

# Keeping Schools Safe

A School Safety Review published by the Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District



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## 1.0 Purpose

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Schools have a responsibility to protect the physical and psychological well-being of their students and staff. This includes creating positive school climates, preventing negative behaviors such as bullying and harassment, and being prepared to respond to potential threats such as weather emergencies, fires, and acts of violence. Recent school shootings have heightened attention to the need for schools to be prepared to prevent and respond to school violence.

This review provides a summary of various school safety protocols and procedures in place at all Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District (MSBSD) schools. The review outlines important strategies and initiatives that will continue to keep schools safe for students, staff, and the community at large. The efforts outlined within this review intend to prevent violence and crime in schools and establish a consistently safe and supportive environment that cultivates student success.

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## 2.0 Review Outline

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This review will begin by providing an overview of past efforts that MSBSD has taken to improve school safety and to inform the community on where we stand as a District today. The review highlights ongoing efforts to improve upon existing systems. Finally, the review will discuss potential future changes and efforts to continue the conversation about what else we can or should do as a District to improve school safety.

MSBSD is continuously evaluating processes, procedures, and needs and implementing incremental changes as appropriate. With this in mind, the review divides efforts into two areas: initiatives and programs that **prevent** school violence and those programs and plans that aim to **prepare** in the event of an incident.



# Perspective on Safe and Healthy Schools

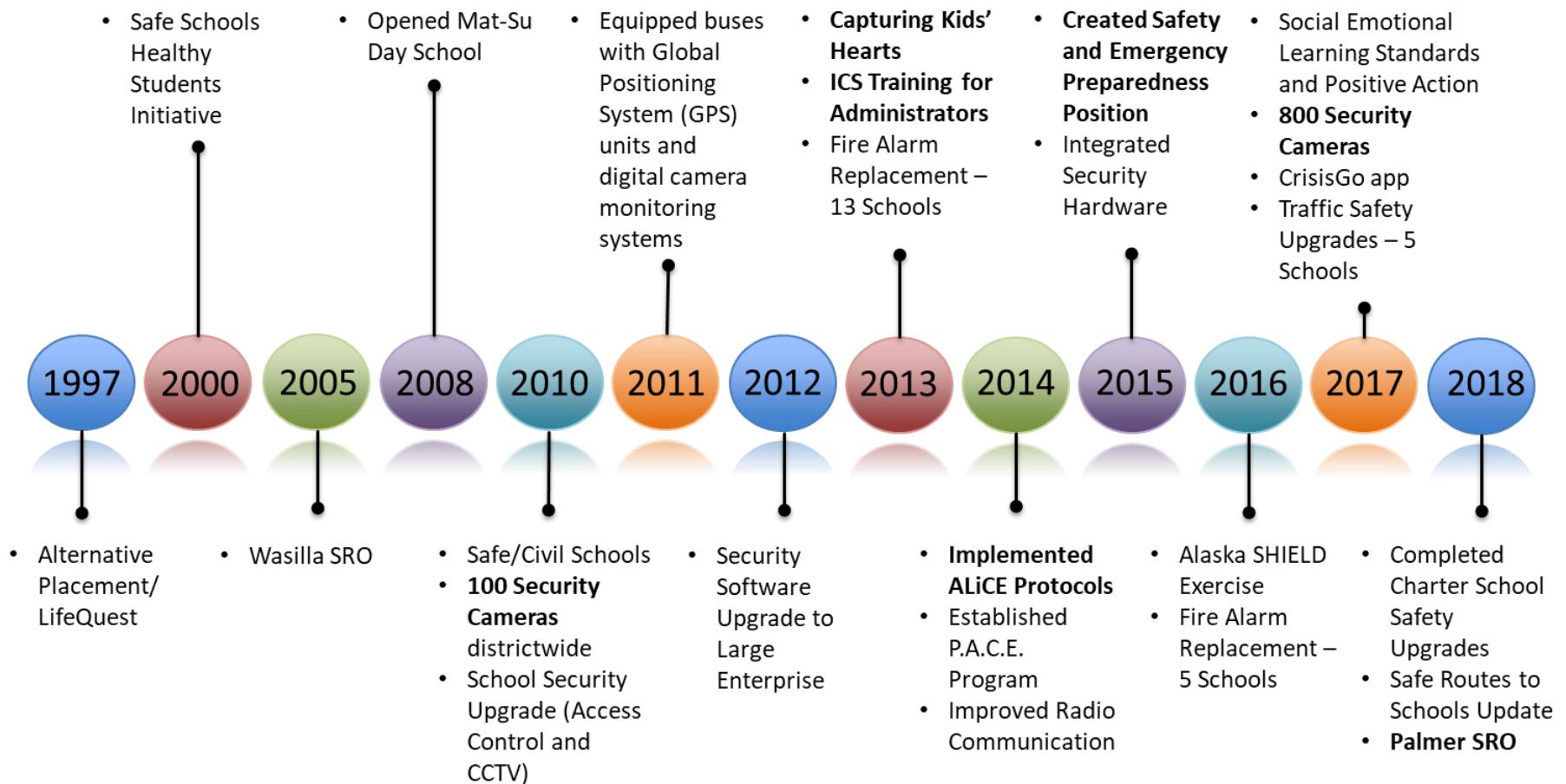


Figure 1: Safety and Security Past Efforts

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## 3.0 Past Efforts

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Figure 1 above illustrates a number of initiatives that MSBSD has undertaken over the past decade or so to improve safety in all schools. The figure highlights significant improvements at the District level and yet does not represent every advancement made in schools across the District.

In 2000, MSBSD formed a community coalition of youth agencies that applied for and was awarded a grant jointly funded from the Departments of Education, Justice, and Health and Human Services. For three years, community agencies partnered with MSBSD to operate a Juvenile Assessment Center, school within a school programs, and multi-hazard emergency planning for schools using a toolkit from FEMA. These efforts increased awareness and capacity for localized, ongoing, multi-faceted school safety planning as part of regular school operations.

MSBSD safety infrastructure, emergency drills, and school safety protocols have all seen significant improvements over the past ten years. Under a 2010 voter approved safety/security bond, MSBSD installed electronic access control and intrusion detection systems districtwide. Additionally, under this bond project, MSBSD increased the number of security cameras on school campuses. Today, over 800 security cameras help keep Mat-Su schools safe by deterring crime and violence on school grounds.

In 2011, MSBSD required First Student to equip all school buses with Global Positioning System (GPS) units and digital camera monitoring systems. Similar to the enhancements made in school facilities, this equipment allows administrators the ability to quickly respond to student discipline issues and ensure a more positive riding experience for all students.

In 2013 and 2014, MSBSD focused its efforts on providing active shooter and incident management training to school principals. All principals were trained in the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) incident command structure, preparing school leaders to serve as incident commanders and improve cooperation with outside agencies.

In 2014, MSBSD adopted the ALICE (Alert, Lockdown, Inform, Counter, Evacuate) protocols for active shooter response training. ALICE training provides a framework for individuals and organizations on proactively addressing an aggressive intruder or active shooter event. ALICE provides options beyond the once traditional lockdown only approach. Improvements to the existing ALICE training model for the 2018-2019 school year will be discussed in section 4.0.



MSBSD's emergency communications systems were further enhanced in 2014. To create redundancies and improve communications with outside agencies, MSBSD deployed emergency radios to all school sites. Schools were equipped with emergency radios programmed for the Alaska Land Radio Management (ALMR) System. The ALMR System is a collaborative partnership between public safety first responders serving citizens of Alaska. In addition to the ALMR radios, schools were issued site-based radios for administrators and key staff to support on-campus communications in the event traditional forms of communications are not available.

Finally, a new position was created in 2015 to help maintain a districtwide focus on all school safety and emergency preparedness efforts. The School Safety and Emergency Preparedness Manager works closely with schools, assisting with emergency drills and conducting facility inspections. This position also serves as MSBSD's liaison with local law enforcement and emergency responders and coordinates training and activities with high school safety and security coordinators to improve the District's capacity to support all schools.

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## 4.0 Ongoing Efforts

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### Prioritizing Social and Emotional Learning in MSBSD

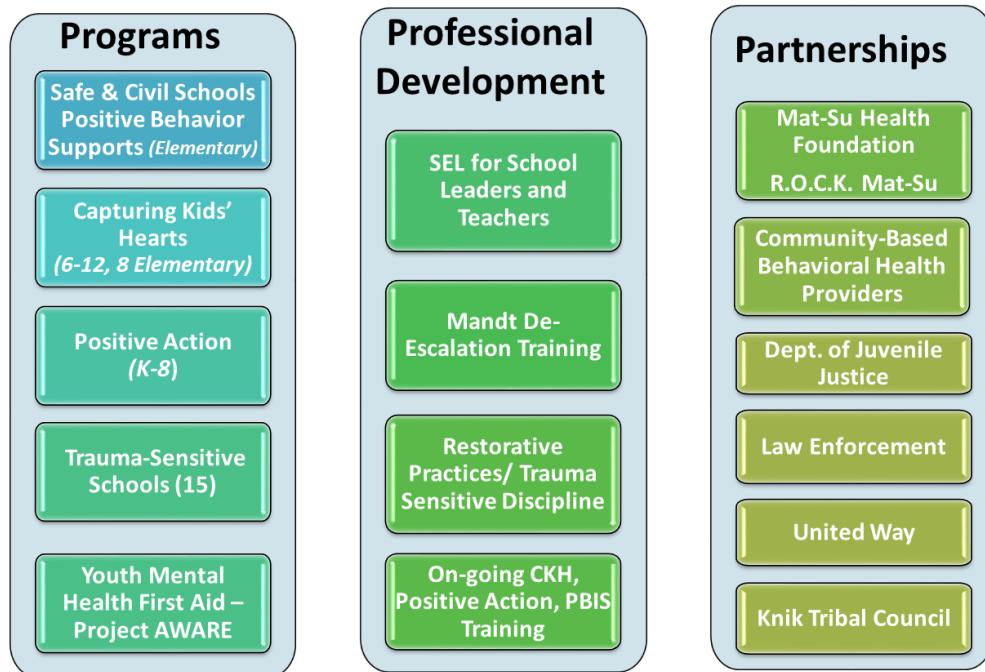


Figure 2: Social and Emotional Learning Framework

#### 4.1 Prevention

Prevention efforts are structured in a multi-tiered system of support. Prevention starts with prioritizing the social and emotional health of all students and staff. If a student is not connected and successful,

the school provides interventions to increase the frequency of adult interactions for both supervision and support. Often schools work with community partners to make appropriate referrals. All schools respond to troubled students in a structured manner, starting with assessment, and followed by placement in the most appropriate setting. This could be a behavior support program in the school or a more restrictive setting off-site.

Social & Emotional Learning Core Competencies



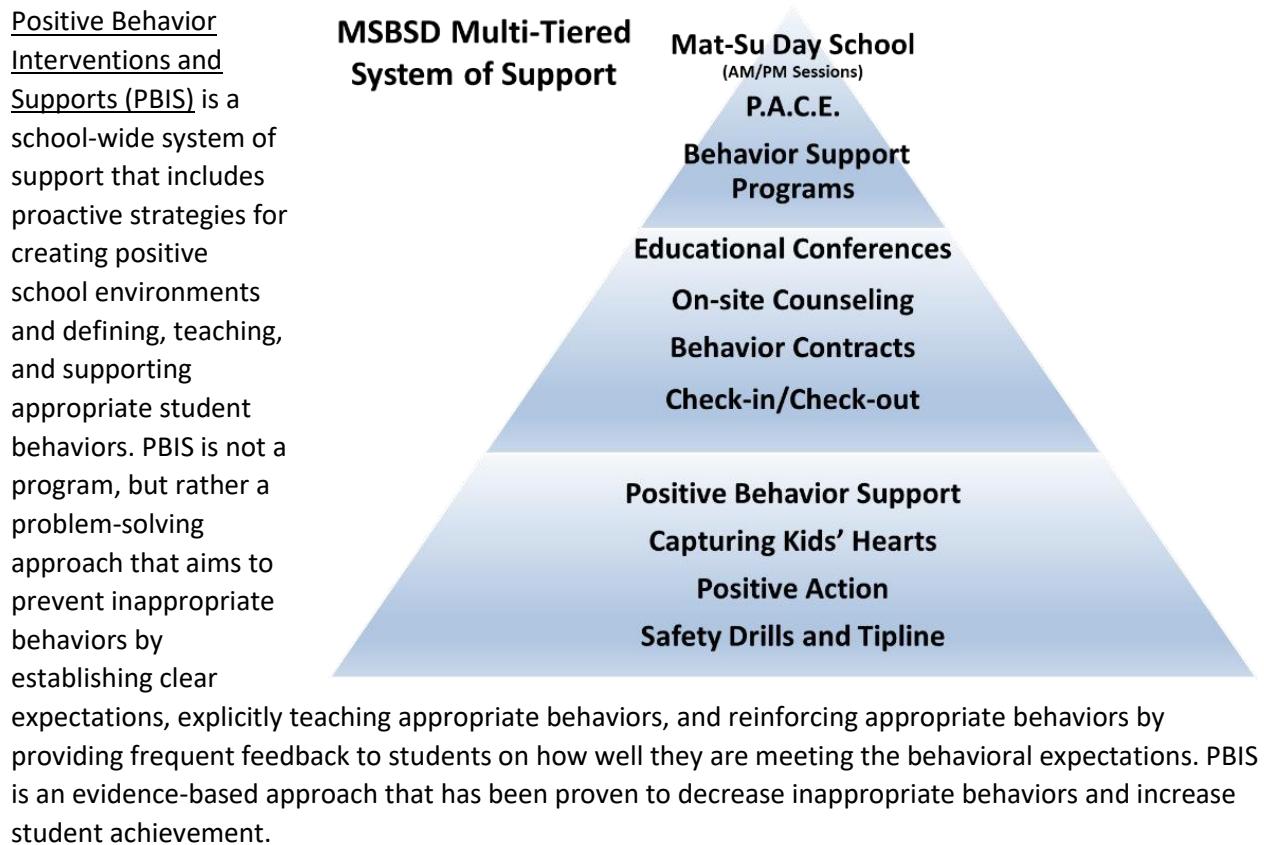
Figure 3: Social Emotional Learning Core Competencies

Each dollar spent on Social Emotional Learning (SEL) can return the equivalent of \$11 in long-term benefits for students, families, and society according to a 2015 study from the Center for Benefit-Cost Studies in Education, Columbia University. SEL is a process of acquiring knowledge, attitudes, and skills related to five core competencies as depicted in Figure 3 above. SEL is taught explicitly through programs such as Positive Action, curriculum and standards, and general practices such as Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS). SEL has been proven to decrease problem behaviors, improve student attitudes about self, others, and school, and increase student achievement. SEL develops job keeping skills, reduces discipline issues, and risk behavior (including drugs and violence), and increases academic achievement. See Figure 4 below for results from a study involving SEL.

## 4.2 Multi-Tiered System of Support

A multi-tiered system of support includes school programs at all 47 MSBSD schools and two more restrictive environments. In MSBSD, we keep students safe through this comprehensive approach, monitoring data to determine effectiveness, and continually evaluating for improvement.

### 4.2.1 Tier 1 Support



Safe and Civil Schools provides professional development, materials, and practical tools to help schools implement Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS). The mission is to help adults create environments that are emotionally and physically safe. The framework fosters independence, integrity, confidence, self-control, kindness, and responsibility for all students. The elements of Safe and Civil Schools include:

- Foundations for school-wide positive routines and expectations
- CHAMPS and ACHIEVE for classroom management
- Start on Time for tardy prevention
- On the Playground for recess safety
- In the Driver's Seat for bus safety
- Smart Kids for intervention teams.

MSBSD has worked successfully with Safe and Civil Schools since 2010 to reduce discipline referrals and improve student safety.

Positive Action (PA) employs evidence-based classroom and whole school curriculum for kindergarten through eighth grades. PA integrates school, family, and community curricula that promote the positive development of the whole child (physical, intellectual, social, and emotional). PA has supplemental curriculum kits for preventing bullying, substance abuse, and violence. Students participate in three PA lessons a week.

### Capturing Kids' Hearts

Capturing Kids' Hearts (CKH) is an adult training and mindset that supports four areas:

- Building relationships with all students and colleagues
- Creating a safe environment for learning
- Developing self-managing classrooms
- Increasing empathy for diverse cultures and backgrounds

MSBSD uses CKH practices with students, teachers, support staff, administrators, bus drivers, coaches, and substitute teachers to create safe and supportive environments that cultivate student success.

MSBSD has experienced a decline in student discipline and increase in graduation rates since CKH implementation. Capturing Kids' Hearts started as a pilot project in 2013 with five schools. Currently all secondary schools and eight elementary schools implement this relationship-building model.

Trauma Sensitive Schools. In partnership with R.O.C.K. Mat-Su, 15 elementary, middle, and high schools have received trauma sensitive professional development, with plans to train 10 additional schools during the 2018-2019 school year. Trauma sensitive practices include supporting all students by encouraging positive behaviors instead of condemning negative behaviors. Further, trauma sensitive practices cultivate safe and supportive learning environments where students feel safe to take academic risks, support their peers, and report at risk students/behaviors to a trusted adult.

Tipline. The MSBSD tipline provides students, staff, and the community an outlet to report any safety concern from bullying to drugs and violence. Reports can be made anonymously. The tipline is available via the MSBSD app.

#### 4.2.2 Tier 2 Support

Check-in/Check-out. This process provides daily contact morning and afternoon with a trusted adult. The focus of the conversation is on student behavior, goals, and emotional support.

Educational Conferences. Free off-site assessments by a school psychologist with referrals made to the appropriate community resources. Students posing a risk to self or others are required to participate in an assessment prior to returning to school.

Project AWARE is a grant for the purpose of improving mental health and making schools safer. The grant started in fiscal year (FY) 15 and ends in FY 19. Three AWARE counselors focus on crisis, educational, violence/conflict resolution, relationship building, and problem-solving interventions. Additionally, counselors partner with community-based providers for grief counseling, acute care, substance-use counseling, and mental/behavioral health therapy. Project AWARE counselors serve as Youth Mental Health First Aid trainers. Youth Mental Health First Aid is a course designed to teach lay people methods of assisting a young person who may be in the early stages of developing a mental

health problem or in a mental health crisis. Since the beginning of the grant, over 727 Mat-Su Borough community members have been trained in Youth Mental Health First Aid.

#### 4.2.3 Tier 3 Support

Positive Alternative for Continuing Education (PACE) provides an alternative to suspensions with meals and transportation. Students engage in online learning for credit recovery and participate with the Department of Juvenile Justice in Tier 3 groups aimed at drug and alcohol abuse intervention and aggression replacement.

Mat-Su Day School offers behavioral, social, and emotional learning in a restrictive, therapeutic environment with an emphasis on academics. Students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) can attend the Day School while suspended. Evening classes are available for students currently expelled from school. Other students with IEPs are placed in this environment based on their need for support.

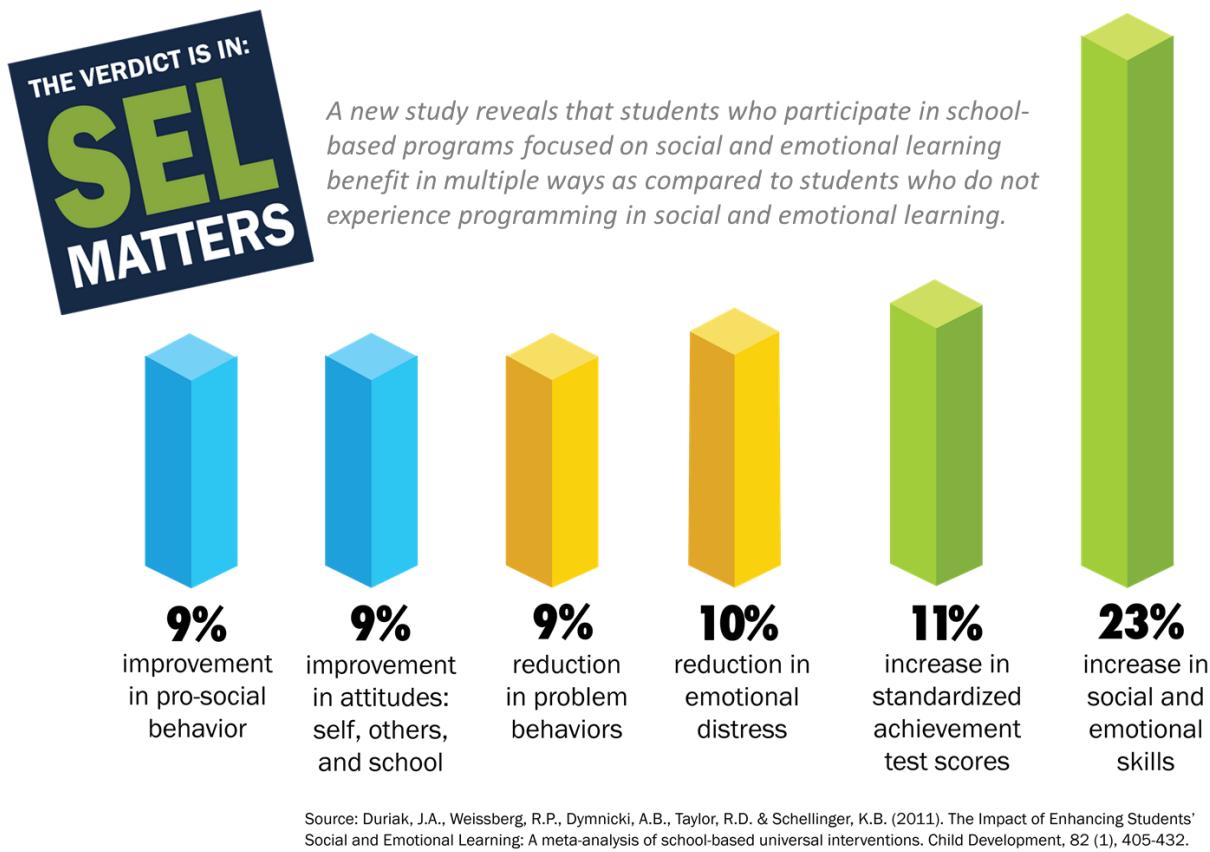


Figure 4: SEL Outcomes

MSBSD recently completed a school climate and culture survey conducted as part of the District's accreditation process. Of those surveyed, 98% of elementary students felt safe at school along with 96% of secondary students. Of the 3,265 parents surveyed, 91% of parents believe their student feels safe at school and agreed that they were welcomed and treated with respect.

## 4.3 Preparedness

As previously discussed in section 3.0, Past Efforts, many processes, procedures, and systems are in place at MSBSD schools to ensure that students and staff are ready in the event of an incident involving school violence.

Figure 5 below illustrates MSBSD's emergency management framework, which includes preparedness, response and infrastructure.

Preparedness includes periodic, recurring site assessments by trained safety and security personnel. During the fall semester of each school year, safety and security personnel complete an annual site assessment of each MSBSD facility, typically alongside the building administrator (principal).

This assessment includes a review of all safety and security measures at schools including drills, communications equipment and various safety and security infrastructure at each site. Shortfalls are annotated and a follow-up is scheduled to address items noted during the inspection. All MSBSD schools complete monthly fire drills and ALICE, bomb, and earthquakes drills each semester. MSBSD employs safety and security coordinators at each large comprehensive high and a School Resource Officer (SRO) at Wasilla High School.

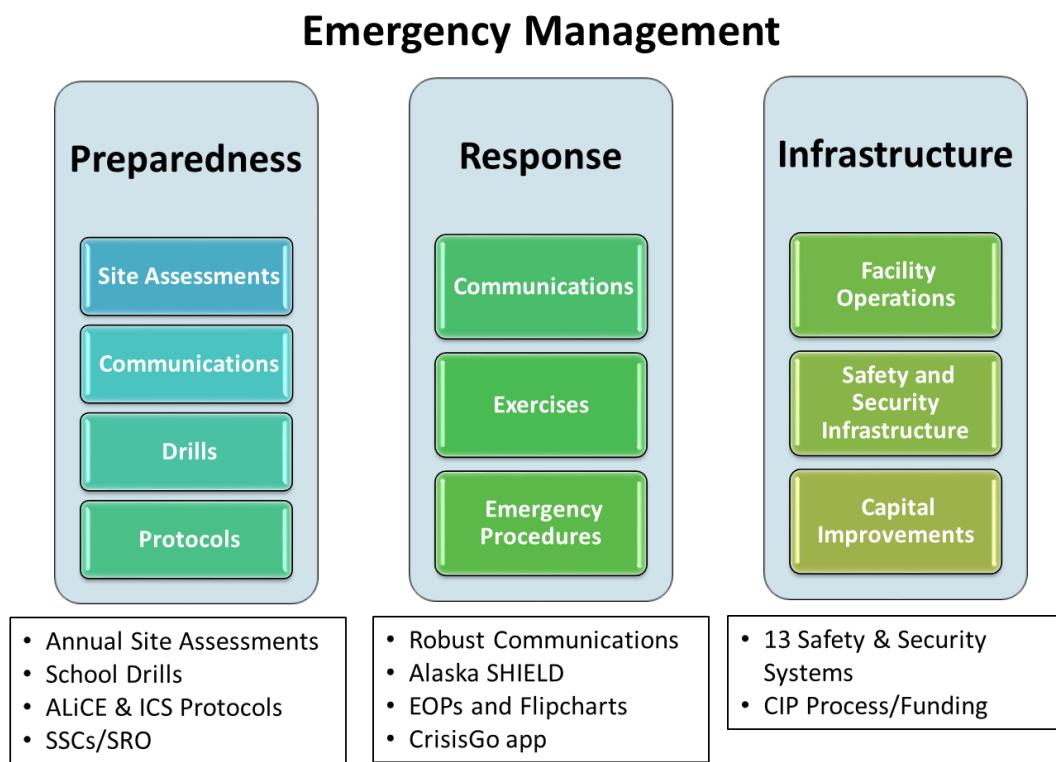


Figure 5: Emergency Management Framework

MSBSD incorporates emergency radio communications at each school site as previously described in section 3.0. All schools evaluate and update campus-specific Emergency Operations Plans (EOPs) annually. These EOPs include evacuation, shelter-in-place, and parent reunification plans. All schools have a crisis response team for emergencies that are critical to executing emergency drills. This past

year, MSBSD launched a new emergency planning and communications platform that puts emergency response plans and contacts on mobile devices and desktops for immediate use. This app provides administrators and staff quick access to emergency response procedures along with the ability to quickly report emergencies, call for help, and stay connected during a crisis.

School safety infrastructure has significantly improved over the past decade. MSBSD implemented and maintains 13 major safety and security infrastructure standards across the district.

1. Keyless access control
2. Intrusion detection system
3. Magnetic holds
4. Duress and lockdown call
5. Security cameras
6. Addressable fire alarm and sprinkler system
7. Intercom
8. Automated external defibrillator (AED)
9. Radio communications
10. Interior roll-down gates
11. Exterior lighting
12. Security fencing
13. Pedestrian and vehicle gates

MSBSD also has an ongoing capital improvement process in place to address new safety and security needs. To help meet capital infrastructure needs, the School Board has authorized \$300,000 in safety and security upgrades over the past two years.

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## 5.0 Future Efforts

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As MSBSD Superintendent, Dr. Monica Goyette, recently stated, "While our mission is the education of all students, school safety is the number one priority for the District." As this review has demonstrated, there are many efforts already in place to foster safe and healthy school environments for students. MSBSD remains committed to sustaining those efforts and best practices while continuing to make incremental improvements.

### 5.1 Prevention

Prevention consists of our efforts in curriculum, relationship building, and disciplinary procedures. This includes our recent initiatives with social emotional learning, specifically Capturing Kids' Hearts at the secondary level and Positive Action at the elementary level. These efforts in prevention will continue in the upcoming school year. Specifically, MSBSD will engage in awareness training to better recognize students at risk to self or others. PBIS foundation teams will be available at all schools with a focus on climate and connectedness.

A cornerstone of school safety is connecting students and families to behavioral health services. MSBSD is partnering with the Mat-Su Health Foundation and behavioral health providers to increase access to behavioral health services for students in schools. Targeted Wellness Grants provide schools with a

toolkit to help at-risk students by paying for initial counseling services from outside providers. Schools help facilitate communication between providers and families by providing a safe space in school for students and their families to meet with behavioral health providers. Five schools piloting this process have demonstrated a decrease in adverse behaviors among at-risk students.

These efforts will continue to bolster safe and healthy schools for all students and staff. In order to evaluate the success of social emotional learning, MSBSD will be looking at key performance indicators around attendance, student achievement, use of restraints, number of discipline incidents, and graduation rates to evaluate success.

## 5.2 Preparedness

### 5.2.1 School Violence Preparedness

MSBSD will be making improvements to our school violence training model this coming school year. As part of ALICE training, staff will be utilizing a new blended learning approach with online learning in conjunction with school drills. This blended model will support training for new employees as well as annual recertification for all other staff as outlined in Figure 6 below. Additionally, MSBSD anticipates notifying parents prior to ALICE drills taking place in their child's school. This notice will include information about ALICE protocols. This communication will help inform parents around what their children are taught and allow them to observe drills, if desired.

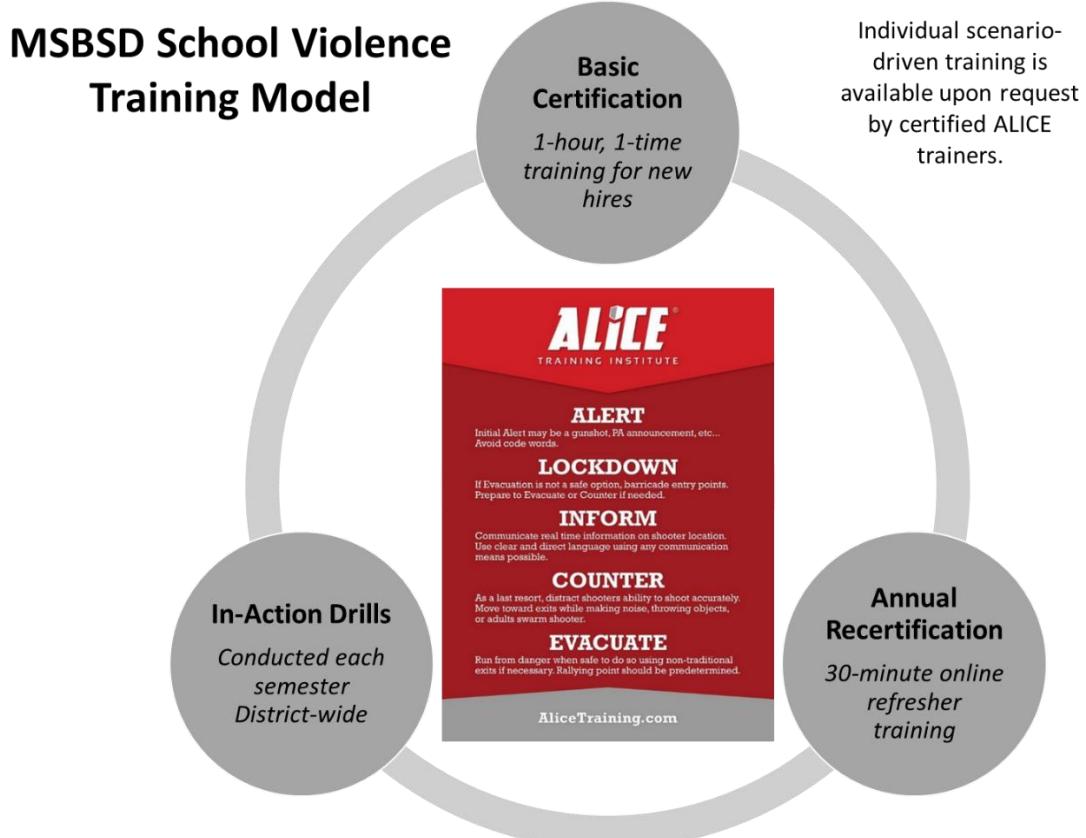


Figure 6: MSBSD School Violence Training Model

MSBSD intends to host an annual forum this fall with local and State responders and agencies involved in school safety. During this forum, participants will engage in a table top exercise (TTX) using a school violence scenario to coordinate with local and State law enforcement and first responders regarding key responsibilities in the event of a school violence incident.

### 5.2.2 Security Measures Under Consideration

MSBSD is currently considering a number of new school security measures. MSBSD staff are coordinating with the City of Palmer for a School Resource Officer (SRO) for Palmer High School as well as surrounding schools within the City of Palmer for the 2018-2019 school year. Additional expansion to the SRO program is being discussed to encompass other schools currently not covered by an SRO.

MSBSD is evaluating a plan for changes to classroom door hardware (locks) as well as changes needed for keeping main entrances locked during normal school hours. Another measure being given consideration is providing front office staff and administrators capsicum (pepper) spray at each school for addressing a violent or aggressive intruder.

### 5.3 Conclusion

Efforts to prevent school crime and violence are varied and, in some cases, multi-tiered to help school officials respond appropriately to any threat. Keeping our schools safe requires ongoing efforts in the way of prevention and preparedness, as outlined within this review. MSBSD is seeking input from community stakeholders regarding school safety and will be looking to continue the conversation moving forward.

MSBSD staff will be providing this review to the School Board at the regularly scheduled meeting on April 4, 2018. Following this update, MSBSD will host a Facebook Live event on April 5, 2018 for the community to discuss school safety. The Facebook Live event will be followed by a school community survey. The school community survey feedback will help to inform the development of short and long term plans to increase our efforts in prevention and preparedness.

For information related to this review, please contact the District office at (907) 746-9200.

