

**Technical Assistance Paper
How to Comply with Section 1006.07(6), Florida Statutes,
Safety and Security Best Practices**

Recent violent events in schools around the country have brought increased focus on school safety. The Safe Passage Act was a product of the 2001 Legislature to ensure every child a safe passage through Florida’s education system.

The goal of this legislation is for every district to have a clearly directed safety and security program that is effective and cost efficient in meeting its intended purpose. This program would include comprehensive plans and procedures that promote the safety and security of students and staff, ensure that school facilities and equipment are safe and in good condition, and address the safe transportation of students.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this Technical Assistance Paper is to provide guidance to Florida school districts on compliance with the Section 1006.07(6), Florida Statutes (F.S.), Safety and Security Best Practices. The first Best Practices for Safety and Security Self-assessment was developed by the Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability (OPPAGA) and the Partnership for School Safety and Security and approved by the Commissioner of Education in 2001, for the 2001-2002 school year. The Best Practices have been updated annually since 2001.


SCOPE

The self-assessment should consider safety in the broadest sense. The Best Practices for Safety and Security include violence prevention, physical security and facilities, fire and casualty safety, regulations associated with safety or risk management departments, and other activities usually linked to law enforcement and security departments and the all-hazards approach to critical incidents that is the basis of emergency management.

DISTRICT RESPONSIBILITIES

Compliance with the requirements of Section 1006.07(6), F.S., can be accomplished through the following steps:

- 1) Identifying the members of the self-assessment team.** Each of the seven general areas of the best practices for safety and security focuses on a different aspect of the district’s program. By choosing district staff and representatives from other agencies, organizations, and jurisdictions with expertise in these areas, the district can be assured of informed input during the self-assessment process.

<p>REFER QUESTIONS TO: Julie Collins (850) 245-0676/SC 205-0676 Lorraine Allen (850) 245-0416/SC 205-0416 Office of Safe and Healthy Schools</p>	 <p>The Department of Education</p>	<p>TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PAPERS (TAPs) are produced periodically by the Bureau of Student Assistance to present discussion of current topics. The TAPS may be used for inservice sessions, technical assistance visits, parent organization meetings, or interdisciplinary discussion groups. Topics are identified by state steering committees, district personnel, and individuals, or from program compliance monitoring.</p> <p>BUREAU OF STUDENT ASSISTANCE</p>
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The seven general areas are:

- **Efficiency and Effectiveness Area (Practices 1-3)**, which addresses the need for an efficient and effective safety and security program. A district or county auditor, either from your own county or from another county, would best appraise this function.
- **Safety Planning Area (Practices 4-11)**, which deals with comprehensive plans and procedures for school safety and security. Those best able to evaluate this function might include the district's safety/security director, county emergency management staff, local emergency responders such as fire service or law enforcement representation, a district school board member, a staff development director, or similar representatives from other Florida counties.
- **Discipline Policies and Code of Student Conduct Area (Practices 12-13)**, which covers the district's code of student conduct and should be assessed by student services staff, local law enforcement, local teachers, School District Safe and Drug-Free Schools Coordinators, and/or Department of Juvenile Justice and/or Department of Children and Families representatives.
- **School Climate and Community Outreach Area (Practices 14-16)**, which focuses on school climate and community outreach. Additional representation might include local public safety agencies.
- **Safety Programs and Curricula Area (Practices 17-20)**, which covers school climate as well as safety programs and curricula to address the fostering of a positive learning environment.
- **Facilities and Equipment Area (Practices 21-26)**, which focuses on the safety of educational facilities and equipment. A district or nearby county's facilities representative would be best able to address these requirements. Also consider law enforcement, fire safety inspectors, and local health officials.
- **Transportation Area (Practices 27-29)**, which deals with transportation safety and might include transportation staff such as administrators and bus drivers as well as local law enforcement.

Those possible representatives identified above might be accompanied by the following in the self-assessment process: public information specialists, parents, students, faculty, non-instructional staff (maintenance, transportation, food service, school resource officers, administration, etc.), risk management personnel, school board attorney, a local member of the K-20 Education Safety Partnership, district administration, health worker/nurse, and Department of Education staff. Ideally, some representatives would be from outside your school district so that policies and procedures are not being reviewed by those that created them. Also, there is great value to using the "peer review" process; districts benefit from the expertise and fresh perspective of those with similar functions working in other districts or counties.

- 2) **Self-Assessment Coordinator**. The district should designate a self-assessment coordinator. This person may contact the Office of Safe and Healthy Schools and/or OPPAGA regarding the best practices and what constitutes meeting those practices. The coordinator will then train the self-assessment team (see below) on how to conduct the assessment. Finally, the coordinator will reconcile any conflicting responses to the self-assessment prior to presenting the report to the school board.

- 3) Training of the self-assessment team.** Prior to the self-assessment, team members should be briefed by the coordinator on the best practices and what constitutes meeting those practices. Where applicable, documentation for each of the best practices/indicators should be made available to team members. Each team member should receive a copy of the latest version of the Best Practices and should be assigned goals or best practices to evaluate consistent with their expertise.
- 4) Involving schools in the self-assessment.** The district should determine the level of school-based involvement desired in the assessment. For some practices and indicators, school involvement will be critical. For others, district level responses are appropriate. In collecting school-based feedback and evidence, the district could: (1) have all of its schools conduct a self-assessment using the applicable “Best Practices” or the Emergency Planning Standards identified below and compile the results, (2) randomly survey the schools using a scientifically-based random selection methodology, (3) have peer review of schools by other schools within the district, or (4) conduct on-site self-assessments as some counties currently do.

Although the Florida Statutes delineate only district-level responsibilities, each school within the district should have policies and procedures in place to adequately respond to a critical incident. Best Practice 4 reads "The district has implemented a school safety plan that includes district-wide emergency and safety procedures and identifies those responsible for them." The development of school-level plans and procedures is critical to the district's success in meeting the intent of this area and its supporting Best Practices and Indicators. School-level procedures should include reasonable lines of authority and spans of control. The school must have in place written procedures, faculty and staff must know the procedures, and the school must be in compliance with all applicable procedures and standards.

- 5) Conducting the self-assessment.** Completing the self-assessment document will generally require addressing the following questions:
1. What policy or procedure does the district have in place to meet a particular best practice?
 2. Is this policy followed and is it followed in a way that is consistent with the intent of the policy or procedure throughout the district?
 3. Are the results of adherence to the policy or procedure consistent with the intended goal or outcome of the best practice?

The self-assessment instrument is organized in an outline format with the General Area in the header (e.g., “Efficiency and Effectiveness”), Best Practices (which are numerical, “1,” “2,” “3,” etc.), and Indicators (which are lettered, “a,” “b,” “c,” etc.). Also the form includes related statutes and rules, a place for the district to state whether they meet the best practices (e.g., “Yes,” “No,” “In Progress,” or “N/A”), and the strategies and actions the district will take to meet the best practice, the fiscal impact, and timeline.

5) Conducting the self-assessment, continued

- Issues to consider when conducting the self-assessment: Who will serve as the coordinator and reconcile the responses? Will the district use an external reviewer such as the internal auditor? What level of documentation will be required? When will the district start the self-assessment and how much time will be allotted? Who will oversee the implementation of recommendations?
- General Guidelines: Different district staff will have a part of the answer and a variety of experiences and knowledge of district practices as they relate to each best practice and indicator. Usually the answer is not a clear “Yes” or “No,” but somewhere in between; the district may be meeting some of the indicators. Give a complete answer and describe what the district is doing if it does not appear to meet the definition of “best practice.” (Note: to mark the boxes on the electronic version of the Self-Assessment form, just double-click the desired box and select “checked”. This will put an “X” in the selected box as shown on the next page.)
- How do districts know if they meet a best practice? The indicators are *not* a checklist; so do not simply count the number met. The Best Practices are the outcomes the district should achieve, but indicators are not the only means to those outcomes. Some judgment is necessary to determine if the district is accomplishing the outcome intended by the Best Practice. If you’re not sure, ask yourself the following: “Is this a model practice that I would recommend without hesitation to other school districts?” and “Is there anything I could recommend that would significantly improve our current practice?”
- If the district does not meet a best practice, determine if the district is doing something else that still meets the intended outcome. If not, what would it take to meet the indicator?
- The self-assessment instrument is available to districts in an electronic format to streamline the submission of the required report. It can be downloaded from either site below:

www.oppaga.state.fl.us/school_districts/safety/schoolsafety.html

www.firn.edu/doe/besss/safe_passage/safe_passage.htm

- Below are several resources available to help districts conduct the self-assessment.

The DOE Office of Safe and Healthy Schools also sent to each school in Florida, in January of 2001, the *Planning Guide for Achieving Safe, Equitable, Healthy and Drug-Free Schools* and its companion document, *Planning Guide: Supplemental Resources*, as part of DOE’s ongoing efforts to improve the quality of school safety and the learning environment in Florida schools. The *Planning Guide* is designed to help schools and School Advisory Councils address the process and content issues that must be considered to make this happen. It offers tools for assessing a school’s needs,

developing priorities, identifying alternatives for addressing those priorities, and identifying sources for further help. This guide works best if used with the companion document titled *Planning Guide: Supplemental Resources*, which contains problem-solving tools such as checklists, survey instruments, and bibliographies. The Planning Guide is available on-line at:

www.firn.edu/doe/besss/pdf/plan_guide.pdf

Hard copies of both documents are available upon request by contacting the Office of Safe and Healthy Schools at (850) 245-0416 or SunCom 205-0416.

5) Developing the final report. Self-assessment reports should identify each of the best practices or indicators where improvement is needed and outline relevant strategies and activities that the school district should implement in order to address those best practices/indicators. However, the final report should include only General Areas and Best Practices. **Indicators are designed to be used in the self-assessment process, but should not be included in the final report.**

- What goes into a district's report? Each district makes its own conclusions and decides how to report them. General elements of a report are:
 - Finding: Did you meet the best practice? If not, explain why you did not meet it.
 - Recommendation: What needs to be done to meet the practice?
 - Strategies and Activities: What specific steps should be taken to implement the recommendation?
- What goes into a recommendation?
 - Findings: Did the district meet the best practices?
 - Recommendation: Describes the general goal or outcome to be accomplished.
 - Strategies and Activities: Describes the specific steps necessary to achieve the recommendation.

Once completed, these steps should add up to the recommendation. State who is responsible for implementing the strategies and actions. Estimate the costs of the actions and determine whether they are one-time costs or recurring.

- Where can examples of last year's districts' reports be found? Examples of last year's district reports that were sent to the Commissioner of Education can be found on-line at:

www.firn.edu/doe/besss/safe_passage/safe_passage2005.htm

- Has OPPAGA summarized the reports? OPPAGA conducted a summary of the districts' reports, which can be found on-line at:

www.oppaga.state.fl.us/school_districts/safety/schoolsafety.html

- 7) **Timeline for Safety and Security Best Practices Self-Assessment Activities.** Last year's self-assessment report was due to the district school board on or by July 1, 2005. The statute states that the self-assessment report is due annually thereafter. Therefore, for Fiscal Year 2005-2006, the reports are due to the school board on or by July 1, 2006. The report must be presented at a publicly-noticed meeting where school board members can discuss and take action on the report findings. The report and school board action shall be forwarded to the Commissioner of Education within 30 days of the school board meeting. Some districts have discussed completing the self-assessments earlier in the fiscal year, so they have time to present the report to the superintendent and school board in order to meet the deadline for including recommended improvements in the budget for the next fiscal year.
- 8) **Process for Submitting Report to the Commissioner of Education.** Reports should be received in the Department of Education no later than **July 31, 2006**. Please note that the deadline cannot be extended as waivers cannot be given for safety activities. The report may be sent either by e-mail or by mail.

To submit via e-mail, send the electronic file of the self-assessment to Julie Collins, Julie.Collins@fldoe.org. To submit by regular mail, please send an electronic copy (Microsoft Word or PDF file), on a disk, to:

Office of Safe and Healthy Schools
Florida Department of Education
325 West Gaines Street, Room 501
Tallahassee, FL 32399-0400

Contact Julie Collins or Lorraine Allen or at (850) 245-0146 or SunCom 205-0416, if there are any questions regarding this process.

- 9) **Are there penalties for non-compliance?** All districts must conduct the self-assessment in accordance with Section 1006.07(6), F.S. Those districts that do not meet the requirements could face penalties as provided in Section 1001.42(11)(b), Florida Statutes. Reports required by law must be promptly transmitted to the Department of Education or the district superintendent's salary can be withheld. The statute describes further penalties if the report is not received after due notice.
- 10) **What is the difference between the Best Practices for Safety and Security and the Best Financial Management Practices?** Section 1006.07(6), F.S., requires that each district conduct an annual self-assessment using the adopted Safety and Security Best Practices.

Section 1008.35, F.S., involves a Best Financial Management Practices Review (also known as "Sharpening the Pencil") to be conducted by a third party on a five-year cycle, as defined in statute. Due to budget constraints, the Legislature did not appropriate funds for the Sharpening the Pencil Program for the 2003-04 fiscal year. Consequently,

OPPAGA does not plan to conduct any new reviews. Reviews may be rescheduled for a future date should the Legislature subsequently provide funding.

11) Resources for conducting district self-assessments. Below is a listing of resources that may be useful to districts preparing to conduct the initial self-assessment:

Materials

- *DOE Planning Guide: Achieving Safe, Equitable, Healthy, and Drug-Free Schools* at: www.firn.edu/doe/besss/pdf/plan_guide.pdf
- *DOE Planning Guide: Achieving Safe, Equitable, Healthy, and Drug-Free Schools-- Supplemental Resource* (Hard copy available from Office of Safe and Healthy Schools, DOE)
- DOE Critical Incident Management: Templates for School Planning
- OPPAGA Overview of Self-Assessment Process (PowerPoint Slide Show)
- DOE School Transportation Resource Documents such as Florida School Bus Specifications; Florida School Bus Safety Inspection Manual; Basic School Bus Driver Curriculum; School Bus Driver Handbook

Technical Assistance and Free Training

- Joint DOE and OPPAGA Technical Assistance and Training for District Self-Assessment Coordinators
- DOE's Multi-Hazard Planning for Florida's Schools Course

Web Resources

- **Office of Program Planning Analysis and Government Accountability Site:** www.oppaga.state.fl.us/school_districts/safety/schoolsafety.html
- **Office of Safe and Healthy Schools/Emergency Planning for Schools Site:** www.firn.edu/doe/besss/em_plan/emerg_plan.htm