



SNAPSHOT

WHAT'S CHANGING IN SCHOOL SECURITY FOR THE 2023-24 SCHOOL YEAR

October 2023

Linda Wesson | Assistant Director | Linda.Wesson@cot.tn.gov

During the 2023 regular and special legislative sessions, additional funding and requirements for school security were passed. Key changes include new state funding, enforcement of requirements for locked school doors, annual school safety plans, mandatory creation of threat assessment teams, new safety drills, security guard training, and the inclusion of private schools (including church-related schools) for some of the new funding and security requirements.

Funding – \$19 million in state funds for the previous Safe Schools Grant is now folded into the per-pupil base funding allocation in the new TISA formula. In addition, new state funds were appropriated that include:

- \$140 million in recurring state funds for at least one full-time **School Resource Officer (SRO)** in every public school and \$54 million in one-time funds for **school security improvements** – \$40 million for public schools and \$14 million for private schools;
- \$10 million in nonrecurring funds (approved during the special session) for traditional and charter public **schools without full-time SROs** in the 2023-24 school year, intended for areas with a shortage of available SROs;
- \$8 million in recurring state funds to expand the number of school-based **behavioral health liaisons** assigned to selected public schools in each county and who assist with connecting students and parents to mental health services and training teachers on ways to help students with behavioral health issues; and
- \$15 million in recurring funds and \$15 million in nonrecurring funds will expand the number of **Homeland Security** agents (plus support staff and systems) who can assist with school security assessments, threat assessments, and emergency response plans.

School Buildings – Public and private schools are required to ensure that school entrances remain locked at all times, with limited exceptions. Inspections by law enforcement and penalties for violations are prescribed for public schools. New security features are required for any public schools constructed or remodeled after July 2023.

Safety Plans – Also known as Emergency Operation Plans (EOPs), these plans are now required for private schools, and both public and private schools must review and submit them annually to designated law enforcement and/or state authorities. (Public schools were previously on a five-year submission cycle.) The leadership of the State-level Safety Team, which develops the EOP templates that public schools are required to use, has shifted from the Tennessee Department of Education to the Department of Safety.

Threat Assessment Teams – School districts, which previously were authorized to establish threat assessment teams, are now required to do so. The purpose of these teams is to identify and assess potential threats and to intervene to prevent violence and foster a safe, supportive, and effective school environment. The teams, which must include local law enforcement as well as school district staff, now have broader reporting requirements that include state authorities in addition to local boards of education.

Training and Drills – Revised training requirements now mandate active shooter training for any licensed armed security guards at public or private schools. Private schools must conduct an armed intruder drill annually, as public schools already do, and public and private schools must begin annual incident command drills and emergency bus drills.

To read the full report, visit the Comptroller's OREA website at tncot.cc/orea.