

**Executive Summary**

Every student and educator in Arkansas deserves a safe learning environment.

To do this, the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) commits to:

- **Distribute funds for improvements in safety measures:** Continue to oversee the implementation of the \$50 million of grant funding to provide resources for districts as they implement ADE’s safety priorities.
- **Expand new Safe Schools Unit to support districts:** Expand the new Safe Schools Unit to provide direct support to districts as they put into place new procedures. This unit will be instrumental in providing direct support, professional learning, monitoring, and direction regarding school safety.
- **Develop best-practice crisis response plans:** Develop a statewide crisis response plan that identifies the roles and responsibilities of each actor (state and local partners) in time of a crisis and support districts to create a local crisis response plans

Overview of LEARNNS Executive Order	1
Background: Arkansas School Safety Commission	1
Current State	2
Commitments	3
Conclusion	3
<i>Appendix A: Approved Use of School Safety Grants</i>	4

**Overview of LEARNNS Executive Order**

On January 11th, 2023, Governor Sarah Huckabee Sanders published the Executive Order to prioritize Literacy, Empowerment, Accountability, Readiness, Networking, and School Safety (LEARNNS) in Arkansas. Included in this Executive Order is a call for the Secretary of the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) to conduct a comprehensive review to be completed within ninety (90) days, to ensure schools and districts are implementing Arkansas’s school safety law under A.C.A 6-15-1303. The comprehensive review should include ensuring that schools and districts have:

- Annual active shooter drills and school safety assessment in collaboration with local law enforcement;
- A school safety plan annual training for all school district employees and students;
- Floor plans and pertinent emergency contact information provided to appropriate first responders;
- Safeguards to ensure floor plans and school safety plans remain concealed from public record and unavailable for public inspection;
- An individual in each district responsible for overseeing school safety; and
- Strategies to increase the presence of trained law enforcement officers and Commissioned School Security on campuses

**Background: Arkansas School Safety Commission**

The Arkansas School Safety Commission reconvened on June 10, 2022 to complete the critical task of preventing Arkansas schools from experiencing tragic events such as the one that occurred in Uvalde on June 10, 2022. The Arkansas School Safety Commission (2022 Commission) had 24 appointed individuals to serve as members.

## School Safety



The 2022 Commission was tasked with the following duties:

1. Review the Commission's Final Report published in November 2018;
2. Provide an update on the status of school safety across Arkansas;
3. Update the analysis of the safety of K-12 schools throughout the state taking into consideration the physical and mental health of students;
4. Determine which findings and recommendations from the previous report have not been remediated and achieved;
5. Identify any new recommendations of best practices in school safety that have been developed since the Commission's final report in November 2018;
6. Submit the final report of the Commission's findings and recommendations to the Governor no later than October 1, 2022.

The [final report](#) was released on time and recommended best practices on school safety for districts. In support of the recommendations the Arkansas Legislature set aside \$50 million dollars to support districts across the state to improve school safety.

### Current State

The Arkansas Department of Education leveraged the School Safety Commission's report and \$50 million dollars into a grant process that prioritized the recommendations of the commission. The [grant](#) was released on February 1, 2023, along with a survey to gather data on the key elements of the executive order. See Appendix A for more information on priorities identified for the grant. These priorities were based on a comprehensive review of the School Safety Commission's Report.

The LEARNNS Act, passed in March 2023, creates additional requirements related to school safety, such as requiring all districts to complete comprehensive school safety assessments prior to August 2024. During the process of grant applications, ADE collected data on districts' progress towards these goals. **Though these actions are not yet required by law, many districts have already been prioritizing school safety through some of the following methods:**<sup>1</sup>

- Over half of districts have already conducted a comprehensive school safety assessment and 74% of those involved local law enforcement, though it is not a requirement until 2024.
- Nearly all districts have identified an individual in the district responsible for overseeing school safety
- 90% of districts have already provided updated floor plans and pertinent emergency contact information to appropriate first responders (the remaining 10% are required to submit their plans prior to the end of the school year)
- 90% of districts have developed a School Safety Plan for each school and provided annual training for all staff
- As of February 1, 2023 88% of districts had completed their annual lock down drill (the remaining 12% are required to complete their drill prior to the end of the school year)
- 80% of districts have implemented strategies to increase the presence of trained law enforcement officers or Commissioned School Security Officers (CSSOs) on school campuses

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<sup>1</sup> This data was collected from 247 districts as of Feb 1, 2023



## School Safety

Though many districts have already taken these measures, the LEARNNS Act sets a vision that every school in the state will be a safe place for students to learn and educators to teach. As such, there is more work to be done in the coming years to ensure that this is true for each and every school in the state.

### Commitments

The Safe School's Commission and the establishment of the DESE Safe School have laid a foundation to better support all Arkansas schools in providing a safe learning environment. The importance and urgency of ensuring safety for Arkansas students has become even more poignant in recent weeks in the wake of the tornados that impacted the state in early April. It is critical that ADE and school districts partner to create a seamless system for emergency crisis response in all schools.

Now that safety priorities have been established, as ADE continues this work and begins to implement the LEARNNS legislation, it commits to the following in order to achieve improved safety for Arkansas's students:

- **Distribute funds for improvements in safety measures:** Continue to oversee the implementation of the \$50 million of grant funding to provide resources for districts as they implement ADE's safety priorities.
- **Expand new Safe Schools Unit to support districts:** Expand the new Safe Schools Unit to provide direct support to districts as they put into place new procedures. This unit will be instrumental in providing direct support, professional learning, monitoring, and direction regarding school safety.
- **Develop best-practice crisis response plans:** Develop a statewide crisis response plan that identifies the roles and responsibilities of each actor (state and local partners) in time of a crisis and support districts to create a local crisis response plans

### Conclusion

Every student and educator in Arkansas deserves a safe learning environment. Over the last several years, Arkansas has laid a foundation for improving school safety by identifying key priorities and dedicating resources for districts to implement these priorities. Now, ADE aims to build upon this foundation and support districts as they make shifts to improve school safety.

Appendix A: Approved Use of School Safety Grants

Approved Use of School Safety Grants	
DESE Priority 1	Electronic access controls for high-frequency-use exterior doors.
	Visitor management system for school campuses
	Covers for vision panels on classroom doors that prevent viewing into the classroom and allow students a blind area to 'hide' during a lockdown.
	Locks for all classroom doors so that doors can be locked from the inside, allow outside access by authorized personnel, and allow for egress. Temporary door stoppers or blockers for doors that need additional security may also be purchased but must comply with current State Fire Prevention Code and ADA standards for accessible design.
	Numbers on classroom interior and exterior surfaces (wall, door, or window) easily identifiable to first responders so that they can reference the position of students and/or intruders.
	Intercom/communication system that allows two-way communication between staff across the district
	Touch bar exit devices to replace crash bar exterior door egress hardware, including replacement of door handles if necessary.
	District campuses should have fencing that limits access to the school entrances, especially the main entrance
DESE Priority 2	Security cameras for school campuses; must be accessible only by designated individuals and law enforcement.
	A grand master key system for the school district, ensuring that each campus has a master key available.
	District master keys to be provided/accessible to local law enforcement for use during a critical incident
	Shatter resistant film or other reinforcement for glass/windows to prevent access into a classroom and the main entrance
	Safety measures for buses and transportation (communication, cameras, etc.)
	Visible signage on school campuses to clearly identify visitor requirements, closed campus areas, and traffic flow
	Modifications to establish a single secure visitor point of entrance, ideally with a secured vestibule, when allowable.

## School Safety



DESE Priority 3	Physical barriers to prevent access, including bollards, landscaping, fencing, low walls, etc., especially at the main school entrance
	Software or other mechanisms to monitor communication platforms, on school owned devices, to include social media outlets as it relates to threats or triggering phrases used by potential active attack suspects.
	Weapon-detection equipment/system(s)
	Shot-detection equipment/system(s)
	Door-prop alarms
	First-aid materials and equipment
	Radios compatible with AWIN system
	Other safety measures approved by the Commissioner