

State task force advises on school safety

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Rosemary Anderson High in Portland. Reynolds High in Troutdale. Umpqua Community College in Roseburg. These three schools are among at least a dozen across the country that have had shootings in the past two years.

To address the growing concerns for school safety, the Oregon Legislature developed the Oregon Task Force on School Safety, whose goal was to come up with strategies to respond more effectively to school violence and active-shooter situations in K-12 schools.

"With the recent shooting ... in Roseburg and other incidents across our state and nation, it is clear we need to do everything we can to help make our schools safer," said Clackamas County Sheriff Craig Roberts, who chaired the task force.

The task force released a report Wednesday with the following suggestions for how the state could improve school safety:

- Re-establish a tip line, which would include voice, text and online options to allow students and parents to anonymously share information about potential threats, which officials would then assess. Oregon created one after the 1998 Thurston High School shooting in Springfield, but it has been discontinued.
- Develop a database of school floor plans, which officials said would assist first responders in knowing the layout of a building before entering it during an emergency.
- Fund a statewide threat-assessment system to identify and help students who present a risk for violence. The task force suggested one similar to the Salem-Keizer School District's model, which helps identify and evaluate students in crisis and helps schools in addressing threats.
- Forge partnerships between school leadership, first responders, mental-health professionals and the community, which the report said are critical to overall school safety.
- Adopt standardized terminology — such as lock-down, lockout, shelter in place, evacuate — for school districts and first responders to use during emergencies.

As seen in the report, the Salem-Keizer School District has been a model for certain school-safety protocols and procedures.

The district has, in recent years, added door locks and window blinds to classrooms that lacked them, said Jay Remy, a spokesman for the district. Additionally, Remy said, the district will continue to add security cameras.

All schools now conduct at least two mandatory lock-down drills per year, in compliance with state law, Remy said, and the district's threat assessment program is a nationally recognized model of schools cooperating with other youth-serving and law-enforcement agencies to analyze and address potentially threatening situations.

In fact, there is even a book about it, titled, "Assessing Student Threats: A Handbook for Implementing The Salem Keizer System."

npate@StatesmanJournal.com, (503) 399-6745, or follow on Twitter @Nataliempate