



GEORGIA STATE SENATE

THE FINAL REPORT OF THE SENATE SCHOOL SAFETY STUDY COMMITTEE

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

**Senator John Albers, Chair
District 56**

**Senator Valencia Seay, Vice Chair
District 34**

**Senator Michael Rhett
District 53**

**Senator Kay Kirkpatrick
District 32**

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District 14**

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**Senator Ben Watson
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**Senator Jeff Mullis
District 53**

**Senator P.K. Martin (ex officio)
District 9**

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INTRODUCTION

The Senate School Safety Study Committee was created by the Georgia State Senate in 2018 through the passage of Senate Resolution 935. The Committee was established because children are Georgia's most precious asset, and therefore it is of incalculable importance to ensure that they are educated in secure and positive environments and facilities which allow them to not only learn, but to thrive while doing so.

The Committee examined the current level of safety of Georgia's K-12 schools, and explored possible programs, solutions, and safeguards to strengthen school safety in three key areas:

- The prevention of emergencies at or attacks on our schools from occurring in the first place;
- The physical security of school buildings, facilities, and buses themselves in the case of an actual emergency; and
- The responses of school authorities, state and local law enforcement and emergency services personnel, students, teachers and staff to active emergencies should they occur on campus.

The Committee heard from a range of speakers including students, teachers, parents, school officials, local and state law enforcement, emergency services personnel, and state agency officials, and also received and reviewed written commentary and suggestions submitted by attendees at its meetings held across the state, and on the Committee's website found at <https://www.gasenatek12safety.com/>.

Senator John Albers of the 56th District chaired the Study Committee, and was joined by eight other Senators: Senator Valencia Seay of the 34th, who served as vice chair, Senator Kay Kirkpatrick of the 32nd, Senator Fran Millar of the 40th, Senator Jeff Mullis of the 53rd, Senator Michael 'Doc' Rhett of the 33rd, Senator Bruce Thompson of the 14th, Senator Ben Watson of the 1st, and Senator P.K. Martin of 9th who served as an ex officio member.

Mr. Trey Bennett and Ms. Megan Andrews, of the Senate Research Office, Ms. Ines Owens and Mr. Andrew Allison of the Senate Press Office, and Ms. Natalie Heath of the Senate Budget and Evaluation Office were assigned to assist the Committee.

The Committee held six public meetings: the first, at North Springs High School in Sandy Springs, Cobb County; the second, at Ringgold High School in Catoosa County; the third, at Lee County High School in Leesburg; the fourth, at Chamblee Charter High School in Chamblee, DeKalb County; the fifth, at Islands High School in Savannah, Chatham County; and the sixth, at the State Capitol in Atlanta.

June 8, 2018 — North Springs High School, Sandy Springs, Georgia

At its first meeting, the Committee received testimony from representatives of the Georgia Department of Education, the Fulton County Board of Education, the Sandy Springs Police and Fire Departments, and students, and a representative of a local Parent Teacher Association.

July 13, 2018 — Ringgold High School, Ringgold, Georgia

The second meeting of the Committee featured testimony from the Georgia State Patrol, the Georgia Trauma Commission, the Superintendent of Catoosa County Schools, the Trion and Ft. Oglethorpe Police Departments, the Catoosa County Fire Department, and a parent, teacher, and student.

August 24, 2018 — Lee County High School, Leesburg, Georgia

At the third meeting of the School Safety Study Committee, the members were presented with testimony from representatives of the Georgia Police Academy at the Georgia Public Safety Training Center, the Georgia National Guard, the Georgia Department of Veterans Affairs, the Lee County Sheriff's Office, the Lee County Fire Department, and a local parent, teacher, and student.

September 17, 2018 — Chamblee Charter High School, Chamblee, Georgia

The Committee’s fourth meeting consisted of testimony from the Georgia Bureau of Investigation, the Data Quality Campaign, the Gwinnett County School Superintendent’s Office, the Alpharetta Department of Public Safety, and a local parent, teacher, and student.

October 26, 2018 — Island High School, Savannah, Georgia

At this meeting, the Committee heard presentations from the American Institute of Architects, Mental Health America, the Georgia School Counselors Association, and the Georgia Emergency Management Agency and Department of Homeland Security, along with testimony from a local school administrator, a parent, a teacher, and a student, and representatives from the Chatham County Board of Education Police Department, the Chatham County Police Department, and the Savannah Police Department.

November 13, 2018 — Georgia State Capitol, Atlanta, Georgia

The Committee held its final meeting on November 13th to formally adopt the Final Report and Recommendations.

A Snapshot of Georgia’s Schools

<ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ Number of Public Schools:<ul style="list-style-type: none">❑ There are currently 181 school districts, large and small, across the state containing over 2,200 schools▶ Public School Students:<ul style="list-style-type: none">❑ Approximately 1.7 million students▶ Public School Teachers:<ul style="list-style-type: none">❑ Over 114,800 teachers▶ Pupil Teacher Ratio:<ul style="list-style-type: none">❑ 14.8 pupils per teacher▶ National Average Pupil Teacher Ratio:<ul style="list-style-type: none">❑ 16 pupils per teacher <p>Source: http://www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and-Policy/AskDOE/Pages/Schools-and-Districts.aspx https://www.publicschoolreview.com/average-student-teacher-ratio-stats/national-data</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ Number of Private Schools:<ul style="list-style-type: none">❑ There are approximately 867 private schools across the state.▶ Private School Students:<ul style="list-style-type: none">❑ Approximately 155,404 private school students.▶ Private School Teachers:<ul style="list-style-type: none">❑ Approximately 17,200 private school teachers.▶ Private Pupil Teacher Ration:<ul style="list-style-type: none">❑ 9 students to every 1 private school teacher. <p>Source: https://www.privateschoolreview.com/georgia</p>
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COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

After hearing extensive testimony at five meetings held across Georgia, receiving and reviewing hundreds of suggestions submitted by constituents at meetings and online via the Committee's website, and examining vast amounts of data and information from both state and federal agencies and governments across America, the Senate School Safety Study Committee makes the following recommendations:

Crisis Prevention

- The Committee recommends that a strong priority be placed on the mental health of Georgia's students, and especially upon those who show signs of instability or potential danger to themselves or their peers. The Committee has repeatedly been presented with testimony revealing that counselors currently working in Georgia's schools are often relied upon to provide career and class counseling to students, as well as mental health counseling. Many of these counselors are overwhelmed by the dual responsibilities expected of them and/or are undertrained and even unqualified to provide mental health counseling for troubled or ill students. Therefore, while increased state funding for specialized mental health counselors may be one solution, another potential solution that the Committee would recommend that the Legislature explore, is that of creating legislation which would allow local governments to use ESPLOST funds to hire specifically trained mental health professionals to treat and serve students in schools.
- The Committee recommends that local school boards and the Georgia Department of Education place a strong emphasis on the provision of specified training for teachers, school staff, and students regarding the early recognition, detection, and reporting of signs of an impending attack in or upon schools.
- The Committee recommends that the recently created "See Something Send Something" mobile phone application be updated and modified to provide a single, unified statewide reporting system that students, faculty, and staff may use anonymously to notify state and local authorities of suspicious activity in, or threats to both public and private schools. In order to effectively operate this application, the Committee recommends that the Legislature appropriate additional funding for the Georgia Bureau of Investigation to modify the current application, and to hire additional staff for the Georgia Information Sharing and Analysis Center (GISAC).
- The Committee recommends that the Legislature explore potential legislation which would create a data-sharing system by which Georgia's schools, social services, and law enforcement agencies are able to coordinate together to create, share, and curate secure individual student profiles throughout a student's educational career. The purpose of such a system will be to better meet the mental, emotional, and educational needs of Georgia's students, while allowing agencies to efficiently share information which may prove critical to the prevention of tragedies before they occur.
- The Committee Recommends that the Legislature consider legislation mandating that every K-12 Georgia school, whether public or private, undergo a third party threat assessment of its buildings, facilities, and grounds, and with the help and input of local law enforcement and emergency services create a detailed, written emergency response plan that is reviewed and updated on an annual basis. Such threat assessments may be conducted by the Georgia Emergency Management Agency and Department of Home Land Security. Additionally, the Committee further recommends that the Department of Education adopt a standard assessment model that may be used by schools throughout the state. (Expanding the requirements of O.C.G.A. § 20-2-1185).
- The Committee Recommends that the issue of media sensationalism of tragedies on school campuses be strongly reprimanded by the State Legislature. While the Committee highly values the American Institution of a Free Press, it believes that the Media have acted extremely irresponsibly in the style of reporting used in the wake of tragedies on school campuses. The nearly obsessive coverage of school shooters' personalities,

backgrounds, motives, manifestos and histories is no doubt a factor in encouraging potential attackers to perform future “copy-cat” attacks.

- The Committee recommends that parents take an active role in developing close and proper authority over their children. While the school system plays a crucial role in the lives of students, the majority of their training, either express or implied, is conducted at home. Georgia is great because Georgia’s families are strong. In the face of the ever-increasing complexity of the modern era, parents must take great care to engage, encourage, and discipline their children in order for them to grow into the healthy, happy, and responsible adults that our society so desperately needs.
- In an era in which interaction between students via social media is every bit as prevalent as face-to face interaction, the Committee recommends and acknowledges that Georgia’s students bear a unique responsibility to foster a positive environment for one another at school and online. Additionally, students must remain alert to spoken and written threats, and be willing to report them to the appropriate authorities in a timely manner.
- The Committee recommends that the Legislature consider enacting legislation creating felony penalties for parents who act recklessly in allowing children to have access to dangerous materials or weapons.
- Recognizing the absolute importance of stable, positive influences in every child’s life, the Committee recommends that the Legislature explore the possibility of allowing and incentivizing certain veterans, military reserve members, law enforcement officers, and first responders, to undergo training to act as “school safety coaches” within schools.

Physical Security of Buildings, Facilities, and Buses

- The Committee recommends that each school system conduct a review of its respective campuses to identify potential weaknesses in the physical security of all buildings and facilities. Such evaluations should focus on the potential improvement or installation of the following:
 - Single, secure points of entry into each building;
 - Adequate speed bumps and concrete barriers in parking lots;
 - Minimizing the amount of unfortified glass used in the construction of buildings;
 - Installing locks on all windows and doors of school buildings;
 - Increase the number of emergency exits when appropriate;
 - Ensuring that room numbers, directional signs, and exit signs are highly visible in all school buildings by utilizing larger signs and fonts;
 - Properly training bus drivers on how to recognize and respond to threats against buses both on and off of school property;
 - Reconsidering the fire drill procedures and policy of each building to ensure that drills do not unnecessarily expose students, staff and teachers to the risk of false alarms being used to bait them into dangerous areas.
- The Committee also recommends that the State revisit the current statewide building codes for schools to reflect today’s safety needs and take into account modern construction materials.

Emergency Response

- The Committee recommends that local law enforcement agencies and emergency services departments coordinate together to create and maintain emergency response plans of their own to establish efficient communication and execution in the event of an emergency.
- The Committee recommends that local law enforcement agencies and emergency services department consider the creation of special joint emergency response units to ensure that wounded victims receive triage and medical treatment as quickly as possible in the event of an attack rather than waiting for an entire building to be cleared.
- The Committee recommends that the entire state be equipped with one unified radio communications network in order to facilitate effective and efficient communication between state, local and federal law enforcement departments.
- The Committee recommends that each school participate in the Stop the Bleed Initiative provided by the Georgia Trauma Foundation.
- The Committee recommends that each school conduct regular emergency drills designed specifically to prepare students, teachers, and staff on the appropriate response to an attack.
- The Committee recommends that each school system regularly reevaluate and update its active shooter emergency drills to ensure that the most current and effective best practices are in place.