



WISCONSIN STATE LEGISLATURE

Joint Audit Committee

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NEWS RELEASE
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
December 18, 2019

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Audit Examines School Safety Grants, Plans, and Best Practices

MADISON – Today, the nonpartisan Legislative Audit Bureau (LAB) released its audit of School Safety Grants and Plans (report 19-28). 2017 Wisconsin Act 143 appropriated \$100 million to the Department of Justice (DOJ) in fiscal year 2018-19 for awarding school safety grants to school districts, private schools, independent charter schools, and tribal schools. In 2018, DOJ awarded \$94.5 million in 1,325 school safety grants, and had reimbursed grant recipients \$35.8 million as of mid-July 2019. LAB reviewed DOJ’s files for a sample of 70 grants that totaled \$17.6 million, or 18.6 percent of the total amount of all grants awarded. LAB found that DOJ had appropriately administered and overseen these 70 grants.

Act 143 modified the requirements for school safety plans and required each school district and private school to submit its school safety plan to DOJ before January 1, 2019. LAB reviewed all 779 school safety plans that school districts, private schools, and independent charter schools had submitted to DOJ as of mid-April 2019. LAB found that most of the plans contained information about at least six of the seven types of school safety guidelines and procedures required by statutes, but that a number of plans contained relatively little information pertaining to certain guidelines and procedures.

“When we passed the school safety bill last session, we wanted to give schools resources that would help with their most pressing safety concerns and create a framework that would allow for ongoing review and improvement of school safety plans,” said Representative Samantha Kerkman (R-Salem Lakes). “As a mother of two boys in Wisconsin schools, I am acutely aware of the direct impact this has on the safety of our kids. This report is not only our first look at how those dollars have been spent, but also provides a path forward to help schools with their plans and make sure Wisconsin students are benefitting from best practices.”

To determine best practices for school safety, LAB reviewed DOJ’s online resources and documents from around the nation. LAB’s review of all 779 school safety plans found a number of examples of best practices in emergency prevention and mitigation, emergency preparedness, emergency response, emergency recovery, school safety assessments, school safety drills, and school building blueprints. Today, LAB directly distributed report 19-28 to every school district and school that was in operation in Wisconsin as of June 2019.

“This is a great example of a functional audit. In distributing this report around the state, LAB’s review of best practices in all of the submitted school safety plans will further help other schools refine and improve their school safety plans into the future. I believe that the items for legislative consideration would further improve and strengthen this program by adding accountability and continuous review of the school safety plans,” said Senator Robert Cowles (R-Green Bay).

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LAB surveyed 1,210 school administrators of all school districts, private schools, independent charter schools, and tribal schools about school safety issues. Most school administrators who responded indicated they were satisfied with the cooperation received from external entities when they created their school safety plans and with their school safety grants. LAB also surveyed 521 local law enforcement agencies about school safety issues. The agencies that responded indicated they were more satisfied with various aspects of school safety at school districts than at private schools. LAB recommends that DOJ use these survey results to consider ways to provide school districts and schools with additional training and support pertaining to school safety issues.

Copies of LAB's report (report 19-28) may be obtained from its website at www.legis.wisconsin.gov/lab or by calling (608) 266-2818. Report concerns related to state government activities to LAB by calling the toll-free hotline at 1-877-FRAUD-17.

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