

## NY School Districts Should Have Uniform Safety Guidance, State Teachers Union Says



*A lockdown button, shown on Aug. 24, is part of the new security system installed at Eugene Auer Elementary School in the Middle Country School District. Credit: Newsday/Steve Post*

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The state should issue uniform school safety guidance for all districts, from single points of entry to lockdown procedures, while establishing staffing ratios for school social workers, counselors and psychologists, according to a new report from the New York State United Teachers.

In the wake of the shooting in May at an elementary school in Uvalde, Texas, that left 19 students and two teachers dead, the union Tuesday released a [report](#) detailing local, state and federal policy recommendations to address violence in schools.

The "Safe Schools for All" report, which included input from educators in the Farmingdale, William Floyd, Bellport and Patchogue-Medford school districts — and comes as students return to the classroom this week — argues that smaller class size, increased hiring of

support staff and the adoption of crisis prevention strategies will help stem violence in schools.

"Every time there's a tragic event like Uvalde or Parkland or Sandy Hook, we call it a wake-up call for action," said NYSUT president Andy Pallotta during a virtual news conference Tuesday. "But safe schools for all cannot be an idea that comes in waves."

"It's become more apparent that these events unfortunately can happen anywhere on any given day," said Jaclyn Schildkraut, an associate professor of criminal justice at SUNY Oswego and the interim executive director of the Gun Violence Research Consortium at the Rockefeller Institute of Government. "Even though the likelihood is very small, we still need to prepare... not for just for the worst day but every bad day."

The report highlights the need for schools to hire more social workers, counselors, psychologists and nurses to proactively address the increased social and emotional needs of students engaged in disruptive behavior.

Experts also called for adopting standardized emergency protocols, such as lockdown drills and acceptable door hardening purchases, and providing schoolwide mental health training for staff as required by state law. Only 10% of school districts in the state offered comprehensive mental health training and support, according to a [June report](#) from the State Comptroller's Office.

"This is all-hands-on-deck work," said Cordelia Anthony, president of the Farmingdale Federation of Teachers and a member of the task force that wrote the report. "We need to make sure everyone in our buildings are trained in the preventive techniques and crisis interventions that will help us triage student needs."

But educators discouraged simulations of an active shooter or armed assailant in classrooms, arguing these drills can cause unnecessary trauma to students, particularly those with special needs. "We have to start with the issue of, give the school community what it needs to start dealing with the issues that our children are facing," said Michael Mulgrew, President of the United Federation of Teachers in New York City.

The union did not provide a cost for its initiatives but Pallotta says there is ample funding available in the State Department of Education's budget to begin the process. Mulgrew suggested the funding be provided through the budget of state and local law enforcement.

Pallotta said the initiatives won't "take an increase in school taxes. It takes the actual spending of the money that they already have."

Education Department spokeswoman Emily DeSantis said "research shows the best way to prevent school violence is by fostering a positive school climate that focuses on student and staff social and emotional needs through the recruitment, hiring and retention of staff to properly support students, including counselors, social workers, and nurses."