



REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

Report 19-28
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School Safety Grants and Plans

2017 Wisconsin Act 143, which was enacted in March 2018, created the Office of School Safety in the Department of Justice (DOJ). Act 143 appropriated \$100.0 million to DOJ in fiscal year (FY) 2018-19 for awarding school safety grants to school districts, private schools, independent charter schools, and tribal schools. All school districts and schools in Wisconsin, other than virtual schools, were eligible for these grants.

School districts and private schools were statutorily required to create school safety plans before enactment of Act 143. However, Act 143 requires them to include additional information in their plans and to submit copies of these plans to DOJ before January 1, 2019, and then before every January 1 thereafter. As of mid-April 2019, 61.5 percent of school districts, private schools, and independent charter schools had submitted a total of 779 school safety plans to DOJ.

To complete this evaluation, we:

- analyzed DOJ's administration and oversight of school safety grants;
- reviewed all 779 school safety plans submitted to DOJ as of mid-April 2019 and determined the extent to which these plans contained information on several key statutory requirements and contained best practices for school safety; and
- surveyed all school districts, private schools, independent charter schools, and tribal schools, as well as local law enforcement agencies in Wisconsin, about their opinions regarding school safety issues.

School Safety Grants

All school districts and schools in Wisconsin, other than virtual schools, were eligible to apply for school safety grants. In 2018, DOJ awarded \$94.5 million in 1,325 school safety grants to school districts, private schools, independent charter schools, and tribal schools. DOJ awarded at least one grant to 99.5 percent of school districts, approximately 49.9 percent of private schools, 50.0 percent of independent charter schools, and 100.0 percent of tribal schools. As of mid-July 2019, DOJ had reimbursed grant recipients \$35.8 million. Most of the grants remained open at the time of our audit.

DOJ plans to spend the remaining \$5.5 million appropriated through Act 143 to support other school safety initiatives, such as providing grants for adolescent mental health training.

Information about how individual school districts and schools intended to use their school safety grants was not readily available. Therefore, we reviewed DOJ's files and determined this information for a sample of 70 grants of the 1,325 grants awarded. These 70 grants totaled \$17.6 million, or 18.6 percent of the total amount of all grants awarded.

Our file review found that almost one-half of the amount awarded to the school districts and schools in our sample was for surveillance and screening items, such as electronic door locks for monitoring or controlling access to schools, school visitor management and screening systems, and video surveillance and video intercom systems. We found that DOJ appropriately administered and oversaw the 70 grants in our file review.

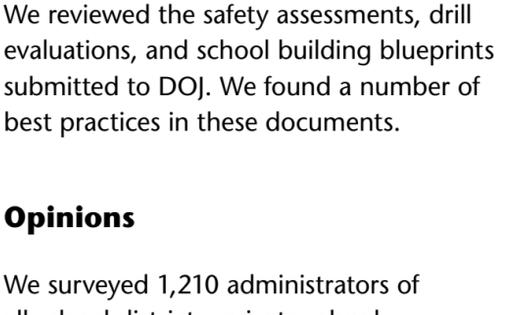
School Safety Plans

As of mid-April 2019, 61.5 percent of school districts, private schools, and independent charter schools had submitted a total of 779 school safety plans to DOJ. The 779 plans included those submitted by:

- 333 of 421 school districts (79.1 percent);
- 438 of 819 private schools (53.5 percent); and
- 8 of 26 independent charter schools (30.8 percent).

Statutes require each school safety plan to include information on seven types of guidelines and procedures. We found that more than 85.0 percent of the 779 school safety plans contained information on guidelines and procedures for school violence and attacks, fires, weather-related emergencies, bomb threats, and intruders. Slightly more than one-half contained information on guidelines and procedures for threats to nonclassroom events and parent-student reunification. Many school safety plans contained relatively little information pertaining to threats to nonclassroom events and parent-student reunification.

Extent to Which School Safety Plans Contained Information on Seven Types of Statutorily Required Guidelines and Procedures¹



¹ Includes 779 school safety plans submitted to DOJ as of mid-April 2019.

Statutes require school safety plans to contain an individualized safety plan for each school building and facility that is regularly occupied by students. Our review of the 779 plans found that 735 plans (94.4 percent) contained individualized safety plans for all school buildings and facilities.

Upon creating a school safety plan, statutes require school districts and private schools to submit copies of the most-recent blueprints of each school building and facility to DOJ. Our review found that blueprints had been submitted by 328 of 421 school districts (77.9 percent), 439 of 819 private schools (53.6 percent), and 8 of 26 independent charter schools (30.8 percent).

Best Practices

To determine best practices for school safety, we reviewed DOJ's online resources and documents from around the nation. To identify examples of best practices for school safety, we reviewed all 779 school safety plans and related documents that school districts, private schools, and independent charter schools had submitted to DOJ as of mid-April 2019. Our review found that the plans contained a number of best practices pertaining to emergency prevention and mitigation, emergency preparedness, emergency response, and emergency recovery.

Statutes require school districts and private schools to:

- conduct on-site safety assessments of school facilities, in consultation with local law enforcement agencies, before creating or updating a school safety plan;
- annually conduct at each school building that is regularly occupied by students at least one drill in the proper response to a school violence event, in accordance with the school safety plan in effect for a given school building; and
- submit school building blueprints to local law enforcement agencies and DOJ.

We reviewed the safety assessments, drill evaluations, and school building blueprints submitted to DOJ. We found a number of best practices in these documents.

Opinions

We surveyed 1,210 administrators of all school districts, private schools, independent charter schools, and tribal schools, as well as 521 local law enforcement agencies, about school safety issues. A total of 427 administrators (35.3 percent) and 331 local law enforcement agencies (63.5 percent) responded to our two surveys. Most school administrators who responded indicated they were satisfied with the cooperation they received from external entities when they created school safety plans and with the school safety grants and the training provided by DOJ. However, most school administrators who responded also indicated that they had unmet school safety needs.

Local law enforcement agencies that responded to our survey indicated that they were more satisfied with various aspects of school safety at school districts than at private schools. Most law enforcement agencies that responded indicated that they had obtained school safety plans and school building blueprints from school districts and private schools.

Recommendation

We recommend that DOJ use the results of our surveys to consider ways to provide school districts and schools with additional training and support pertaining to school safety issues and report to the Joint Legislative Audit Committee by April 24, 2020, on its efforts to implement this recommendation (p. 64).

Issues for Legislative Consideration

The Legislature could consider modifying statutes to:

- require independent charter schools to develop school safety plans and submit them to DOJ (p. 26);
- require school safety plans to be submitted to DOJ every three years (p. 26); and
- require DOJ to annually review a sample of the school safety plans and provide school districts and schools with guidance on complying with statutes and improving their plans (p. 26).

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