



For Immediate Release

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School Safety Continues to Top Educators' Priority List for 2023-2024

Trenton, NJ – With a new school year underway, education officials continue to focus on a crucial issue for their school communities: student safety. From threat assessment teams to digital blueprints, the 2023-2024 school year brings a renewed focus on safe schools.

“The safety of our students is a top priority for our Department, which is why we have been working alongside our partners to train, assist, and prepare schools in the area of student safety,” **said Dr. Angelica Allen-McMillan, Acting Commissioner of Education.** “Some of the recurring themes of our ongoing efforts include proactive measures, extensive training, and collaboration with local school communities. Our partnership with local school districts helps us ensure New Jersey students are able to attend school in a safe and secure learning environment.”

Districts are working to establish threat assessment teams in each school to recognize and address concerning behaviors to help prevent the escalation of targeted violence before it occurs. The purpose of the multidisciplinary threat assessment teams is to assist teachers, administrators, and other school staff in identifying students that may present a potential safety concern, assessing those students' risk for engaging in violence or other harmful activities, and delivering intervention strategies to manage the risk of harm.

The requirement for each school to establish a threat-assessment team – and ensure accompanying training of school staff by the NJDOE – was driven by a [law](#) signed by Governor Phil Murphy last year. Threat assessment teams include, at a minimum, a school administrator; the district's school safety specialist; a teaching staff member; a school psychologist, social worker, counselor, or other school employee with expertise in student counseling; and a liaison with law enforcement. The NJDOE's Office of School Preparedness and Emergency Planning has been busy throughout the summer, providing training to more than 10,000 staff in K-12 schools who will be assigned to these teams.

Some other NJDOE school-safety initiatives include:

- NJDOE continues to work with the New Jersey State Police and the New Jersey Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness to collect and digitize school building blueprints for all K-12 schools and make them available to first responders. Accurate maps are critical to help law enforcement personnel to swiftly respond to emergencies in unfamiliar environments. This ongoing effort began when Governor Murphy signed legislation last winter requiring all New Jersey schools to submit digital maps of their campuses to law enforcement. The initiative is funded by an initial allocation of \$6.5 million in federal funding and an additional \$5.4 million in State funding.
- Trained and certified nearly 300 school staff in the NJDOE's School Safety Specialist Academy in 2023. By law, each school district was required to designate at least one staff member as a certified School Safety Specialist starting in the 2018-2019 school year. To date, the NJDOE's academy has trained 1,500 School Safety Specialists.
- The NJDOE continues to collaborate with the Sandy Hook Promise organization to provide evidence-based violence prevention programs to schools and students. Since the NJDOE's [collaboration](#) with the organization began in 2018, violence prevention programs have been provided to thousands of students and staff in 68 schools across New Jersey.
- The NJDOE is supporting a program called Invent2Prevent, which allows high-school students across the country to design marketing projects aimed at preventing violence. The program, a collaboration with EdVenture Partners and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, supports participating teams of students to conduct research and create programs intended to reduce hate and prevent targeted violence to present to their school communities. The program also coordinates an annual judging of the top three student campaigns held in Washington, D.C. This year, N.J. schools received the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place awards.
- The NJDOE provides on-site drill observations to evaluate the effectiveness of school safety drills. In the past six school years, the Department has performed approximately 1,800 observations of active shooter drills.
- So far in calendar year 2023, the NJDOE has also provided 55 training sessions to approximately 9,500 school staff on various aspects of school safety; delivered several “Response to School Bomb Threat” training sessions to 489 attendees; and conducted 118 field visits to schools to provide on-site assistance.

