

School Safety & Mental Health Services Improvement Act

The School Safety and Mental Health Services Improvement Act expands the use of federal funding to improve school safety, ensure federal mental health funds are available to children and youth, and creates a Presidential Task Force to better coordinate resources between the Departments of Education, Health and Human Services, Justice, Interior and Homeland Security.

Improving School Safety – Changes to the Every Student Succeeds Act:

1. **Makes Federal Funding Available for School Safety Infrastructure:** Allows Title IV funding to be used to improve school safety infrastructure. Examples include physical security, technology, and training of school personnel to recognize and respond to threats of school violence. Title IV's authorization level is \$1.65 billion annually through 2020; it was appropriated at \$400 million for FY17.
2. **Makes it Easier to use Federal Funding to Hire School Counselors:** Allows Title II funds to be used to hire and improve the professional development of school counselors. Title II's authorization level is \$2.3 billion annually through 2020; it was appropriated at \$2.04 billion for FY17.
3. **Makes it Easier to use Federal Funding on School Safety and Violence Prevention Programs & Activities:** Updates Titles II and IV to clarify existing allowable school safety activities. Examples include: bullying and harassment prevention, crisis response, and other programs designed to reduce and prevent school violence.
4. **Helps Schools Learn Best Practices:** Directs the Secretary of Education to establish a School Safety and Violence Prevention National Technical Assistance Center to help States and local school districts address school safety and violence prevention needs.

Addressing Mental Health Needs – Changes to the Public Health Service Act:

1. **Helps Schools Identify & Treat Mental Illness:** Reauthorizes and updates the “Children and Violence” program (Sec. 581) which allows the Secretary of Health and Human Services to work with the Secretary of Education and the Attorney General to help states and local communities develop ways to support children struggling with violence. The program can help states and communities implement programs that will provide mental health and substance use disorder assessments, crisis intervention training, counseling, and referral to a continuum of services. SAMHSA has previously used this authority in response to Sandy Hook.
2. **Sharing Mental Health Best Practices with Schools:** Allows federal funds to be used to disseminate information about evidence-based training of school personnel on early identification of children with, or at risk of mental illness, and how to refer children to treatment and prevention intervention services. The bill also requires best practices to be shared about how to collaborate with behavioral and mental health professionals and law enforcement for at-risk youth who have a history of interactions with law enforcement or the criminal justice system.
3. **New Studies to Help Prevent Mental Illness:** Authorizes the Secretary of Health and Human Services to conduct new studies on infants, children, and adolescents who are at significant risk of developing, show early signs of, or have been diagnosed with mental illness, including a serious emotional disturbance.
4. **Better Federal Crisis Response:** Ensures federal crisis response programs are coordinating with local schools, and makes sure Project SERV resources are available to them.

Better Coordinate Federal Resources – Creates a Presidential Interagency Task Force:

- Creates a Presidential Interagency Task Force led by the Secretary of Education with the Departments of Health and Human Services, Justice, Interior, Defense, and Homeland Security to make recommendations – not mandates – on best practices, policies, and procedures to improve school safety and school safety infrastructure and ways to prevent school violence.