



School Safety Task Force

FINAL REPORT

October 2022

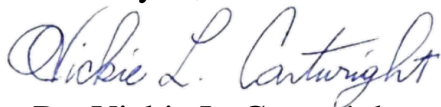
October 23, 2022

On behalf of the School Board Members and myself, thank you to everyone who participated in the task force and for their contributions to making our schools a safe and secure learning environment for our students and staff.

The tremendous work of the Broward County Public Schools (BCPS) School Safety Task Force would not have been accomplished without the substantial efforts of numerous community members, BCPS partnering organizations, and BCPS staff.

We want to acknowledge the substantial efforts of our community members, partnering organizations, and BCPS staff because, without their dedication, this work would not have been possible. BCPS has become a model in many areas of school safety, and this task force has contributed to those efforts. We truly appreciate your work and service to our District.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Vickie L. Cartwright". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "V".

Dr. Vickie L. Cartwright

Superintendent

October 2022

Dr. Vickie L. Cartwright,

Thank you for reconvening the School Safety Task Force (SSTF) for the 2021 – 2022 school year. The SSTF is made up of a multitude of individuals representing various stakeholder groups including Broward County ESE Advisory, Broward County PTA/PTSO, Broward Schools Principal & Assistant Principal Association, Broward School's Special Investigative Unit (SIU), District Advisory, District Risk Management, District Employee & Labor Relations, Federation of Public Employees, and the Office of School Performance & Accountability. The SSTF met six times throughout the 2021 – 2022 school year. The SSTF engaged in rich conversation around current school safety and security practices, policy updates, and legislative activity during the 2021 – 2022 school year.

This report provides recommendations that were developed during our SSTF meetings to improve safety and security processes. We look forward to the consideration of implementing these recommendations to improve safety and security practices in Broward County Public Schools. We appreciated the opportunity to engage with each other to focus on the safety and security of the students and staff in our District. The safety and security of our students and staff will remain an important issue in the years ahead. We appreciate the District's focus on improving working conditions for employees, promoting positive school climates, and providing continued mental health support to the students, families, and employees of Broward County Public Schools.

Sincerely,

The School Safety Task Force

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Recommendation 1 - Continue to prioritize positive school climate practices

District's actions:

Broward County School District's comprehensive mentoring initiative addresses many of the concerns expressed by students, parents, school staff, and community stakeholders who are in search of ways to provide opportunities for all students to benefit from mentoring relationships with caring peers and adults. Our mentoring programs use a multitiered approach to leverage school and community-based mentoring resources to better serve the needs of students. Broward's school-based mentoring programs emphasize academic gains, and improvements in school connectedness and attendance. Non-academic goals, such as personal growth, artistic expression, future planning, goal setting (often around the transition into college or career), and social-emotional development are highlighted as well. Broward County Public Schools' mentoring programs provide an innovative supplement to the traditional learning that takes place in our schools. We foster an opportunity for potentially underserved students to feel more confident about their schoolwork and improve their sense of well-being and commitment to learning.

Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) is an evidence-based three-tiered framework for preventing and treating challenging behavior in schools and improving the overall school climate by establishing and instructing schoolwide behavior expectations. Tier 1 focuses on the schoolwide level, which supports all students and prevents the development of problem behavior. The students who require support in addition to universal Tier 1 support will receive this at Tier 2. Tier 2 interventions entail implementing evidence-based interventions matched to students' skill-based needs. Tier 3 interventions focus on students with chronic and severe behavior problems, providing intensive, individualized interventions such as a behavior intervention plan or a wraparound approach. PBIS's prevention framework establishes a positive school climate and addresses student behaviors. This framework provides a proactive system for promoting students' success in schools by employing a multitiered continuum of support with evidence-based behavioral interventions for all students. In Broward County Public Schools, the effective implementation of PBIS aims to improve students' social and learning behaviors and decrease disruptions that interfere with instruction; additionally, adverse outcomes such as Office Discipline Referrals (ODRs), suspensions for students, and expulsions.

Positive school climates result from a school's attention to fostering safety and promoting a supportive academic, disciplinary, and physical environment while encouraging and maintaining respectful, trusting, and caring relationships throughout the school community. A positive school climate is critical to a school's success. A positive environment can improve attendance, achievement, retention, and even graduation rates. Ongoing training, coaching, and support to employees, on building a positive school climate and implementing alternatives to exclusionary discipline (e.g., implicit bias, cultural competency, empathy, and restorative justice training) provides a foundation for promoting a positive school climate. The professional development that BCPS employees receive provides preparedness and confidence to structure students' learning while ensuring all students feel welcome, safe, and supported.

See Something, Say Something is a grant-funded program through the Safety, Security, & Emergency Preparedness Department. This program is designed to help identify at-risk individuals before they hurt themselves or others by reporting threats, harassing behaviors, or illegal activity. The Diversity & School Climate (D&SC) Department promotes awareness and usage of the tip reporting methods (anonymous tip submission box, call line (754)321-3500, email securitytips@browardschools.com, SaferWatch app, or FortifyFL app). D&SC staff promotes this initiative through Policy 5.9: Anti-Bullying (note: This policy number will be changing in accordance with the District's Policy Reorganization Project. The new Policy number will be 5900), as well as the mandatory Anti-Bullying (K-12) and Dating Violence (6-12) trainings for students, parents, and staff.

BCPS' STOPS Violence initiative is centered around two researched-based programs: "Say Something" and "Start with Hello." Both of these initiatives are managed through the Student Services Department and are aligned with the D&SC violence prevention initiatives as well as the See Something, Say Something Program through the Safety, Security, & Emergency Preparedness Division.

"Say Something" is a web-based curriculum for grades 6-12, that teaches youth how to recognize the signs and signals, especially within social media, from individuals who may be a threat to themselves or others. The program teaches participants how to act immediately by saying something to a trusted adult or by reporting a concern using either the SaferWatch or FortifyFL app.

"Start with Hello" teaches youth how to be more inclusive and connected to one another by minimizing social isolation and reducing the chances that the individual will hurt themselves or others.

Choose Peace/Stop Violence is both an annual observance and a comprehensive three-year initiative to educate, engage and empower youth to take action to prevent bullying and youth violence, foster social justice awareness, create safe and violence-free environments, as well as improve school climate and academic performance. Both use research-based positive community norms marketing that focuses on creating safe and Violence free environments where peace and inclusivity are celebrated.

The Diversity & School Climate (D&SC) department provides all schools with activities, lessons, and resources to use during the observance week and throughout the school year to promote peace in our schools and communities. The Diversity & School Climate also offers a three-year initiative to all secondary schools to participate in this program which was established through a partnership with United Way. D&SC staff provide training, resources, and support to schools with implementing this initiative over the three-year period as well as sustaining their efforts beyond the initial three-year implementation.

Students Against Violence Everywhere (SAVE) Promise Clubs is a student leadership initiative from the Sandy Hook Promise that aims to cultivate and bolster student leaders to take an active role in increasing school safety and preventing different forms of Violence in schools and communities. Every elementary school in the District has been offered the opportunity to have a SAVE Promise Club so their students can show their creativity and passion for protecting their friends, schools, and communities from Violence before it happens.

The Diversity & School Climate Department (D&SC) provides schools with training and resources as well as support with implementing this club at their schools to promote a safe and positive school climate. The D&SC department was awarded a one-year no-cost grant extension for the 2022-23 school year to continue our efforts of promoting and sustaining this initiative across our elementary schools.

To support inclusive practices, the ESE Department will share the Best Practices in Inclusive Education Plan (BPIE) with all schools at the beginning of the 2022-23 school year. A summary of the indicators identified as needing improvement will be highlighted. Recommended action steps will be reviewed. A progress monitoring

plan will be implemented to ensure effective implementation. District staff will provide support and consultation to schools that need additional support.

To support students and staff who witness or are involved in a situation with a student in crisis, the Student Services department will deploy counselors and therapists to the affected school(s). In addition, one-on-one counseling and/or group counseling are made available and determined on a case-by-case situation. Counselors and therapists are made available for the time frame that may be necessary. The department also ensures community resources arrive at the school to provide additional services to further assist with recovery efforts for everyone.

Recommendation 2 – Broaden participation in enhanced De-escalation professional development

District's Actions:

The Exceptional Student Education (ESE) Department will work with the Positive Behavior Intervention Support Specialists to provide ongoing professional learning to teachers, support staff, District staff, and administrators. Throughout the year, a four-part series will be offered at various times to meet the needs of staff. These sessions will focus on how the use of de-escalation strategies can reduce disruptive behavior; prevention and de-escalation of intensive behavioral responses; effective proactive practices and classroom management; and the use of trauma-informed strategies to de-escalate classroom conflicts. All sessions will be available in the District's online professional learning system for registration (LAB). Staff will receive in-service points toward recertification. The completion of the four-part series will result in a Level 1 micro-credential (a digital certification that verifies an individual's competence in a specific skill or set of skills).

The ESE Department will work with the Positive Behavior Intervention Support Specialists and Parent Liaisons to provide training for parents/guardians and caregivers on the effective implementation of de-escalation strategies in the home and community environments. Trainings will be tailored to participants by age/grade band (i.e., preschool, K-2, 3-5, middle school, high school, etc.). In addition, consideration will be given to special populations with sessions tailored to those particular needs. Sessions will be held at various times to accommodate participant schedules. The training opportunities will be advertised on the District ESE website page as well as shared with all schools as applicable.

Recommendation 3 – Ensure all staff and affected families receive annual updates on procedures for accessing support after a crisis

District's Actions:

The Employee Assistance Program (EAP) has worked with thousands of employees and their families since 1984. At the beginning of each calendar year, a memo is released to all District employees via BCPS Alert, notifying them of the confidential services provided by the Employee Assistance Program.

The Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is designed to support BCPS employees' total mental and behavioral well-being, whether the concerns are personal or work-related. The goal is to help all BCPS employees and their dependent family members to gain a better understanding of mental wellness, learn about the services available, and choose a plan of action.

The EAP delivers support to employees in a Multi-tiered System of Support (MTSS) format. Services provided include; psycho-education presentations, crisis stabilization, intake stabilization and needs assessments, wellness contact, resource connections, and referrals.

The services offered by EAP are free and confidential to all employees and their families. EAP is a benefit program that utilizes a policy of support and assistance to employees, whether job performance is being adversely affected. This assistance is beneficial for those that are dealing with persistent concerns that may jeopardize their physical or mental health, work satisfaction, or continued employment.

District employees can access the Employee Assistance Program at <https://www.browardschools.com/Page/32079>.

The District's Integrated Workers' Compensation Program will provide workers' compensation benefits in accordance with Florida Statutes (Chapter 440) to employees injured in an accident arising in the course and scope of employment.

The goal of the program is to provide access to high-level medical care, maximize positive clinical outcomes and minimize residual disability.

The District's "in-house" Workers' Compensation unit is both self-insured and self-administered, meaning District staff are responsible for making the core decisions as it relates to managing workers' compensation claims and assuring our injured employees receive timely, high-quality medical care.

Currently, the Workers' Compensation (WC) unit provides an annual memo to all principals and department heads before the opening of schools in early August to take appropriate safety precautions when preparing schools and classrooms to prevent unnecessary injuries. Additionally, the memo provides the WC triage and reporting phone number (1-800-374-4810) which is available to injured employees 24/7/365.

Additional District Communications regarding the Workers' Compensation Unit include, but are not limited to:

The WC webpage is updated annually and when appropriate to contain the most recent list of WC Contacts and procedures. Staff can access it at <https://www.browardschools.com/Page/36609>.

Both the WC injury reporting line and main staff line are listed on the District's Important Phone numbers webpage. Staff can access this webpage at <https://www.browardschools.com/domain/14046>.

WC staff provides onsite WC orientations as part of Loss Prevention/Risk Assessments in partnership with the Risk Management Department and Risk Consultants (Arthur J. Gallagher).

To support families after an incident occurs that requires support, the Recovery Team within the School Counseling Department will contact the family along with other individuals involved in the incident, such as the person(s) directly impacted and other students, family members, or staff who may have experienced secondary trauma, lost a loved one, or had previous experiences of trauma. The team will conduct a needs assessment to determine appropriate support strategies and provide assistance which may include connecting those in need with District and/or community mental health services, group support opportunities, coping and resiliency skills training, resources, information, and follow-up counseling as needed.

Recommendation 4 – Define and enforce emergency procedures for early morning and late afternoon/evening school site operations

District's Actions:

During the 2022-23 school year, the District will be implementing a plain language Standard Response Protocol that will simplify what to do in the event of an emergency. The emergency protocols will be the same District-wide whether the incident occurs before, during or after school. All employees in the District are required to attend training on the new standard response protocols and actively participate during drills.

In addition, for the 2022-23 school year, the Safety, Security & Emergency Preparedness Division will convene a working group to review procedures for security and emergency response protocols during early morning and late afternoon/evening school site operations.

Recommendation 5 – Creation of a District Behavioral Threat Assessment (BTA) Department to assist schools and improve quality assurance

District Response:

Based on staff input and the recommendation of the School Safety Task Force, Dr. Cartwright initiated the creation of a department within the Safety, Security, and Emergency Preparedness Division to lead and monitor the threat assessment processes in the District. On May 17, 2022, the School Board approved the creation of the Behavioral Threat Assessment (BTA) department. The department will consist of 11 staff members.

The role of this department will be:

- to coordinate the creation of a District Threat Assessment Review Team to evaluate all very serious substantive threats
- to ensure all state statutes, requirements from the Office of Safe Schools, District policies, and procedures regarding threat assessments are implemented with fidelity
- to support schools with the creation of the school-based BTA Core Team
- to provide required and ongoing professional development to District and school-based staff in threat assessment implementation
- to provide support to schools by using an electronic threat-reporting database
- to support schools with conducting and completing threat assessments
- to support schools with implementing and developing monitoring plans
- to coordinate threat assessment processes with municipalities and law enforcement agencies
- to ensure schools schedule and conduct Monthly Threat Assessment Team Meetings
- to collaborate with others on the review of our threat assessment process audits
- to conduct quality assurance reviews of completed threat assessments and provide feedback to schools
- to assist schools with informing students, staff, and the community on processes and resources to report threats
- to collaborate with District departments to ensure students receive the necessary support

The creation of this department enables the District to provide consistency and efficiency to the BTA processes, professional development, BTA awareness and reporting activities, and collaboration around student support.

Recommendation 6 – Improve communications to staff and parents/guardians during crisis incidents and incident follow-up.

District Response:

The District partners with SaferWatch to enhance school safety and provide Broward County Public Schools with real-time alerts and updates. The SaferWatch with Alyssa's Alert App gives students, parents, teachers, visitors, and staff in Broward County Public Schools a direct line of communication that works seamlessly with our local law enforcement communication centers and the Broward County Public Schools District Security Operations Center (DSOC).

Using the SaferWatch with Alyssa's Alert App, individuals can report incidents and receive real-time safety alerts directly from Broward County Public Schools and local law enforcement. SaferWatch with Alyssa's Alert gives real-time updates on a situation as it progresses.

The Safety, Security, and Emergency Preparedness Division will continue to collaborate with the Information & Technology Department to improve communication on school websites to give real-time updates to school communities during and after an incident.

The Broward County Public School District utilizes Parent Link to communicate with parents and families during and after a crisis. Parent Link is an automated message delivery system that allows for the instant distribution of important messages from either a school or the District. The delivery of this message can be customized using a combination of phone, email, and SMS text messages. It is important for families to provide current phone numbers and email addresses to schools to ensure critical messages are received in a timely manner. Parents/guardians can choose to receive Parent Link messages in either English, Spanish, Portuguese, or Creole.

The District has added a Critical Incident Communications Flowchart to expedite parental notifications during a critical event. Procedures have been modified to ensure internal and external communications occur, even when the principal is unable to relay information. The Office of the Chief Communications Officer and our Regional Offices stand ready to provide support during a critical event.

The Broward County Public Schools (BCPS) Crisis Communications Plan establishes a process for initiating and maintaining timely and accurate

communications among essential departments/divisions that include internal and external stakeholders during an emergency or crisis. The plan outlines the roles, responsibilities, protocols, and procedures to follow in communicating with District stakeholders, the community-at-large, and media when faced with a crisis.

For the purpose of this plan, a crisis is a significant event that prompts an immediate response from fire, police or emergency medical personnel and may create sustained news coverage. The key to achieving the best possible outcome during a crisis begins with ensuring parents/guardians have provided current directory information to their child's school in the event of an emergency.

The BCPS Crisis Communications Plan was developed with the understanding that no plan can cover all emergency situations. With this reality in mind, the Crisis Communications Plan should be used as a guideline to address crisis communications when a significant event occurs affecting students and staff.

Recommendation 7 – Increased behavioral support staff to support students and teachers.

District Response:

On May 17, 2022, Dr. Cartwright presented a reorganization of BCPS' Divisions and Departments. Through this reorganization, the Chief Academic Officer and ESE Department reviewed the structure, processes, and procedures in place prior to the reorganization and what would be needed to address behavioral support under the new reorganization. The District Behavior Specialists from the Exceptional Student Education (ESE) Department are assigned to regions and schools based on needs. The Deputy Superintendent of Teaching and Learning, Chief Academic Officer, and ESE Department leadership are working with the Budget Office to review all budgets, grants, and funding associated with the ESE departments. Through this process, they will work with the Budget Office to determine funding available to hire additional Behavior Specialists and/or Behavior Technicians based on student and school data.

In addition, the ESE Department is working on a series of professional learning opportunities to better support general education teachers, ESE teachers, and support staff in effective practices to support positive behavior in our classrooms. The Deputy Superintendent of Teaching and Learning, Chief Academic Officer, and ESE Department leadership are also working with the Budget Office to determine the extent to which general funds, or additional funding sources, can be leveraged to provide additional Education Support Professionals (ESPs) to support students and teachers in classrooms throughout the district.

Access School Safety Task Force resources at

www.browardschools.com/sstf

Acknowledgments

The work of the Broward County Public Schools (BCPS) School Safety Task Force would not have been able to be accomplished without the substantial efforts of numerous community members, BCPS partnering organizations and BCPS staff. Thank you to everyone who participated in the task force and for their contributions to making our schools a safe and secure environment for all. We would like to acknowledge the substantial efforts of our community members, partnering organizations, and BCPS staff because, without their dedication, this work would not have been possible.

The following departments/community members were instrumental in accomplishing the work of the School Safety Task Force:

Broward County Council PTA/PTSA
Broward Principals' & Assistants' Association (BPAA)
Broward Teachers Union (BTU)
Federation of Public Employees (FOPE)
District Advisory Council (DAC)
Exceptional Student Education Department (ESE)
ESE Advisory Council
Office of Academics (OoA)
Division of Teaching and Learning (formerly the Office of School Performance & Accountability)
Office of Chief of Staff (OCS) - Risk Management
Office of Human Resources & Equity (HRE) - Labor Relations
Office of Legislative Affairs
Office of Safety, Security, & Emergency Preparedness (SSEP) - Special Investigative Unit (SIU)
Office of Strategy and Operations (OSO) - Strategic Initiative Management
Office of Student Support & Recovery (SSIR) - School Climate & Discipline
Student Services