

Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools (REMS) Technical Assistance (TA) Center

Dear Ms. Herlitzke,

Thank you for contacting the U.S. Department of Education's (ED) Office of Safe and Healthy Students (OSHS) and REMS TA Center with your request for policy examples or policy statements on the use of metal detectors in K-12 school buildings, as well as any research articles on the effectiveness and/ or challenges of using them. Below we provide an introduction to the use of metal detectors in schools, sample materials from schools on the use of metal detectors, and planning to reduce violence in schools.

Introduction to Metal Detectors in Schools

When used, metal detectors in schools should be one component of a comprehensive school violence and safety program that works to prevent weapons from entering school buildings under the direction of law enforcement partners. Of the schools that do use metal detectors, some use them regularly to inspect all students, while others use the technology for random inspections. According to the [2017 Indicators of School Crime and Safety](#), approximately 1.8% of public schools required students to pass through metal detectors daily and 4.5% used random metal detectors on students in the 2015-2016 school year.

Research into the effectiveness of metal detectors in reducing violence in schools is limited. One study, [Impacts of metal detector use in schools: Insights from 15 years of research](#), reviewed 15 years of research and concluded,

There is insufficient data in the literature to determine whether the presence of metal detectors in schools reduces the risk of violent behavior among students, and some research suggests that the presence of metal detectors may detrimentally impact student perceptions of safety.

However, the effectiveness of metal detectors can be increased through programming that includes collaboration with community partners, ongoing data collection and analysis to inform continual improvement of processes, clear policies and procedures about the use of the technology that respects privacy, appropriate and regular training of screening personnel, and clear expectations of student behavior at the school.

For many schools, metal detectors are not feasible and are not considered an effective practice due to the many drawbacks and perceived negative effects to the school climate (for reference, see the National Association of School Psychologists' [School Security Measures and Their Impact on Students Research Summaries](#)). In addition to the presence of metal detectors possibly affecting student perceptions of safety, other downsides of the technology are the cost associated with them (especially the walk-through types), the need to install them at all entrances, the staff (and their training) needed to monitor/use the equipment, and the need for a private area for a further examination if a metal detector's alarm goes off. Further difficulties arise due to time constraints of the school day (e.g., many students accessing the school at the same time after being dropped off by buses), even if metal detectors do not indicate there is a need for further investigation.

Sample Materials

In response to your request, the OSHS/REMS TA Center team identified the following resources and sample materials on metal detectors.

- [Tool Box](#). The Tool Box is an online repository of tools and resources developed by practitioners in the field and pertinent to the needs of school and higher ed practitioners as they engage in the process of school and higher ed emergency management planning. Here, you will find sample templates, planning guidelines and procedures, among other resources, including:
 - [Metal Detector Training](#) (Los Angeles Unified School District [LAUSD], California). This 11-minute training video is available to LAUSD staff, so they are familiar with the district's policy, practices, and procedures for random detector searches.

- [Policy—Use of Metal Detectors](#) (Edison Board of Education, New Jersey). This policy outlines the use of metal detectors in the Edison Township Public Schools, including where and when metal detectors may be used, the types of metal detectors (walk-through, hand-held, or other) that may be used, and training provided to individuals who will be authorized to use metal detectors. Procedures taken if a threatening object is found are described as well.
- [Policy—Using Metal Detectors](#) (Riverside Beaver County School District, Pennsylvania). This policy includes definitions for terms related to the school district’s metal detector screening policy and includes information on how persons who attempt to avoid detection or refuse detection will be handled.
- [Policy Bulletin—Administrative Searches to Ensure School Safety](#) (LAUSD, California). This policy includes information on which types of schools are subject to metal detector use, guidelines on reasonable suspicion and its limitations with regards to metal detector use, the frequency of metal detector searches, plans for searching other school areas such as lockers, and the composition of metal detector search team members. Procedures for conducting random searches and public advisory of searches are also included as well as information on documentation related to searches. Minimum equipment resources are also outlined.
- [Scanning in NYCDOE Schools](#) (New York City Police Department [NYPD] and New York City Department of Education [NYCDOE]). This document highlights the partnership between the NYPD and NYCDOE with regards to metal detector scanning in New York City schools. Topics addressed include the type of scanning that is conducted, the training required of scanning personnel, and how to become a scanning school.

Planning to Reduce Violence on Campus

Due to the downsides of using metal detectors in schools—including no proven effectiveness in reducing violence in schools—planning teams may want to implement other resources, systems, and processes to reduce violence. One way to help achieve this, increase school safety and security, and nurture a supportive climate is through the development of a comprehensive, all-hazards emergency operations plan (EOP). The recommended way to create, review, or revise an EOP is via the six-step planning process described in the [Guide for Developing High-Quality School Emergency Operations Plans](#) (*School Guide*):

Step 1: Form a Collaborative Planning Team: In this first step, the planning team is formed, comprised of a core planning team, school personnel, community partners, including emergency management, law enforcement, and fire department. Here, input from the school resource officer (SRO) or local law enforcement will be especially useful. If the planning team decides that modifications need to be made to the school (see information on CPTED below), the group can also seek input from individuals with expertise in building design, such as an architect or engineer. Additional partners and stakeholders that might have knowledge and expertise to contribute include school counselors, social workers and psychologists, family representatives, and students, as well as community partners such as public and mental health practitioners.

Step 2: Understand the Situation: Here, the planning team uses a variety of assessments to identify possible threats and hazards to the school, assesses the risk and vulnerabilities posed by them, and prioritizes them for inclusion in the EOP. This information helps to formulate goals, objectives, and courses of action that work to build capacity in the five mission areas (Prevention, Protection, Mitigation, Response, and Recovery). Key assessments for consideration as part of a school safety initiative would include a site assessment, climate assessment, behavioral threat assessment, and capacity assessment. A site assessment would be especially useful as it examines the school buildings and grounds and is complemented by a climate survey. And, having a school threat assessment team supports monitoring and being responsive to individual potential threats. Additionally, following a capacity assessment, the planning team would be better positioned to know what resources are available and are needed as these are developed. For additional information on assessments, see this [REMS TA Center Web page](#), including the Related Resources (indicated with a light bulb icon on the left of the page).

One assessment tool you may want to consider reviewing is the OSHA and REMS TA Center [SITE ASSESS](#) tool, which is a secure, comprehensive mobile application that allows personnel to walk around a building and grounds and examine their safety, security, accessibility, and emergency preparedness. SITE ASSESS generates a customized to-do list that may be used in the short term and long term to address facility improvements, prompts teams to share pertinent information with first responders, and contains relevant resources on several education facility and

safety topics. Also presented within the related resources section are resources to assess and address school climate and culture, including surveys put forth by our partner TA Center, the [National Center for Safe and Supportive Learning Environments \(NCSSLE\)](#).

Another source of information is the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's [Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System](#) that is informed by a school-based survey. The survey monitors six types of behaviors that lead to the highest causes of death and disability, including behaviors that contribute to unintentional injuries and violence, sexual behaviors, alcohol and drug use, and tobacco use.

Step 3: Determine Goals and Objectives and Step 4: Plan Development (Identifying Courses of Action): The work conducted in step 2 will reveal that several hazards, threats, and cross cutting activities/functions, such as security, will need to be addressed. Goals, which are broad statements, can then be created for desired outcomes before, during, and after each hazard, threat, and function. Objectives can be established that are specific and measurable actions to achieve each of these goals and courses of action are then developed to accomplish the objectives. As the planning team moves through steps 3 and 4, the resources in the section below may provide the team with ideas of what to address.

Step 5: Plan Preparation, Review, and Approval: In this step, a draft of the EOP is written, including threat- and hazard-specific and functional annexes. Goals, objectives and courses of action related to violence prevention could be included in their own annex, but the planning team can decide where that information fits best within the EOP based on the needs of the school and partners who play a role in implementing the plan. A draft of the EOP is then reviewed by senior leadership and the Office of General Counsel, revised if needed, and approved.

Step 6: Plan Implementation and Maintenance: Finally, the plan is implemented, which includes providing training to teachers, staff, administrators, and students on their roles and responsibilities in an emergency and conducting exercises to test the school's and individuals' response.

Violence Prevention in Schools

As the school or school district planning team progresses through the six-step planning process, the group may want to consider the following activities that can help prevent or reduce violence in schools.

- *Foster a safe and supportive learning environment.* Numerous resources are available to help with these efforts, including those provided by ED's OSHS and [NCSSLE](#). For example, OSHS and the NCSSLE provide a toolkit on [Creating a Safe and Respectful Environment in our Nation's Classrooms](#) and a [School Climate Improvement Resource Package](#).
- *Implement Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED).* CPTED is an approach to crime prevention that aims to reduce opportunities for crime by using elements of the environment to control access, provide opportunities to see and be seen, and define ownership.
 - [Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design](#) (American Clearinghouse on Educational Facilities). Information is provided in this two-page document on CPTED principles that apply to natural surveillance, natural access control, territoriality reinforcement, and maintenance.
 - [Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design School Assessment \(CSA\)](#) (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention). This assessment, with accompanying materials, can be used by planning teams to rate parts of the school that can affect youth fear and aggressive behavior, based on CPTED principles.
 - [Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design CPTED Principles Checklist for Kentucky Public Schools](#) (Kentucky Center for School Safety). This checklist provides considerations, including security technology, for school officials and design professionals when planning new construction.
 - [Designing Safe Schools: Planning and Retrofitting for Safety in Education Facilities](#) (OSHS & REMS TA Center). Presenters in this archived Webinar shared safety considerations for the design and construction of new school buildings, as well as improvements to existing facilities. This included the use of site assessments and cost-effective options for improving safety and security.
 - [School CPTED Training](#) (National Association of School Resource Officers [NASRO]). This training for SROs, school and school district administrators and facilities staff, architects, and facility planners

teaches participants principles of CPTED and how to conduct the CSA and includes a practical component.

- *Collaborate with community partners.* Members of the planning team may be able to suggest other ways to work with community partners to reduce violence in schools. For reference, the Federal Bureau of Investigation's document [Violence Prevention in Schools: Enhancement through Law Enforcement Partnerships](#) describes aspects such as training and resources for SROs, legal matters, and school climate.
- *Implement behavioral threat assessments.* Threat assessments identify, evaluate, and reduce the risk posed by a student who may be thinking about or planning a school-based attack. Related resources from OSHS and the REMS TA Center include:
 - [Training by Request \(TBR\)](#). This day-long, on-site training introduces participants to various components of school threat assessments, effective characteristics of threat assessments, and specialized topics, such as the use of social media in threat assessments.
 - Archived Webinars:
 - [Forming a School Behavioral Threat Assessment Team](#) describes some of the common elements of effective threat assessments, such as they are performed by a trained, multidisciplinary team, including an investigator such as an SRO.
 - [Use of Social Media in School Behavioral Threat Assessments](#) addresses emerging trends of social media and threat assessments, including how local law enforcement can help identify potential threats on social media.
- *Establish systems for the school community to report a concern.* Examples of statewide reporting systems include [Safe Oregon](#) and Ohio's [tip line](#). For tip lines to be effective, users must be able to submit a report anonymously and they must be supported by trusted adults (so those making a tip feel as though their information will be taken seriously); maintained collaboratively, so that information passes through law enforcement and is acted upon by the appropriate group; and accessible to students, teachers, staff, parents, guardians, and community members. Schools, and their communities, can also promote the [If You See Something, Say Something](#) campaign to report concerning behavior.

Additional information and resources is provided on the REMS TA Center's Web page [Addressing Adversarial- and Human-Caused Threats That May Impact Students, Staff, and Visitors Topic-Specific Web page](#). The page houses ED, OSHS, REMS TA Center and federal partner resources on addressing issues such as active shooters, bullying, criminal threats or actions, and suicide.

We hope the above information and resources are useful to you in your work. For additional resources and information, please visit the REMS TA Center [Website](#), or call us toll-free at 1-855-781-7367 [REMS]. Thank you for contacting the REMS TA Center again!

Sincerely,

Paul Myers, PhD, CEM
Director, Research & Development



If you have questions or need additional assistance, please contact the REMS TA Center at

(855) 781-REMS (7367) or info@remstacenter.org.



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