Overview

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) held a two-day roundtable discussion with members of the K-12 school community to collect insight and feedback on how to improve school safety and security. The goal of this event was to define actionable recommendations that DHS could implement to address the challenges and obstacles to creating safe and secure schools identified by representatives of the K-12 community.

Format

To ensure that the dialogue represented the widest cross section of interested stakeholder communities, DHS invited approximately 95 stakeholders representing first responders, local government, school operations support, family members of school shooting victims, industry, as well as internal and federal partner agencies, to share their experiences, insights, and expertise.

DHS designed the event in two parts to accommodate the breadth and size of the participants. On day one, participants divided into small group sessions that rotated through the course of the day to discuss the challenges facing schools, obstacles that DHS may have created, and partnership opportunities to improve safety and security across three areas: **DHS Programs and Policy, School Security Operations,** and **Physical Security and Technology**. DHS representatives facilitated the discussions during the small group sessions while agency subject matter experts contributed their thoughts and insights on existing programs, activities, and resources. On day two, participants reconvened in a large plenary discussion to hear the results from the day one small group sessions, validate those findings, and offer additional comments.

Participants heard from Brock Long, Administrator for the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA); Ryan Petty, a parent to one of the students killed during the incident at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School and a Commissioner of the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School Public Safety Commission; Robert Kolasky, Acting Assistant Secretary for the Office of Infrastructure Protection; and Susan Payne, Director and Founder of Safe2Tell™. These speakers set the tone for the discussions on both days of the roundtable.

Findings and Recommendations

Prevention and Early Warning: Participants identified three serious challenges for schools and law enforcement in identifying and engaging with students who may exhibit warning signs or behaviors before they commit an act of violence.

Challenge 1: Sharing information on high risk students over time and across institutions.
Participants repeatedly identified a key information gap for educators and law enforcement working to identify high-risk students before they escalate to violence. While individual educators, counselors, or student peers may experience instances of high-risk behavior, schools often lack a comprehensive view of a student's behavior over the course of his or her academic career.

Educators and counselors lack critical context when assessing the gravity of specific instances of high-risk behavior, and law enforcement are deprived of complete information when assessing the severity of the threat posed by individuals. Participants expressed a desire to have a "record" that could be tied to the student throughout his or her tenure in school, could follow them across institutions, and be

accessible by authorized educators and potentially law enforcement when assessing the threat presented by individual instances of high-risk behaviors.

- Participants recommended that DHS partner with appropriate federal, state, and private sector stakeholders to develop a system or portal modeled after the functional capabilities of the national criminal registries, such as state and local felon registries. This system would be accessible only to authorized school officials and law enforcement, allowing them access to information on a student's high-risk behavior or criminal incidents. This record could transfer from K-12 to a student's higher education career.

Challenge 2: Information sharing under Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).
While all participants recognized that information about students is properly protected under FERPA, many highlighted that confusion over the application of FERPA protections often prevented educators and administrators from appropriately sharing information with parents and law enforcement that could be pivotal to early intervention efforts.

- Participants recommended that DHS partner with the Department of Education to develop clear guidance and associated training for educators, administrators, and law enforcement on the application of FERPA to foster the exchange of information on high-risk students during early intervention efforts.

Challenge 3: Encouraging peers, family members, and communities to report troubling or suspicious behavior to facilitate detection and early intervention.
During the discussions, various participants noted that the first indicators of a student in distress often come from peers, family members, or the community. Participants described the need to encourage peers, family members, and community members to report troubling or suspicious behaviors to ensure that educators and law enforcement receive timely information.

- DHS should modify the existing Suspicious Activity Report (SAR) tool to be used at the K-12 level. DHS should train the school community, including students, how to use this tool to report on risky student behavior. DHS can coordinate with partners to conduct the necessary follow-up activities.
- Participants recommended that DHS partner with state, local, and private sector stakeholders to expand implementation of programs similar to the Safe2Tell™ peer monitoring program currently in use by the states of Colorado, Wyoming, Michigan, Nevada, Utah, and Oregon.
- Participants recommended that DHS expand the "If You See Something, Say Something™"[1] campaign and develop content and resources specifically tailored for K-12 communities that includes information for students and school officials on common warning signs or behaviors to report, resources available to support early intervention, and the appropriate authorities for anonymous reporting.
- Participants recommended that DHS partner with the Departments of Justice and Education, to develop training and information products for students, family members, and educators to expand awareness of the indicators of students at risk of turning to violence.

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[1] Cf. the model for Safe2Tell™ as an option for a coordinated anonymous reporting.

Physical Security and Technology: Participants identified two primary obstacles that prevent communities and school districts from implementing new physical measures and integrating new technology enhancements in their schools.

Challenge 1: Lack of uniform physical security standards to harden schools.
Participants stated that schools do not have a standardized set of security guidelines specifically to harden schools. School districts are forced to sort through various standards, guidelines, and supporting materials to identify security requirements for new school construction or upgrades to existing facilities.
- Participants recommended that DHS develop a coordinating council made of relevant community stakeholders to develop a set of physical security standards specifically for school buildings and infrastructure, modeled after the federal facilities securities standards.

Challenge 2: Inability to fund upgrades to aging infrastructure to harden schools.
Participants highlighted the lack of funding to finance physical infrastructure and technology upgrades for their schools as a significant challenge to improving safety and security. Once a school identifies physical security gaps, they must secure funding to address these gaps.
- Participants recommended that DHS coordinate with federal partners to develop guidance on low-cost or no-cost solutions which school officials can use to immediately upgrade physical infrastructure in facilities.
- Participants recommended that DHS seek necessary authority to modify existing grant programs or establish a new grant program specifically for schools to use to conduct security upgrades in accordance with a uniform set of physical security guidelines.[2]
- Similarly, participants recommended that DHS coordinate with federal partners at the Departments of Justice and Education to seek the necessary authority to premise receipt of related federal grant dollars on compliance with uniform physical security guidelines.[3]

Planning and Preparedness: Participants identified three challenges that impact planning and preparedness for incidents at local schools.

Challenge 1: Schools and communities lack access to common standards and training to conduct effective threat and vulnerability assessments.
Participants described a confusing array of programs, guidelines, and protocols that exist for threat and vulnerability assessment across multiple sectors and communities, but could identify no clear set of uniform and recognized standards or guidelines for school vulnerability assessments. Moreover, participants could not identify readily available and cost effective training options to enable communities to conduct independent assessments at local schools as a basis for action in preparing emergency plans and response strategies.
- Participants recommended that DHS partner with states to develop a common set of standards or guidelines for effective vulnerability assessment tailored specifically for the K-12 environment.
- Participants recommended that DHS develop a train-the-trainer model and curriculum to certify state and local officials to perform threat and vulnerability assessments.
- Participants recommended that DHS develop a risk prediction methodology to assess the risk of a deliberate attack at a school. The methodology should consider the threat, vulnerability, and

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[2] Cf. Creation of a uniform set of standards referenced under Challenge 1.
[3] Cf. Creation of a uniform set of standards referenced under Challenge 1.

consequences for each school and use a mixed qualitative/quantitative analysis. DHS currently utilizes a methodology to assess risk to special events; the proposed methodology for risk to schools should function similarly by utilizing an interagency working group and making school participation voluntary.

Challenge 2: Educators, school administrators, and parents are often excluded from the process for developing emergency operations plans.
Participants stated that emergency response action plans do not include all available members of the school community, such as teachers, school officials, and students. They highlighted how in almost all occasions, educators and students are the "first-first responders" during an incident.
- Participants recommended that DHS revise guidance and training for the development of emergency operations plans to be inclusive of the broader school community, including school administrators, educators, and parents.
- Participants recommended that DHS develop or modify the existing emergency preparedness training curriculum to reflect the multi-disciplinary nature of preparedness and define tracks for individuals serving in the various roles in an emergency situation, including students, teachers, and school administration.
- Participants recommended that DHS develop and provide training exercise events and products that are inclusive of the broader school community, including school administrators, educators, and parents.
- Participants recommended that DHS develop and offer youth safety school resilience courses through FEMA's Emergency Management Institute.

Challenge 3: Emergency response training does not address the full end-to-end scope of response during a safety incident.
Participants stated that emergency response training does not include the full breadth of response required during a school incident. Training should include medical response and medical triage, such as first aid responses, as part of operations training.
- Participants recommended that DHS develop or tailor existing medical response and first aid programs, such as *Stop the Bleed,* for school communities to provide the immediate medical attention required.

Challenge 4: The Run-Hide-Fight campaign is not appropriately tailored to the K-12 setting.
While participants recognized that the Run-Hide-Fight campaign is effective for a generic audience of adults, the campaign message is not appropriate in the K-12 setting. The inclusion of the "Fight" theme fails to account for the obvious challenges for students at the K-8th grade level taking a combatant role during an incident, and contradicts a larger effort within schools to dissuade students from engaging in physical altercations.
- Participants recommended that DHS conduct roundtable sessions with members of the K-12 community to develop age-appropriate messaging and content for the Run-Hide-Fight campaign.

School Security Operations and Response: Participants identified three critical challenges that impede effective operations during incident response.
Challenge 1: Stakeholders cannot understand each other and communicate effectively during incident responses.

Participants highlighted challenges for educators and administrators to understand and communicate with law enforcement during incidents. The groups often do not "speak the same language" and fail to communicate effectively at critical moments.

- Participants recommended DHS coordinate across the education and law enforcement communities to develop guidance and training to clarify and standardize key language and terminology to facilitate effective incident communication.

Challenge 2: School officials do not have access to radios and related technology to communicate with law enforcement during an incident.

Participants noted that during an incident, school administrators and resource officers often lack access to radios and related tools to communicate and coordinate with law enforcement. They are forced to rely on conventional cell phone calls relayed through 911 call centers, costing time and confusing the exchange of information during a response.

- Participants recommended that DHS expand existing first responder technology and communication bridges for mobile radios and broadband systems to incorporate local school networks during an incident.

Challenge 3: Integrating school resource officers (SROs) within school operations and planning.

While participants recognized the value of SROs, many expressed challenges with properly utilizing them to support school safety and connect with local law enforcement. Additionally, many participants described difficulty in recruiting and retaining high-quality officers because they lack access to uniform standards for SRO qualifications and training. They do not know which factors would make up a high-quality SRO. Participants indicated that it is difficult to identify and hire high-quality candidates. Participants from smaller districts highlighted that their police departments do not have adequate resources to dedicate a full-time SRO. Participants recognized that not having a SRO deprives them of an important bridge between law enforcement, school administration and educators, and the student body.

- Participants recommended that DHS, in conjunction with the Departments of Education and Justice, draft national guidance on SRO qualifications and training standards, building off existing work from the Department of Justice Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) office.
- Participants recommended that DHS coordinate with the Department of Justice, alongside state and local law enforcement, to create forums to introduce more police officers and law enforcement to the SRO role, and allow them to exchange best practices regarding dealing with youth and generate interest in serving as a SRO.
- Participants recommended that DHS coordinate with the Department of Justice to create a grant program for smaller school districts with smaller law enforcement agencies to allow for dedicated SROs to be on site at their schools.

Next Steps and Post-Event Actions

The key threads running through these participant recommendations is a need for comprehensive and inclusive planning and response to threats; cross-Department coordination; and tailoring existing initiatives for K-12 community members. The recommendations listed above represent a small sub-section of the overall solutions brought forward at the two-day roundtable.

These recommendations will be distributed to DHS leadership and moved up through the Federal Commission on School Safety. In the interim, DHS leadership will further review recommendations to implement select ones in the near future. Possible next actions include pilot programs, short-term or interim guides, and incremental training while longer-term programs are evaluated. DHS will continue to engage with the participants and ask them to continue to provide feedback and further recommendations.

Participants are ready to implement, administer, and continue engagement on these recommendations as they are reviewed by DHS leadership and its federal partners. They want to stay involved through additional roundtable events, webinars, newsletters, and other interactive methods to collaborate with DHS. Participants are eager to see outputs as a result of these recommendations.