**RSAI 2021 Legislative Priority:
School Safety**

**Background:** Safety at school for staff and students is of great concern to rural school leaders. Stories of school shootings and other dangers across the nation have taken place in schools and communities where people later stated, “we thought it couldn’t happen here.” Iowa rural school leaders are aware of the possibilities and have concerns about adequate resources to prepare thoughtful, effective emergency plans, train staff and students, and network with local law enforcement that may be long distances and too many minutes away to respond timely in a crisis. Although the COVID-19 pandemic has overshadowed other school safety concerns, when the pandemic is behind us, Iowa schools should be prepared for what could happen.

The National Institute of Justice Report, [School Safety by the Numbers](https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/251173.pdf), shared information compiled by the Comprehensive School Safety Initiative regarding school safety and violence. “School officials have become more concerned about student safety, in part as a result of high-profile school shootings. School security measures have increased since the Columbine shooting of 1999. Nearly 100% of schools servicing 12- to 18-year-olds use at least one safety or security measures, such as locked doors, security cameras, hallway supervision, controlled building access, metal detectors and locker checks. School use of these measures varies by factors like population served and location.”

**Recent Iowa Legislative Action:**

[**SF 2364**](https://www.legis.iowa.gov/legislation/BillBook?ga=87&ba=sf2364) **School Security Plans**, enacted in 2018,required schools to develop and implement safety/security plans, work with law enforcement, conduct annual drills, train staff, and required school boards to review plans annually. There was no funding associated with this mandate.

[**HF 546**](https://www.legis.iowa.gov/legislation/BillBook?ga=88&ba=hf546) **State Penny Extension**, enacted in 2019, expanded the definition of allowable “school infrastructure” to include school safety and security infrastructure such as (but not limited to) to safe rooms, remote entry technology and equipment, security camera systems, card access systems, and communication systems with access to fire and police emergency frequencies. The bill specifically prohibited the use of sales tax revenue for the cost of personnel, development of safety and security plans, or training related to their implementation.

[**SF 284**](https://www.legis.iowa.gov/legislation/BillBook?ga=88&ba=SF%20284) **Operational Sharing SRO,** introduced in 2019, would have added school safety personnel such as a school resource officer position (SRO) to qualify for operational sharing, but did not move forward in the Senate Education Committee.

[**SF 2155**](https://www.legis.iowa.gov/legislation/BillBook?ga=88&ba=SF%202155) **ISL Authorization for SRO**, introduced in 2020, would have allowed additional Instructional Support Levy local funds to pay for one school resource officer and corresponding equipment per district. Although approved in the Senate Education Committee, it did not advance out of the Senate Ways and Means Committee.

**Current Reality:** Rural school budgets, already stressed by several years of low per pupil increases and declining enrollment, are not sufficient to cover the costs of developing and implementing plans and training staff annually without having to make reductions elsewhere. Rural schools are further disadvantaged in response time to emergencies due to remote locations, far from both law enforcement and hospitals.

**School Safety:** RSAI supports school safety investments. Rural schools need the resources, training and support necessary for Iowa student and staff safety at school, including additional funding for security personnel and training to protect against emergency situations presenting harm. For rural schools in particular, distance from emergency support compounds an already stressed situation lacking sufficient resources to fully train staff and provide security supports.