



# MIKE DEWINE

## GOVERNOR OF OHIO

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June 16, 2022

Dear Superintendent,

Thank you for all that you and your team are doing to keep your students safe.

I am writing to share information about new help the State can provide to you in the area of school safety.

### STUDENT WELLNESS

As you know, in my first two budgets, I asked the Legislature to provide student wellness dollars that you can use for the physical and mental wellbeing of students. We have invested \$1.2 billion for this through the Student Wellness and Success Fund.

Among the permissible uses for these funds is students' mental health.

Schools have been very creative in developing over 1300 new mental health programs for their students. We would be happy to share some of these programs with you.

**For information or questions about the Student Wellness and Success Fund, please contact Christina May, RN, in the Ohio Department of Education at [wellnessandsuccess@education.ohio.gov](mailto:wellnessandsuccess@education.ohio.gov) or 614-995-1474.**

### OHIO SCHOOL SAFETY CENTER EXPANSION

When I became Governor, Ohio did not have a state office focused exclusively on the safety of our schools, and so in 2019, we launched the Ohio School Safety Center within the Ohio Department of Public Safety.

This office currently provides the following services:

1. Regularly scans social media for school threats;
2. Runs the State's free "Safer Ohio School Tip Line" (844-SAFEROH);
3. Assists schools with their emergency management plans;
4. Conducts the annual "School Safety Summit" and other related training; and
5. Offers free vulnerability assessments to help schools identify and address safety gaps.

The Ohio School Safety Center is headquartered in Columbus with a handful of regional liaisons stationed elsewhere in the state. I have directed the School Safety Center to expand its school safety liaison teams to 16 positions, which will represent each of the Ohio Department of Education's 16 established school safety support team regions. Once in place, these liaisons will be available to help you with school vulnerability assessments, emergency response plans, and threat assessment teams.

**Once these new staff members are on board, the School Safety Center will provide all schools in each region with the appropriate contact information. In the meantime, you can reach out directly to Ohio School Safety Center Director Emily Torok at 614-387-1932 or [enmtorok@dps.ohio.gov](mailto:enmtorok@dps.ohio.gov).**

## **\$100 MILLION IN NEW K-12 SCHOOL SAFETY GRANTS**

With help from the General Assembly, we have also launched our new K-12 School Safety Grant Program to give schools money to pay for important physical safety upgrades in school buildings, classrooms, perimeters, and parking lots. This week, I signed the State's new capital budget bill, which includes an additional \$100 million for this important safety grant program. You can use this money for school safety improvements, including visitor badging systems, facility mapping, school radio systems, exterior lighting, and door locking systems.

The Ohio School Safety Center is currently in the process of developing the grant application for the distribution of this \$100 million. Our team will notify you when the next grant period is open.

**Again, the Ohio School Safety Center Director Emily Torok is your best source of information for any questions. She can be reached at 614-387-1932 or [enmtorok@dps.ohio.gov](mailto:enmtorok@dps.ohio.gov).**

## **BEHAVIORAL THREAT ASSESSMENT TRAINING**

Regarding again the importance of our students' mental health, you and your teachers are among those who know students the best and can often tell when a child is struggling. However, identifying a child who could potentially become violent isn't easy. The Ohio Department of Education is contracting with Dewey Cornell, one of the nation's leading experts on behavioral threat assessment, to begin offering training in August to staff at our Educational Service Centers (ESCs). Mr. Cornell uses an evidence-based training model considered among many to be the gold standard in identifying, assessing, and managing threats and threatening behavior before it escalates to violence.

Once ESC staff is trained, they can then train educators throughout Ohio. I encourage you to use this resource. This will be free training for any school to help schools meet the statutory requirement under House Bill 123, which mandates that every public school serving grades 6 through 12 has a trained behavioral threat assessment team in place by March 2023.

**If you have questions about the forthcoming behavioral threat assessment training, please contact Emily Eckert at the Ohio Department of Education at 614-995-3735 or [emily.eckert@education.ohio.gov](mailto:emily.eckert@education.ohio.gov).**

## OPTIONAL ARMING OF SCHOOL STAFF

House Bill 99, which I signed this week, addresses the option of arming school staff. Arming school personnel is a serious decision that is left up entirely to your school. **It is optional.** It is one of many tools that you can choose based on your unique school situation. Other tools, such as a school safety officer, may serve your school better.

I signed this bill because we know some schools want to do this and know that each school situation is different. I did not want to deny schools this option and wanted to make sure that if a school chooses this option that all training hours are directly relevant to situations that could occur in schools. However, I have made it clear that, in my opinion, the much preferred option is to have a school resource officer in each school building.

IF you decide to arm a school employee, the selection of the right person or persons is obviously extremely important, and having the right temperament, good judgement, and prior familiarity with guns all would be factors to consider. Hiring retired law enforcement officers in your schools is also something you might consider when deciding whether or not to arm a school employee.

I would like to share a little history in regard to the new law and how we got here.

Up until about a year ago, Ohio law allowed schools to arm a teacher or other non-security personnel without any minimum training (At the same time, a person whose principal job in the school was security was required to complete the same basic training as a police officer, which is 700 hours of training). This was the generally accepted understanding of Ohio law until the Supreme Court, in a four to three decision in Gabbard v. Madison Local School District Board of Education, ruled that ANYONE armed in a school had to have the equivalent training as a police officer.

That has been the law in Ohio for the last year because of this court decision. Some schools told the Legislature that over 700 hours of training (most of which is not relevant to a school setting) is not practical and that they wanted legislative action. The Court, in fact, made clear that the Legislature could pass a new law to change the existing law.

Now, in House Bill 99, the Legislature has said that the maximum hours of training the Governor could require is 24 hours. I will require the MAXIMUM 24 hours of training that the law allows. I also will require the MAXIMUM of eight hours of continuing training each year thereafter for those who first obtained the 24 hours.

We worked with the Legislature to make sure the training hours required would all be relevant to the school setting, and further, I recently announced that we will develop longer blocs of training for schools that want more training for their teachers. These will be in blocs of six additional hours, so schools will have the option to pick 24, 30, 36, 42, or 48 hours of required training.

To develop this training and carry it out, House Bill 99 appropriated funding that will allow us to create a new Safety and Crisis Division within the Ohio School Safety Center. The division will be overseen by a chief training officer with a background in law enforcement or military service. Similar to our School Safety Center's regional liaisons, there will be one mobile training officer assigned to each of the Ohio Department of Education's school safety support team regions.

This new team of 17 experienced training officers will be tasked with developing the initial 24-hour curriculum, the annual requalification curriculum, and the additional optional training curriculum of up to 48 hours. Our training officers will then provide this training for any school designees who have been authorized by their school board to have access to a firearm on school grounds. Schools may also opt to select training from an outside entity, however, all outside training curriculum must be approved by the Safety and Crisis Division to ensure it meets Ohio's standards before the training can be used to meet required training hours.

**The Ohio School Safety Center is in the process of hiring this team of mobile training officers and will advise you when the training is available. In the meantime, Ohio School Safety Center Director Emily Torok is the contact for any questions. She can be reached at 614-387-1932 or [enmtorok@dps.ohio.gov](mailto:enmtorok@dps.ohio.gov).**

Again, I thank you for your commitment to Ohio's children -- for helping ensure their safety and wellbeing. I strongly encourage you to utilize the existing and additional resources we are providing through grant funding, training, and the expertise of the Ohio School Safety Center. We are here to help you and remain dedicated to doing all we can to be a resource to you, our teachers, and other school staff.

Very respectfully yours,



Mike DeWine  
Governor