

Safe Schools, Thriving Students

Evidence-Based Strategies for Creating Safe and Supportive Schools

Speaker



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Speakers



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Ranking Member, Committee on
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Jennifer McCombs
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Bipartisan Safer Communities Act (BCSA)

- **\$1 billion** for social-emotional programs, restorative practices, and integrated student supports
- **\$1 billion** to train and increase the number of qualified, well-trained counselors, psychologists, social workers, and other mental health professionals
- **\$300 million** through STOP School Violence Act to institute safety measures in and around schools



Research Presentation Speaker



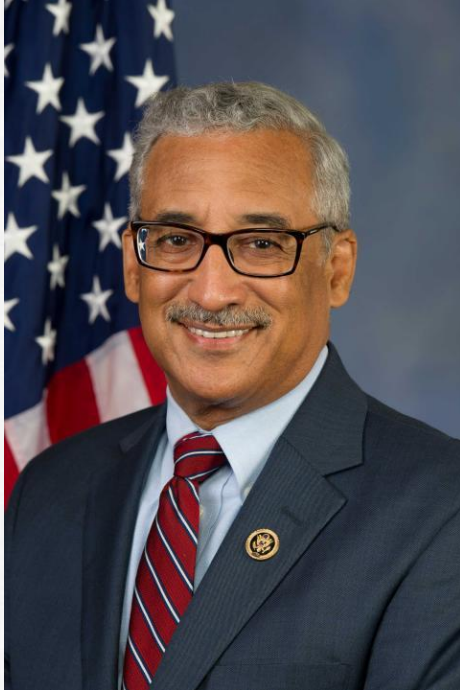
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Congressional Remarks



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Background

- ▶ Increased interest in school safety driven by continued increase in mass school shootings
- ▶ Students face other violence at schools as well
- ▶ Impacts of school violence
 - Decrease student engagement, mental health; increase risky behaviors
 - Reduce educators' self-efficacy, professional engagement, and retention

Safe Schools, Thriving Students

- ▶ Proposed ideas to improve school safety range include:
 - Strategies to increase physical security
 - Strategies to build supportive school communities (protect against violence)
- ▶ This review examines existing research to understand the evidence base for proposed strategies.



Safe Schools, Thriving Students

What We Know About Creating
Safe and Supportive Schools

Jennifer DePaoli and Jennifer McCombs

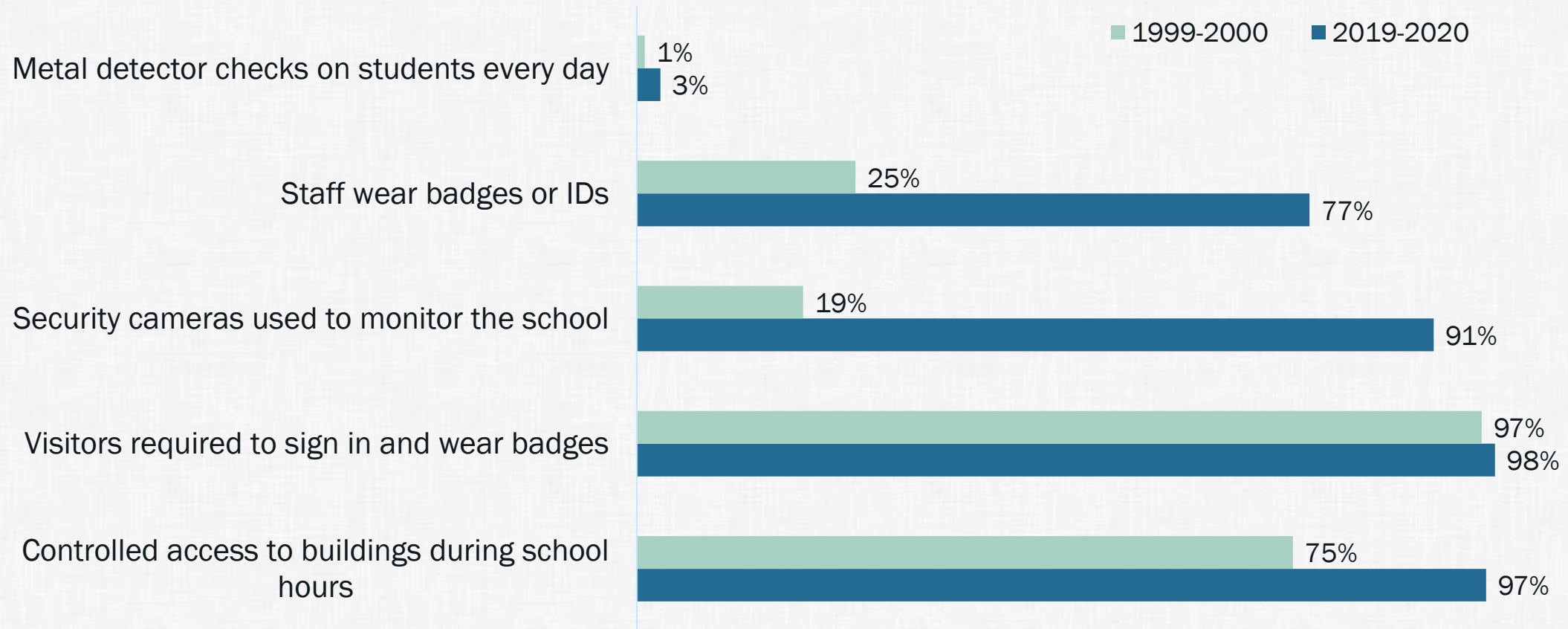


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Strategies to Increase Physical Security

Use of Physical Security Strategies Has Increased Over Time (1999-2000 to 2019-2020)



Strategies to Increase Physical Security: Access and Security Devices

Restricting Access to Building/Badging

- ▷ Not studied

Security Cameras

- ▷ No evidence of improved student safety or reductions of school violence

Metal Detectors

- ▷ No evidence of reducing reported threats, physical fights, or student victimization
- ▷ Associated with *decreased* feelings of safety among students

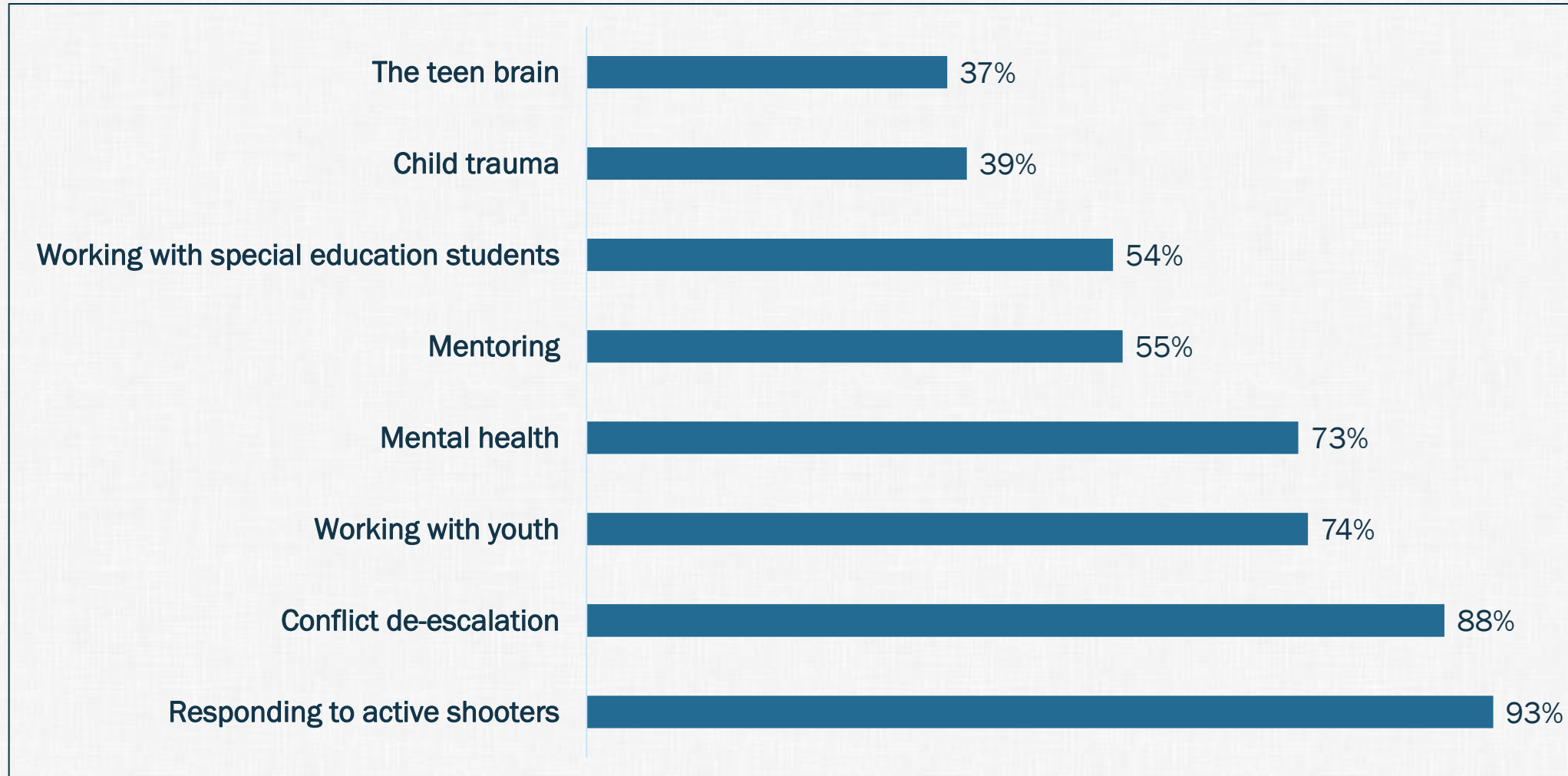
Strategies to Increase Physical Security: School Resource Officers

- ▶ In 2019–20, 41% of elementary schools, 68% of middle schools, and 71% of high schools has a school resource officer
- ▶ Limited impact on school safety
 - Reduced number of fights and threats
 - Increased number of weapons detected
 - No impact on rates of gun-related incidents or shootings
 - One study found presence of an armed guard associated with increased deaths
- ▶ Negative impacts, particularly for students of color and students with disabilities
 - Increased rates of suspension and expulsion, which increase dropouts
 - Increased rates of police referrals and student arrests for minor offenses, which criminalize behavior

Studies of SRO Implementation Suggest How Unintended Negative Impacts Accrue

- ▶ Federal COPS program funds police departments to place SROs in schools
- ▶ Use of school resource officers
 - Highly variable across schools
 - Use in disciplinary action associated greater severity of punishment
- ▶ Lack of clear roles and responsibilities
 - 2017–18, only two thirds of schools that assigned a school resource officer had a policy outlining the officer’s roles and responsibilities
 - Among those with a policy, about a third of principals did not know the content of the policy
- ▶ Lack of training, particularly prior to entering job

Training Reported by School Resource Officers



Strategies to Increase Physical Safety: Arming Staff

- ▶ No empirical evidence
- ▶ Evidence on firearm deaths outside of schools suggest having more firearms in schools could be detrimental to student safety
- ▶ Majority of teachers believe this would make schools less safe
- ▶ Opposed by American Federation of Teachers, National Association of School Resource Officers, National Education Association, and Major Cities Chiefs Association



Strategies to Build Supportive School Communities

Supportive School Communities Can Protect Against Violence

- ▶ Risk factors for perpetrating mass shootings, school shootings, and school violence include
 - childhood trauma
 - mental health concerns
 - prior perpetration of violence

- ▶ Factors that protect against violence include
 - Empathy
 - School attachment and belonging
 - Social Support
 - Supportive student-teacher relationships

Strategies to Build Supportive School Communities: Mental Health Resources

- ▶ Effective in improving student mental health and wellbeing
- ▶ Schools' ability to provide services is strained
 - Insufficient number of counselors (average 408:1 ratio)
 - Insufficient number of school psychologists (average 1,127:1 ratio)
 - Only 55% of schools provide diagnostic health assessments
 - Only 42% of school offer mental health treatment

Strategies to Build Supportive School Communities: Social and Emotional Learning

- ▶ Reduces behavior problems and emotional distress and increases school safety
- ▶ Increases
 - prosocial behavior
 - relationships with others
 - engagement in learning and academic achievement

Strategies to Build Supportive School Communities: Restorative Practice

- ▶ Improves
 - School climate
 - Student safety
 - Student wellness
 - Student behavior
 - Academic achievement
- ▶ Decreases use of suspension

Strategies to Build Supportive School Communities: Positive Relationships

- ▷ Reduce violence and bullying
- ▷ Improve communication that helps prevent violence
- ▷ Structures promote positive relationships
 - Small learning communities
 - Looping
 - Block scheduling
 - Advisory systems
 - Small class size
 - School-family connection

Policy Recommendations

- ▶ Increase student **access to mental health and counseling resources**
- ▶ Invest in **integrated support systems/community schools** to connect students and families to needed supports
- ▶ Adopt structures and practices that **foster strong relationships**
- ▶ Invest in **restorative practices** and **social-emotional learning**
- ▶ Prepare all school staff to better support student well-being

How are states distributing BSCA funds?

Funds available for use until Sept. 30, 2026

- States have set varied grant timelines, amounts, and priorities

Majority of states have prioritized student well-being and mental health:

▶ Washington

- Build and sustain systems...that build capacity and provide direct services to: 1. Meet each student's social, emotional, physical, and mental well-being needs. 2. Create positive, inclusive, and supportive school environments; MTSS

▶ Ohio

- Future Forward Ohio, which prioritizes student wellness, including addressing barriers that prevent students from engaging in learning.

Panel Discussion



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Thank You!

Please join us on **October 17, 2023**, at 4pm ET for Part II of this webinar series, **Safe Schools, Thriving Students: Fostering Restorative Practices and Safe and Supportive Communities**