities.

**Matter for Legislative Consideration 1:** The legislature may wish to consider a requirement that each school district designate a school safety coordinator who is responsible for ensuring that an EOP is developed for each school in the district.

**Matter for Legislative Consideration 2:** The legislature may wish to consider authorizing a state entity such as LDOE or LCSS to establish accountability measures for noncompliance with state laws related to school safety.

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**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.**

Louisiana has allocated approximately \$9 million to create LCSS and has received nearly \$26 million from the federal government to strengthen school safety across Louisiana schools through measures like strengthening EOPs and hardening school perimeters. Exhibit 4 summarizes the funding received by Louisiana from calendar years 2018 through 2022.

**Exhibit 4  
School Safety Funding for Louisiana Schools  
Calendar Years 2018 through 2022**

| <b>Funding Type</b>  | <b>Amount</b>       | <b>Source</b>                            | <b>Recipient</b>                           | <b>Description</b>  |
|--|---------------------|--|--|---|
| Grants to States for School Emergency Management (GSEM Grant) (2014 - 18 month)                                      | \$392,400           | U.S. Department of Education             | Awarded to LDOE and allocated to GOHSEP    | Developed the Louisiana School Emergency Management Program (LASEMP).   |
| Grants to States for School Emergency Management (GSEM Grant) (2018 - 5 year)  | \$3,659,198         | U.S. Department of Education             | Awarded to LDOE and allocated to NCBRT/ACE | Continued the previous LASEMP efforts and provide training and technical assistance to local education agencies (LEAs).                                   |
| Stronger Connections Grant (2022 - 3 year)   | \$21,279,385        | Bipartisan Safer Communities Act of 2022 | Awarded to LDOE                            | LDOE allocated approximately \$.5 million each to 39 school districts to fund single-points of entry on school campuses and strengthen school perimeters. |
| The Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) STOP School Violence Grant Program (2018 - one-time)                          | \$500,000           | U.S. Department of Justice               | Awarded to LSP                             | Funded the Crimestoppers Safe Schools Louisiana App which is aimed at creating a single anonymous reporting system statewide.                             |
| The Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) School Violence Prevention Program Grant (2018 - one time) | \$374,798           | U.S. Department of Justice               | Awarded to LSP                             | Funded the RAVE Panic Button App which is used to expedite notification to first responders during an active event.                                       |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>\$26,205,781</b> |  |  |   |

**Source:** Prepared by legislative auditor’s staff using information provided by the Louisiana Center for Safe Schools and the various funding sources mentioned above.

**Although schools have been offered free resources to develop, improve, and implement EOPs, not all schools took advantage of these resources.** The GSEM grant was awarded to Louisiana by the U.S. Department of Education in calendar years 2014 and 2018. GOHSEP received the 2014 GSEM award and administered the LASEMP program to build capacity at the district and local levels for emergency operations planning, including EOP development, review and feedback. According to GOHSEP, the program included stakeholder outreach for meetings, trainings, and exercises. However, according to LASEMP attendance records, a total of 227 individuals attended the program meetings with only 89 (39.2%) representing educational institutions and 138 (60.8%) being affiliated with other organizations such as the Louisiana Department of Health and state and local emergency response officials.

The 2018 GSEM grant was also awarded to Louisiana to help ensure appropriate development and implementation of EOPs. However, according to participation data and interviews with LSU’s NCBRT which administered the approximately \$3.7 million grant, participation from schools was well beneath the

capacity of the program. Only 70 (58.3%) out of 120<sup>16</sup> school districts participated with representatives<sup>17</sup> from 45 (64.3%) of these 70 districts attending three or fewer of the eight free courses offered. NCBRT and LDOE allowed the grant to expire with \$1.6 million in available funds<sup>18</sup> rather than requesting an extension, citing low participation levels and extensive administrative requirements tied to the grant. According to NCBRT and LDOE, the COVID-19 pandemic and recovery from hurricanes also contributed to low participation as responding to these emergencies was time-consuming for education officials.

**Although funding has been provided to implement reporting systems required by state law, not all schools have fully implemented these systems.** State law<sup>19</sup> requires schools to implement an anonymous reporting system and a panic emergency alert system by April 1, 2024. Anonymous reporting systems include mobile apps that are geared toward students and are preventative in nature. For example, a student can provide a tip through the app if there are concerns about another student harming themselves or others. Panic emergency alert systems include panic button apps and are intended for school staff and are reactive in nature, alerting first responders to an occurrence or active threat of violence. LSP received \$500,000 from the U.S. Department of Justice in fiscal year 2018 for a panic app called RAVE and \$374,798 for an anonymous reporting app called Safe Schools Louisiana. Schools may opt to implement other apps that have the same capabilities as RAVE and Safe Schools Louisiana, but the schools would be responsible for the costs and, according to LSP, these alternative apps are not as useful at the state level as state-sponsored apps. For example, while activating the RAVE panic button alerts both local and state authorities of active threats, alternative apps only alert local authorities. Likewise, when schools implement an alternative anonymous reporting app for students, tips received by those schools are not incorporated into state data. As a result, state data related to threats of school violence are incomplete.

LCSS has been working with schools to ensure that all public schools comply with state law concerning the implementation of the anonymous reporting and panic button apps by April 1, 2024. According to LCSS, 59 of 91 (64.8%) identified school districts have "opted in" to the RAVE panic app while two districts (2.2%) have opted to implement alternative systems as of November 2023. However, according to LCSS, the remaining 30 districts (33.0%) have yet to report their enrollment in RAVE or an alternative app emergency notification system app. Even for the 59 districts that have opted in to the RAVE app, LCSS stated that 11 (18.6%) districts have not yet begun operational use of the app. LCSS was unable to provide updated enrollment statistics for the Safe Schools Louisiana anonymous

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<sup>16</sup> This includes 70 traditional school districts, 44 stand-alone charter systems, as well as 6 other individual systems.

<sup>17</sup> This includes individuals at the district level as well as from specific schools within the district.

<sup>18</sup> According to LDOE, approximately \$0.7 million of the awarded \$3.7 million was never dispersed to the state due to decreased demand for the funds.

<sup>19</sup> LA R.S. 17.416.16

reporting system app. According to Crimestoppers,<sup>20</sup> which administers the Safe Schools Louisiana anonymous reporting system app,<sup>21</sup> 565 of 971 (58.2%) eligible schools<sup>22</sup> have enrolled in the app as of December 2023, with 135 additional schools having begun the enrollment process. According to LSP, one reason that schools have not implemented the panic button app is because they are apprehensive about rolling out a program that relies on grants that do not guarantee continued funding for long-term maintenance of the app. LSP also stated that some 911 call centers whose cooperation is vital for the functionality of the app have resisted its implementation citing the inability to fund technical upgrades and personnel that would be necessary to process app alerts. Information on compliance with the implementation of these systems should be complete by May 2024 when schools are required to report implementation status for both an emergency notification system and anonymous reporting system.

**LDOE received \$21.3 million through the federal Stronger Connections Grant in calendar year 2022 and awarded 39 school districts \$518,355 each to strengthen access controls across school campuses by reinforcing single-points of entry.** Access controls include things like surveillance cameras, metal detectors, or other physical security equipment or construction renovations to enhance security. Applying districts were deemed eligible by LDOE for this grant if the school system had a poverty percentage of 50% or greater and either a chronic absenteeism rate greater than the state average or was significantly impacted by a natural disaster or traumatic event within the last three years. According to LDOE, recipients have designated these funds for projects such as installing security fencing and gates, ballistic board panels, and online programs to track the performance of safety drills.

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**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 Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools Technical Assistance Center (REMS TA),<sup>23</sup> a site assessment examines the safety, accessibility, and emergency preparedness of a school's buildings and grounds. This may include assessments of security measures required by law or recommended by best practice organizations. Areas that may be assessed include access controls such as the implementation of fencing systems and designated areas to receive and

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<sup>20</sup> Crimestoppers is a non-profit organization that aims to prevent and solve crime by providing crime prevention programs for youth and adults.

<sup>21</sup> As of December 2023, Crimestoppers is still administering the Safe Schools Louisiana app although new contract negotiations with the state are pending.

<sup>22</sup> According to LCSS, there are 971 schools that include middle and high school students or students in grades six through twelve which are eligible for the Safe Schools Louisiana App.

<sup>23</sup> REMS Technical Assistance Center is administered by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Safe and Supportive Schools and assists with security and emergency management programs.

screen visitors, the condition of emergency response equipment, and needs for additional training. According to the Education Commission of the States, at least 17 other states such as Texas and Florida require periodic site assessments of schools. These states require site assessments to be performed by a school safety entity or by a local entity in which case findings must be reported to a state entity such as the state's Department of Education or School Safety Center. However, site assessments are only completed for Louisiana schools upon governor directive or school request.

According to LSP, it was directed by the governor to conduct one-time physical site assessments of all Louisiana schools, both public and private in March 2018 to evaluate the safety measures currently in place and determine the steps necessary to improve school security. LSP formed a team of approximately 250 assessors<sup>24</sup> and completed assessments within three months for the approximately 1,600 schools open during 2018.

However, according to LSP, it does not have the funding for dedicated personnel to perform routine site assessments, although it believes that routine assessments are necessary and a funded mandate to perform assessments for all schools every three years would be ideal. LSP stated that such a schedule would allow schools time to mitigate findings before their next assessment and LSP could aim to visit schools more often if it determines that there is a need to do so. As of December 2023, LSP only has one dedicated staff member to perform site assessments, but the agency does recruit retired LSP troopers to help with the assessments. According to LSP, findings of noncompliance with state law and best practices during its site assessments are common. According to LSP, schools are sometimes noncompliant with physical security requirements due to a lack of funding, but other times it comes down to convenience. Schools forgo some low-cost updates or no-cost practices because complying with those requirements creates inconvenience for staff. As of now, there are no mechanisms in place to hold education officials accountable if noncompliance is detected.

**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.**

According to LSP, it would need approximately \$1.1 million in funding to perform routine site assessments for each school. Although some states require assessments to be performed at schools or district levels, LSP stated that it would like to continue performing assessments at the state level as Louisiana does not have the accountability or quality control systems in place to sustain a decentralized system. However, for districts that have the capacity, LSP intends to work with them to train their designee(s) to conduct the assessments while continuing to provide the quality control element to ensure the program is receiving the attention needed to keep school staff and students safe.

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<sup>24</sup> Includes both LSP and non-LSP staff

**Matter for Legislative Consideration 3:** The legislature may wish to consider requiring periodic physical site assessments of elementary and secondary public schools, as well as allocating funding to support these assessments.

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**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 part of its November 2022 survey, LDOE asked school districts to indicate how many SROs served their schools. While results indicated that 839 SROs served 79 responding districts that included approximately 1,257 schools, it is unclear how many schools in responding districts did not have a single SRO. This is because a single school sometimes has more than one SRO, which could inflate estimates of the number of schools with SROs. While the survey indicated at least 418 (33.3%) of 1,257 responding public schools did not have at least one SRO as of November 2022, the actual number may be higher. Other states, such as Florida, Kentucky, and Texas, require SROs in public schools. In addition, school safety officials in Louisiana that we spoke with recommend the presence of SROs in all schools.

According to LSP, the hesitation for mandating the placement of officers is largely due to associated costs as schools that struggle with funding may have no means to fund SRO positions. In addition, some national organizations, such as the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), have expressed concerns that the presence of SROs may increase students' risks of developing criminal records while attending elementary and secondary schools. According to the ACLU, students are more likely to be arrested for nonviolent crimes, like disruptive behavior, than the previous generation due to the growing presence of school resource officers. However, the ACLU also referenced little to no training for SROs as a cause. According to NCSL, multiple states, including Louisiana,<sup>25</sup> have passed legislation related to training requirements for SROs.

**Matter for Legislative Consideration 4:** The legislature may wish to consider allocating funds for all elementary and secondary public schools to hire and maintain at least one SRO.

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<sup>25</sup> LA R.S. 17:416.19

**Matter for Legislative Consideration 5:** The legislature may wish to consider requiring school districts and charter school operators to place at least one SRO in each elementary and secondary public school.



## **APPENDIX A: MANAGEMENT'S RESPONSE**

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## LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Michael J. Waguespack, CPA  
1600 North 3<sup>rd</sup> St.  
Baton Rouge, La. 70804-9397

Dear Mr. Waguespack,

The Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE) understands that school safety is a multifaceted way of life on campuses across our state. Every single day, parents instill in us a sacred trust when sending their children to school. The safety of Louisiana's students is our top responsibility.

Below are some of the actions that the LDOE has taken to improve school safety:

- **Louisiana School Safety Summit:** The LDOE, in coordination with Louisiana State Police and GOHSEP, launched the annual Louisiana School Safety Summit. This was the first statewide event of its kind. This free professional development conference was designed to bring school system leaders, local and state law enforcement, governmental agencies, and mental health providers together for an opportunity to share and learn best practices around school safety and emergency preparedness.
- **Stronger Connections Grant:** The LDOE invested over \$20 million to harden the perimeters of schools across the state. The Stronger Connections Grant program allocated roughly \$500,000 each to 39 traditional public and public charter systems for projects such as surveillance cameras, metal detectors, or other physical security equipment or minor remodeling to enhance security at a single point of entry.
- **Anonymous Reporting App:** The LDOE partnered with Crimestoppers GNO to make it easier for students, educators, and families to prevent acts of violence at school. The LDOE encouraged school systems to adopt the free Crimestoppers GNO Safe Schools Louisiana Program and its *Say It Here* mobile app for middle and high schools.
- **School Safety Collaborative:** Established by GOHSEP, the Collaborative hosts a monthly call to identify and coordinate applicable programs and services falling within the scope of work for more safe and secure learning environments. The LDOE, GOHSEP, and its partners discuss policies, laws, capabilities, funding, and training that build resiliency and address Louisiana school's safety and security issues. These monthly collaborative calls have been a jumpstart to strategic school safety conversations in Louisiana.
- **Hurricane Preparedness Playbook:** The LDOE created the state's first Hurricane Preparedness Playbook for schools. The playbook includes best practices and expert guidance to support school system leaders before, during, and after a hurricane. It was developed by the LDOE's Protect Louisiana Schools Hurricane Preparedness Commission and made possible through a partnership with AT&T.



## LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

- **Emergency Preparedness and Recovery Resources:** The LDOE maintains an [online suite of resources](#) for schools that will enable LDOE to support school systems with emergency management in Louisiana schools. All school systems are encouraged to designate an Emergency Preparedness and Recovery Point of Contact. This contact serves as the person responsible for entering and maintaining emergency preparedness and recovery information for each school system.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ernise Singleton". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Dr. Ernise Singleton

Assistant Superintendent, Office of Career & College Readiness

## APPENDIX B: SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

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This report provides information on 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. Our objective was:

**To provide information related to the status and quality of emergency operations plans and other security measures in Louisiana’s elementary and secondary public schools.**

Informational reports are intended to provide more timely information than standards-based performance audits. While these informational reports do not follow *Government Auditing Standards*, we conduct quality assurance activities to ensure the information presented is accurate.

To answer our objective, we performed the following steps:

- Obtained and reviewed information related to school safety planning from stakeholders, including LCSS, LSP, and LDOE.
- Researched best practices from organizations such as FEMA and compared to information gathered on EOPs for Louisiana’s elementary and secondary public schools.
- Researched legal criteria including state law and criteria provided by the National Conference of State Legislators (NCSL) and the Education Commission of the States to understand requirements for Louisiana as well as other states.
- Analyzed survey results from an EOP survey administered by LDOE.
- Administered a separate survey to obtain additional information on the status of EOPs across a selection of Louisiana public elementary and secondary schools.
  - We administered this survey to a targeted selection of 45 districts including 612 schools based on the following criteria:
    - No response to LDOE’s November 2022 survey
    - LDOE survey responses indicated substantial EOP deficiencies for at least one school in the district.
  - We received 345 responses and requested approximately five EOPs from each district for further review.

- Districts provided 49 EOPs within the review timeframe. We did not review the five EOPs that were received outside of the review timeframe.
- One district was unable to fulfill our request for five EOPs due to upgrading its EOP tracking system and losing EOPs completed for previous years.
- Reviewed the 49 EOPs and compared contents to state law and best practices related to the composition of EOPs
- Analyzed schools' use of available school safety resources, such as:
  - RAVE panic button app
  - Louisiana Safe Schools app
  - 2018 GSEM program
- Reviewed school safety monitoring efforts at the state level as well as additional measures for preventing school violence.
- Reviewed our results with stakeholders and incorporated their feedback into the report.

## APPENDIX C: LOUISIANA SCHOOL SAFETY LEGISLATION 2019 THROUGH 2023

| Legislation                             | Provisions  | Effective Date |
|---|---|----------------|
| <b>2019 Regular Legislative Session</b> |   |                |
| SB43<br>(ACT 44)                        | Reenacts R.S. 17:416.16(B) relative to school crisis management and response plans and provides for student input in the annual review of the plans in high schools.  | June 1, 2019   |
| HB53<br>(ACT 93)                        | Outlines provisions relative to suicide prevention in schools and provides for training for school employees.   | August 1, 2019 |
| HB160<br>(ACT 148)                      | Outlines provisions relative to information on school safety and discipline and requires the collection and reporting of certain information relative to school safety and discipline.  | August 1, 2019 |
| <b>2020 Regular Legislative Session</b> |   |                |
| SCR62                                   | Urges and requests the State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, through the state Department of Education, to develop and implement a traumatic injury response program to ensure that each city, parish, or other local public school in the state is prepared to respond to a traumatic injury emergency. | N/A            |
| <b>2021 Regular Legislative Session</b> |   |                |
| HB411<br>(ACT 473)                      | Outlines provisions relative to student discipline and requires certain reporting by the LDOE.  | August 1, 2021 |
| <b>2022 Regular Legislative Session</b> |   |                |
| HB495<br>(ACT 643)                      | Outlines provisions relative to suicide prevention and violence in schools, requires training on related topics for certain students, and provides for requirements of the LDOE.  | July 1, 2023   |
| HR208                                   | Urges and requests each public-school principal to conduct a safety drill quarterly that specifically addresses the scenario of an active shooter on campus.  | N/A            |
| HR218                                   | Urges and requests the LDOE to study school safety issues and submit a written report of findings and conclusions, including any recommendations for related legislation, to the House Committee on Education not later than sixty days prior to the beginning of the 2023 Regular Session of the Legislature.        | N/A            |
| <b>2023 Regular Legislative Session</b> |   |                |
| HB78<br>(ACT 55)                        | Outlines provisions relative to school facilities and needs in certain school districts, provides funds dedicated to preserving and improving school facilities, provides for the systemwide needs program and for the funding and operation of such program.   | August 1, 2023 |
| HB169<br>(ACT 362)                      | Outlines safety policy for K-5 carpool and bus lines.   | August 1, 2023 |
| HB348<br>(ACT 164)                      | Revises procedures for the reporting and investigation of threats of terrorism and violence, and revises definitions. Outlines mandatory  | August 1, 2023 |

| Legislation   | Provisions  | Effective Date  |
|---|---|---|
|   | reporting requirements of school administrators, teachers, and other school employees.  |   |
| HB353<br>(ACT 318)  | Outlines provisions relative to student behavioral and mental health, instruction on mental health, programs on suicide prevention/substance abuse prevention, and requirements of the LDOE to develop a pilot program for the purpose of trauma-informed mental health screenings for students.  | August 1, 2023  |
| SB12<br>(ACT 234)   | Requires automated external defibrillators (AED) on the premises of each elementary, middle and high school.  | The first school year that starts at least twelve months after the date of fiscal approval necessary to implement this requirement. |
| SB207<br>(ACT 334)  | Known as the “School Safety Act of 2023” outlines provisions relative to school crisis management and response plans, provides for additional safety drills, requires bleeding control kits in each school and rules relative to training on the use of these kits, provides for training of designated employees on traumatic injury response, and provides for the creation of the Louisiana Center for Safe Schools and related matters. | June 13, 2023   |
| <p><b>Source:</b> Prepared by legislative auditor’s staff using information provided by the Louisiana Center for Safe Schools and information found on the Louisiana Legislature’s website.</p> |   |   |

## APPENDIX D: LDOE EOP SURVEY RESULTS NOVEMBER 2022

| EOP Criteria Tested  | Percent of Noncompliance |
|--|--------------------------|
| Created jointly with the Appropriate Emergency Officials?  | 20.8%                    |
| Focuses on preventing the loss of life and the injury of students and teachers and other school employees?   | 14.9%                    |
| Includes preventing the loss of life and the injury of students and teachers and other school employees?   | 14.0%                    |
| Details the roles and responsibilities of each school employee?  | 17.3%                    |
| Details the relevant coordination agreements, services, and security measures of a school?   | 22.6%                    |
| Provides for parental notification in the event of a shooting or other violent incident or emergency situation?  | 17.0%                    |
| Does the school's principal review and revise their EOP at least annually?   | 14.3%                    |
| Did the school's principal submit their EOP in writing to the local superintendent or governing authority for approval at least annually, including upon revision?                                     | 17.8%                    |
| Did the school conduct a safety drill within the first thirty days of the school year?   | 15.2%                    |
| Did the school's principal submit a written report summarizing the details of the drill to the local superintendent or governing authority?  | 22.8%                    |
| Did the superintendent make an annual report to the public schools' governing authority on the status of the plan of each school?  | 35.1%                    |
| Is the school's staff notified when revisions to the EOP are made?   | 99.8%                    |
| Does the EOP include 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%                    |
| Does the school's principal provide in-service EOP training to all staff?  | 15.3%                    |
| Does the school's principal have a copy of the approved EOP in their office?   | 15.0%                    |
| Did the school's principal share the EOP with the President of the School Board or Governing Authority?  | 47.9%                    |
| Did the school's principal share the EOP with the Police Chief or Sheriff?   | 30.5%                    |
| Did the school's principal share the EOP with the local Fire Chief?  | 45.1%                    |
| Did the school's principal share the EOP with the local Emergency Preparedness Office?   | 47.1%                    |
| <b>Source:</b> Prepared by legislative auditor's staff using information from LDOE Survey.   |                          |