

# ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION & EARLY DEVELOPMENT

## RECENT, CURRENT, AND PLANNED EFFORTS TO SUPPORT SCHOOL SAFETY

### Recent Efforts

#### Emergency Operations Plan Technical Assistance

In 2014, DEED received the School Emergency Management Program Grant from the US Department of Education. This grant facilitated a successful partnership between DEED and the State's Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Management (DHSEM) to provide new training, tools and technical assistance opportunities to Alaska school districts based on the federal Guide to Developing High Quality School Emergency Operations Plans. Between 2015 and 2017 DEED increased the number of districts with high quality district emergency operations plans by training and working with 17 of the 54 school districts in Alaska who responded to a statewide invitation for assistance developing or revising their districts emergency plans.

#### Alaska School Emergency Operations Plan Guidebook and Template

DEED in collaboration with the Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Management, worked with stakeholders from across the state to develop a guidebook and template that school districts in Alaska could use to develop an Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) or update their existing EOP's. The template has specific considerations for the unique challenges and circumstances that school districts in many Alaskan communities face with regards to School Emergency Preparedness and Management.

### Current Efforts

#### Alaska Education Challenge

The Alaska Education Challenge has established "Cultivating Safety and Well-Being" as one of 3 of its guiding commitments for education in Alaska. The "Cultivating Safety and Well-Being" commitment will overlay all of DEED's work, and fully intersect with its efforts to advance the other 2 commitments in the coming years. In addition, DEED will promote the Education Challenge's School Safety and Well-Being specific goals of helping all schools become trauma engaged, establishing a more positive school climate for all staff and students, and ensuring the physical and mental health needs of all students are addressed by providing direct access to school nursing and counseling services.

#### Youth Mental Health First Aid

Youth Mental Health First Aid (YMHFA) is a nationally acclaimed evidence-based training designed to teach parents, family members, caregivers, teachers, school staff, peers, neighbors, health and human services workers, and other caring citizens how to informally assess and help or direct to professional help, any adolescent (age 12-18) who may be experiencing a mental health issue like suicidality, substance abuse, anxiety, depression, etc.. DEED has been working in partnership with the Alaska Training Cooperative to offer YMHFA trainings to school personnel and community partners since 2015 and has already trained more than 3000 Alaskans to be Youth Mental Health First Aiders.

#### Superintendent Letter

On February 25, 2018 Commissioner Johnson sent a letter to all Superintendents in response to the school shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida. The letter served as an opportunity for DEED to remind and highlight the available school crisis response preparedness resources and responsibilities for districts in Alaska.

## Recommendations on Student Walkouts

On March 9, 2018 Commissioner Johnson provided Superintendents with a courtesy document outlining recommendations for how to handle Student Walkouts. The recommendations put together by DEED were an adaptation of the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) model guidance. Our hope is that this resource will be useful to districts both immediately, should students engage in walkouts in response to Parkland, and also into the foreseeable future as our students involve themselves in other important civic issues.

## Grants Supporting School Safety

DEED manages state funded school safety initiatives in partnership with the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council and from Behavioral Health, as well as federally supported initiatives from Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) Project AWARE and from the US Department of Education's Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)'s Title IV Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants.

## UPCOMING/PLANNED EFFORTS

### School Safety Gap Analysis

DEED staff will conduct a gap analysis of current school safety efforts and needs. The gap analysis will create a state profile of Alaska's current school safety/emergency response preparedness that will be instrumental in determining if our school safety efforts need to be expanded. If so, the gap analysis will help inform Alaska about which of the elements that comprise comprehensive school safety are in need of strengthening. The results will inform the state's efforts to enhance school safety.

### Researching other Nationally Recognized State School Safety Models

DEED will attend Indiana's annual School Safety Conference in May at the recommendation of the Council of Chief State School Officers and by invitation by the Indiana Department of Education. Indiana, by statute, conducts a robust statewide school safety conference annually that includes designated school safety specialists from every district. This event ensures every district has certified safety experts with training on best practices. DEED will utilize what it learns to inform its fall statewide school safety conference.

### School Safety and Well-Being Summit

DEED is in the initial stages of planning a convening for key stakeholders involved in school safety both locally and statewide. The gathering is tentatively planned for the fall of 2018, and will serve as a space to bring together educational stakeholders from across the state to bolster school safety. DEED, in partnership with other state departments and key stakeholders, will convene the School Safety and Well-Being Summit that includes school safety teams from every district in the state.

### Training for Students

DEED will develop a training resource for schools to enhance student engagement in school safety. This resource will teach students strategies and create safer schools and emphasize their roles and responsibilities in this process. It will encourage students to speak up when they have concerns around school safety and hear of any potential threats of harm. DEED will make this resource available to districts at no cost.

### Updates to DEED's School Safety and Emergency Management Webpage

DEED's school health and safety team is in the process of updating the School Safety and Emergency Management page of the department's website. The updates will better organize the state and national resources available to districts around a variety of school emergency related topics.

## Family Engagement

Alaska will be among 7 states joining a state consortium on family engagement. The Council of Chief State School Officers, in partnership with strategic agencies, will engage the leading experts in family engagement research and practice to assist participating state departments of education in strengthening their family engagement practices and programming. DEED will integrate school safety into this body of work as we understand family involvement must be a cornerstone of any comprehensive effort to bolster student safety.

## Opportunities emerging in Congress' 2018 Budget

### ESSA Expansion of Title IV Part A

The Every Student Succeeds Act Title IV Part A Student Supports and Academic Enrichment Grant Program: Congress just released its 2018 budget which increased Title IV Part A program funding from \$400 million to \$1.1 billion. This should result in an increase of several million dollars for Alaska. Districts can use a significant portion of their Title IV Part A funding for school safety issues like: crisis management, conflict resolution, school based mental health services, trauma-engaged schools, suicide prevention, bullying prevention, and school counseling services. DEED will also see a modest increase in the funding it receives to administer state level Title IV Part A activities which can be safety related.

### STOP School Violence Act 2018

The STOP School Violence Act 2018 will create new competitive school safety grant opportunities for DEED to pursue. Congress included \$75 million dollars in the 2018 fiscal year and authorized \$100 million for the years 2019-2028. (Some funding will be administered by the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services and some by the Bureau of Justice Assistance.) DEED will pursue any state level school funding opportunities it is eligible for. Identified uses for funding include training for school personnel and students to prevent student violence against others and self, the development and operation of anonymous reporting systems for threats of school violence, the development of school threat assessment and intervention teams, specialized training for school officials in responding to mental health crises, coordination with local law enforcement, training for law enforcement officers, and more.