

**REPORT TO THE HOUSE AND SENATE COMMITTEES ON EDUCATION
OF THE LOUISIANA LEGISLATURE**



**RESPONSE TO SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION 8
OF THE 2018 REGULAR SESSION**

FROM THE LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

OVERVIEW OF THE RESOLUTION

Senate Concurrent Resolution 8 of the 2018 Regular Session urged and requested the Louisiana Department of Education to investigate the feasibility and cost of installing silent alarms in all elementary and secondary school classrooms in Louisiana and submit of its findings and recommendations no later than February 1, 2019.

BACKGROUND AND FINDINGS

Providing for the safety of Louisiana's students has been a top priority for local and state education leaders, the Louisiana Legislature, and the Governor. Over the past several years, as tragedies were experienced at elementary and secondary schools across the country, those individuals, working with law enforcement and emergency preparation and response experts, have worked to gether to enact and implement laws related to school safety and security, crisis management, and emergency response. These measures include the creation of and practice of a local school crisis management and response plan that is developed and executed in coordination with local law enforcement, empowering students to anonymously report dangerous social media posts to school administrators, requiring mental health evaluations for students who make threats of violence or terrorism against classmates and administrators or teachers before they can return to school. In the summer of 2018, Governor John Bel Edwards created a Blue Ribbon Task Force on School Safety which brought together local and state level education and emergency response leaders and other experts and charged them with identifying vulnerabilities and supports to strengthen school safety and emergency response, particularly active shooter incidents. The group held several meetings, conducted on-site physical safety and security assessments at all public high schools and many elementary and middle schools, and applied for and received federal grants to provide schools with training and supports.

Many concerned individuals and policymakers across the country have inquired about the possibility of installing silent panic alarms in school facilities, similar to those installed in banks and other facilities. While such alarm systems can be effective in increasing response time for law enforcement, given the number of buildings and rooms that students and school employees occupy, costs may be significant and prohibitive, and statewide systems rarely offer the flexibility and customization local school systems and emergency responders desire. It is likely for these reasons that, while silent alarms are often considered when assessing a school's level of emergency preparedness, they rank low on the list of most-widely implemented school safety strategies.¹

¹ National Center for Education Statistics - Percentage of public schools with various safety and security measures: Selected years, 1999-2000 through 2015-16. Retrieved from https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d17/tables/dt17_233.50.asp

National Data

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), silent alarms are listed as one of the external indicators for “school safety and security measures.” When sorted by the percentage of American schools that implement the practice, silent alarms rank fifteenth on this list of indicators. Ranking highest on the list are controlled access to buildings during school hours, dress codes and identification badges, and enhanced communication tools. NCES began collecting this data in 1999 and only has one school year’s data about silent alarms, further indicating that silent alarms are a relatively new national discussion. The table below shows the top fifteen most widely used safety measures in the United States during the 2015-2016 school year.

Rank	Practice	%
1	Buildings (e.g., locked or monitored doors)	94.1
2	Visitors required to sign or check in	93.5
3	Limited access to social networking sites from school computers	89.1
4	Used security cameras to monitor the school	80.6
5	Provided telephones in most classrooms	79.3
6	Provided two-way radios to any staff	73.3
7	Provided electronic notification system for schoolwide emergency	73.0
8	Required faculty and staff to wear badges or picture IDs	67.9
9	Classrooms equipped with locks so that doors can be locked from inside	66.7
10	Prohibited use of cell phones and text messaging devices	65.8
11	Enforced a strict dress code	53.1
12	Provided school lockers to students	50.4
13	Grounds (e.g., locked or monitored gates)	49.9
14	Provided structured anonymous threat reporting system	43.9
15	Had silent alarms directly connected to law enforcement	27.1

Louisiana schools already employ many of these strategies, particularly those that are less expensive to implement. Recent school campus security assessments conducted by law enforcement revealed opportunities to enhance those efforts.

Visible, external, and infrastructure-related safety measures are critical components of a school’s ability to react and respond to security breaches. Other more proactive and preventative measures do not fall into the external categories measured by NCES data, and include creating school-wide plans for assessment, intervention, and positive school culture.

Federal Guidance

Last year, the United States Secret Service and the Department of Homeland Security published guidance on school safety and reached out directly to Louisiana officials to make those tools available to local school leaders and emergency responders. The Department of Homeland Security provided a K-12 School Security guide in response to the tragic events in Parkland, Florida, on how to assess threats and prevent gun violence. The guidance covers threat assessment, prevention and protection, the importance of school climate and mental health.² The Secret Service approach is based upon a threat assessment model of early intervention, particularly focused on mental and behavioral supports of students, instead of a focus on hardened physical targets of violence.³ In the executive summary,⁴ they recommend the following actions:

Step 1: Establish a multidisciplinary threat assessment team

Step 2: Define behaviors

Step 3: Establish and provide training on a central reporting system

Step 4: Determine the threshold for law enforcement intervention

Step 5: Establish threat assessment procedures

Step 6: Develop risk management options

Step 7: Create and promote a safe school climate

Step 8: Provide training for all stakeholders

They recommend that each local education agency (LEA) and school site have a comprehensive plan and appropriate tools for when and how to assess and respond to an on-campus threat, including when and how to involve law enforcement. These efforts complement proactive, preventive, and restorative safety and security measures are most foundational, such as clearly defined behavior expectations, mental health evaluations, safe school climates, and community-wide trainings.

Many states are piloting school safety initiatives; Louisiana can look to them for policy, costs, data, impact, and outcomes. Statewide initiatives include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Providing or requiring comprehensive safety and security plans for each school site
- Statewide set-asides for building infrastructure enhancement⁵
- LEA controlled tax-funds (like Educational - Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax)

² U.S. Department of Homeland Security (2018) *K-12 School Security*. Retrieved from

<https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/K12-School-Security-Guide-2nd-Edition-508.pdf>

³ U.S. Department of Homeland Security, United States Secret Service, National Threat Assessment Center (July, 2018) *Enhancing School Safety Using A Threat Assessment Model*. Retrieved from

https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/18_0711_USSS_NTAC-Enhancing-School-Safety-Guide.pdf

⁴ U.S. Secret Service School Safety Brief. Retrieved from https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/18_0711_USSS_NTAC-Enhancing-School-Safety-Brief.pdf

⁵ GA's \$70 Million Dollar Allocation. Retrieved from <https://www.ajc.com/blog/politics/kemp-unveils-school-safety-and-gang-crackdown-plans/NcBlwSjlulEv7cFNQughKK/>

- Counselors and mental health professionals at each school

Other State Efforts on School Safety

Georgia

While federal guidance has historically focused more on school climate and the mental health of students, states are also very concerned and in search of guidance and support to address physical safety. Georgia created a comprehensive school safety plan and local support system using a multi-disciplinary team of local experts, including judges, district attorneys, health officials, mental health organizations, and local social services. On November 6, 2018, Georgia voters passed the Educational Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (ESPLOST), which renewed a one cent sales tax for education. Soon after the tax passed, the state senate's school safety panel made a recommendation to add one or more mental health professionals to each school. The panel is exploring legislation that would allow the use of ESPLOST funds to hire trained mental health professional to treat and serve students. Currently, the ESPLOST money can only be used for capital improvement projects or paying off debt. Recently, Georgia's governor proposed a \$70 million dollar allocation for school security, which includes a mental health professional and a one-time \$30,000 grant for infrastructure related expenses such as video surveillance cameras, metal detectors, alarms, communications systems, building access controls and other similar security devices.⁶

New Jersey

The General Assembly in New Jersey tried to pass Alyssa's Law, named in honor of Ayssa Alhadeff, a 14-year old student who was killed on February 14, 2018 at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School. Alyssa had moved to Parkland from Woodcliff Lake, New Jersey. The bill would require all public elementary and secondary schools to be equipped with a panic alarm linked to local law enforcement to be used during a security emergency.⁷ The state, through its bonding agency, the School Development Authority, would incur costs association with installation of these panic alarms.

The bill⁸ was returned by Governor Murphy in August of 2018. In his letter, the governor signaled his concern with insufficient time and resources for school districts to comply with the mandate. Due to the costs associated with the alarms and the fact that the School Development Authority had nearly exhausted its bonding capacity, the governor indicated that that a more viable source of funding should be identified to accomplish the goals of the bill.⁹

⁶ Georgia Legislature (2018) *House Bill 763*. Retrieved from <http://www.legis.ga.gov/Legislation/20172018/178927.pdf>

⁷ New Jersey General Assembly, 218th Legislature (2018) *Assembly, No. 764*. Retrieved from https://www.njleg.state.nj.us/2018/Bills/A1000/764_I1.PDF

⁸ New Jersey Proposed Legislation - https://www.njleg.state.nj.us/2018/Bills/A1000/764_I1.PDF

⁹ Governor Phillip Murphy

North Carolina

In 2013, North Carolina passed House Bill 452 related to school safety. The funded mandate includes resources for school counseling programs provided by school psychologists and school social workers, grants for school resource officers in elementary and middle schools, school safety exercises, plans and training, anonymous tip lines, and panic alarm systems. The goal is to implement and maintain a statewide panic alarm system to launch real-time 911 messaging to address internal or external risks to the school population or buildings.¹⁰

The funding for the panic alarm system totaled \$4 million. In 2013-2014, \$2 million was appropriated from the General Fund to the Department of Public Instruction. In 2014-2015 the remaining \$2 million came from grants¹¹ administered to local school districts, regional schools and charter schools. These funds were matched on the basis of one dollar in state funds for every dollar in local funds.¹²

HB 666 from the 2013 Legislative Session was intended exclusively for statewide implementation of silent alarms and eventually died in committee.

Despite state and district initiatives, some school leaders are using vendors, apps, and service providers to find ways to incorporate silent alarm solutions on their own.

Pennsylvania

Pennsylvania for several years has had a Select Committee on School Safety and Security, which in 2013, recommended installation of panic buttons in school administrative offices.¹³ The state's Delaware County Council made funding the alarms a priority, securing grant funding to install them in all of the county's public and private schools at a cost of \$188,600.¹⁴ Legislation was introduced last year that would require the same, yet it was not referred by a legislative education committee.¹⁵

Options and Costs of Silent Alarms

The costs for implementing silent alarms in all schools depend on many factors, including:

- the type/brand of alarm;
- how many panic buttons in the school;
- functions of the alarm;
- mobile or immobile panic buttons;
- flashing alarm lights;

¹⁰ North Carolina General Statutes, (2013) *Chapter 115C, §115C-105.51* Retrieved from https://www.ncleg.net/EnactedLegislation/Statutes/PDF/ByArticle/Chapter_115c/Article_8C.pdf

¹¹ North Carolina School Safety Grants - <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/cfss/>

¹² North Carolina Legislature, (April 10, 2013) *General Assembly of North Carolina, House Bill 452*. Retrieved from <https://www.ncleg.net/Sessions/2013/Bills/House/PDF/H452v2.pdf>

¹³ <http://www.reptoohil.com/NewsItemPrint.aspx?NewsID=19209>

¹⁴ http://www.mainlinemedianews.com/mainlinesuburbanlife/news/silent-alarms-installed-in-public-private-delaware-county-schools/article_38e33bf6-df5e-5791-ac85-976434975c70.html

¹⁵ <https://www.legis.state.pa.us/cfdocs/billInfo/billInfo.cfm?sYear=2017&slnd=0&body=H&type=B&bn=2057>

- cell-phone apps; and
- video monitoring.

Help Alert, Sonitrol, and TattleTale are among the most well-known vendors for manufacturing and supplying silent alarm systems to schools nationally. They provide different levels of whole-school integrated alarm systems. Other vendors, including some locally, would also likely to be able to offer such services.

North Carolina's funding of \$4 million would be used to support silent alarms in approximately 2,500 public schools, roughly \$1,600 per school. The Hall County school system in Georgia, which has thirty-nine schools, allocated \$150,000 to pilot a silent alarm initiative. Assuming each school participates, the cost could be about \$4,000 per school. In 2013, the Delaware County efforts in Pennsylvania funded nearly 100 schools with \$188,600. More detailed cost estimates necessitate a more thorough review of specifications and services provided.

CONCLUSION

School safety is an extremely important topic that many states and school systems are continuing to evaluate and enhance as resources allow. Silent alarm systems are one of many strategies that can improve a school's ability to quickly respond to emergencies. However, such systems come with many features, require close collaboration between school and emergency responding agencies, and can be expensive to implement and support.

In order to gather more detailed information about options available and possible costs, given the unique landscape of Louisiana public schools, the Department of Education will issue an Request for Information (RFI) that will solicit information to more thoroughly respond to the following questions:

- What local and national vendors are able to provide such services?
- What features do their systems have?
- What is required in terms of installation and on-going support?
- What collaboration is required between schools and local emergency responders?
- What, if any, role could or should the state play?
- What are the cost options to implement silent alarms in each school building, each classroom, and/or other assembly rooms?

The Louisiana Department of Education will submit a follow-up summary of information received and remain in close contact with the Governor's Blue Ribbon Task Force on School Safety and local school leaders to consider the feasibility of such options.