

Best Practices for School Safety and Prevention in Schools

Quality Education Commission Best Practices White Paper Series

ODE Safe and Inclusive Schools Team

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Executive Summary

The creation of safe and inclusive learning environments is paramount to ensuring holistic well-being and equitable educational opportunities for all students. This white paper delves into the key principles and best practices that support this critical endeavor. Drawing on resources from the Oregon Department of Education's Safe and Inclusive Schools Team, including their [October 2024 presentation to the Quality Education Commission](#), this paper explores the complex interplay of challenges and opportunities that influence student safety and inclusion. It further highlights the core principles that drive effective school safety and equity initiatives and provides practical, evidence-based strategies for implementation to empower schools in fostering environments where every student feels seen, heard, safe, and valued, supporting them in reaching their full potential.

Challenges and Opportunities in Ensuring Student Safety and Inclusion

Schools today face a complex array of challenges impacting student safety. These challenges necessitate proactive, preventative, and comprehensive strategies, but also present significant opportunities for positive change.

Challenges:

- **Threats of Violence:** Schools must address a range of threats, from verbal and physical altercations to serious incidents like school shootings, including online threats that can rapidly escalate and spread fear throughout the school and community.
- **Bullying (Including Cyberbullying):** Bullying, in all its forms, remains a pervasive problem, with cyberbullying extending its reach beyond the school day.
- **Mental Health Concerns:** Students experience increasing rates of anxiety, depression, and other mental health challenges, impacting academic performance, behavior, and social interactions, and increasing the risk of self-harm.
- **Social and Emotional Barriers:** Many students struggle with self-regulation, managing emotions, building healthy relationships, and resolving conflicts.
- **Disparities and Inequities:** Certain student populations, such as students of color, students who identify as LGBTQ2SIA+, students living with disabilities, and students living in out-of-home settings, often face disproportionate rates of discipline and high rates of youth suicide.

Best Practices for School Safety and Prevention in Schools

- **Lack of Resources and Support:** Limited funding for school safety and mental wellness, school-based mental health services, staff training, and prevention programs hinder effective foundational support for Oregon schools and districts.
- **Impact of External Factors:** Societal issues such as housing instability, community violence, and access to firearms significantly impact school safety and well-being.

Opportunities:

- **Evidence-Based Practices:** Implementing strategies like Transformative Social-Emotional Learning (TSEL), Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS), Multitiered Systems of Support (MTSS), Restorative and Trauma-Informed Practices, as well as Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Practices can significantly improve school climate and student outcomes.
- **Collaboration and Partnerships:** Strong partnerships between schools, families, caregivers, community organizations, mental health providers, and law enforcement are essential.
- **Focus on Prevention:** Proactive prevention efforts, including suicide prevention programs, mental health awareness campaigns, and online safety and reporting options are a crucial aspect of safety and prevention in schools.
- **Data-Driven Decision Making:** Using discipline data and other forms of data to monitor school climate, student behavior, intervention effectiveness, and to identify possible disproportional trends allows for informed decision-making, strengthening foundational behavioral supports and an overall healthy school culture.
- **Emphasis on Positive School Culture and Climate:** Cultivating a safe, trusting, and inclusive school climate is paramount to every student's success.
- **Leveraging Technology Responsibly:** Technology can be a powerful tool for promoting safety and inclusion, such as through online reporting systems, accessible learning platforms, and teaching [digital civics and citizenship](#).
- **Investing in Staff Training and Professional Development:** Equipping staff with the necessary knowledge and skills in school safety efforts is essential.

Key Principles for Fostering Safe and Inclusive Schools

A foundation for building safe and inclusive schools rests on core, interconnected principles. These principles inform policies, practices, and interactions, creating an integrated approach to student well-being.

Best Practices for School Safety and Prevention in Schools

- Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Practices: This involves actively valuing the diverse backgrounds of all students through culturally relevant curriculum, responsive teaching, inclusive environments, diverse staffing, and ongoing professional development.
- Transformative Social-Emotional Learning (TSEL): TSEL focuses on developing skills like self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making, improving students' academic performance, behavior, and well-being. [Oregon's Transformative SEL Framework](#) is intended to enact ORS 329.045 and help build capacity for strengthening equity-focused school cultures that support student and adult wellbeing. A focus on Transformative SEL enables students and adults to be affirmed in their identities, where they can develop a sense of agency and belonging, engage in collaborative problem-solving, and deepen their curiosity about the kind of society they want to make a reality.
- Culturally Responsive Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (CR-PBIS): [CR-PBIS](#) is a proactive, systems-level approach to preventing and addressing problem behavior through clear expectations, positive reinforcement, tiered supports, and data-based decision-making.
- Multitiered Systems of Support (MTSS): [Multitiered Systems of Support](#) is a framework for schools to provide academic, behavioral, and social-emotional support by using data-driven decision-making to match students with the appropriate level of support across multiple tiers. MTSS aims to proactively offer universal supports to all students (Tier 1), more targeted interventions to some students (Tier 2), and intensive, individualized support to a smaller number of students who require the most help (Tier 3).
- Restorative Justice: This approach focuses on building relationships by intentionally increasing understanding of culture and community, creating relational capacity among the school community and partners, strengthening empathy for one-another, and on repairing harm by addressing accountability, healing, and increased community connection
- Trauma-Informed Practices: These practices recognize the impact of trauma and prioritize creating safe and supportive environments through safety, trustworthiness, peer support, collaboration, empowerment, and addressing cultural and historical issues.
- Universal Design for Learning (UDL): UDL provides a framework for designing accessible and engaging learning experiences through multiple means of representation, action and expression, and engagement.

Best Practices from the Oregon Department of Education

- Behavior Safety [threat]Assessments (BSAs): A multi-level approach to identify situations that may pose a risk of violence or harm, determine the seriousness of that risk, and develop both safety and supervision strategies, involving school-based and community-based teams.
- Suicide Prevention (Adi's Act): This legislation mandates every school district school board to adopt a policy that requires a Student Suicide Prevention Plan.

Bullying, Harassment, Intimidation, and Sexual Violence Prevention: ODE emphasizes creating safe environments and provides resources and guidance based on Oregon law (ORS 339.351, OAR 581-029-0001), addressing bullying, cyberbullying, harassment, intimidation and sexual violence in schools by exploring the diverse resources available with a strong emphasis on the guidance and support provided by the Oregon Department of Education (ODE).

Conclusion

Creating safe and inclusive schools is a fundamental investment in the future of our communities. It requires an unwavering commitment and a spirit of collaboration among all partners. This white paper offers a foundation for understanding the best practices in school safety, prevention and inclusion; we can transform our schools into spaces where all students feel valued, respected, and empowered to succeed, both academically and personally. When students feel safe and included, they are more likely to engage in learning, develop positive relationships, and cultivate a strong sense of belonging. This, in turn, contributes to improved academic outcomes, reduced behavioral issues, and a more positive school climate overall. Ultimately, the creation of safe and inclusive schools is not just about addressing immediate needs; it's about nurturing the next generation of leaders, innovators, and responsible citizens who will contribute positively to a more just and equitable world.

Recommendations

Achieving safe and inclusive schools necessitates significant investment across six key areas:

- Dedicated funding
- Inclusive and diverse staffing
- Evidence-based professional development and training
- Community partnerships
- Data collection and evaluation
- Support for policies and systemic changes

Best Practices for School Safety and Prevention in Schools

While isolating precise spending on school safety and prevention efforts is difficult due to a lack of adequate, dedicated funding as well as local control over resource allocation, it is imperative that districts, schools and education service districts prioritize these investments.

To ensure transparency and maximize the effectiveness of these resources, districts, schools and education service districts should clearly articulate how they are expending funds to support these six key areas and regularly report on the outcomes of these investments. This transparent approach will allow partners to understand how they are using resources to create safe and inclusive learning environments for all students.

Introduction

Safe and inclusive schools are essential for fostering a positive learning environment where all students feel seen, heard, safe, and valued. This white paper explores key principles and best practices to create such environments, drawing on the valuable resources provided by the [Oregon Department of Education's \(ODE\) Safe and Inclusive Schools Team October 2024 presentation to the Quality Education Commission](#).

Challenges and Opportunities in Ensuring Student Safety and Inclusion

Schools today navigate a complex landscape of challenges that impact student safety. These challenges require proactive and comprehensive strategies to ensure a positive and supportive learning environment for all. However, within these challenges lie significant opportunities for growth and positive change.

Challenges

- **Threats of Violence:** This encompasses a range of concerns, from verbal threats and physical altercations to more serious incidents like school shootings. The prevalence of school violence creates a climate of fear and anxiety, disrupting the learning process and impacting student well-being. This also includes online threats, which can quickly escalate and create widespread panic.
- **Bullying (Including Cyberbullying):** Bullying, whether physical, verbal, or emotional, continues to be a pervasive problem in schools. Cyberbullying, facilitated by technology, extends bullying beyond the school day and can have devastating effects on victims. This includes harassment, intimidation, and discriminatory behaviors targeting students based on protected characteristics.
- **Mental Health & Youth Suicide:** Students are facing increasing rates of anxiety, depression, and other mental health challenges. These issues can manifest in many ways, including increased school absences, academic concerns, behavioral challenges, and social isolation. Untreated mental health concerns can also increase the risk of self-harm and suicidal ideation.
- **Social and Emotional Needs:** Many students experience social and emotional challenges that hinder their ability to fully engage in school. These can include difficulty with self-regulation, managing emotions, building healthy relationships, and resolving conflicts.

- **Disparities and Inequities:** such as students of color, students who identify as LGBTQ2SIA+, students living with disabilities, and students living in out of home settings, often face disproportionate rates of bullying, harassment, and disciplinary action. Addressing these disparities is crucial for creating truly inclusive schools.
- **Lack of Resources and Support:** Schools often struggle with limited resources, including funding for mental health services, staff turnover, ongoing training, and prevention and support programs. This lack of resources can make it difficult to implement and sustain effective prevention and intervention strategies.
- **Impact of External Factors:** Societal issues such as poverty, violence in the community, and access to firearms can significantly impact school safety and student well-being.

Opportunities

Despite these challenges, there are significant opportunities to create positive changes:

- **Evidence-Based Practices:** Research has identified numerous effective strategies for promoting school safety and inclusion, including Social-Emotional Learning (SEL), Culturally Responsive Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (CR-PBIS), Restorative Justice, Trauma-Informed Practices, and Culturally Responsive Practices. Implementing these evidence-based approaches can significantly improve school climate and student outcomes.
- **Collaboration and Partnerships:** Strong partnerships between schools, families, community organizations, mental health providers, and law enforcement are essential for addressing school safety and inclusion comprehensively. These partnerships can provide access to additional resources, expertise, and support.
- **Focus on Prevention:** Proactive prevention efforts, such as solidifying tier 1 school-based climate and culture supports for bullying prevention, ensuring [Oregon K-12 Health Education Standards](#) are taught in classrooms, and promoting mental health awareness campaigns can help to address problems before they escalate.
- **Data-Driven Decision Making:** Using data from surveys, referrals, assessments, or empathy interviews to monitor school climate, student behavior, and the effectiveness of interventions can help schools to make informed decisions and continuously improve their practices. School and district teams monitoring disproportionality in behavior data can make informed decisions regarding students' experiences and necessary systemic changes to increase opportunity and access to universal supports and tiered interventions.
- **Emphasis on Positive School Climate:** Creating a positive school climate characterized by respect, trust, and belonging is crucial for promoting student well-being and

preventing violence and bullying. By utilizing strategies in [Oregon's Student Success Plans](#) in addition to TSEL standards and practices, schools can create safe school and classroom environments for every student to thrive.

- **Leveraging Technology Responsibly:** While technology presents challenges, it can also be a powerful tool for promoting safety and inclusion. For example, schools and districts can promote the [SafeOregon Tip Line](#), providing students with a confidential online reporting system to report bullying or threats. Teaching online safety, including keeping personal information private, sharing media including photos, and accessing appropriate content and platforms is essential for all students.
- **Investing in Staff Training and Professional Development:** Equipping school staff with the knowledge and skills to address issues of safety, belonging, and suicide prevention is essential. This also includes training on topics such as cultural competency, trauma-informed practices, and crisis intervention.
- By acknowledging the challenges and actively pursuing the opportunities, schools can create learning environments where all students feel safe, supported, and empowered to succeed.

Key Principles

Prioritizing the holistic well-being of every student is paramount to creating safe and inclusive schools. This requires commitment to key principles that address their diverse needs and experiences. The following principles—Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Practices, Social-Emotional Learning (SEL), Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS), Restorative Justice, Trauma-Informed Practices, and Universal Design for Learning (UDL)—offer a roadmap for fostering environments where all students can thrive academically, socially, and emotionally.

Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Practices

This goes beyond simply acknowledging diversity. It involves actively embracing and valuing the diverse backgrounds, cultures, languages, and experiences of all students. Key elements include:

- **Culturally Relevant Curriculum:** Integrating diverse perspectives, histories, and contributions into the curriculum. This helps students see themselves reflected in the learning materials and fosters a sense of belonging.
- **Culturally Responsive Teaching:** Adapting teaching methods to meet the diverse learning styles and needs of students from diverse cultural backgrounds. This includes understanding cultural communication styles, incorporating students' cultural

knowledge into lessons, and creating a safe space for students to share their experiences.

- **Inclusive School Environment:** Creating a welcoming and inclusive school environment where all students feel respected and valued. This includes celebrating cultural events, providing resources in multiple languages, and ensuring that school policies and practices are equitable for all students.
- **Diverse Staffing:** Hiring and retaining diverse staff that reflects the student population. This provides students with role models and mentors who understand their cultural backgrounds and experiences.
- **Professional Development:** Providing ongoing professional development for staff on cultural competency, culturally responsive teaching, and implicit bias.

Transformative Social-Emotional Learning (TSEL)

[Oregon's Transformative SEL Framework](#) is intended to enact ORS 329.045 and help build capacity for strengthening equity-focused school cultures that support student and adult wellbeing. A focus on Transformative SEL enables students and adults to be affirmed in their identities, where they can develop a sense of agency and belonging, engage in collaborative problem-solving, and deepen their curiosity about the kind of society they want to make a reality. [The Guiding Principles](#) are the foundational values and beliefs that guide decisions about implementing Transformative Social Emotional Learning (TSEL). They are:

- Culturally Responsive
- Community Responsive
- Strengths-Based
- Trauma-Informed
- Grounded in Neuroscience and the Science of Learning

Culturally Responsive Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (CR-PBIS)

[CR-PBIS](#) is an evidence-based implementation of PBIS that requires all systems and interventions to be culturally responsive to the communities they serve. Foundational PBIS includes proactive, systems-level approach to creating positive school climates, teaching expected behaviors, and providing tiered supports to students. The core components in CR-PBIS are:

- **Identity:** Educators exercise identity awareness and be conscious of how they influence their classroom and school each day. This includes their identity as well as the identities of students, school staff, families, and the community.
- **Voice:** Provide meaningful and authentic opportunities for students, families, caregivers and community voices to be heard within the school system, including reaching out for engagement in decision making and school involvement.
- **Supportive Environment:** Understand that school expectations are a framework for teaching desired behavior and not a system which discipline is enforced. Staff and students understand the vision of the school, holding each other accountable to achieving that goal. This can include the use of acknowledgement and reinforcement but understands that staff's obligation is to reteach desired behaviors.
- **Situational Appropriateness:** Determine behavior that will lead to positive outcomes in different settings and utilize those skills with fluency. Instruction on behavior should be context-specific, clearly explaining when and where expectations may change (for example, between the playground and library, or the hallway and math class), while also considering the cultural dynamics of students, staff, and both home and school environments.
- **Data for Equity:** Culturally responsive and supportive school systems understand the importance of disaggregated data for analysis and action planning regarding equity and foundational students supports.

Restorative Justice

Restorative justice is a philosophy and set of practices that focus on building and strengthening relationships and repairing harm in community rather than traditional disciplinary practices and exclusionary discipline. It emphasizes accountability, empathy, and community involvement.

Key principles of restorative justice include:

- **Relationship Building:** Proactively building and strengthening relationships between individuals and within the community. Restorative practices can include utilizing affective language, affective and restorative questions, restorative conversations or impromptu dialogue, community building circles, responsive circles, listening circles, peer mediation and dialogue, and restorative conferencing.
- **Opportunity for Voice and Community Connection:** The wider school community can have input, voice, and opportunity to shape the way schools interact with families, caregivers, and community partners through listening circles, restorative dialogue, conferencing and relationship building events.

- **Focus on Addressing and Healing from Harm:** Addressing the harm caused in community by exploring the conditions that created the context for harm and coming to agreements rather than simply relying on traditional disciplinary measures, specifically exclusionary discipline.
- **Accountability:** Holding those who have caused harm accountable for their actions and encouraging them to take responsibility for repairing the harm they have caused.
- **Ensuring Those Who Have Caused Harm Continue to be Connected and Supported in Community:** Ensuring safety and healing for those who cause harm by creating conditions for community connection rather than exclusion.
- **Community Involvement:** Involving the community in the restorative process. Strengthening relationships in the community promotes accountability and healing. Furthermore, community involvement creates networks of support, open lines of communication, and continuous feedback loops for improvement.

Trauma-Informed Practices

Trauma-informed practices recognize the widespread impact of trauma on individuals and communities and seek to create safe and supportive environments that promote healing and resilience. Key principles of trauma-informed practices include:

- **Safety:** Creating a physically and emotionally safe environment.
- **Trustworthiness and Transparency:** Building trust and transparency between students and staff.
- **Peer Support:** Providing opportunities for peer support and connection.
- **Collaboration and Mutuality:** Working collaboratively with students and families.
- **Empowerment, Voice, and Choice:** Empowering students and giving them a voice in their education.
- **Cultural, Historical, and Gender Issues:** Addressing cultural, historical, and gender issues related to trauma.

Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

UDL is a framework for designing learning experiences that are accessible and engaging for all students, regardless of their learning styles or needs. It is based on three principles:

- **Multiple Means of Representation (the "what" of learning):** Providing information and content in multiple ways to accommodate different learning styles.
- **Multiple Means of Action and Expression (the "how" of learning):** Providing students with multiple ways to demonstrate their learning.

- **Multiple Means of Engagement (the "why" of learning):** Providing students with multiple ways to engage with the learning material and stay motivated. UDL emphasizes flexibility and choice in learning, allowing students to learn in ways that work best for them.

Strategies for Creating Safe and Inclusive Schools

Creating safe and inclusive schools requires a multi-tiered approach that addresses school climate, policies, the physical environment, and community partnerships. This section outlines key strategies aligned with Oregon's focus on equity and student well-being as defined in [Oregon's Equity Lens](#), providing examples and referencing relevant state resources and initiatives such as OHA's [Oregon Student Health Survey](#), ODE's [Every Student Belongs](#) Initiative, community partners such as [SafeOregon](#), and codified laws in the Oregon Revised Statutes related to school safety, bullying, and suicide prevention.

School Climate

1. **Conduct Regular Climate Surveys:** To assess school climate and promote equity, the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) emphasizes the importance of data collection. The [Student Educational Equity Development \(SEED\) Survey](#) is a comprehensive tool designed to gather data from students statewide, in grades 3-11. The content of the survey varies by grade level. The survey measures student perceptions in four core domains:

- Access to learning resources
- Opportunity to learn
- Self-efficacy
- Sense of belonging

The middle and high school versions of the survey also include questions pertaining to extracurricular engagement and career and technical education. High school versions of the survey further include questions around post-graduation planning. The survey is available in multiple languages. The same accessibility supports are available for the SEED survey as on statewide summative assessments. In 2020-21, 2021-22, and 2022-23, schools and districts choose whether to offer the SEED Survey to their students. Beginning in 2023-24, in compliance with HB 2656, districts must make the SEED survey available to all students in grades 3-11 enrolled in Oregon public schools or programs.

SEED Survey information may also help districts develop a fuller picture of their local contexts and make strategic modifications to curriculum, instruction, and para-academic supports that they offer students. The Oregon Health Authority's [Oregon Student Health Survey \(OSHS\)](#) also provides valuable data, particularly on health-related aspects of school climate; however, the SEED Survey offers a more in-depth and equity-focused approach.

Example: Districts using the SEED data to identify trends in bullying, threats to safety, or feelings of overall safety, potential suicide ideation or mental wellness needs, using this data to inform school-wide interventions. Reports using the SEED data are available on the ODE website and provide valuable statewide and district data.

- 2. Promote Student Leadership:** Oregon schools have various student leadership opportunities.

Example: Many high schools have Associated Student Body (ASB) programs, and initiatives like the [Oregon Association of Student Councils \(OASC\)](#) provide resources and training for student leaders. Some districts also have student representatives on school boards. Schools can utilize these and other student groups to create and promote campaigns related to school belonging, inclusion, and acceptance. Relatedly, schools can develop and implement peer mediation programs and other restorative approaches that involve student led initiatives.

- 3. Foster Positive Relationships Between Students and Staff:** ODE emphasizes the importance of positive relationships in their guidance on [Transformative Social-Emotional Learning](#) and trauma-informed practices.

Example: Implementing adult and peer mentoring programs like has been used in some Oregon schools, focused on building strong relationships between students, educators, coaches, staff and mentors.

- 4. Organize Inclusive School Activities:** Oregon schools participate and promote various inclusive activities and community groups.

Example: Cultural celebrations are common in many Oregon schools, reflecting the state's diverse population. ODE also promotes inclusive practices through its work on Every Student Belongs, which addresses issues of bullying and harassment based on protected characteristics.

Policies and Procedures

1. **Develop Clear Policies and Procedures:** Oregon has specific legislation related to bullying, harassment, and suicide prevention that guides district policies.

Example: Oregon Revised Statute (ORS) 339.341 outlines requirements for school districts regarding bullying prevention including policy. ORS 339.343 (Adi's Act) mandates suicide prevention policies and plans. These laws provide a framework for district-level policies. (Source: Oregon Revised Statutes)

2. **Establish Reporting Mechanisms for Incidents:** The SafeOregon Tip Line is Oregon's statewide reporting system to report and respond to school safety issues including bullying, threats of violence, and online safety concerns. They provide [resources for schools](#) for the promotion and use of the tipline as well as [annual reports](#) of tips received.

Example: Schools have access to [curriculum](#) promoting the use of the SafeOregon Tip Line as a confidential reporting mechanism and are notified by tip line staff when a tip is reported. A [toolkit](#) is available to all schools containing campaign materials for reporting online threats which can be used in communication schools and districts put out to the school community. (Source: [SafeOregon](#))

3. **Consistent Enforcement and Follow-Up:** ODE emphasizes the importance of consistent enforcement and restorative practices.

Example: (General but aligned with Oregon's emphasis on restorative justice): Some Oregon districts are implementing restorative justice practices as an alternative, or in addition to, exclusionary discipline, focusing on repairing harm and building relationships.

Physical Environment

1. **Create Safe and Welcoming Environments:** Oregon districts and schools prioritize student wellbeing, belonging, and safety.

Example: Schools work to build and strengthen positive relationships between staff, students, families, and community by implementing student centered expectations and learning objectives in classrooms. Each student has identified a trusted adult in the building who is able to connect with them, ensuring continued supported leading to belonging and mental wellbeing.

2. **Promote Safety and Security:** Schools in Oregon implement various security measures.

Examples: [Oregon Revised Statute 336.071](#) requires schools instruct students on emergency procedures and maintains a comprehensive Emergency Operations Plan. Many schools have security protocols, visitor management systems, and other physical school safety measures in place.

- 3. Ensuring Diversity and Belonging:** ODE's focus on equity and inclusion encourages schools to reflect diversity in their physical environment, through intentional equity initiatives and implementing initiatives such as [Every Student Belongs](#) to ensure acts of racism and discrimination are addressed.

Example: Schools displaying artwork representing diverse cultures and languages and creating inclusive spaces for students from diverse backgrounds.

Community Partnerships

- 1. Collaborate with Community Organizations:** Oregon's schools partner with various community organizations.

Examples: Schools partnering with local mental health agencies to provide mental health services, suicide prevention [training](#), and resources for students and their adults. Collaboration with community-based organizations serving specific populations, such as youth of color or LGBTQ2SIA+ youth.

- 2. Engage Families and Caregivers:** ODE emphasizes family and caregiver engagement through initiatives like Title I and family involvement programs.

Example: Schools hosting culturally responsive family nights and workshops for parents and engaging with parent-teacher organizations to build positive relationships and strong connections.

- 3. Build Relationships with Local Law Enforcement and Other Agencies:** Oregon schools have established relationships with local law enforcement and other agencies.

Example: School resource officers (SROs) are present in some Oregon schools, working to build relationships with students, staff, and families.

Best Practices from the Oregon Department of Education

The ODE Safe and Inclusive Schools Team presentation highlights several best practices, grounded in the School Safety and Prevention System as required under [ORS 339.341](#) and [OAR 581-029-0001](#):

Behavior Safety Assessments (BSAs)

A Behavioral Safety (threat) Assessment (BSA) helps identify situations that may pose a risk of violence or harm, determine the seriousness of that risk, and develop both safety and supervision strategies. BSA teams follow an assessment protocol based on the [SK Cascade Model](#), developed from evidence-based research, while also ensuring the process addresses issues of bias and equity.

A school-based team composed of an administrator, school counselor and/or school psychologist completes the initial assessment of concerning statements or behaviors at the school level. Most safety threats fall within the Level 1 protocol conducted by the school-based team.

When a threat is determined to be viable, the assessment is then escalated to the Level 2 protocol which is carried out by a multidisciplinary, community-based Behavior Safety Assessment Team. The school-based team needs to have completed all steps of the Level 1 assessment and determined the need for a Level 2 consultation before requesting the protocol. Schools can request assistance with Level 2 assessments by partnering with their [School Safety and Prevention Specialist](#).

The Oregon Department of Education is partnering across the state to develop and implement the Oregon Model of Behavior Safety Assessment grounded in the SK Cascade Model of Behavior Threat Assessment Management with a framework for integrating an explicit focus on equity including bias mitigation, inclusive decision making, and a focus on support over discipline. The Oregon Model of Behavior Safety Assessment Promotes the use of an equity lens to ensure responses to student behavior are fair, non-discriminatory, and culturally responsive, while maintaining safety. It combines principles of restorative and transformative justice with strategies for identifying, assessing, and responding to threats that emphasize accountability, healing, community connection, and reintegration rather than punishment or exclusion. Aligning to National Threat Assessment Center and FBI standards, the Oregon Model is endorsed by John Van Dreal and recognized/backed by [PACE](#). With support from a Bureau of Justice Assistance Students, Teachers and Officers Preventing (STOP) Violence Grant, the Oregon Department of Education will advance a restorative and transformative justice theoretical framework and orientation towards school safety, which posits that culturally responsive and trauma-informed behavioral safety assessment systems integrating transformative and restorative practices will address the full continuum of student mental and behavioral health needs, from individual crisis response and recovery to whole school culture and climate interventions.

Suicide Prevention, Intervention, Postvention (Adi's Act)

Senate Bill 52 ([SB 52, 2019](#)), also known as Adi's Act ([ORS 339.343](#); [OAR 581-022-2510](#)), requires each school district school board to adopt a policy requiring a Student Suicide Prevention plan. Every year, schools and districts make these available to students and the school district community and post them on the district's website.

District suicide prevention plans that are compliant with state requirements provide procedural planning in the areas of prevention, intervention, and postvention, have equity and racial equity centered supports, and include a staff training process that outlines when and how students and families will be referred to appropriate mental health and crisis services.

The administrative rule (OAR 581-022-2510) implementing Adi's Act (ORS 339.343) further requires school districts to ensure supports for all students including LGBTQ2SIA+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender/non-binary, queer/questioning, two-spirit, intersex, asexual, and the myriad other way to describe gender identities and sexual orientations) youth, BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) and tribal communities/members/students, youth in out-of-home settings, youth with disabilities, as well as historically and currently underserved youth. OAR 581-022-2510 is part of the [Division 22 Standards for Public Elementary and Secondary Schools](#). These standards require school district superintendents to report their compliance annually.

Bullying and Harassment Prevention

Oregon law ([ORS 339.351\(2\)](#)) defines “harassment, intimidation, or bullying” as any act that “substantially interferes with a student’s educational benefits, opportunities, or performance, and; Takes place on or immediately adjacent to school grounds, at any school-sponsored activity, on school-provided transportation, or at any official school bus stop; and has the effect of: Physically harming a student or damaging a student’s property; Knowingly placing a student in reasonable fear of physical harm to the student or damage to the student’s property; or Creating a hostile educational environment, including interfering with the psychological well-being of students.” ORS 339.351(1) includes cyberbullying, which it defines as “the use of any electronic communication device to harass, intimidate, or bully.”

The Oregon Department of Education commits to creating safe and supportive educational environments for all students. We strive to empower students, educators, and parents with the tools and knowledge to recognize, prevent, and address bullying, harassment, intimidation, cyberbullying, and sexual violence in schools by fostering a culture of respect, inclusion, safety and empathy. Prevention efforts start by creating a safe, inclusive, and welcoming school

environment where students' identities and differences are recognized and celebrated. This includes the integration of [Oregon's Student Success Plan](#) strategies and classroom [community building](#) efforts in every classroom and across school settings.

Schools can instruct students and engage families and caregivers about the harm of bullying and cyberbullying through integrated initiatives across curriculum and grade levels, national and state awareness months, campaigns to bring awareness to emotional and mental health, and community engagement/learning opportunities. Relatedly, having clear, posted policies and procedures regarding bullying, developed with input from the school community and centered on restorative and inclusive practices, supports a framework of positive school culture.

When issues do arise, a best practice for students to report bullying is to offer multiple, easy-to-access options such as speaking directly with a trusted teacher or administrator, filling out a confidential online form, and/or submitting a tip through Safe Oregon. Instructing students and informing families on these reporting options and providing clear guidance on what to include in a report such as dates, locations, and a description of what happened helps schools respond more effectively. Encouraging open communication, ensuring reports are taken seriously, and following up with students and families about next steps are all important ways schools can build trust and provide meaningful support.

Any bullying complaints in Oregon not involving a protected class, as defined within [ORS 174.100](#) and 339.351, are handled at the local (district) level. For bullying complaints on the basis of protected class, support for students and families is available through districts' [Civil Rights Coordinators](#) and through [ODE's Civil Rights department](#).

Conclusion and Recommendations

Creating safe and inclusive schools requires ongoing commitment and collaboration. This white paper provides a starting point for schools and communities to explore best practices and resources available, like those offered by the Oregon Department of Education. By implementing these strategies, we can create schools where all students can thrive and reach their full potential.

Schools, families, and communities must work together to create safe and inclusive learning environments for all students. We encourage you to explore the resources provided by the Oregon Department of Education and other organizations dedicated to this critical mission.

Without substantial resources and support across diverse areas, achieving safe and inclusive schools remains an unattainable goal. Implementing best practices requires significant investment in six key necessities: funding, school and district staff (qualified and diverse staff), professional development, collaboration and partnerships, data collection and evaluation, and

supportive policies and systemic changes. This crucial investment is not simply an expenditure; it is the foundation upon which we must build to ensure equitable opportunities and positive outcomes for every student.

Adequate and sustained funding

Adequate and sustained funding is essential for creating safe and inclusive schools. Without sufficient financial resources, schools cannot effectively staff programs, provide professional development, or acquire the necessary materials to support all students. Funding is necessary for:

- **Staffing:** Oregon's School Safety and Prevention Specialists ensure support within the School Safety and Prevention System and provide assistance and training to all schools, districts, private/alternative schools, and any non-profit that supports youth-centered activities for public school students. Full funding should be secured for this program as a foundational necessity to school safety and wellness for Oregon students and educators.
- **Professional Development:** Providing ongoing training for all staff on suicide prevention each year, ongoing training for new and returning staff on Behavior Safety Assessment, as well as topics like cultural awareness, trauma-informed practices, restorative justice, developmentally appropriate behavior, and employee wellness.
- **Curriculum and Materials:** Purchasing culturally relevant and sustaining curriculum materials, as well as resources to support diverse learning needs.
- **Mental Health Services:** Funding mental health screenings, counseling services, and partnerships with community mental health providers.

School and District Staff

The presence of qualified and diverse staff is essential for creating a welcoming and supportive learning environment. Educators and support personnel who are culturally competent, trained in relevant practices, and representative of the student body are crucial for fostering a sense of belonging and addressing the diverse needs of all students.

Qualified and Diverse Staff who are:

- **Culturally Competent:** Understand and respect diverse cultural backgrounds and experiences.
- **Trained in TSEL and Trauma-Informed Practices:** Equipped to support students' social-emotional needs and address the impact of trauma.

Best Practices for School Safety and Prevention in Schools

- **Skilled in Restorative Practices:** Able to build and strengthen relationships and facilitate restorative conversations, circles, and conferences.
- **Knowledgeable about UDL:** Capable of designing inclusive learning experiences.
- **Representative of the Student Population:** Reflecting the diversity of the student body in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, language, and other characteristics.

Dedicated School Staff:

- **School Safety Staff:** Provide access and support for school-based Behavior Safety Assessment teams, can identify pathways to violence, and are also trained in the areas of Emergency Management Sexual Incident Response, and Crisis Management
- **School Counselors and Social Workers:** Providing mental health support, suicide risk assessments, counseling, and crisis intervention.
- **Special Education Staff:** Supporting students with disabilities and ensuring access to appropriate accommodations and services.
- **Equity Coordinators or Specialists:** Leading school-wide efforts to promote equity and address disparities in discipline and school/district systems.

Professional Development and Training

Ongoing and comprehensive professional development equips all school personnel with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to implement best practices for safety, prevention, and wellbeing. This continuous learning ensures that staff are prepared to address the evolving needs of students and create culturally responsive and trauma-informed learning environments.

- **Behavior Safety Assessment (BSA):** District and School staff who are involved in BSA need ongoing training and practice to refine practices. Any new staff need training, preferably in the beginning of the year before any referrals are made to the school team.
- **Suicide Prevention, Intervention, and Postvention:** Recognizing warning signs and providing appropriate support. [Recommended trainings](#) vary based on school staff's role.
- **Bullying Prevention and Intervention:** Implementing effective strategies to prevent and address bullying.
- **Cultural Competency and Implicit Bias:** Understanding and addressing their own biases and creating culturally responsive classrooms.
- **Social-Emotional Learning (SEL):** Implementing SEL programs and integrating TSEL into classrooms and curriculum throughout K-12.

- **Trauma-Informed Practices:** Recognizing the signs of trauma and creating supportive learning environments for all students.
- **Restorative Justice:** Building and strengthening relationships and facilitating restorative conversations, circles, and conferencing.
- **Universal Design for Learning (UDL):** Designing accessible and engaging learning experiences.

Collaboration and Partnerships

Strong collaboration and partnerships between schools, families, caregivers, community organizations, and other partners are vital for creating a comprehensive support system for students. These partnerships leverage external resources, expertise, and perspectives to enhance school-based efforts and create a more integrated approach to student well-being.

- **Strong Partnerships with Families and Caregivers:** Schools need to actively engage families and caregivers in school activities and decision-making.
- **Collaboration with Community Organizations:** Partnering with community organizations can provide access to additional resources and support.
- **Relationships with Local Law Enforcement and Other Agencies:** Establishing clear communication protocols and working collaboratively with law enforcement, social services, and other agencies.

Data Collection and Evaluation

Robust data collection and evaluation systems are crucial for monitoring progress, identifying areas for improvement, and ensuring accountability in creating safe and inclusive schools. By collecting and analyzing data on school climate, student behavior, and the effectiveness of interventions, schools can make informed decisions and continuously improve their practices.

- **Regular Data Collection:** Schools need to collect data on school climate, student behavior, and the effectiveness of interventions.
- **Data Analysis and Use:** Using data to inform decision-making and continuously improve practices.
- **Evaluation of Programs and Initiatives:** Regularly evaluating the effectiveness of implemented programs and initiatives.

Policy and Systemic Support

Supportive policies and practices at the district, school and classroom levels are essential for establishing a framework for safe and inclusive schools. Policies should promote equity, address

systemic barriers, and provide clear guidance for schools in implementing best practices in school safety and prevention while also ensuring accountability.

- **Supportive Policies at the District Level:** Policies should support the implementation of best practices for safe and inclusive schools.
- **Systemic Changes:** Addressing systemic inequities and barriers that contribute to disparities in student outcomes.

Creating safe and inclusive schools requires prioritizing investments across six key areas: adequate and sustained funding, qualified and diverse staffing, comprehensive professional development, robust collaboration and partnerships with families and the community, rigorous data collection and evaluation systems, and supportive policies and systemic changes. Recognizing the complexities of integrated funding models, where resources often support multiple interconnected goals, and the local control that empowers districts to allocate funds based on their unique needs, the focus should shift from solely tracking discrete program spending to demonstrating the impact of investments on student outcomes within these six key areas. This shift in focus acknowledges the reality that funds allocated for chronic absenteeism, for example, might also contribute to improved academic achievement, reduced disciplinary incidents, and an improvement in school safety. Therefore, transparent reporting on resource allocation and the resulting outcomes—such as improved student well-being, reduced bullying incidents, increased academic engagement, and enhanced cultural responsiveness—ensures accountability and provides a more accurate picture of the overall investment in creating safe and inclusive learning environments.

By clearly demonstrating how investments in these six key areas translate into positive changes for students, schools, districts, and education service districts can build public trust, secure continued support, and create a strong foundation where every student feels a sense of belonging, is valued for their unique contributions, and is empowered to thrive academically, socially, and emotionally. This outcome-focused, transparent approach is not simply an expenditure; it is a strategic investment in a stronger, more just future for all Oregon Students, contributing to safe and engaged communities and a more equitable society.

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