

June 8, 2018

TO THE ADMINISTRATOR ADDRESSED

SUBJECT: Governor Abbott's School Safety Plan – Immediate Opportunities to Improve Campus Security Through Available School Safety Supports

Last week, Governor Greg Abbott released a comprehensive School and Firearm Safety Action Plan (https://gov.texas.gov/uploads/files/press/School_Safety_Action_Plan_05302018.pdf).

Release of this plan followed three roundtable discussions in Austin with stakeholders, including superintendents, law enforcement representatives, mental health authorities, as well as survivors of mass shootings in our state. As Commissioner, I participated in all the discussions and travelled to Santa Fe with the Governor twice. During these discussions, the Governor gathered feedback from these individuals and incorporated that into the Action Plan.

With this correspondence, I am sharing information regarding various programs, grants and opportunities available to strengthen school safety over the summer, which must be an urgent priority for all school officials. To the extent that you have not already initiated this important work, please begin school safety improvements this summer. As outlined in this letter, the Governor has identified considerable funding and other resources to support this work. TEA has consolidated information on these resources at https://tea.texas.gov/About_TEA/School_Safety_Resource.

The first and most valuable resource is the Texas School Safety Center (TxSSC). TxSSC has already provided TEA with excellent information that can be used this summer to make schools safer. All that information is available on our school safety resources website. TxSSC is a free resource for all school districts and charter schools. They stand eager and willing to help all Texas districts improve their school safety this summer. The TxSSC can be reached at (512) 245-8082 or by email txssc@txstate.edu.

This letter highlights opportunities that build off of the recommendations in the Governor's plan. These include:

- Increasing the number of school marshals;
- Coordination with local law enforcement;
- Behavioral Threat Assessments;
- Mental Health First Aid;
- Additional school safety trainings; and
- Federal funding available for school safety under Title IV, Part A.

Increasing the Number of School Marshals

Included in the Governor's plan is a recommendation to increase the number of school marshals in districts and charters. State law (*TEC 37.0811*) allows a school district or charter school to appoint one or more specially trained and licensed employees as school marshals. The appointment must be made by the board of trustees and the marshal must have the appropriate licensing and certification by the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement (TCOLE). More Information on the School Marshal Program can be found on the TCOLE website at <http://tcole.texas.gov/content/school-marshals>.

This specialized training requires a psychological exam and includes 80 hours of instruction. Among the topics covered in the School Marshal course are: physical security, improved campus security, use of force, active shooter response, and weapon proficiency. No other course can be substituted or exempt an individual from TCOLE approved school marshal training.

The Governor's Criminal Justice Division has provided a grant to pay tuition, fees and other qualifying expenses for school marshal training from June through August. This opportunity is made available to help reduce the threat of active shooters on all our public school campuses. To learn more about the training or to register, contact Chris Varady with TCOLE at (512) 936-7761 or email schoolmarshal@tcole.texas.gov.

Coordination With Local Law Enforcement

If you have not already done so, you should be in contact with your local law enforcement, emergency managers and other first responders. I have found our law enforcement agencies and first responders to be a wealth of knowledge on improving safety and security practices, using approaches that I was simply not aware of previously.

During the Governor's roundtables, it was incredible to see the quality and strength of recommendations that were developed when superintendents and law enforcement officials worked together. One practice identified related to collaboration between school districts and local law enforcement offices. For example, the Hays County Sheriff's Office has worked with school districts in Hays County so that deputies, while out on patrol, stop in schools for restroom breaks, to eat breakfast or lunch, and to sit in a space where they can do paperwork. This kind of change can result in an immediate increase in law enforcement presence in our schools, improving safety and improving interactions between students and law enforcements. I would encourage you to reach out to your local Sheriff, Justice of the Peace, City Police Departments, and other first responders to determine whether similar no-cost partnership approaches could be started in your schools at the beginning of the new school year.

With humility, we need to approach and view local partners as critical in keeping our students and schools safe. We can all do more to improve safety with improved interagency coordination – at the state level between TEA and Texas Department of Public Safety, as well as between our local school districts and local law enforcement.

Behavioral Threat Assessments

During the roundtable discussions, we met a former U.S. Secret Service agent who brought copies of a report I wish I had read during my time as a school board member. I encourage all superintendents and school board members to take time to read *Implications for the Prevention of School Attacks in the United States* (<https://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/safety/threatassessmentguide.pdf>).

The U.S. Secret Service and U.S. Department of Education collaborated in drafting this report as a tool for school systems following the attack at Columbine High School. This report includes a guide to establishing and operating a threat assessment team. These teams act as nerve centers, analyzing information from multiple sources on students (and others) who may pose a threat to themselves or others.

TxSSC will partner with SIGMA Threat Management to deliver training on Behavioral Threat Assessment to school personnel. These trainings will be available in July and August, as well as throughout the school year. For more information, call the TxSSC at (512) 245-8082 or email txssc@txstate.edu.

Mental Health First Aid

Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) is a free, evidence-based training available to all educators. MHFA is an 8-hour instructor led course, which teaches the general public about the signs and symptoms of mental illness and substance use disorders. It employs a variety of teaching techniques including hands-on exercises and real-world scenarios to equip participants with the skills they will need to intervene in a crisis situation. Participants receive invaluable information that they can then use in the classroom to potentially help prevent traumatic events with our Texas youth. The goal is to maximize the number of Texas school children who have direct contact with an individual who has successfully completed an MHFA training course.

MHFA is free to teachers and any school district employee. Education Service Centers, Independent School Districts and charter schools can contact the local mental health authority or local behavioral health authority in their areas and begin the process of scheduling training during June, July and August. Additional MHFA information (including accessing contact information for your area) is available on our school safety resources website page at https://tea.texas.gov/About_TEA/School_Safety_Resource.

Additional School Safety Trainings

The following school safety trainings will be provided at no cost for the remainder of 2018.

- Active shooter response training is available through the Advanced Law Enforcement Rapid Response Training (ALERT) Center. ALERT has trained more than 105,000 police officers nationwide and over 86,500 civilians in active shooter scenario-based training. The Governor's Criminal Justice Division has already provided a \$1.25 million grant to ALERT to be used to deliver 75 classes this summer, training approximately 2,800 students, most of whom are law enforcement; more classes are expected to be added to the summer schedule soon. Officers who have been through their Civilian Response to Active Shooter Events training are equipped to then take that information back to their local communities and train others. In addition, ALERT has videos posted on Youtube as resources. You can find those videos at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j0lt68YxLQQ>. For more information or to register, contact ALERT at (512) 245-1668 or email help@alerrt.org.
- TxSSC will offer a workshop-based course that allows for hands-on application of high-quality planning practices that includes identifying all threats, hazards and vulnerabilities; assessing capabilities for response, developing effective response protocols; and training and drilling to the plan. TxSSC will be providing information on this opportunity in the coming days. For more information, call TxSSC at (512) 245-8082 or email txssc@txstate.edu.
- TxSSC is also partnering with the I Love U Guys Foundation to provide Standard Response Protocol (SRP) and Standard Reunification Method training for schools. This training can be incorporated into your emergency operations plan. For more information, call TxSSC at (512) 245-8082 or email txssc@txstate.edu.
- This past March, TxSSC (in collaboration with the ALERT Program) recorded a webinar providing an overview of the Civilian Response to Active Shooter Events (CRASE) course. The course was designed for educators to increase their awareness of Avoid, Deny, Defend (ADD) strategies to survive an active shooter event. This is a free video that you should consider showing to faculty and staff as you all prepare to return to school next fall. This free video can be watched by any public school employee in Texas online at their convenience at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tLbhurhAYzs>.

Federal Funding Available for School Safety under Title IV, Part A

Texas will receive \$62.1 million in additional federal funding under the Title IV, Part A: Student Support and Academic Enrichment (SSAE) grant program for the 2018-2019 school year. The federal grant has many allowable uses that fall within the broad categories of 1) well-rounded education opportunities, 2) safe and healthy students, and 3) effective use of technology.

TEA has previously awarded SSAE grants to local educational agencies (LEAs) for many purposes that meet the LEA's identified needs, including school safety. This year, Texas' SSAE funds will increase significantly, from \$36.3 million to \$98.4 million. Per the Governor's Action Plan, this \$62.1 million increase in federal grant funds should be prioritized to immediately implement school safety improvements on campuses, including counseling and mental health programs, addressing ways to integrate health and safety practices into school or athletic programs, and disseminating best practices and evaluating program outcomes relating to any LEA activities to promote student safety and violence prevention.

A safe learning environment for all students is crucial to advancing the purposes of the SSAE program. TEA further urges LEAs to submit SSAE applications that prioritize increased spending on allowable school safety training and activities. Additional information on specific recommended uses of SSAE funds will be forthcoming on the TEA web site.

- TEA will release the 2018-2019 Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) Consolidated Application this week. This year, the ESSA Consolidated Application will include a significant funding increase under the Title IV, Part A program that can be used to improve safety in our Texas public schools.
- Information about the ESSA Consolidated Application can be found on the TEA's [Grant Opportunities](#) page by searching for 2018-2019 ESSA Consolidated Federal Grant Application. Allocations for eligible applicants will be available on the [Entitlements](#) web page. Eligible applicants must apply through the eGrants system by 5 p.m. Central Time, September 4, 2018.
- With any questions about the ESSA Consolidated Application or SSAE funding, please contact the Grants Administration Division at grants@tea.texas.gov or (512) 463-8525.

Thank you for your ongoing commitment to the safety of students and staff on all your campuses. Should you have any additional questions on this topic, please contact Candace Stoltz, TEA Director of Emergency Management, at (512) 463-9286 or email Candace.Stoltz@tea.texas.gov.

Mike Morath
Commissioner