



## School Districts Identify a Variety of Ways to Improve Safety in Schools

### *at a glance*

As required by 2001 legislation, school districts have used a self-assessment process to develop recommendations for corrective action to improve school safety.

Overall, school districts reported meeting an average of 90% of the state's 26 safety and security best practices. However, between 19% and 25% of Florida's school districts reported not meeting or partially meeting the following four best practices:

- establishing accountability mechanisms to ensure performance, efficiency, and effectiveness;
- conducting regular organizational structure reviews;
- identifying personnel who need safety training and providing an appropriate level of safety training for all personnel in the master plan for in-service training; and
- having appropriate equipment to protect property and records.

### Background

This report examines the results of the 2001-2002 self-assessments conducted by each of Florida's 67 school districts.

In 2001 the Legislature and Governor began requiring school districts to conduct annual safety self-assessments. The law often referred to as the Safe Passage Act, required OPPAGA and the Partnership for School Safety and Security to develop the best practices.<sup>1</sup> The Commissioner of Education subsequently adopted these best practices. Divided into six areas, the best practices cover a wide range of school safety goals.

- District safety and security programs are to have clear direction and be effective and efficient.
- Districts are to have comprehensive safety and security plans and procedures.
- Districts are to have a clear code of student conduct that is communicated with students and parents.
- Districts are to identify, minimize, and protect others from disruptive and/or violent student behavior.
- District educational facilities and equipment are safe and in good working condition.
- Districts ensure student and staff safety during transportation.

Each of these goal areas include between 2 and 7 best practices; together there are a total of 26 best practices. For more information on the

<sup>1</sup> [Section 229.8348, F.S.](#)

adopted safety and security best practices see OPPAGA Report No. [01-57](#).

The Safe Passage Act required school districts to conduct self-assessments and superintendents to provide recommendations to their school boards by July 1, 2002. Districts submitted the self-assessment reports to the Department of Education. Reports provided each district's conclusion as to whether or not it met each best practice. The reports also included the strategies and activities each district identified to improve school safety.

To assess the results of the Safe Passage Act, OPPAGA reviewed the 67 school district self-assessments and analyzed each district's conclusion for each best practice.<sup>2</sup> The district reports typically stated whether the district met, partially met, or did not meet each best practice. Districts that did not fully meet a best practice usually provided a list of corrective actions. However, some districts reported meeting a best practice while also including recommendations for improvement.<sup>3</sup> On average, districts met, but still developed recommendations for, 11% of the best practices.

## Findings

---

### ***Districts report meeting an average of 90% of the 26 best practices***

Overall, districts reported meeting an average of 90% of the 26 best practices. However, as shown in Exhibit 1, the proportion of districts reporting they met each best practice varies across the goal areas. For example, a lower percentage of districts indicated they met the efficiency and effectiveness best practices (78%)

while almost all districts (97%) reported meeting the transportation best practices.

Within each goal area, more districts reported meeting some practices than others. Specifically, at least 19% of the districts reported not meeting or partially meeting four best practices.<sup>4</sup>

- Twenty-four percent of districts reported not meeting or partially meeting the best practice requiring establishing accountability mechanisms to ensure performance, efficiency, and effectiveness.
- Twenty-five percent of districts reported not meeting or partially meeting the best practice requiring appropriate equipment to protect property and records.
- Twenty-four percent of districts reported not meeting or partially meeting the best practice requiring their master plan for in-service training to identify personnel who need safety training and provides an appropriate level of safety training for all personnel.
- Nineteen percent of districts reported not meeting or partially meeting the best practice requiring regular organizational structure reviews.

As a result of the self-assessments, districts identified a variety of recommendations for improving school safety. Not every district identified a corrective action for each unmet practice, and some developed recommendations even though they reported meeting the best practice.

---

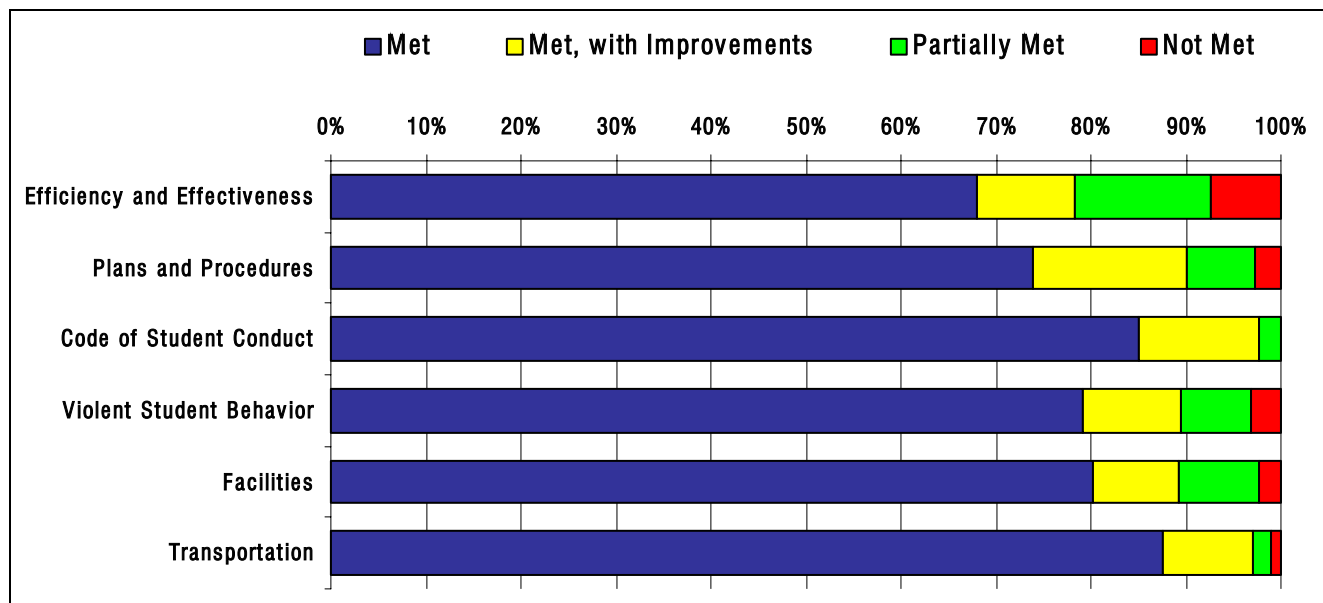
<sup>2</sup> OPPAGA did not review the lab school self-assessments.

<sup>3</sup> In 18 instances, districts did not explicitly state whether they met, partially met, or did not meet a best practice. OPPAGA coded these districts as follows: districts reporting yes on all indicators with no corrective actions were coded as "met," districts reporting yes on all indicators but with a corrective action were coded as "met with improvements," and districts reporting no for all indicators were coded as "not met." Eight districts provided a narrative explanation without specifically saying whether or not they met the best practice. In these situations, OPPAGA used the above criteria to evaluate the explanation.

---

<sup>4</sup> This includes districts that partially met a practice, but did not meet all of the best practice indicators.

**Exhibit 1  
Districts Report Meeting Most Best Practices, But the Percentage Varies by Goal Area**



Source: OPPAGA analysis of school district self-assessments.

***Districts report meeting 78% of Efficiency and Effectiveness Best Practices***

Although the majority of districts indicated having accountability measures to ensure an effective and efficient safety and security program, this goal area showed the largest number of corrective actions.

Twenty-three districts developed corrective actions to improve their accountability mechanisms. Some of these actions include developing effectiveness and efficiency goals and standards, implementing a certification process based on Volusia County’s model, and incorporating this best practice in the district’s strategic plan.

Nineteen districts recommended corrective actions to better review their safety and security programs’ organizational structures and to minimize their administrative layers and processes. These actions included conducting an organizational review, involving teachers and the community in the self-assessment feedback process, and developing safety and security job descriptions with the responsible parties identified.

***Ninety percent of districts report meeting safety planning and procedures best practices***

Although most districts reported meeting the practices in this area, the self-assessments of safety planning and procedures still resulted in a relatively large number of corrective actions.

Twenty-six districts included recommendations in their self-assessments to improve safety training. Common improvements reported by districts involve setting a minimum safety training level for all staff and identifying staff needing additional training, and adding specific safety related training to the master plan.

Also, 25 districts reported plans to improve their step-by-step emergency procedures. These include plans to upgrade the communication system, establish an emergency crisis team, and to ensure that every classroom in the district has an emergency procedures checklist.

***All districts report at least partially meeting the student code of conduct best practices***

All districts reported meeting or partially meeting the code of student conduct best

practices. However, districts still identified a few areas for planned improvement. These included developing policies for the occasions when the Department of Children and Families or law enforcement agencies need to interview students, and establishing professional conduct standards for the use of reasonable force.

***Ninety percent of districts report meeting the best practices regarding minimizing student violent behavior***

Most districts reported meeting these practices. For example, 97% reported having community outreach programs and 96% reported having appropriate violence and drug prevention programs for each school based on the needs identified in the school hazards analysis.

However, 21 districts developed recommendations to improve the hazards analysis of the safety and security issues facing each school. For example, districts recommend corrective actions such as creating or expanding the committee that conducts the district hazards analysis and developing a plan to assist schools in the implementation of the “schools within a school” initiative.

***Eighty-nine percent of districts report meeting facility-related best practices***

Most districts reported meeting the seven facilities best practices. For example, 96% of districts reported meeting the environmental

food safety health best practice and 99% report providing appropriate safety equipment and information to prevent injuries to students and others.

Even so, 22 districts reported plans for improving performance in this area to protect the safety and security of property and records. The corrective actions include providing recovery kits, installing security systems, purchasing fire safes and cabinets, and fencing schools.

***Ninety-seven percent of districts indicated they meet the transportation best practices***

Districts recommended very few corrective actions related to the transportation best practices. This may be partially because much of school transportation safety procedure is codified in rule or law. The most common transportation best practice to receive corrective actions calls for districts to have procedures for an orderly arrival and dismissal process. Three districts plan to renovate driveways and/or loading zones.

## **Conclusion**—————

Florida’s school districts report meeting 90% of the safety and security best practices. The required self-assessments enabled districts to identify actions to help improve school safety and security.

---

OPPAGA provides objective, independent, professional analyses of state policies and services to assist the Florida Legislature in decision making, to ensure government accountability, and to recommend the best use of public resources. This project was conducted in accordance with applicable evaluation standards. Copies of this report in print or alternate accessible format may be obtained by telephone (850/488-0021 or 800/531-2477), by FAX (850/487-3804), in person, or by mail (OPPAGA Report Production, Claude Pepper Building, Room 312, 111 W. Madison St., Tallahassee, FL 32399-1475).

**Florida Monitor:** <http://www.oppaga.state.fl.us/>

Project supervised by Jane Fletcher (850/487-9255)

Project conducted by John Hughes (850/922-6606) and Deanna Bishop

John W. Turcotte, OPPAGA Director