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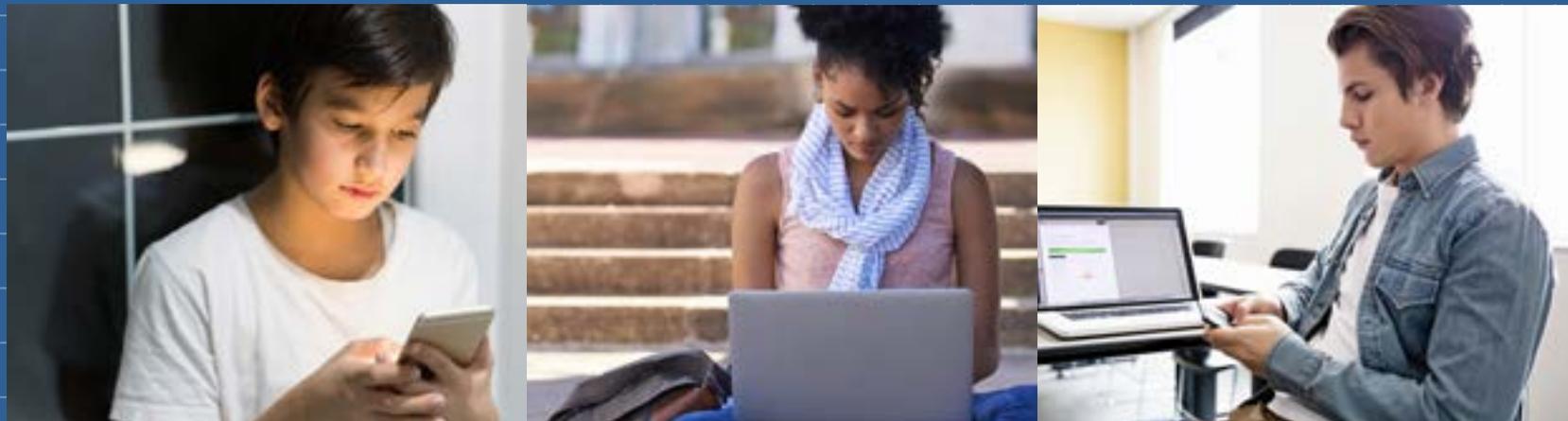
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# SCHOOL SAFETY TIP LINE TOOLKIT





## ABOUT THIS TOOLKIT

This School Safety Tip Line Toolkit is designed to support the operationalization, implementation, and maintenance of school safety tip lines. It is a compendium of multifaceted briefs designed to engage stakeholders in assessing key attributes of tip line implementation and sustainability; the nascent evidence base involving tip lines; current legislation establishing tip lines; suggested tip line metrics and data elements; and resource considerations, including cost-benefit analyses. The resources in this document are intended to serve school stakeholders at the state, local, district, and school levels who are invested in school and student safety. This toolkit is informed by RTI International's research and evaluation on school safety,<sup>1</sup> including the National Institute of Justice-funded study, *Assessment of National and State Tip Line Technology as a Strategy for Identifying Threats to School Safety*, and input from school safety experts and staff operating state school safety tip lines. RTI International is an independent, nonprofit research institute dedicated to improving the human condition. For more information, [visit www.rti.org](http://www.rti.org).

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.rti.org/focus-area/school-safety>



# A NATIONAL PORTRAIT OF TIP LINE USE



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Planty, M., Banks, D., Lindquist, C., Cartwright, J., & Witwer, A. (2020). *Tip Lines for School Safety: A National Portrait of Tip Line Use*. Research Triangle Park, NC: RTI International. [Link: https://www.rti.org/publication/tip-lines-school-safety/fulltext.pdf](https://www.rti.org/publication/tip-lines-school-safety/fulltext.pdf)



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**School tip lines, which are structured systems that allow students, parents, school staff, or community members to report information about potential threats, are a promising approach to school safety.**

Tip lines, which focus on preventing incidents that are threats to school safety or student well-being, come in various forms, including computer applications, websites, and telephone hotlines. Studies have shown that, in many school shooting incidents and other attacks, there were warning signs known to other individuals before the act was carried out. Leveraging such knowledge about potential threats, tip line systems relay information to the most appropriate parties, such as school officials, law enforcement officers, and mental health professionals, so action can be taken before an incident occurs.

Although tip lines are promising, very little is known about how widely they have been implemented and what their characteristics are. This report is based on survey responses from a nationally representative sample of 1,226 school principals conducted from February through July 2019. The survey, conducted by RTI International, an independent, nonprofit research institution, was designed to document the prevalence of tip lines, types of schools that are more likely to use tip lines, ways in which tip lines are designed and implemented, challenges of operating tip lines, and perceived effectiveness of tip lines.

### » Key Findings

- Just over half (51%) of public middle and high schools in the United States currently have a tip line in operation.
  - Most tip lines are relatively new. Sixty percent have been in operation for less than 3 years.
- Principals perceive tip lines as an effective school safety strategy, addressing multiple threats:
  - Seventy-seven percent believed that their tip lines made them more aware of safety issues at their school.
  - Over 50% said that their schools' tip lines had prevented violent incidents.
  - Two-thirds believed that their tip lines allowed their schools to respond more effectively to bullying.
  - Seventy-three percent reported that their tip lines had prevented incidents of self-harm or suicide.
- Over half of tip lines are staffed or monitored 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, such that a staff member receives calls, texts, or other entries in real time.
- Most are described as anonymous rather than confidential.
- Most schools involve school administrators (89%) and law enforcement officers (56%) in their tip line programs, but only about 25% involve mental health professionals or students as active partners.
- The most common challenges to operating a tip line include the following:
  - Receiving tips with insufficient information to act on
  - Raising student awareness and getting students to submit tips
  - Identifying false or bogus submissions
  - Receiving tips for situations that are considered out of scope
  - Raising community awareness



# INTRODUCTION

School tip lines are structured systems (including computer applications, websites, telephone hotlines, etc.) that allow students, parents, school staff, or community members to report information about potential threats to students or others. Tip lines offer a promising approach to enhance school safety by relying on student knowledge of potential threats, providing a safe reporting environment, and establishing a response protocol to act on the tips and prevent incidents. They leverage knowledge, primarily from students, about potential threats to school safety and other problems schools face daily (e.g., bullying, substance use, self-harm).<sup>1</sup> Students are on the front lines and are aware of many behaviors and threats, both in person and over social media, that occur out of the sight of teachers, administrators, and other school staff. Many students do not want to be responsible for getting others in trouble or do not know how to report. Tip lines provide a confidential or anonymous way to share this information with school administrators, law enforcement officers, service providers, and other partners. Tip lines work by identifying harms and threats before they happen rather than waiting to respond to an event. These features have brought increasing attention to tip lines as a potentially effective school safety strategy, with many states passing legislation requiring their use and federal agencies offering funding support (see sidebar).

However, very little is known about how widely tip lines have been implemented and what their characteristics are. This report summarizes the results of the first national effort to document the use of tip lines in public middle and high schools in the United States. The findings described in this report are based on a web-based survey completed by 1,226 school principals or school safety points of contact at a nationally representative sample of public middle and high schools in the United States. The survey, conducted by RTI International, an independent, nonprofit research institution, was designed to document the prevalence of tip lines, types of schools that are more likely to use tip lines, ways in which tip lines are designed and implemented, challenges of operating tip lines, and perceived effectiveness of tip lines.

<sup>1</sup> A review of school attacks occurring from 2008 through 2017 concluded that all attackers exhibited concerning behaviors (engaged in behavior that caused fear, issued direct threats of violence, or brought weapons to school). Most attackers elicited concern from others, and most communicated their intent to attack. National Threat Assessment Center. (2019). *Protecting America's schools: A U.S. Secret Service analysis of targeted school violence*. Washington, DC: Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Secret Service.

## » Tip Line Laws and Federal Support

The context of tip lines is rapidly evolving. A review of the state legislation requiring the use of tip lines conducted by RTI in fall 2019 revealed that at that time 20 states had passed such legislation and another 3 states had pending legislation.

Federal agencies are providing funding to support the development and maintenance of anonymous school tip lines. For example, the Department of Justice's 2019 STOP School Violence Technology and Threat Assessment Solutions for Safer Schools Program, funded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance, awarded projects under Category 7 to "implement a technological solution, such as an anonymous reporting technology, that can be implemented as a mobile phone-based app, a hotline, or a website in the applicant's geographic area designed to enable students, teachers, faculty, and community members to anonymously identify threats of school violence" (<https://bja.ojp.gov/sites/g/files/xyckuh186/files/media/document/BJA-2019-15118.PDF>).



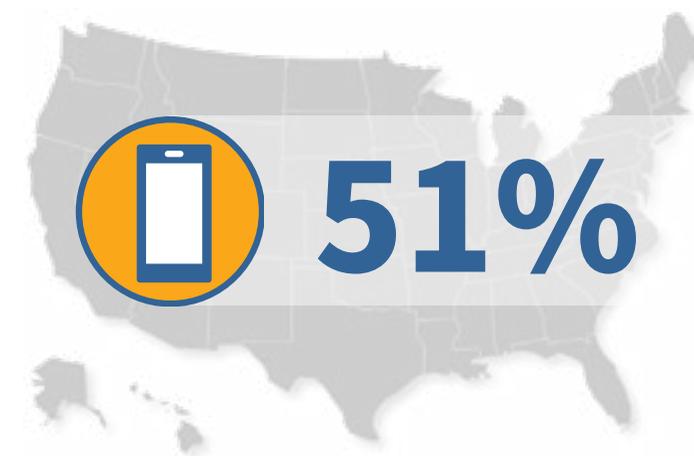
## » Study Methods

RTI conducted the national survey of school tip line implementation as part of a grant from the National Institute of Justice (Award No. 2017-CX-BK-0004). The Department of Education's Common Core of Data (CCD), a comprehensive, national database of all public elementary and secondary schools and school districts, was used to identify the study sample. Survey respondents were based on a random sample of 4,120 public middle and high schools that was stratified by school size, region, and urbanicity. Approval for the study was obtained from the school districts and the institutional review board at RTI. Principals at the sampled schools received a letter from RTI inviting them to participate in a brief (10-minute), web-based survey on tip lines. Principals could complete the survey themselves or delegate it to the person most knowledgeable about each school's safety practices. The survey was fielded from February through July of 2019, with extensive follow-up procedures undertaken by RTI (e.g., e-mail and telephone follow-up; a short, hard-copy version mailed to selected schools) to increase participation. Surveys were completed by 1,226 schools (a 30% response rate). A nonresponse bias analysis was conducted using CCD data to compare characteristics (e.g., size, region) of the 1,226 schools that completed the survey to those of the original sample of 4,120. Low bias was detected, and the survey data were weighted to adjust for the small amount of nonresponse bias that was found. This process was designed to ensure that all findings produced from the data are nationally representative.

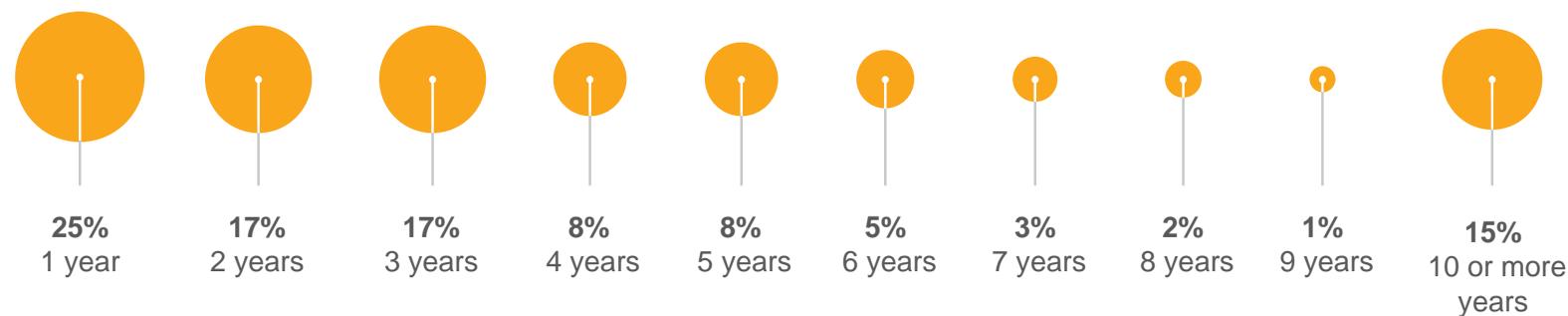
## HOW COMMON ARE TIP LINES?

Just over half (51%) of public middle and high schools in the United States had a tip line in operation at the conclusion of the 2018–2019 school year.

Most tip lines are relatively new (*Figure 1*). About 60% of schools with tip lines reported that the tip lines had been in operation for 3 years or less. However, some schools have had tip lines in place for quite some time; 15% of schools have had a tip line in operation for 10 or more years.



**Figure 1. Number of Years School Tip Line Has Been in Operation**





## » What types of problems are reported to tip lines?

Tip lines are not necessarily designed just to alert school safety personnel of threats of violent acts. In fact, they are a tool to identify many types of problems, such as physical threats and attacks, bullying and harassment, drug use, self-harm, suicidal ideation, sexting, and weapon carrying, among many others. This variety is illustrated in the figure below, which depicts tip types from Oregon’s SafeOregon state tip line program.

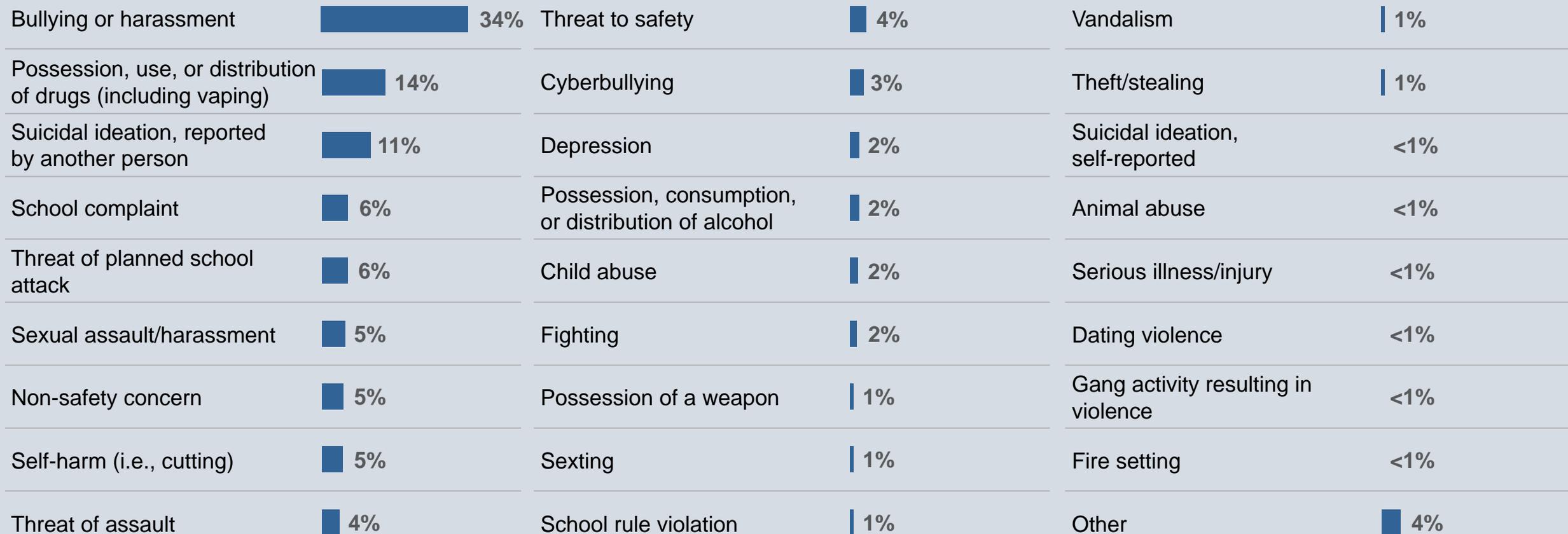
4,905  
Tips



1,165  
Schools Enrolled



534,308  
Students Served



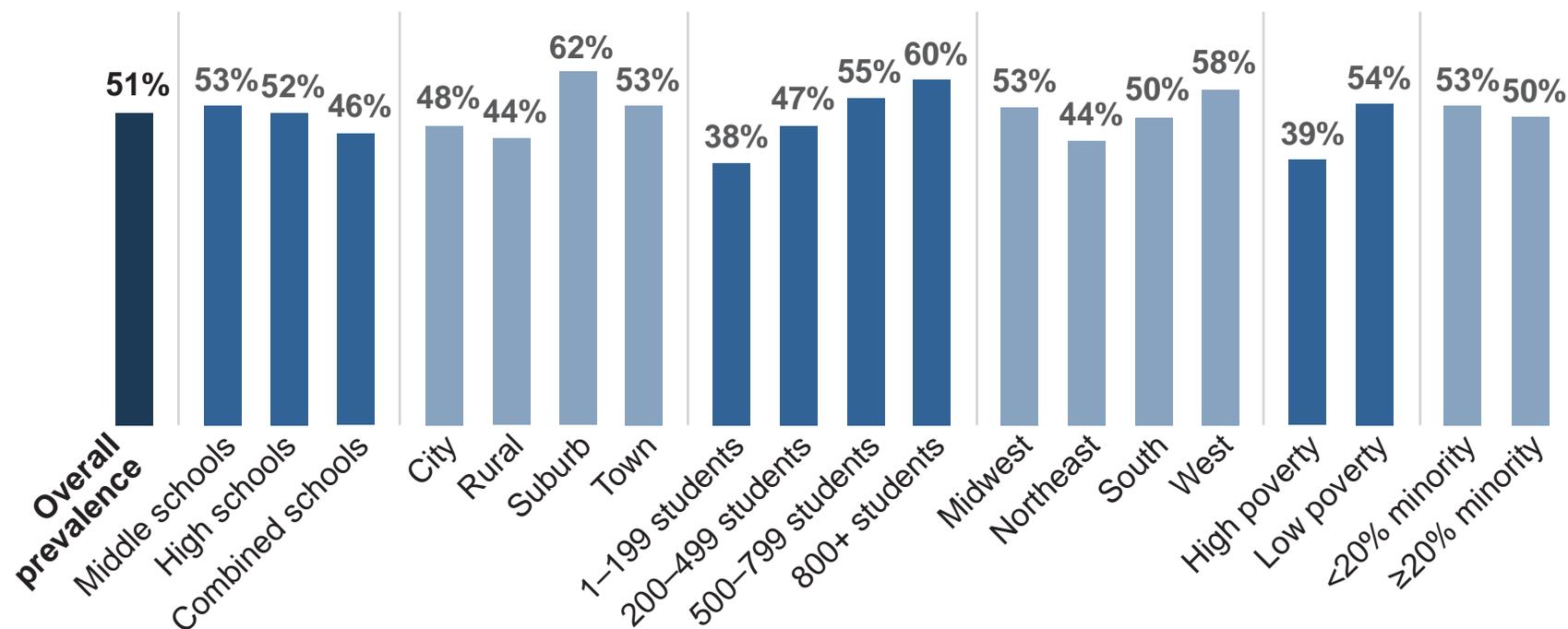


## WHAT TYPES OF SCHOOLS ARE MOST LIKELY TO HAVE A TIP LINE?

The types of public middle and high schools that are generally more likely to have a tip line in operation (*Figure 2*) include

- schools with higher student enrollment,
- schools located in suburbs rather than in cities or rural areas, and
- low-poverty schools.

**Figure 2. Tip Line Use, by School Characteristics**



### » Why don't schools have tip lines?

Schools without a tip line were asked why they were not using one. The most common reasons were that

- a tip line is perceived to be unnecessary because the school has other ways to share information about potential threats and school safety (43%),
- the school has an insufficient budget to implement and operate a tip line (26%), and
- the school has insufficient staff to implement and operate a tip line (21%).

Legal liability concerns (9%) and concerns about the technical expertise required (10%) were the least common reasons for not having a tip line.

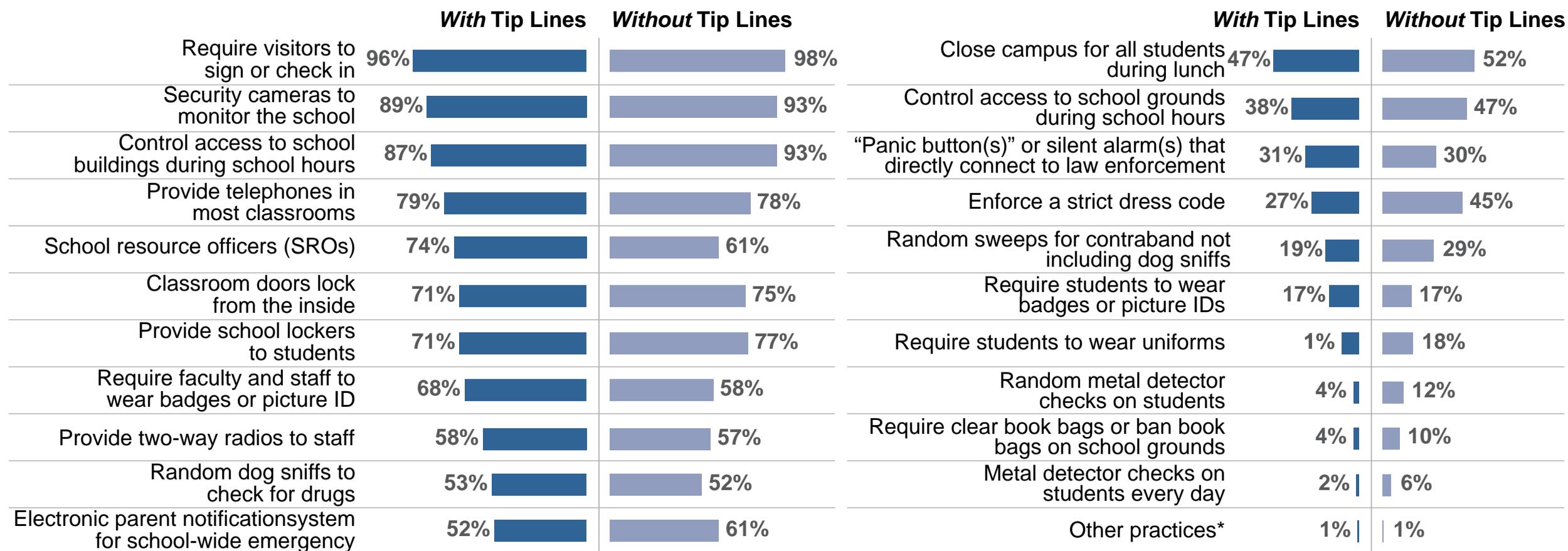
About 14% of schools without a tip line reported that they were in the review, planning, or approval stages for adopting a tip line. The findings in this report can be used to help such schools think through the available options for designing a tip line, common challenges associated with operating a tip line, and partnerships involved in operating a tip line. See also Planty, M., Banks, D., Cutbush, S., & Sherwood, J. (2018). *School tip line toolkit: A blueprint for implementation and sustainability*. Research Triangle Park, NC: RTI International.



## HOW DO TIP LINES FIT IN WITH OTHER SCHOOL SAFETY PRACTICES?

Tip lines are one component of a comprehensive set of school safety practices. *Figure 3* shows the use of various school safety practices among schools with and without tip lines. Schools not currently operating tip lines are using many security procedures (e.g., metal detectors) and required practices (e.g., dress codes, book bag requirements) to protect their students.

**Figure 3. Use of Various School Safety Practices**



\* “Other practices” included behavioral health activities, crisis response apps, drills/lockdowns, enhanced entrance protections, office call systems from the classroom, other hardware or security technology, partnerships with law enforcement or community organizations, relationship building/communication, safety/emergency response protocols, security staff/SROs/officers, armed staff, staff training on crisis response, student search activities (e.g., drug testing, pat downs, wands), and survival kits.



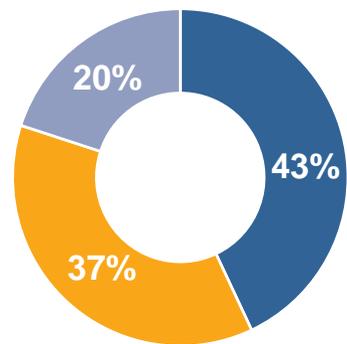
## HOW ARE TIP LINES DEVELOPED AND OPERATED?

Among the schools using tip lines, 37% of the systems had been developed in house and 43% had been purchased from a vendor or contractor (Figure 4). Other options for obtaining tip lines included getting them free of charge or from a state agency, local agency, or community organization.

The most common level at which tip lines are administered is the district level (39%), although state- and school-level models are also common (Figure 5).

State-level tip lines are most commonly administered by a state law enforcement or public safety agency (Figure 6), whereas district-level tip lines are most commonly administered by a school district or local education agency (Figure 7).

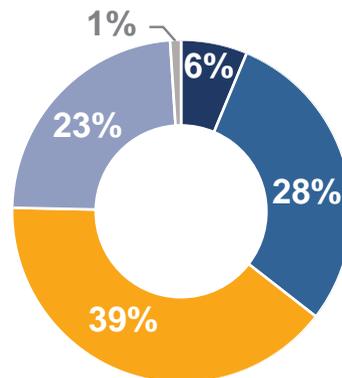
**Figure 4. Origin of Tip Lines**



- Purchased from a vendor or contractor
- Developed in-house
- Obtained from a state agency, local agency, or community organization

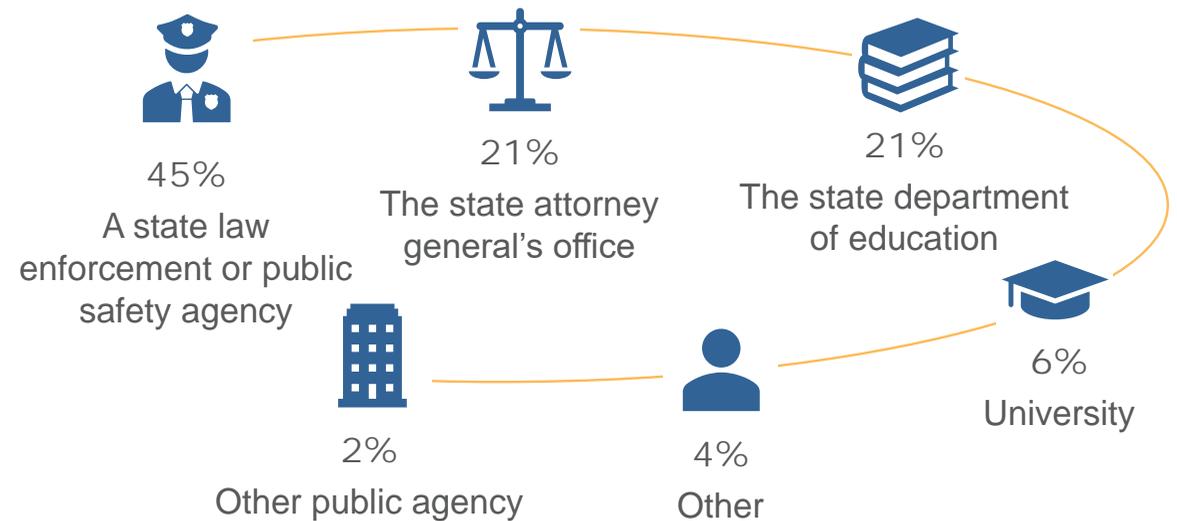
Note: percentages are based on valid responses. Thirty-four percent responded 'Don't know' to this question.

**Figure 5. Level of Tip Line Operation**



- National
- State
- District
- School
- Other

**Figure 6. Administration of State Tip Lines**



Note: percentages are based on valid responses. Twenty-six percent responded 'Don't know' to this question.

**Figure 7. Administration of District Tip Lines**



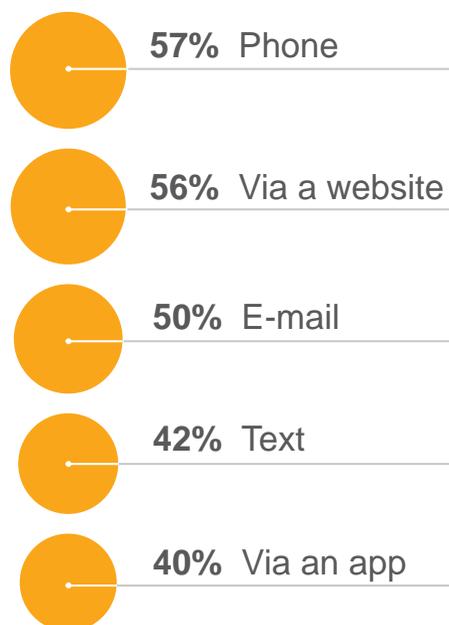
Note: percentages are based on valid responses. Three percent responded 'Don't know' to this question.

## HOW ARE TIPS SUBMITTED?

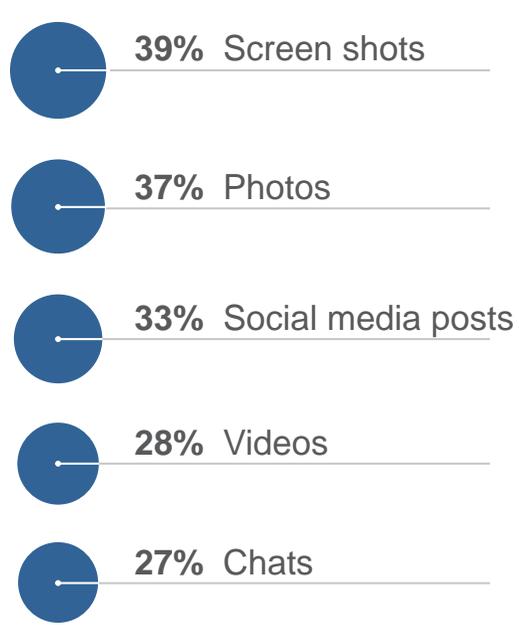
Schools reported several ways in which tips can be submitted, including via a website, phone, e-mail, text, or an app (*Figure 8*). Many tip lines are set up to accept a variety of media, such as screen shots, photos, social media posts, and videos (*Figure 9*).

One of the defining features of tip lines is that they offer a confidential or anonymous way for students, parents, and others to report information. The majority of tip lines are described to students as anonymous or as anonymous and confidential (*Figure 10*).<sup>2</sup>

**Figure 8. Tip Submission Options**

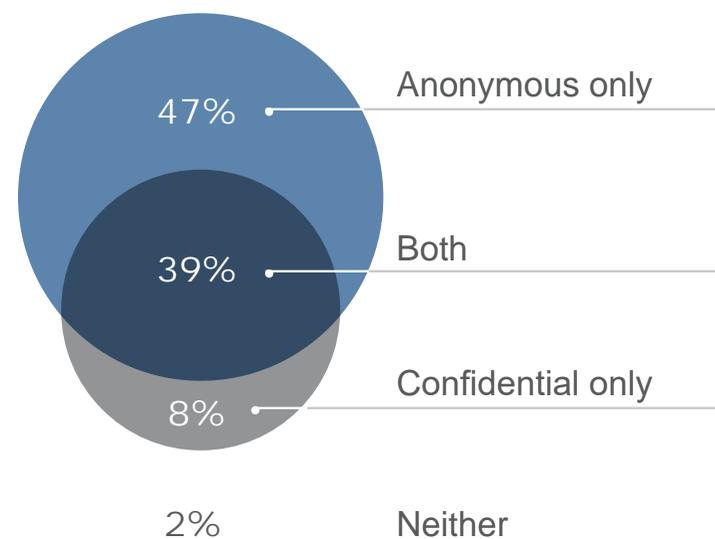


**Figure 9. Media Accepted With Tips**



Regardless of how they are described to students, most tip lines are set up to offer anonymity. Over three-quarters (77%) allow the reporter to submit a tip without providing personal information. At the same time, recognizing that sometimes additional information is necessary, most tip lines (61%) allow the reporters to choose whether they can be recontacted if needed, which would entail the provision of some contact information.

**Figure 10. Anonymity of Tip Lines**



<sup>2</sup> In the survey, “anonymous” was described as “persons can submit a tip without providing any information that could be used to identify them” and “confidential” was described as “information about the person who submits a tip is collected but kept private.”



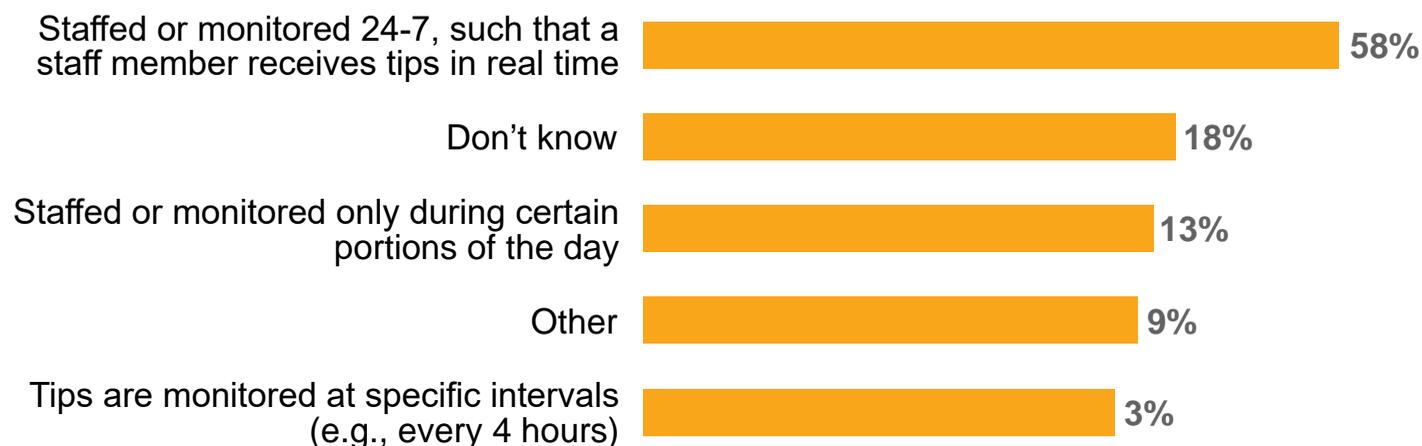
## HOW ARE TIPS REVIEWED AND TRIAGED?

Over half of tip lines are staffed or monitored 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, such that a staff member receives calls, texts, or other entries in real time (Figure 11). However, a sizable percentage of respondents were unsure about how their tip line was staffed.

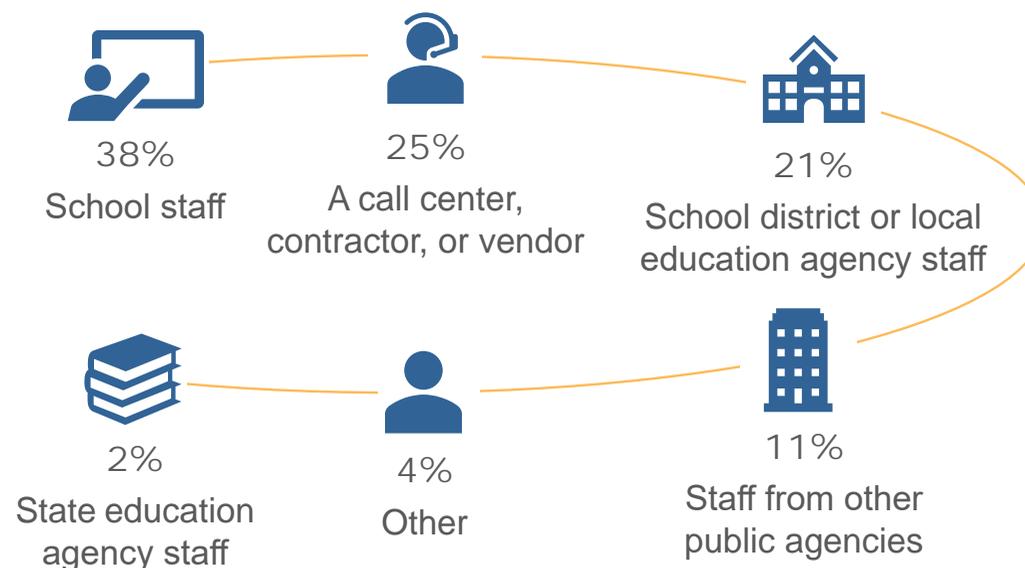
The stakeholder who receives a tip upon initial submission (for triage or forwarding to others) is most commonly a school staff member. This was the case for more than one-third of schools. About a quarter of schools said that a call center, contractor, or vendor receives the tips initially (Figure 12).

Only about a quarter (24%) of respondents reported that they had a formal, written policy detailing the process for triaging tips (i.e., prioritizing or categorizing them based on level of urgency) when the tips first get submitted. Slightly more (35%) said that they had a formal, written policy detailing the process for acting on tips when their school gets them. Many tip lines have built-in procedures to ensure that a tip is not missed. These include distribution of tips to multiple staff trained to respond (51%); a confirmation process to acknowledge that a tip has been received (41%); a communication tree such that if the first individual is not reached, a second is contacted (17%); and other procedures (4%).

**Figure 11. Process for Reviewing Tips**



**Figure 12. Responsibility for Review of Incoming Tips**





## » Insights Into Triage and Acting on Tips

Open-ended survey responses describing schools' processes for triaging and acting on tips showed substantial variability across schools. Whereas some tip lines are structured to prioritize tips on the basis of urgency (e.g., self-harm), others use a first-come, first-served approach. Not surprisingly, given that many tip lines are operated at the district or state level and often involve law enforcement partners, some tip lines are structured so that tips are reviewed by a law enforcement agency or call center before being directed to the school. Other options are for tips to be simultaneously routed to the school and a local law enforcement agency or to be routed only to the school. The procedures for staff review of the tips vary widely (e.g., a single gatekeeper or multiple staff involved in reviewing a tip). The process for group decision making (e.g., whether the first person who sees the tip is expected to act or a group discussion precedes action) also differs, as does the manner in which key partners are looped in based on the nature of the tip.

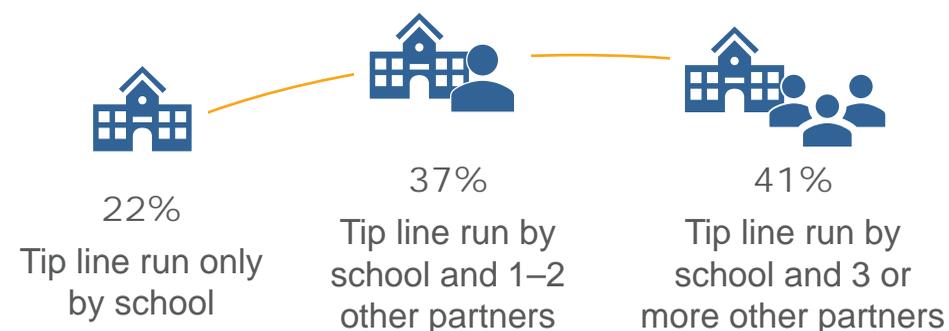
Nuances by time of day, school size, and the types of state and local partners involved also influenced the triage and response process. For example, some schools noted that school administrators handled tips received during school hours and law enforcement agencies handled after-hours tips. Smaller schools often reported having a single point person and acting on each tip immediately, whereas larger schools were more likely to report using a triage process and involving multiple partners in the response.

The built-in redundancies used by many tip lines, particularly the simultaneous distribution of tips to multiple staff, do suggest the need for a more structured, clearly defined process. Some respondents perceived that tips were often met with independent (and often uncoordinated) action on the part of several actors, which created inefficiencies and confusion.

## WHAT TYPES OF PARTNERSHIPS ARE IN PLACE TO IMPLEMENT TIP LINES?

Developing a broad-based coalition of active partners is a recommended practice for tip lines to establish buy-in, increase awareness, and promote long-term sustainability.<sup>3</sup> However, not all schools appear to be involving external partners in their tip line administration (*Figure 13*). About 22% of schools have no additional partners actively involved in their tip line program, and another 37% have just one or two other partners.

**Figure 13. Number of Active Partners Involved in Tip Line Administration**



Note: Eleven percent of schools were not actively involved as partners in the school's tip line.

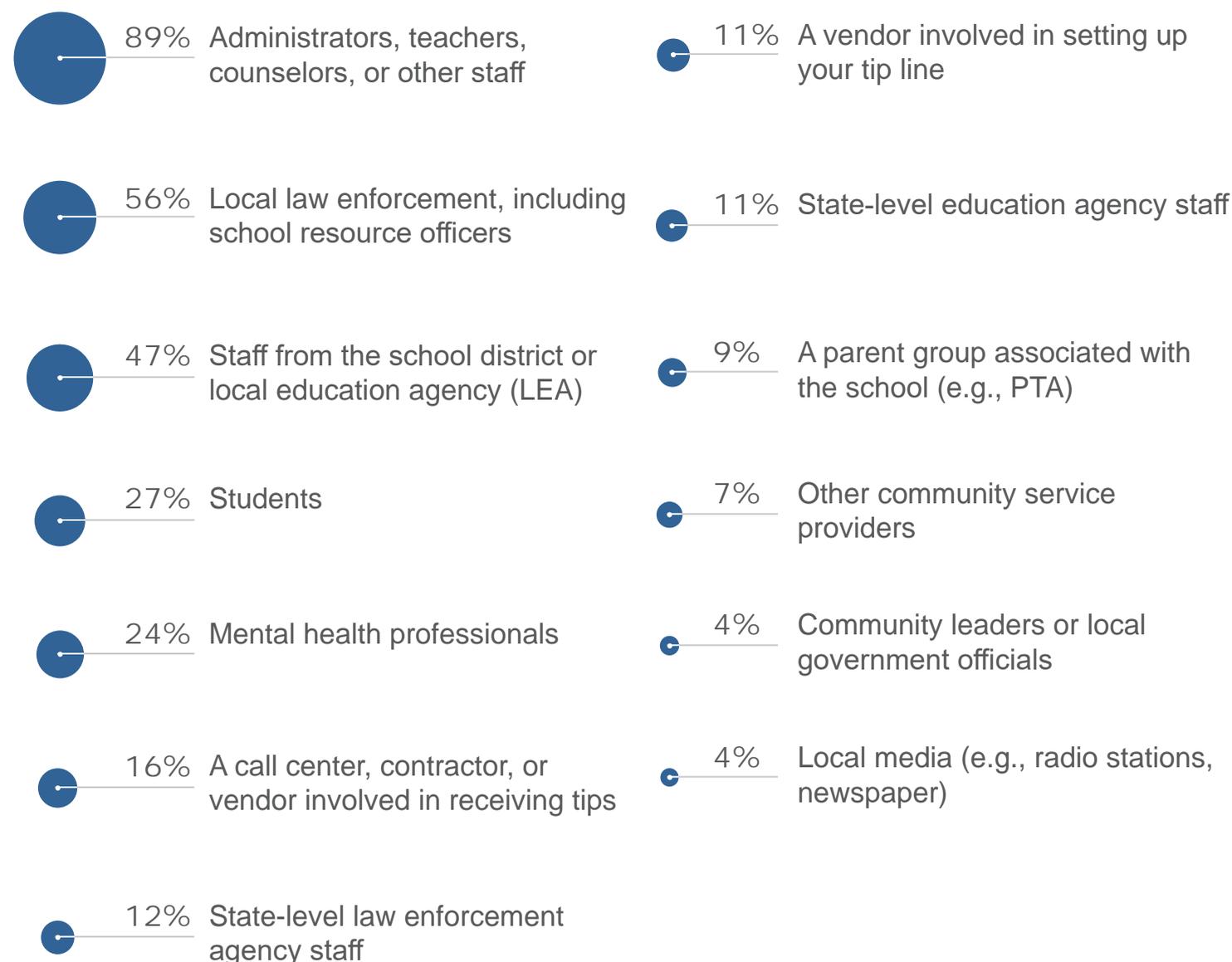
<sup>3</sup>Planty, M., Banks, D., Cutbush, S., & Sherwood, J. (2018). *School tip line toolkit: a blueprint for implementation and sustainability*. Research Triangle Park, NC: RTI International.



Furthermore, there appears to be a need for better strategies to involve some critical external partners. Although administrators, teachers, counselors, and other school staff are active partners in the vast majority of tip lines (89%), local law enforcement officers (including school resource officers) are actively engaged in only 56% of tip lines and students in just 27%. Parent groups and mental health professionals are also uncommon partners (*Figure 14*).

For each active partner, the survey captured information about the ways in which that partner is involved in the tip line's operation. School staff (including administrators, teachers, counselors, or other school staff) were commonly involved in all roles, including investigating tips (71%), marketing to students (66%), making referrals (62%), providing services (59%), and reviewing and prioritizing tips (53%). School district or local education agency staff were also involved in all roles, but with a lower frequency (20–30% of schools reported that these partners were involved in the various roles). Local law enforcement staff were primarily involved in investigating tips (51%), providing services (29%), and reviewing and prioritizing tips (28%). Students' primary role was making referrals (20%), and the primary role of mental health professionals was to provide services (23%). Call center, contractor, or vendor staff were involved in reviewing and prioritizing tips for 13% of schools.

**Figure 14. Active Partners Involved in Tip Line**

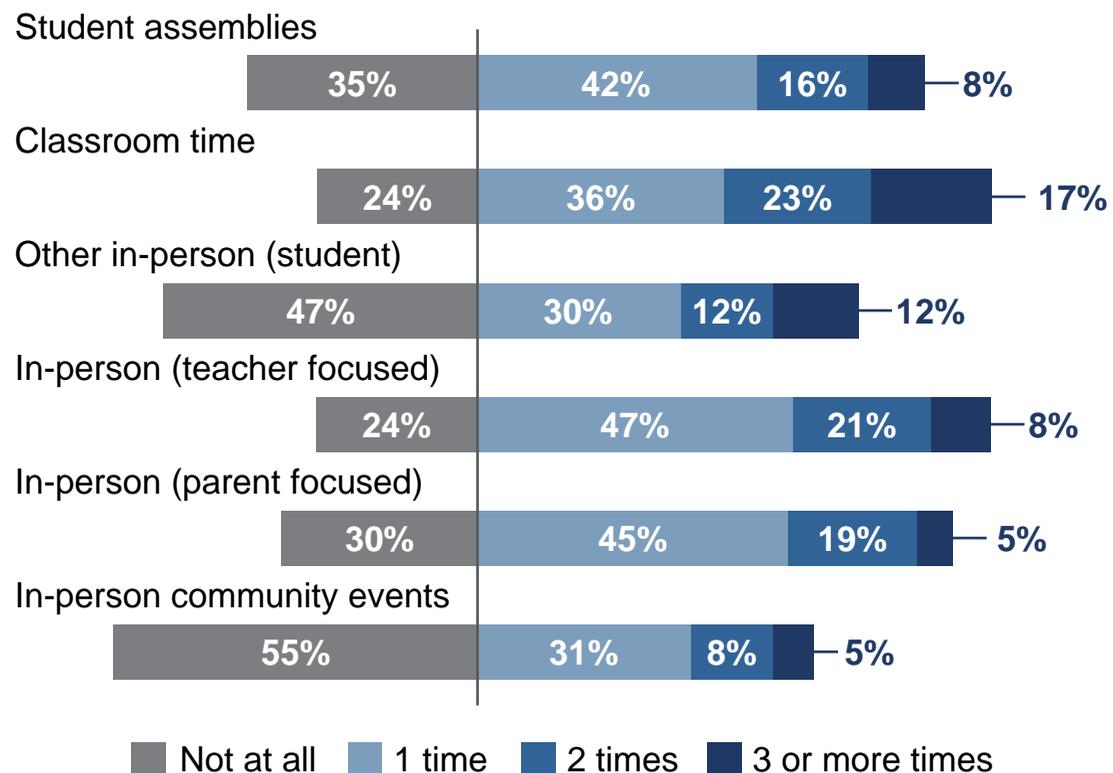




## HOW ARE SCHOOLS RAISING AWARENESS TO ENCOURAGE TIP LINE USE?

Raising awareness on the availability of a tip line and getting students to submit tips in the correct way for the right types of incidents is critical to tip line success. It is therefore useful to consider schools' strategies for raising students' awareness of their tip lines. As illustrated in *Figure 15*, in-person activities are uncommon. Most schools either do not engage in in-person activities or do so only once a year.

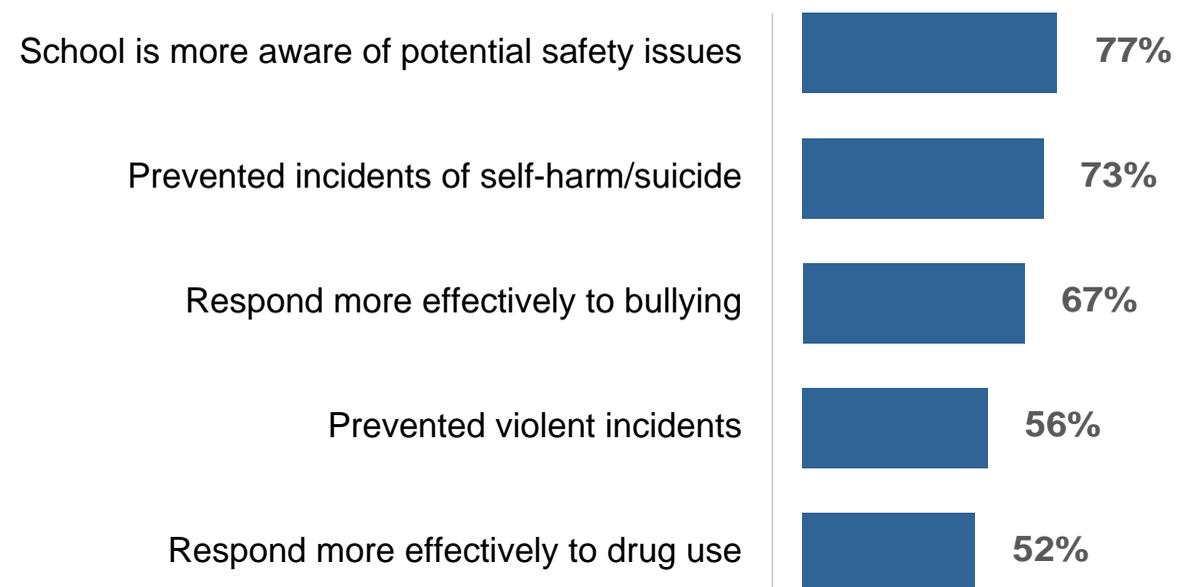
**Figure 15. Frequency of In-Person Awareness-Raising Activities**



## WHAT BENEFITS DO SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS SEE FROM THEIR TIP LINES?

In schools that are using tip lines, principals and school safety personnel identified several benefits from their tip lines (*Figure 16*). Overall, 77% of survey respondents believed that their schools' tip lines made them more aware of potential safety issues at their schools. Over half of survey respondents said that their schools' tip lines had prevented violent incidents and had allowed the school to respond more effectively to drug use. Two-thirds believed that their tip lines allowed their schools to respond more effectively to bullying, and around three-quarters reported that their tip lines had prevented incidents of self-harm or suicide among their schools' students.

**Figure 16. Perceived Benefits of Tip Lines**

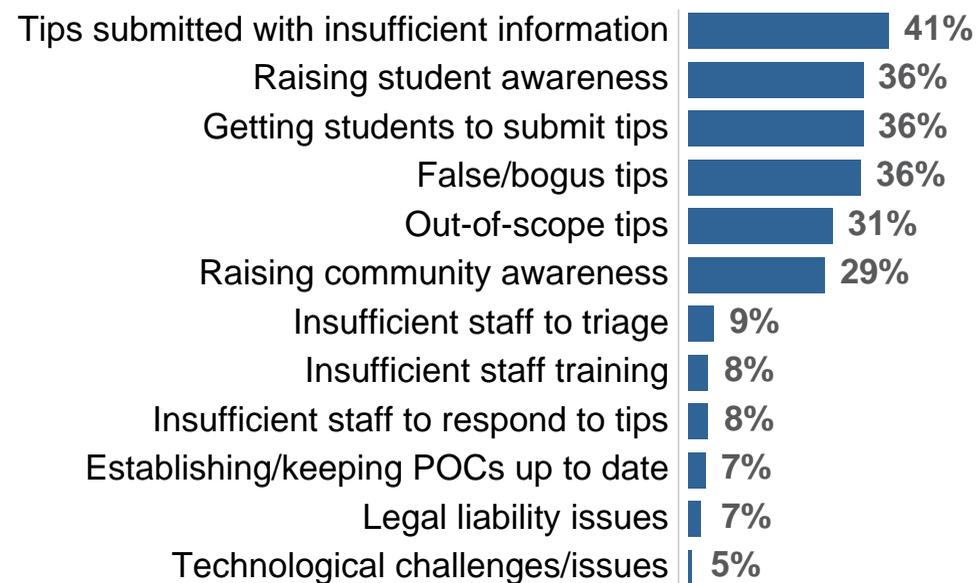




## WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES WITH OPERATING TIP LINES?

The biggest challenge to operating tip lines, according to schools using them, is tips submitted with insufficient information for the school to act on (*Figure 17*), either about the problem, persons involved, or school location. The interrelated issues of lack of student awareness and lack of student-submitted tips were also among the most common challenges, along with false or bogus tips and tips that were beyond the scope of the tip line. The least common challenges were technological and legal liability issues, established points of contact (POCs), and insufficient staff (and staff training).

**Figure 17. Challenges in Operating a Tip Line**



## CONCLUSIONS

This study, as the first nationally representative assessment of tip lines in the United States, found that just over half of public and middle high schools are operating tip lines and that tip lines are more common among larger schools, suburban schools, and low-poverty schools. Most tip lines have been implemented within the past 3 years, and they are substantially diverse in design and operation (e.g., the level at which they are operated, the procedures for reviewing and triaging tips), as well as in the coalitions involved in their operation. The findings of this study show that efforts are needed to involve more stakeholders as active partners in tip line operation, particularly engaging students as active tip line users, involving parents, and developing stronger partnerships with mental health providers. These partnerships could help raise students' awareness of their schools' tip lines, encourage the submission of tips, and ensure the adequate provision of mental and behavioral health referrals and services to students in need.

Given the challenges to operating tip lines that respondents identified, more intensive efforts are also needed to raise student awareness about tip lines, educate students about the types of issues that tip lines are designed to deal with, and train students on how to submit tips with sufficient information for their schools to act on. Such efforts may require in-person events and training with students (as well as parents and teachers), which are currently held infrequently.

Encouragingly, tip lines were largely perceived as effective by most school principals (or other school safety personnel who completed the survey). Survey respondents said that tip lines had improved their schools' ability to respond to a diverse set of issues, including self-harm, drug use, and bullying, in addition to safety concerns. Further research is needed to understand whether implementation of a tip line is associated with changes in school safety and disciplinary outcomes (based on school-level data) and to identify characteristics of tip lines that are associated with better outcomes. This research will help to establish an evidence base for identifying promising practices in the use of tip lines.



# A BLUEPRINT FOR TIP LINE IMPLEMENTATION AND SUSTAINABILITY



Planty, M., Banks, D., Cutbush, S., & Sherwood, J. (2018). *School Tip Line Toolkit: A Blueprint for Implementation and Sustainability*. Research Triangle Park, NC: RTI International. [Link: https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/252537.pdf](https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/252537.pdf)

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# INTRODUCTION



**Tip lines represent one approach that schools and communities may use to promote school and student safety and well-being. Tip lines are designed to provide students or other members of the public with a safe and confidential way to report a threat or potential threat to student or school safety.**

This Blueprint provides information for educators, law enforcement professionals, community leaders, and school safety experts who are exploring various approaches to promote school safety and student well-being. One such approach to prevent instances of violence, self-harm, and other disorders in the school system is an anonymous or confidential school safety tip line. A school safety tip line is a comprehensive communication system designed to provide students, school personnel, or other members of the public with a safe and anonymous or confidential way to report a threat or potential threat to student or school safety, thereby equipping authorities with the information needed to respond to threats and avert tragedy.

Tip line technology has been used effectively outside of schools to address safety concerns in other contexts (e.g., law enforcement investigations, domestic violence, suicide).

Tip lines offer relatively low-cost solutions that collect information from students as the most knowledgeable source of potential threats to school safety. They leverage existing technology to capture multiple forms of media and can serve as

a one-stop shop to report a range of problems that can affect individual student safety, well-being, and school disorder (e.g., self-harm and bullying) in addition to broader school safety threats.

This guide is designed to help stakeholders navigate key decisions and consider the factors necessary to support successful and efficient tip line implementation as part of an overall school safety strategy. Tip lines are promising, but much is still unknown about their effectiveness. Research is under way to determine what impact tip lines have on overall school safety and how to customize this strategy to varied school settings and circumstances. Tip lines can take many forms; this research will help to determine which elements most successfully gather reliable and actionable information from the school community to promote school safety and well-being. The information provided below describes the factors that decision-makers should consider when determining whether and how to implement a tip line as part of a comprehensive, proactive school violence prevention and response plan.



## THE VALUE OF A TIP LINE



### In 2015, 1,700 public schools reported taking serious disciplinary action in response to the use or possession of a firearm or explosive device at school.

The problems of school crime and safety are widespread and diverse. In 2015, students ages 12–18 experienced 850,000 victimizations at school, including almost 500,000 violent victimizations and 70,000 serious violent victimizations, such as sexual assaults, robberies, and aggravated assaults with a weapon or involving serious injury. Approximately 21% of students were bullied at school in 2015, often through, e-mails, and social media. In 2013–14, 1,501 firearm possession incidents were reported at schools across the United States.

These problems are not clustered in just a few places. Almost 69% of public schools reported that one or more violent incidents had taken place on school grounds during the 2015–16 school year (Figure 18). Additionally, about 1,700 public schools reported taking serious disciplinary action during the 2015–16 school year in response to the use or possession of a firearm or explosive device at school, including out-of-school suspensions lasting 5 days or more, removals with no services for the remainder of the school year, and transfers to specialized school.

Instances of violence, bullying, fights, weapons, and drug/alcohol use create harmful conditions, fear, and disorder that affect students, staff, and the community. These acts carry enormous costs (direct and indirect) and disrupt the educational process. Solutions based on deterrence and prevention are the most beneficial to reducing these harms to your school community.

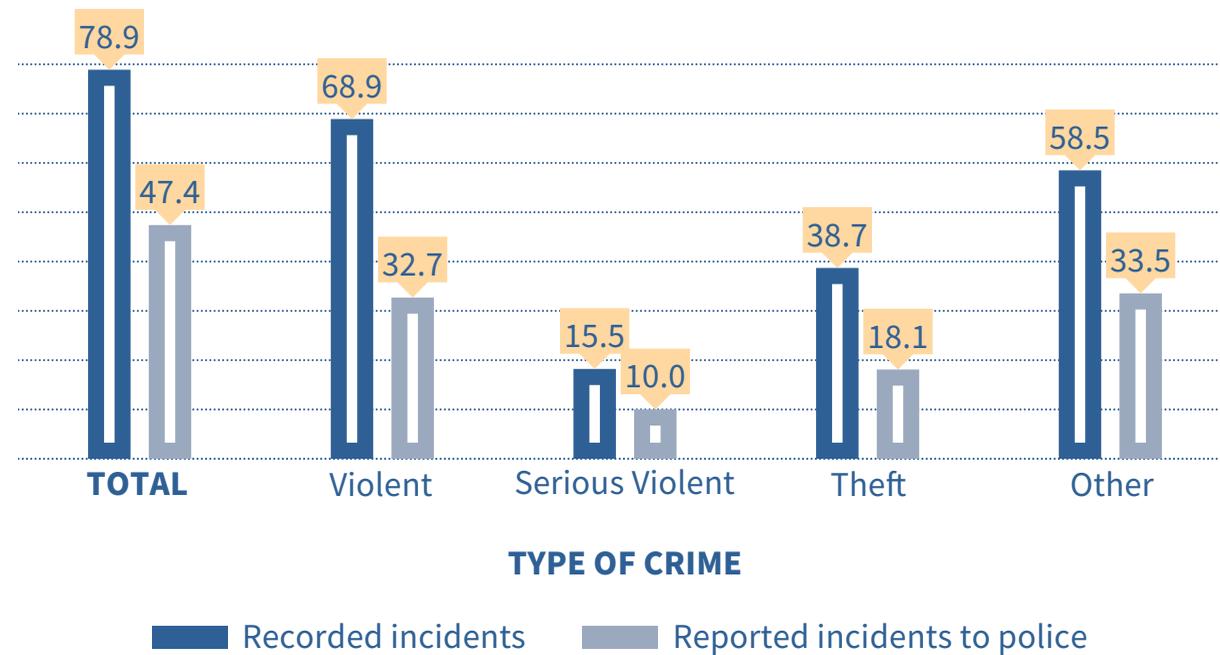
Importantly, tip lines leverage students' direct knowledge of potential threats or adverse events, which is critical because students are often the best source of such information. For example, a review of school attacks occurring from 1974 through 2000 concluded that in 81% of these incidents, at least one person had information that the attacker was thinking about or planning the school attack; in 93% of those cases, that person was a peer—a friend, schoolmate, or sibling.

Furthermore, victimizations, bullying, and other disorders such as drug and alcohol use are often not reported directly to school authorities. Students don't want to be identified, don't want to get a friend or classmate in trouble, or simply don't know how or where to report these threats. The large amount of unreported victimization and disorder is well known, but the problem is also solvable.

Tapping into students' knowledge is key to response and prevention, and tip lines break the code of silence; they knock down barriers by giving voice to students who might otherwise remain silent out of fear of retaliation or rejection. Tip lines provide an avenue for students to step up and speak out. Students learn the value of civic engagement, skills in bidirectional information sharing, and a proactive approach to concerns they are facing. These skills can be critical not only to their educational development, but also to the safety of their school community. Tip lines provide an opportunity to increase the likelihood that threats to school safety will be reported by providing students a confidential, often anonymous, tool to access support, address violence, and report information about potential attacks and a host of other safety issues actionable by school administrators or law enforcement.



**Figure 18. Percentage of Public Schools**



Source: Musu-Gillette, L., Zhang, A., Wang, K., Zhang, J., Kemp, J., Diliberti, M., & Oudekerk, B. A. (2018). Indicators of school crime and safety: 2017 [NCES 2018-036/NCJ 251413]. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, and U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics.

## COORDINATION WITH KEY STAKEHOLDERS



**Successful tip lines require coordination and buy-in from multiple stakeholders across various disciplines.**

The oversight and operations of tip lines vary, often residing within the attorney general’s office or state departments of education, police, or public safety. Regardless, effective planning, adoption, and implementation of tip line technology in schools requires coordination among all relevant stakeholders. Coordination among these key partners can promote widespread buy-in, elicit a comprehensive response to the issues identified, and maximize impact on public safety.

School safety and tip line technology can involve many different relevant stakeholders, including school personnel, parents, students, law enforcement agencies, and social service providers (e.g., mental health service or substance abuse treatment providers). All of these partners may have varying types and levels of input germane to tip line planning, adoption, and implementation.

Stakeholders may be involved at any point along or throughout the continuum of activities associated with the adoption and implementation of a tip line, including leveraging resources; marketing and outreach strategies; implementation approaches; selection of how information provided will be reviewed, triaged, and forwarded to appropriate responders; and expected costs and outcomes associated with tip line adoption.



*In the vast majority of school attacks, someone knew about the plan prior to the incident. Often, it was a schoolmate or friend.*



## » Relevant stakeholders include...

- School personnel
  - Principal
  - School safety resource officers
  - Teachers
  - Staff
  - Legal counsel
  - Local or district-level education agencies
  - State education agencies
  - Others
- Parent-teacher organizations
- Families
- State attorney general
- State and local law enforcement agencies (e.g., FBI agents based in the state; state and local police departments)
- State and local educational agencies
- State mental health and child welfare agencies
- Community health providers, counselors, crisis intervention services, mental health services, and substance abuse treatment providers
- Community leaders/local government officials and staff
- Others involved in larger school safety strategy

Optimal coordination among stakeholders includes clearly defined roles, ongoing communication, and information-sharing. Communication should be bidirectional; that is, information should be both provided to and obtained from key stakeholders.

Convening a School Safety Tip Line task force, commission, or advisory group may help formalize stakeholder roles and increase group commitment and cohesion over time. In some contexts, shared decision-making or even consensus decision-making may be ideal; in other contexts, the role of the task force may be more advisory in nature.

## » A tip line website can be a key information hub for partners, including critical information on how to access the tip line, what to report, and key metrics on tip line usage and outcomes. Examples of state-based tip line websites include

- Safe2Tell Colorado:  
<https://safe2tell.org/>
- SafeOregon:  
<https://www.safeoregon.com/>
- S.T.O.P. Tipline (Kentucky):  
<https://kycss.org/stop/index.php>
- Safe UT:  
<https://safeut.med.utah.edu/>
- OK2SAY (Michigan):  
<https://www.michigan.gov/ok2say/>
- Safe2Tell Wyoming:  
<http://www.safe2tellwy.org>
- SafeVoice (Nevada):  
<http://safevoicenv.org/>



## CASE STUDY

### MICHIGAN OK2SAY PARTNERS

#### State Partners

- Office of the Governor
- Department of the Attorney General
- Department of Education
- Department of Health and Human Services
- Department of Technology, Management and Budget
- Michigan State Police

#### Interest Groups

- American Federation of Teachers Michigan
- Michigan Emergency Management Association
- Michigan Association of Chiefs of Police
- Michigan Association of Community Mental Health Boards
- Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators
- Michigan Association of Non-public Schools
- Michigan Association of Psychologists
- Michigan Association of School Administrators

- Michigan Association of School Boards
- Michigan Association of School Social Workers
- Michigan Association of Secondary School Principals
- Michigan Catholic Conference
- Michigan Education Association
- Michigan Elementary and Middle School Principals Association
- Michigan High School Athletic Association
- Michigan League of Public Policy
- Michigan Parent Teacher Association
- Michigan Sheriffs' Association
- Michigan State Medical Society
- Middle Cities Risk Management Trust
- Middle Cities Education Association
- Middle Cities Workers Compensation Fund
- Prosecuting Attorneys Association of Michigan
- Special Olympics Michigan

#### As well as private partners

- (<https://www.michigan.gov/ok2say/>)

# TIP LINE MARKETING APPROACHES



## Marketing and outreach

To increase knowledge of and ready access to the tip line, market it to various audiences across multiple platforms. Naturally, reaching the school-based audience with the most direct knowledge of threats to student and school safety should be a primary marketing focus: students, parents, teachers, administrators, and other school staff must know the tip line exists and how it works. They must readily know where and how to access it.

Because students are the primary gatekeepers of information, marketing and outreach efforts directed at students are foundational, and messaging is key. To create a culture of reporting within schools, students must trust that the information they provide will remain confidential, if not anonymous. Students must also trust

### Develop marketing and communication materials with...

- A logo that appeals to students
- An easy-to-remember telephone and text number

### Promote the tip line...

- Through public service announcements:
  - at athletic events and movie theaters
  - on radio, social media, and television
- In highly visible locations:
  - on school buses with magnetic tape
  - on school calendars and planners
  - in lockers and bathroom stalls
- On digital media:
  - download the app to every tablet in schools
  - require all students to download the app to their mobile devices so schools can communicate with them
  - post on the school website
- Through interactive community events
- With tip line “business cards” and mobile screen cleaners



that some action or change will occur as a result of the tip provided. Marketing and outreach efforts should repeatedly emphasize these messages. Further, students must witness and experience these outcomes to develop and maintain trust that the information they provide to the tip line is taken seriously and acted on accordingly.

Students can be educated about the tip line reporting process and how to recognize threats and harms before they happen. Classroom-based outreach and school-wide events can be used to convey the value of early identification and prevention.

Importantly, though, tip line visibility should extend beyond schools into the broader community. School safety isn't just a school-level concern. It's a public safety concern. Marketing beyond the school audience to the larger community underscores shared responsibility and accountability; it amplifies collective monitoring and surveillance.

The tip line should be marketed through multiple and repeated forums. Methods for marketing and outreach across audiences may include brochures, posters, billboards, letters to households, presentations, assemblies, staff training sessions, social media, and other community outreach campaigns and events. Information about how to access the tip line may be prominent on materials that students access often, such as printed on agendas where students keep homework assignments and testing dates and on school websites. Messaging may be most effective with few words and a call to action. Involving stakeholders in both generating materials and marketing is likely to extend reach. Repeated and highly visible messages are key so that potential reporters know about the tip line and have ready access to it when they become aware of a threat to student or school safety.





## Information reception

Successful tip line operation requires consideration of how, by whom, and under what circumstances reported information will be received and protected. One key consideration includes determining whether the tip line will function as confidential or anonymous. In the event of confidential reporting, a third party may follow up with the tipster to confirm and collect any remaining necessary information. However, confidential data can still be subpoenaed. Alternatively, anonymous reporting may increase a reporter's confidence that they will not experience any negative repercussions for reporting, thereby increasing trust in the system. However, anonymous tip lines often include two caveats: anonymity will be forfeited, but confidentiality maintained, in the event of (1) an active threat (e.g., acute/active suicide) or (2) a malicious false tip. In both instances, anonymous calls are traced.

Carefully disclosing these exclusions at the outset of a tip via any platform may be prudent or legally necessary. Tip line administrators should explore strategies to identify and address tip line misuse and malicious false reporting. Tip lines often enact penalties for malicious false reporting, ranging from school disciplinary action to monetary fines (e.g., \$100) or criminal charges.

Submission of information depends on the mechanics of the system. Students, parents, and other tipsters may be able to submit information through a toll-free telephone number, web-based/mobile device applications, texts, e-mails, or a combination of these modes. Related, multimodal platforms may accept online chats, phone messages, photos, videos, and images from social media applications. Given the ever-evolving technological landscape, it is essential to involve tip line advisors or stakeholders who have a pulse on students' technology and social media use, ensuring relevant and effective tip line capabilities.

Through any of these means, students or tipsters are asked a series of general questions about the school, nature of the problem, incident information (what happened or could happen?), time, date, persons involved, and other relevant details. If the threat is made by a known person, information should be collected about name, address, age, gender, relationship to the tipster, and other pertinent details. Careful consideration of tip line questions is warranted, as the responses to these questions could enable tip line responders to connect the dots between related tips.

Performance or use issues might arise if the reporting application is not well integrated into other platforms that students regularly use. The reporting platform must be easy to access and use, provide clear instructions, and assure users that their information will remain confidential. Certain platforms might be more likely to elicit tips on specific issues; for example, suicidal threats or self-harm might be more likely communicated through a two-way interaction like texting or voice. Allowing tips to be provided via whatever media the reporter is most comfortable with is essential.





## Information access and triage

When developing a plan to implement a tip line, stakeholders should consider how reported information will be accessed and triaged. Once information is received, it should be reviewed and shared as warranted with the appropriate responders, whether school officials, mental health providers, counselors, or law enforcement officers. Ensuring cross-agency buy-in can be a key to effective coordination. Consider establishing a Threat Assessment Team comprising skilled stakeholders, including a digital expert; this team must be capable of making informed decisions regarding the appropriate triage and response to tips. It is critical that the threat assessment team be informed of state laws and regulations germane to their tip line access and triage.

The escalation of information to a more formal response by the criminal justice system will be determined by the nature of the tip and by state, district, and school policies. These policies can be coordinated with formal memorandums of understanding between agencies. Consider written policies that require responders to report outcomes to the tip line database, with regular review of “open” tips or those that result in an ongoing investigation. This follow-up is important to communicate to tipsters as evidence that the information they provide is being taken seriously and acted upon. In addition, tip line funders and school administrators need to know that the tip line is eliciting valuable and credible information and a response that has a demonstrated impact on school safety.

School tip lines will likely elicit a large volume of information that references several different types of threats to school safety. The information will be communicated through a variety of formats, and it will likely need to be validated. The volume and variability as to how the information is received are extremely valuable, however. For example, videos or images can provide more concrete evidence about a potential situation than just a voice message alone. Duplicate

reporting from separate tipsters about the same incident can provide verification that a threat is legitimate. The process of verification—collecting as much detail as possible and cross-validating information with other tips and available information from schools or other authorities—is one strategy to address this concern.

## Training

Identifying, recruiting, and training staff to answer and respond to tip line calls has been found to be a critical component of effective tip line implementation in other settings, including crisis response lines and 911. Following this model, the school safety tip line should be staffed 24/7/365 to respond to crisis calls whenever they come in.

All tip line staff should pass a background check and fully understand the scope of their work, including training requirements and content; expectations for the information that will be shared by tip line reporters; state laws and regulations, including FERPA and HIPAA compliance; and any expectations about minimum and maximum levels of effort to staff the tip line. For example, tip line administrators may want staffers to commit to a minimum number of hours per week to maintain their skills to engage with reporters and respond to tips; however, a maximum level of hours may also be important to minimize burnout. Tip line administrators may set specific screening and personnel requirements, such as being a U.S. citizen who is at least 18 years old.

Staff should be experienced working with your stakeholders. They should be trained in and have a full understanding of the types of issues that are likely to be reported, including self-harm, suicide, depression, bullying, specific threats to school safety, harassment, and other concerns. Training should also focus on skills that are needed during the call, including reflective listening, collaborative problem solving, and crisis management. Training should provide staff with the skills to develop trust and positive rapport, while also eliciting the



information that is needed to understand the nature of the concern and forward it to community partners to effectively respond. For these reasons, tip lines often enlist highly qualified, licensed professionals as tip line technicians. Regardless of who is staffed as tip line operators, tip line administrators should conduct frequent assessments for vicarious trauma among staff and provide support as necessary. Refresher trainings at regular intervals are also advised.

Staff must also be trained on all tip line policies and standard operating procedures, including salient state laws, confidentiality and non-disclosure agreements (i.e., maintaining the confidentiality of the information that they receive from tips); protocols for protecting personally identifying information involving students (e.g., indecent photos); and use of tip information involved in criminal investigations. For example, it may be a crime for staff to communicate, save, or make copies of certain types of material they are exposed to in their role on the tip line. Staff should have a full understanding of the operations of the tip line system to answer questions that reporters may have, including how the system protects reporter anonymity or confidentiality, what happens to a tip after it is reported, and how a reporter can follow up to provide more information about an event or to check on the status of school, law enforcement, or other response to the tip. An operations manual that includes tip line policies and standard operating procedures can be a helpful reference for tip line technicians; consider also including relevant state laws and frequently asked questions. Make the operations manual a living document; update it regularly.

Training should further include information on the varied resources available in the community to respond to youth who are in mental health crisis, experiencing substance use issues, or feel unsafe, as well as contact information to access those services. Staff should have access to a current database of school and emergency contacts to route the tip message to and be trained to recognize red flags that indicate the situation should be forwarded to law enforcement officers, school administrators, child protective services, other first responders, or community services.

Tip line staff should be trained to have a full understanding of

- The types of issues that are likely to be reported.
- The tip line system operations and reporting policies and procedures.
- The range of resources available in the community to respond to caller information: mental health crisis, substance use issues, feeling unsafe, or imminent harm.





## RECORDING INFORMATION



**Tip line programs that link initial tip information with final dispositions can provide critical information about best practices related to information assessment and incident response.**

Reporters should be notified what information is being recorded and how it will be used. Information from the initial call or tip should capture all the information provided about the event, including the type of event and specific details to determine whom the information should be forwarded to and how urgent a response is needed. In addition, information on the people involved, the suspects, and the location or other context surrounding the event is important to inform the response and to link multiple tips that may refer to the same event or the



same individuals. Finally, the initial call may also indicate whether the reporter can be contacted (by providing a name or saying that he or she can be contacted anonymously through the app), which should elicit an immediate response by tip line staff to engage the reporter and collect more information as needed.

Records of individual tips ideally will include not only information provided by the reporter in that initial call or during follow-up exchanges, but also the routing of and response to the tip. The record should indicate whom the tip was routed to and on what date, along with a confirmation that the responder was notified of or received the tip information. The responder (e.g., a law enforcement officer) should also provide information to the tip record, including the date of receipt, follow-up actions taken, and status of the issue identified in the tip (whether it has been resolved or is ongoing). Understanding how many tips are responded to and what actions are taken is important information to communicate to students and to the broad community to promote buy-in for the tip line. Communicating that tips are taken seriously and are responded to promptly, in a manner that preserves confidentiality and promotes student safety, will promote trust by reporters and encourage more participation.

Finally, consider how the tip record can include any information that can link the tip to already-identified events or individuals. Tip lines may receive multiple reports referring to the same incident and may also receive multiple reports of the same individuals involved in a series of incidents, such as repeated bullying. Analysis of the number of tips that come in can suggest how well you are reaching your intended audience of student, teacher, parent, and other reporters. However, linking tips to unique events and individuals will further help you and your partners to understand the scope and nature of school safety issues in your community and to develop effective responses to those issues.

Consider creating a case management system for recording tips and threats. Maintaining the information in a central database enables access to appropriate parties and facilitates linkages across incoming tips. Provide a user-friendly dashboard to facilitate navigating tips and data.



## ARCHIVING AND MAINTENANCE



### Tip line programs must comply with federal and state privacy laws.

At a minimum, all information should be retained in a database that allows tip line administrators and their partners to track trends in tip volume and types of tips received, identify unique incidents and individuals involved in those incidents, and track responses to the tips received. The information should be retained in a format that allows for linking and analysis and that is also compatible with other school or emergency response systems, as needed, such as calls for service received by law enforcement (911), school administrative systems that track information on safety events and discipline responses, or other systems maintained by your community partners.



To protect privacy and maintain control of the information, you should limit access to the tip line database to the tip line administrators and identified key staff from your partners. In general, federal mandates and other privacy protections will limit access to any identifiable information, so multisystem access to the database is not possible. Reports from the database on trends and responses will likely provide your partners the information needed to plan and leverage resources to respond to the tips received. Database access should therefore be limited to individuals who are responsible for conducting such analyses and have been specifically trained in protecting personally identifiable and sensitive information.

Data should be housed on a secure platform that prevents unauthorized access to or disclosure of the information. You will likely want to retain the information for multiple years to allow analysis of trends over time and to link individuals, events, and event locations that are identified across multiple tips. Tip line database administrators should also consider routine data review to identify common gaps in information reported (e.g., do reporters frequently know the contact information of a suspect?), identify unique events and individuals, and ensure that tips are responded to in a timely and thorough fashion. The tip line data that you retain is useful to your partners for analysis and reporting only if the information is as complete and accurate as possible. Regular checks of the data can not only identify trends in school safety, but also inform training for tip line staff and responders to more effectively respond to tips and engage the community in appropriate use of the tip line.

Technology will fail at times, and a system failure can be catastrophic. It is important to consider the mechanisms for and frequency of (1) testing your tip line functioning, and (2) backing up tip line data. IT support should conduct regular testing, possibly even daily, of all tip line communication methods. New technology updates, pushes, or bugs may create glitches in tip line systems. Equally important is considering including as standard operating practice both the mechanism for and the frequency of backing up tip line data systems. Maintaining the functionality of your technology systems is vital.



## DISSEMINATION AND REPORTING



**Routine and annual summary reports are effective ways to promote the program for wider use and communicate value to key stakeholders.**

One of your most important tools to support ongoing and appropriate use of the tip line can be the dissemination and reporting strategy you choose. Regular, concise reports targeted to schools, potential tip line reporters, likely responders to tips, and your other community partners can provide evidence that the tip line has been implemented in the manner intended and is receiving and responding to information related to school and student safety.

Dissemination and reporting should be informed by (1) identifying key audiences for your reports and (2) defining what type of tip information is most useful to your partners and audiences. Key audiences will include funding resources, likely responders to tips (e.g., law enforcement officers, crisis counselors), schools, and tip reporters (e.g., students, teachers, staff). After you identify these audiences, engage them to determine what information is most useful for their purposes. For example, you may choose to limit the information you report to safety threats, such as a summary of the tips that relate to school safety, bullying or self-harm, or you may also describe tips that relate to student wellness (e.g., substance use) or opportunities for disruptions (e.g., planned parties). You may also include media or other partners that can help reach your key audiences through a variety of platforms, including social media, marketing materials, regular group electronic mailing lists, newsletters, annual reports, meetings, or other communications.

For tip line partners, particularly those that have committed resources to develop and support implementation of the tip line, consider quarterly reporting that focuses on the volume and types of tips received. This audience will benefit from knowing the monthly volume of tips, the sources of tips (e.g., students, teachers, parents), the locations of the events that prompted the tip (e.g., in identified schools, at home, in the community, online), and the responses to the tips. This information will help to inform marketing strategies should tips be more likely to come from students in a specific district, for example, or identify the need for additional partners or resources if a high volume of tips is coming from a certain location or does not have a documented response.

Information about the nature of the tips, the characteristics of the individuals involved, and the response taken is important to communicate to all of your partners, including students and the community, to support the impact of the tool. This information can include aggregate statistics not only on the number of tips, but also information on unique incidents, locations, and individuals. As noted repeatedly throughout this Blueprint, information on responses to tips is critical to communicate to these audiences, to provide evidence that the information is being taken seriously and that the community and your partners are taking action in response to the tips received. It can also be powerful to communicate selected feedback or anonymized examples to relay the impact of the tool on individuals or communities.

A perspective on a crisis averted, an individual who was removed from an unsafe situation, or someone who was linked to counseling or other support services can be a powerful message. Statistics on the volume and type of information received on the top line are important to communicate, but all your partners will likely agree that even averting just one crisis is a compelling reason to continue the work that you do.



Reports and other dissemination materials are most effective when they are targeted, concise, and communicated through a variety of media. Dashboards or fact sheets on your tip line website can provide information on overall usage and potentially be customized to examine detailed information on certain types of tips (e.g., bullying), or specified responses to tips (e.g., law enforcement response). Examples of the positive impact the tip line has had can be communicated through presentations to partner organizations and on marketing materials. We recommend that reports be disseminated at least annually to funding sources, and more often to your immediate partners to communicate information about the overall tip line usage, responses to tips received, and impact on school and student safety.



### CASE STUDY: Planned School Attack

#### Tip

Multiple tips were received from students concerning a planned school attack. The reports gave additional information regarding a high school student who was making statements of his plan to kill others.

#### Response

The school resource officer, school counselor, and dean of students met with the student. The student's parents were contacted and advised of the situation. The student saw an outside therapist and was later admitted to a psychiatric hospital.

#### » Key indicators for partners may include the following:

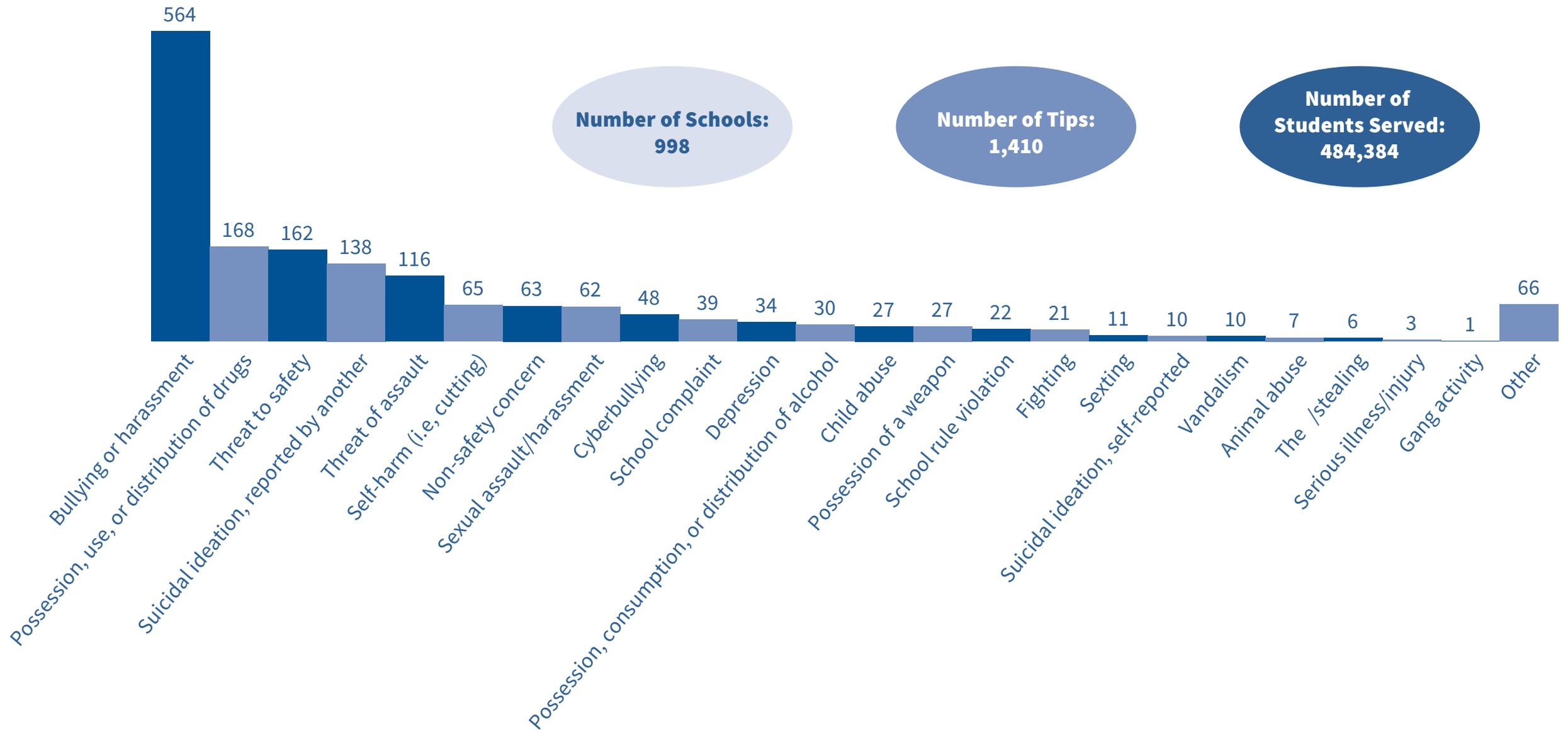
- Number of schools or jurisdictions with at least one tip
- Number of tips received per month
- Number of tips received by type of event (e.g., bullying, harassment, self-harm, credible threat to school safety)
- Source of tips (e.g., students, teachers, community members, anonymous reporters)
- Method of tip reporting (e.g., app, online platform, phone, text, e-mail)
- Number of and type of tip responses (e.g., referred to school officials, linked to counseling services, forwarded to law enforcement)

#### » Key indicators for communities may include the following:

- Number of unique events identified
- Characteristics of unique events (e.g., number of threats against teachers)
- Assessment of event (e.g., Was it determined to be credible tip? Did the tip involve a threat to school safety?)
- Number of unique victims or suspects (or both) identified
- Number and type of responses to threats
- Outcomes of events reported (e.g., suspension)
- Individual perspectives or anonymized tip response examples



**Figure 19. Case Study: Incident Types**



**Tips may have multiple incident types. All incident types are based on the tipsters' perception of the tip information prior to investigation. These numbers do not reflect the outcome of the incident type after investigation.**

Source: SafeOregon.com. (2018, June 15). *2017–2018 annual data report, June 16, 2017–June 15, 2018* (version 1). Retrieved from <https://www.safeoregon.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/SafeOregon-2017-2018-Annual-Report-061518-1.pdf>



## RESOURCES

### Ongoing attention to securing funding is paramount, as is careful consideration of costs and returns on investment.

Preventing harm and loss of even one life is worth any cost. Still, as with any school security solution, schools must consider costs and returns on investment.

Relative to other school safety technology, tip lines are considered a low-cost solution. The technology is a straightforward acquisition, usually through existing vendors. The most significant cost drivers include hosting a vendor platform (i.e., phone, text, social media, and online systems) and hiring, managing, and training staff.

Best practice and optimal tip line functioning includes staffing the tip line with a live operator at all times. This includes 24-hour monitoring of all incoming tips through all reporting mechanisms (e.g., phone, text, online). Of course, a 24-hour monitoring approach can drive up costs.

Alternatively, tip lines may include a tip line operator for only a portion of the day (e.g., 6 a.m.–10 p.m.). During the times when there is no operator (e.g., 10 p.m.–6 a.m.), voice recordings or automated replies to texts and online submissions may direct callers to contact local law enforcement. However, it's possible reporters will fail to take further action; this may be a lost opportunity to receive an important tip. In addition, involving third parties in receiving tips also introduces the likelihood of error, including the failure to systematically document, triage, triangulate, and respond appropriately to all incoming tips, according

to established tip line processes and procedures (e.g., reporter confidentiality). This may introduce liability. Should districts or schools pursue this option, the importance of partnership planning and coordination cannot be overstated.

Yet another cost-saving alternative for tip line technologies includes asynchronous tip line monitoring. With this approach, there isn't a tip line operator. Rather, staff review tips (e.g., voicemails, texts, online reports) at regular intervals (e.g., every 4 hours). However, this approach creates a time lag between when the tip was reported vs. when the tip was received. This time lag may introduce failure to avert a critical incident. Subsequently, districts or schools may be held liable for having information and failing to act in a timely or appropriate manner.

In addition to staffing, other direct costs include marketing and promoting awareness (refer to Section 4a), systems, maintenance, and supplies. Marketing and awareness is done at the state, district, and school level. School-based efforts usually involve hanging posters or using school or class time to promote awareness and educate staff, students, and parents.

Funding must be obtained and secured for ongoing tip line operations. Funding streams for school safety technologies may be available at the federal, state, and local levels through grants or legislative allocations. Braided funding streams (e.g., from multiple federal and state agencies) may promote the sustainability of a tip line as funding sources ebb and flow.

Fortunately, increasing school safety is a nonpartisan issue. Enlisting bipartisan support and identifying tip line champions within the state legislature can be a productive means of galvanizing support.

In sum, ongoing attention to securing funding is paramount, as is careful consideration of costs and returns on investment.



## POTENTIAL RISKS

### Proactively anticipating and managing potential risks will increase student and school safety and increase the tip line's credibility and operational integrity.

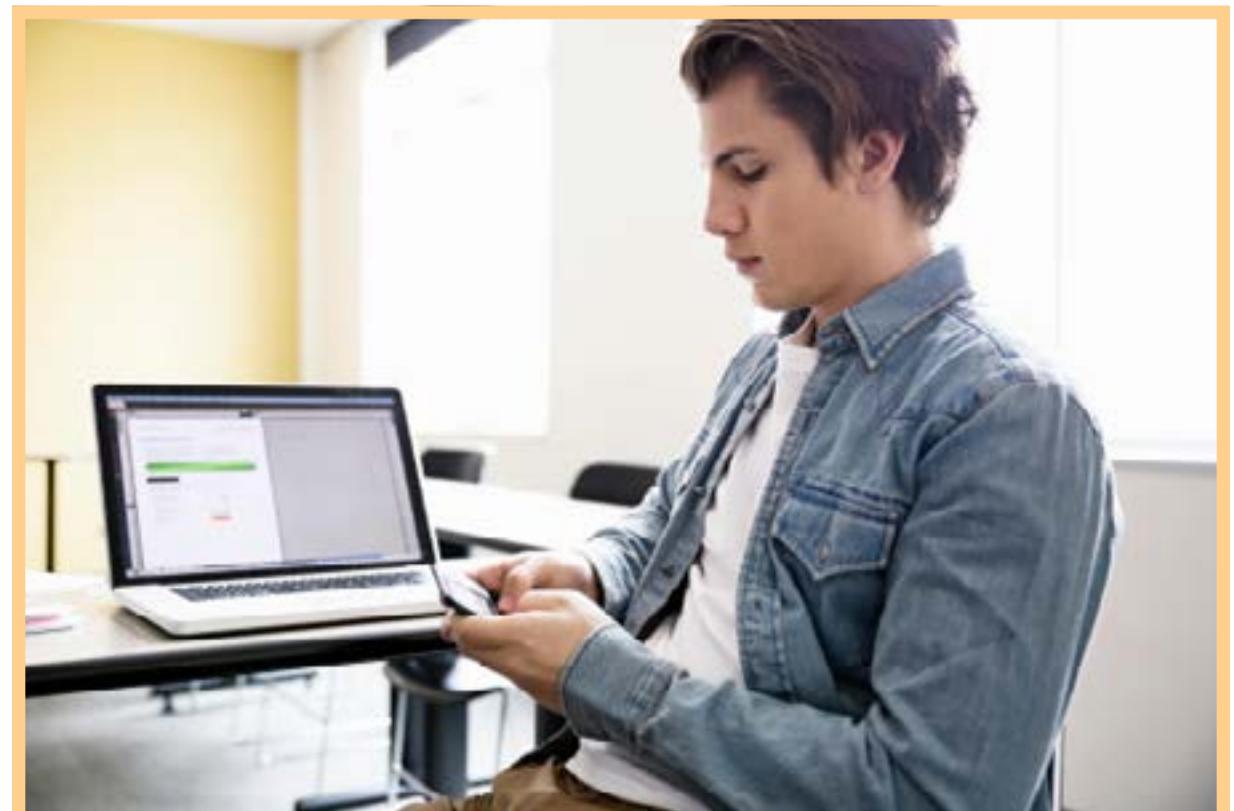
During tip line planning, adoption, and implementation, it is necessary to anticipate and mitigate any potential operational risks. Potential risks may include issues involving liability and accountability, among others.

Liability issues in tip line technology range from (1) protecting the confidentiality of the person reporting a tip to (2) treating the tip as sensitive information to (3) being held responsible for prompt review, triage, and appropriate response to tips received. During the tip line planning process, the planning team should establish policies and procedures to secure and safeguard the identity of the reporter. Otherwise, retaliatory acts toward the reporter may ensue. Furthermore, the tip itself should be considered sensitive information. Failure to treat it as such could inadvertently destabilize existing safety and security measures or escalate the risk of harm or loss of life. Failure to comply with federal and state laws and regulations, including FERPA and HIPPA, may also create liability. Further, it's possible that responsible parties (e.g., schools, FBI) may be held liable if they receive information about a threat to student or school safety and fail to act on it.

Balancing school safety and individual privacy is important. Maintaining confidentiality around a reporter's identity and a tip can be particularly challenging when information must be divulged to others for appropriate handling. Persons involved in tip line operations must both protect confidentiality and sensitive data, on the one hand, and investigate tips and avert imminent harm, on the other. Every system must comply with federal and local laws concerning individual privacy.

Another potential risk includes issues involving performance and accountability. Tip line effectiveness is therefore paramount, not only to secure student and school safety, but also to demonstrate accountability to stakeholders. Performance and accountability are also necessary to secure ongoing funding for tip line operations. Tip line planning teams should therefore develop and clearly communicate performance standards to responsible parties. Planning teams might also consider conducting tip line process and outcome evaluations; conducting evaluations allows midcourse corrections and improvements in operations and thus demonstrates a commitment to transparency, performance, and accountability.

In sum, proactively anticipating and managing potential risks will increase student and school safety and increase the tip line's credibility and operational integrity.

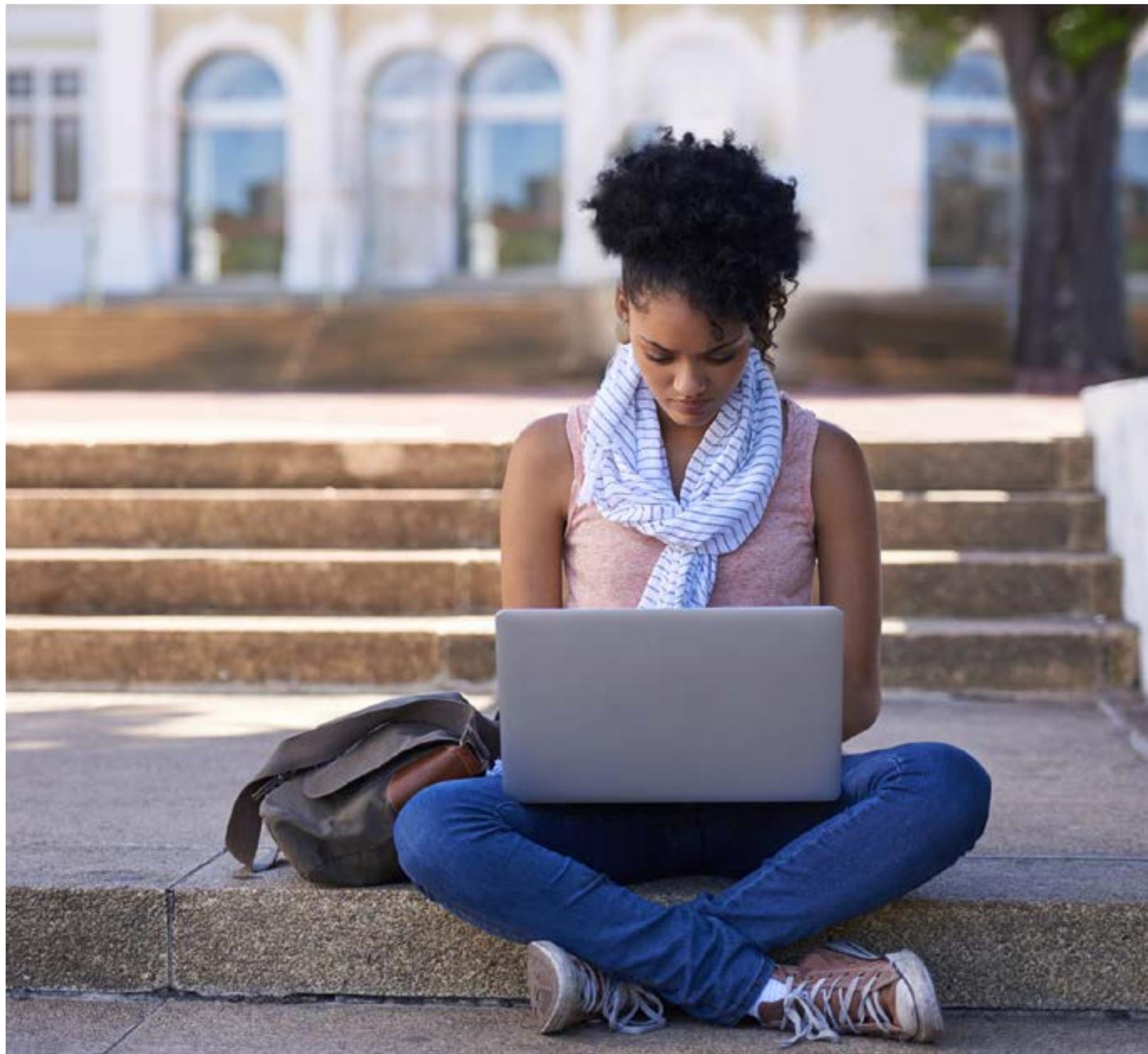




## SUMMARY

**Tip lines equip authorities with the information needed to respond to threats and avert tragedy.**

Research is still under way to determine the impact of tip lines and other approaches to support school safety. This Blueprint identifies the important factors that educators, law enforcement professionals, community leaders, and school safety experts should consider when exploring tip lines as a part of their solution. Many factors remain unknown about the effectiveness of tip lines and the optimal design for a particular school setting. What we do know is that tip lines afford students, school personnel, and other members of the public a safe and anonymous or confidential way to report a threat or potential threat to student or school safety that could otherwise go unreported. Tip lines equip authorities with the information needed to respond to threats and avert tragedy.





# SCHOOL SAFETY TIP LINES: TIP LINE METRICS



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### Acknowledgements

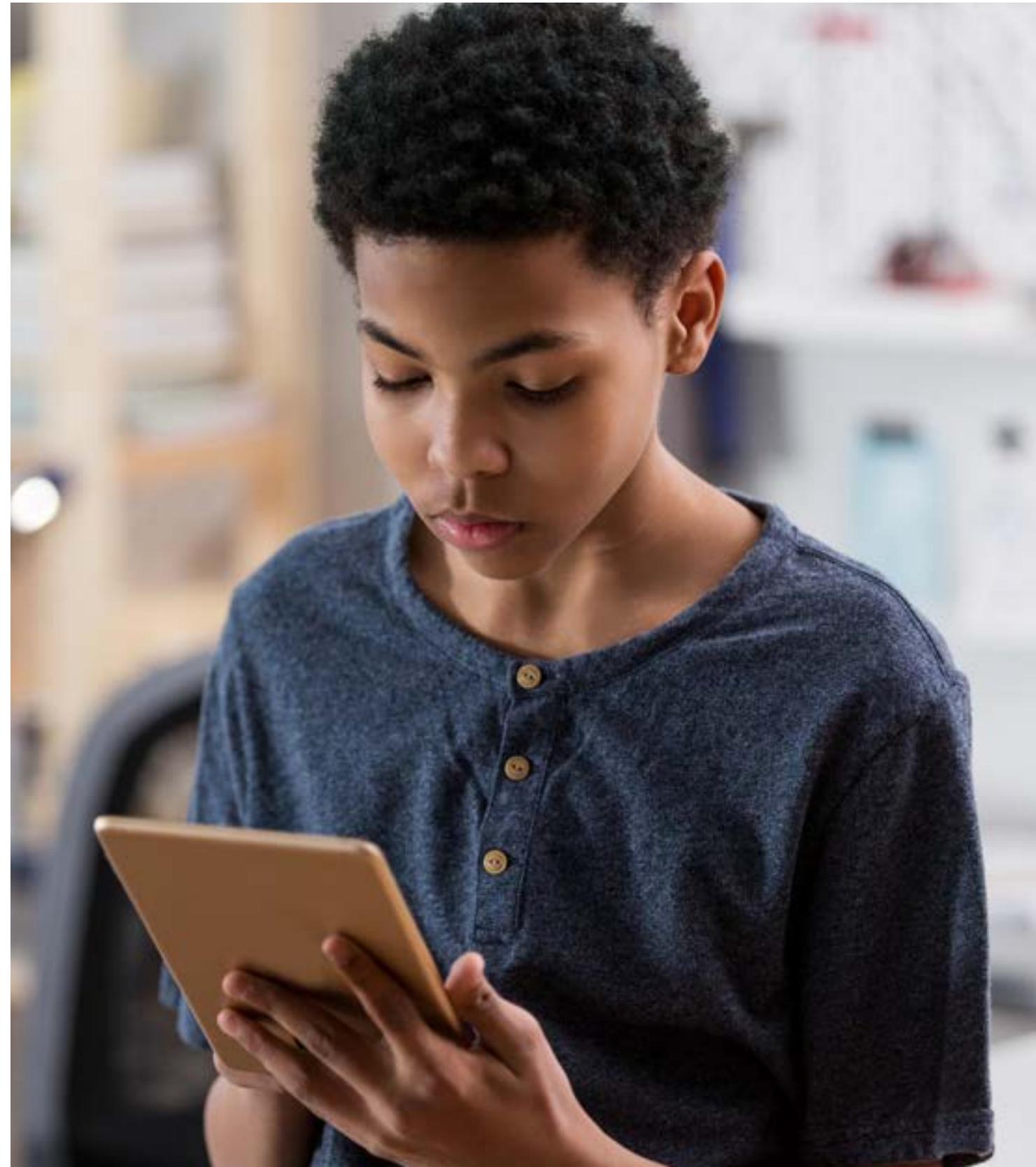
This project was supported in part by Award No. 2017-CK-BX-0004 from the National Institute of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions, findings, conclusions, and recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department of Justice.



# INTRODUCTION

**This guide is designed to help stakeholders consider key metrics, or data elements, that tip lines should include.**

Alongside traditional school safety measures, tip lines provide a unique opportunity to capture anonymous data on student and school safety concerns. During the tip line planning phase, carefully consider what data elements, or data points, will be most meaningful to collect. Data you chose to collect (or omit) will have implications for how stakeholders (e.g., school staff, law enforcement) understand and respond to the identified school and student safety concerns. Proper metrics can guide appropriate prevention, intervention, and response strategies; they are also essential for meaningful data analysis and reporting to stakeholders (e.g., funders, school community).





## THE VALUE OF TIP LINE DATA

### Tip lines assist school staff in recognizing student and school safety concerns.

They serve an investigative function, laying bare the types of safety issues (e.g., bullying, weapon carrying, suicidality) occurring in schools and among students. They also point to patterns among those safety concerns—for example, whether certain types of incidents occur in specific locations or at particular times of day. Identifying patterns may serve to punctuate the scope, or extent, of one or more problems, signaling the need for a coordinated, systematic intervention or response.

Tip line data can also assist school stakeholders in deploying appropriate prevention, intervention, and response strategies. Data-driven investments in school safety solutions yield more efficient approaches. Funding to ameliorate student and school safety concerns is limited, so strategies must be targeted and precise. Tip line data provide empirical evidence directing school stakeholders to universal, selective, or indicated interventions.<sup>1</sup>

Finally, tip line data can demonstrate impact and justify need to funders, the school community, and other stakeholders. Tip lines provide a quick, one-stop shop for school-based constituents to report time-sensitive information. School stakeholders can point to the presence of tip line data to substantiate its impact—for example, that students are using the tip line, and that they are reporting serious concerns that may not otherwise come to light. Furthermore, the presence of such data may be leveraged to justify other school resource needs, such as additional behavioral support systems or mental health professionals.



<sup>1</sup> For more information on universal, selective, and indicated prevention and intervention, see [Prevention and Intervention: Multi-tiered Approaches to Bullying \(stopbullying.gov\)](https://www.stopbullying.gov).



# TIP LINE METRICS AND DATA SOURCES

Tip line metrics must be carefully considered during the planning phase.

Too much data creates burden. Too little data hampers effective intervention and response. Therefore, careful consideration and prioritization of data elements for inclusion remains paramount. The tip line must collect sufficient data to inform surveillance, targeted intervention and response, and robust reporting to stakeholders. This section details possible data elements for inclusion, as well as various data sources to consider.

## Tip Line Data Sources and Mechanisms

Tip line reports may be obtained through a variety of modes, and data can be abstracted through several mechanisms during tip processing. Tipsters report information through myriad vehicles, including on a website or social media app, or via calls or texts. Some data elements may be required, whereas others may be optional. The tip line platform or computer system may be programmed to record additional information. Tip line operators, in turn, receive, review, and triage tips, at which time they enter ancillary information critical to tip line processing. School staff or other stakeholders may provide follow-up information about tip disposition and student case outcomes. A robust set of data elements from a variety of sources can fully characterize the school or student safety concerns at hand.

## User-Interface Data

Considerable variability exists in what data elements collected from tipsters. However, some metrics are consistently applied. The following metrics were identified from tip lines in Colorado, Florida, Idaho, Indiana, Kentucky, Maryland, Michigan, Nevada, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Utah, Wisconsin, and Wyoming. This list is a menu of possible data elements. Each state or local education agency and its stakeholders should include the data elements that fit its situation after weighing their relative benefits, deciding which to include, and—more importantly—determining how each element will be used to facilitate intervention and response to safety concerns, as well as larger analysis and reporting to funders, stakeholders, and constituents.

- School name
- Incident type/category
- Description of incident
- Tipster role
- Who is being harmed/who is the victim?
- Who is the offender?
- Location of incident
- Date of incident
- How many times has the incident occurred?
- Has the incident been reported to an adult?
- Who else has knowledge of the incident?
- Social media platform associated with incident
- Associated social media username or URL
- How did you hear about the tip line?
- Names of people involved
- Reporter name and contact information (optional)
- Reporter phone number, email, or both
- Grade level of people involved
- Name, gender, race, grade, age, school, city, address, physical appearance, clothing of victim and offender
- Vehicle make, model, year, color, license plate, state, description
- Other identifying information about people involved, like scars, piercings, tattoos, address, clothing, weapons
- File upload option



*Tip lines produce additional data points—another set of indicators. When used along with more traditional school administration records, tip line data can triangulate other data sources.*

## Tip Line Operations Data

Carefully consider what additional data elements may be captured by the tip line platform itself, in addition to those reported by the tipster. Capturing data through the tip line reporting platform reduces burden on both the tipster and the tip line staff, and it increases data accuracy. For example, programming the tip line reporting platform to automatically record (1) the date and time of tip submission, (2) the date and time of tip processing (e.g., tip receipt, tip dispatch) by the tip line staff, and (3) the length of time between those events may provide useful information involving incident reporting patterns. The data may also be instructive in monitoring and documenting response times involving tip line staff processing and triage. Inappropriate response times may signal the need for additional tip line staff or additional training. For this reason, it may also be advisable to document which tip line staff triage which tips. Capturing the tipster's reporting mode—phone, text, website, or social media app—may also be automated and illustrate tipster reporting preferences and trends. This information could be useful in augmenting the tip reporting platform. For example, if reporting patterns demonstrate higher call volumes on particular times or days, additional tip line staff may be needed on phone lines at those times. Alternatively, if reporting patterns demonstrate a preference for social media app reporting, perhaps investing in additional social media app functionality is warranted.

In addition, tip line staff should record additional data involving tip line triage. Most tip lines have a tip classification system that signals the time-sensitive nature of the tip. For example, the tip may be classified as critical, urgent, or standard. Tip line staff should be trained to manually code an incident. An incident classification code, in turn, dictates required response times from both tip line staff who route the tips and school staff who respond to them. The classification code also dictates whether law enforcement should be directly notified and dispatched. Tip line staff may also manually record additional data associated with the triage process, including the school staff member the tips were routed to.

### OK2SAY School Operations



As a result of an OK2SAY tip, school operations were impacted two times. This included a school cancellation and an evacuation.

- **10 tips involved the confiscation of weapons.**
- **42 tips involved the seizure of drugs/alcohol.**



## Disposition Data

A final source of data are the school staff, and in some cases law enforcement officers, who provide an incident disposition. During the planning phase, consider what disposition data are necessary, both to ensure that appropriate actions have been taken and to appropriately document those actions. Disposition data inform accountability and transparency; protect against liability; and create a record capable of justifying, informing, and communicating the provision of necessary support services for students. To optimize and facilitate reporting, a combination of drop-down menu options with available data fields to expand upon entries may be helpful. Drop-down menus may include a wide variety of options, such as whether the parents of involved students were contacted, the students met with an administrator, or the students met with a counselor. Although the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) may restrict some recording and reporting options, it is vitally important to document case dispositions with as much specificity as possible. These data can and should be used to serve students' safety and well-being.

## OK2SAY Dispositions

### 2020 OUTCOME REPORTS

Schools and local law enforcement are asked to complete an outcome report to let us know how the process worked. MSP adds outcome report information to its database to compile:

- The number of tips received;
- The number of tips forwarded;
- The nature of the tips received;
- The recipient of the forwarded tips;
- The details of the response; and,
- The effectiveness of the response.

Tip recipients submitted 785 outcome reports in 2020. The information collected in these reports plays an important part in assessing the overall effectiveness of the program and has resulted in changes to program categories.

Based upon the outcome report, school personnel and law enforcement would have investigated the situation to resolve it and tip issues. Most often the tip involved multiple interventions.

### TYPES OF INTERVENTION

|                                 |     |       |
|---------------------------------|-----|-------|
| Parents notified                | 368 | 46.9% |
| Monitor the situation           | 237 | 30.2% |
| School counseling               | 208 | 26.5% |
| Law enforcement involved        | 87  | 11.1% |
| Ongoing investigation           | 72  | 9.2%  |
| School disciplinary action      | 53  | 6.8%  |
| Outside resources recommended   | 46  | 5.9%  |
| Not enough information provided | 33  | 4.2%  |
| Detained/taken into custody     | 2   | 0.3%  |



# REPORTING TIP LINE DATA

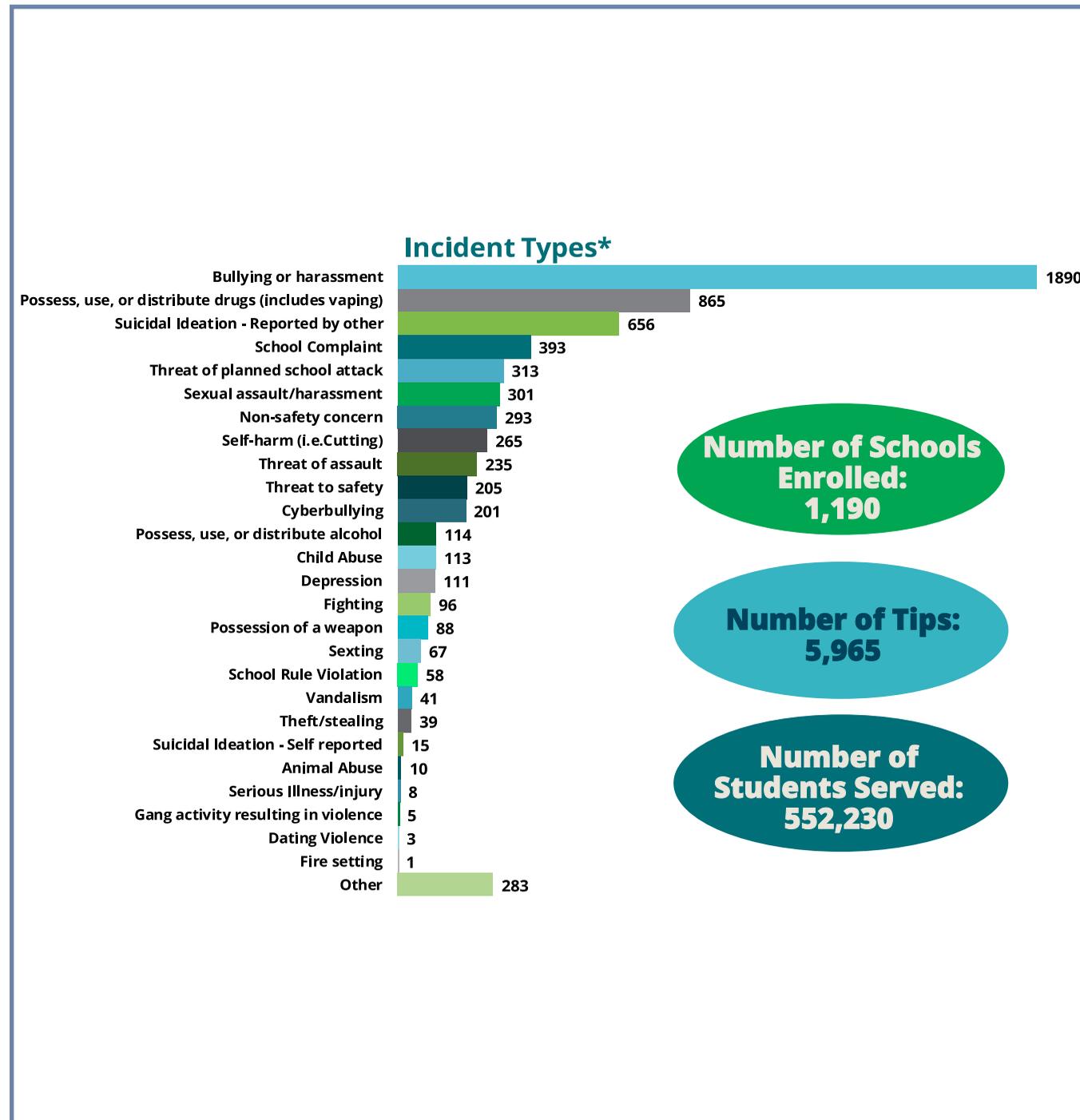
Tip line data can be reported to diverse audiences for a variety of purposes.

When you are planning the data elements and data sources to be included in the tip line reporting system, forward thinking is required. Who will ultimately use the data, and for what purposes? Data will be shared with and among school-level stakeholders, including law enforcement where appropriate, for the immediate purpose of responding to school safety incidents. In addition, tip line data may also be reported to constituents for the purpose of characterizing a school's climate and safety profile and, importantly, demonstrating awareness of school and student safety resource needs. Data may also be reported to funders (e.g., state legislatures) to justify the need for ongoing tip line funding, point to specific resource needs (e.g., hall monitors, mental health specialists), or both.

## Incident Response

Tip line data, first and foremost, should be used to protect school and student communities from imminent, in-process, or ongoing threats or harm. Metrics are the ultimate arbiter of what gets communicated, and communication is key to informing effective prevention, intervention, and response. What data can help inform appropriate, judicious investigation and incident response? Prioritize metrics that will yield actionable data. Otherwise, school staff may receive tips with concerning information, yet be unable to act on them. Worse yet, students may lose confidence in the reporting system if they do not observe active intervention or meaningful change.

SafeOregon Incident Types





## Reporting to Constituents

Reporting school and student safety incidents increases transparency and may serve to build trust among constituents. After all, an awareness of school safety concerns is a prerequisite to addressing them. Some key metrics to consider reporting include the number of schools enrolled in the tip line reporting system; the number of tips received, both during the reporting window (e.g., annually) and to date (i.e., cumulatively); the incident types and frequencies; the tip reporting method (e.g., social media app, text); the tip incident level (e.g., critical; urgent; standard); the percentage of tips submitted anonymously compared with those submitted confidentially; and the time of day and day of the week that most tips were submitted. Including success stories can be a powerful means of illustrating the types of tips and associated responses. It is critical, however, to sanitize these tips to protect the identities of the reporter, offender, and victim. Consider making the report user-friendly with graphics to facilitate a quick rendering.

### SafeOregon Success Stories



#### Success Stories:

Below are real tips (details have been changed for confidentiality purposes)

that was being abused by their parent while the parent was intoxicated.

The school met with the student and other parent who was seeking help immediately. The school contacted DHS and involved their school resource

A student posted a photo of themselves holding a gun pointed to the camera with the caption "don't come to school tomorrow."

Student was apprehended by law enforcement and placed in a secure location to perform a threat

A student was showing off and bragging about a bag of illicit drugs they had in their possession during

School investigated the allegations and found the student needed wrap-around services for struggles they were having in their home life. Student was connected to a social worker and counseling services.

A student was reported for threatening certain students while telling others they were safe from harm.

The parents and law enforcement were contacted and a threat assessment was completed.

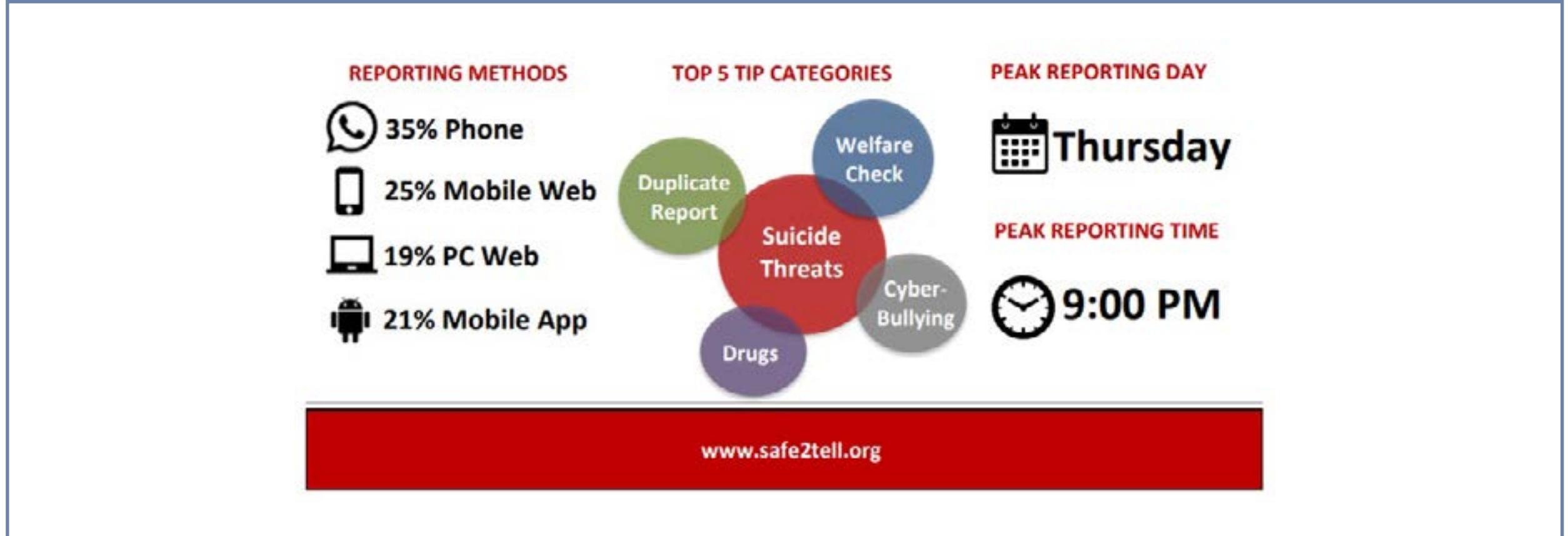


## Reporting to Funders

Reporting to national, state, or local funders highlights material and human resource needs in the school community. Tip line data will highlight these needs. Those data can, in turn, be used to justify material resource needs (e.g., school security cameras to monitor student substance abuse behind the school; bullying prevention curricula and training for staff) or human resource needs (e.g., mental health specialists to support students who are experiencing self-

harm or suicidality). It may also be prudent to consider how tip line data can be triangulated with other sources of administrative data to augment reporting and demonstrate need. Data-driven requests for material and human resource needs may yield improved funding odds by respecting funders' needs for evidence-based fiscal accountability. Reporting to funders also demonstrates the return on their investment and supports sustainability. Communicating with funders and policymakers (e.g., state legislature) about those data elements critical for continuation funding may be the most direct way to identify necessary metrics.

### Safe2Tell Reporting Metrics





## CONCLUSION

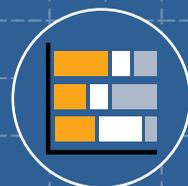
**Metrics are a critically important consideration in tip line planning and operationalization.**

Data can be collected from tipsters, through automated processes within the tip line reporting system, from tip line operators and staff, and from school staff who respond to incidents. Metrics can be used to communicate to various audiences, including school administrators and staff, law enforcement (where appropriate), the larger school community, and funders and policymakers. Resulting data can be used to inform appropriate intervention and response, point out resource needs and allocations, demonstrate return on investment, and build a case for tip line sustainability.





# STATE LEGISLATION TO EXPLORE OR ESTABLISH SCHOOL SAFETY TIP LINES



Gourdet, C., Kolnik, J., Banks, D., & Planty, M. (2021). *State Legislation to Explore or Establish School Safety Tip Lines*. Research Triangle Park, NC: RTI International. [Link: https://www.rti.org/sites/default/files/13736\\_tip\\_lines\\_management\\_2-4-21.pdf](https://www.rti.org/sites/default/files/13736_tip_lines_management_2-4-21.pdf)

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# SCHOOL SAFETY TIP LINES: PART OF A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO SCHOOL SAFETY



School safety continues to be a key priority for educators, policymakers, and communities across the United States. In 2018, about 836,100 student victimizations occurred at, or on the way to or from, school. In the 2018–2019 school year, there were 66 reported school shootings that resulted in casualties at public and private elementary and secondary schools, including 29 incidents that resulted in at least one death.<sup>1</sup>

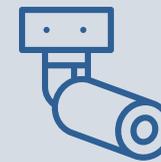
Studies of the characteristics of school-based shootings have found that, before many school shooting incidents, other people were concerned about the behaviors of the perpetrators and some even knew of the planned attack.<sup>2</sup> The vast majority of those who had prior knowledge of the plan were peers, including siblings, friends, and schoolmates.<sup>3</sup> Reasons for not reporting this information varied, but proposed prevention strategies emphasized providing students with an anonymous reporting system.

School tip lines are one avenue of reporting that may facilitate the sharing of concerns and prior knowledge of violence or threats that extend beyond routine disciplinary or behavioral problems or conflicts between students. A school safety tip line is

a comprehensive communication system designed to provide students, school personnel, or other members of the public with a safe and anonymous or confidential way to report a threat or potential threat to student or school safety, thereby equipping authorities with the information needed to respond to threats and avert tragedy. Anonymous or confidential reporting systems can be a critical component of a comprehensive school safety approach, which should also include strategies to promote physical safety, emergency response, threat assessment, and support services for students.

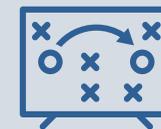
Funded by the National Institute of Justice, the Assessment of National and State Tip Line Technology as a Strategy for Identifying Threats to School Safety project, which supported the preparation of this brief, sought to explore the implementation of school safety tip lines (Award No. 2017 CK-BX-0004). According to the recent, nationally representative survey conducted under this NIJ-funded project, just over half (51%) of public middle and high schools in the United States currently have tip lines in operation.<sup>4</sup> Principals reported that they believed the tip lines to be an effective strategy to address multiple threats to school safety, and more than 50% of principals in

A school safety tip line is one component of a comprehensive approach to promote school safety, along with other approaches that seek to enhance security, prepare response systems, assess possible threats, and support student well-being.



### Physical Security

- Armed school personnel
- Technology to control or monitor access to school property
- School resource officers



### Protocols/Drills

- Emergency response plans
- Emergency drills
- Response protocols
- School safety audits



### Receive/Assess Threats

- School tip lines
- Threat assessment teams
- Risk assessments



### Supportive Services

- Student behavior modification
- Suicide prevention
- Mental health services
- School safety centers



schools with tip lines reported that the tip lines had prevented violent incidents. Of schools without tip lines, 26% reported that the school had an insufficient budget to implement and operate a tip line and 21% reported that the school had insufficient staff to implement and operate a tip line.

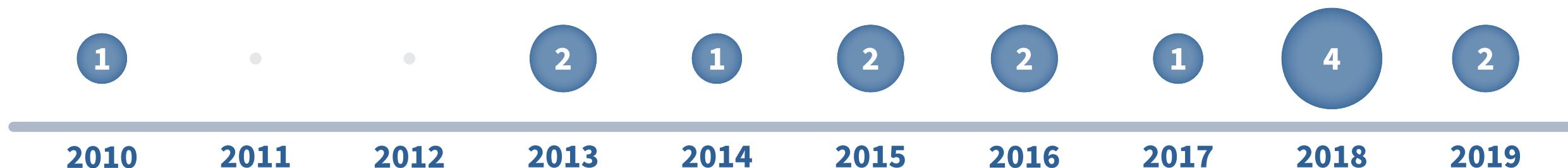
Many states across the country have supported the implementation of school safety tip lines by passing laws that authorize or require the establishment of reporting systems through which students, staff, and members of the wider community can report potentially harmful, violent, or criminal activities that threaten school safety and student well-being. Although legislation is not required in order for schools to establish and then implement school safety tip lines, such legislation can be helpful in launching, and in some cases streamlining, the establishment of a tip line in schools across the state. In the absence of a state law requiring it, some schools within a state may not otherwise establish and implement a school safety tip line. This brief summarizes state laws passed from 2010 through 2019 that establish school safety tip lines.<sup>5</sup>

We identified 15 states that enacted or adopted codified state laws that require or authorize the creation of school safety tip lines<sup>6</sup> (see *Figure 20*). Under state laws that require the creation of a tip line, there is a designated state or local-level entity that is tasked with developing or maintaining the tip line. By contrast, under state laws that simply *authorize* the creation of a tip line, a particular state or local-level entity is allowed or encouraged to create a tip line, but the development or implementation of the tip line is not mandated.

An additional three states have passed codified laws that explicitly explore the feasibility of creating a statewide school safety tip line.

The policy analysis described below is limited to state laws that explicitly<sup>7</sup> authorize or require schools to create tip lines that can receive tips of potential threats to school safety through a website, mobile application, or other mechanism of an actual or perceived threat or danger to school safety.<sup>8</sup> State laws are included in the analysis only if each of these components is explicitly specified in the law. We additionally included state laws that require anonymous or confidential<sup>9</sup> reporting of potential threats to school safety, but this was not a required element of our inclusion criteria. We excluded state laws that solely implied the existence of reporting procedures or protocols, or established tip lines specifically for the purpose of identifying threats against an individual as opposed to threats against school safety. We included in our legal research state laws that authorize or require the creation of a school safety tip line, by either requiring or encouraging that a designated state-level entity, school district, or individual school establish a school safety tip line. While valuable, an assessment of the degree to which schools throughout these states have actually implemented these tip lines is beyond the scope of this brief, since it is not possible to determine and reliably assess simply from the face of these state laws. Local and non-codified tip lines are also excluded.<sup>10</sup>

**Figure 20. Number of States That Have Passed Laws Requiring or Authorizing the Creation of School Tip Lines**





## Overview of state laws to establish school safety tip lines

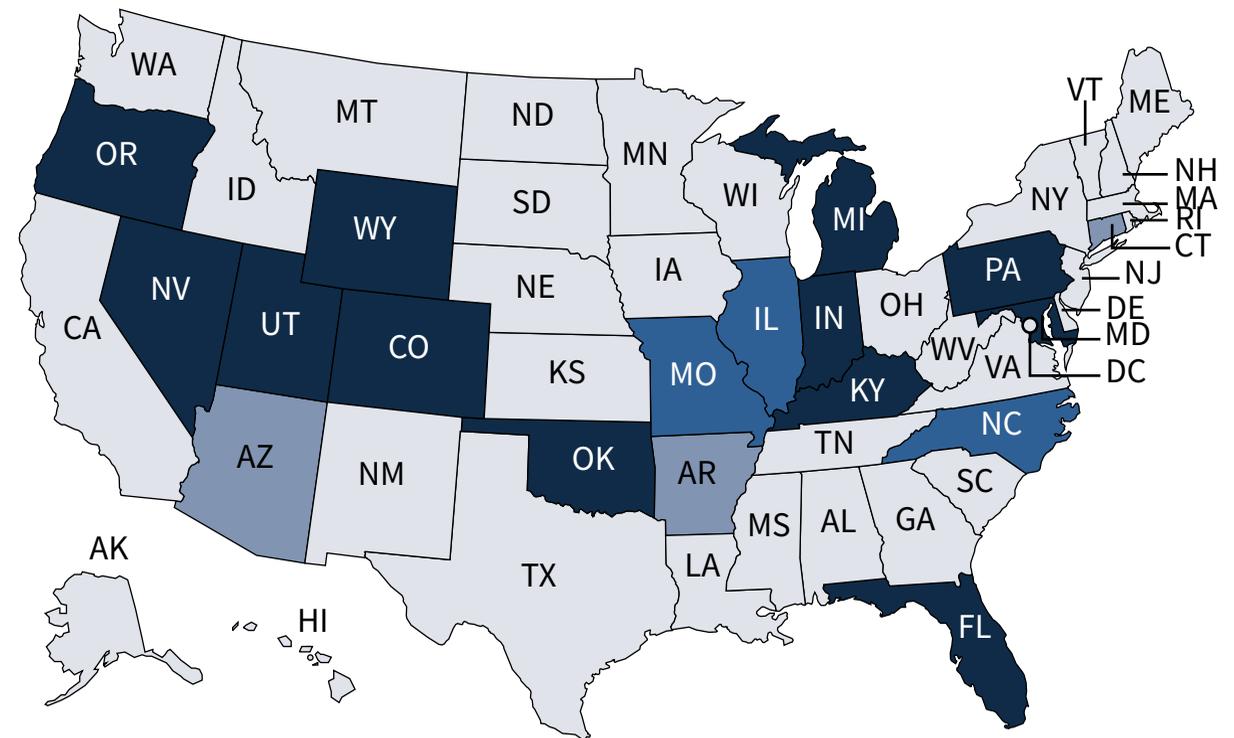
According to the 2019 national survey of public middle and high schools described above,<sup>11</sup> most (60%) school safety tip lines have been in operation for less than 3 years. Similarly, our analysis of state tip line laws found that in recent years an increasing number of states passed laws authorizing or requiring tip lines. These increases were most pronounced in 2018 and 2019, after the school shooting that killed 17 staff and students in February 2018 at Parkland High School.<sup>12</sup>

From 2010 through 2019, 12 states had laws that established statewide school safety tip lines (*Figure 21*). The laws in these 12 states explicitly create statewide systems that procedurally enable tips to be centrally reported.

Distinct from statewide tip lines, three additional states have passed laws mandating the creation of a tip line specific to a subset of schools in the state, focusing on a specific jurisdiction or part of the school system. These states are Illinois, Missouri, and North Carolina. In Illinois, state legislation establishes a school safety tip line for the Chicago Public Schools. The Missouri legislation establishes a tip line for each college or university in the state, and the North Carolina legislation establishes a tip line for each secondary public school in the state.

Finally, there were three states with legislation that specifically mentions the creation and functioning of tip lines. However, rather than formally establishing tip lines, the states in this category instead require a feasibility study or pilot program to be conducted to assess the viability and potential impact of a tip line. Legislation to explore the feasibility of tip lines in these three states is discussed in more detail near the end of this document.

**Figure 21. State Legislation to Establish or Explore School Safety Tip Lines**



- State legislation establishes a statewide school safety tip line
- State legislation establishes a tip line for a defined subset of schools
- State legislation to explore the creation of a school safety tip line
- No state legislation found that establishes or mandates exploration of a school safety tip line



# CHARACTERISTICS OF STATE LEGISLATION ESTABLISHING SCHOOL SAFETY TIP LINES



As noted above, 15 states enacted laws that established school safety tip lines (see sidebar). In these 15 states, we analyzed the laws for whether they included one or more elements that stakeholders may consider when establishing a comprehensive school safety tip line. Some components of a comprehensive school safety tip line that may be established through state law include which entity or professional is charged with administering the tip line, how the tip line is to operate, and whether funding has been allocated to implement or maintain the tip line.<sup>13</sup> Throughout this document, we will reference elements of the state laws in the 12 states with laws that establish statewide tip lines, the three that establish tip lines for a subset of schools, and the combined 15 states.

## Entity responsible for administering the tip line

State laws were analyzed to determine which agency, organization, or office was charged with creating, maintaining, and reporting on activities related to the tip lines. The specific entity the law assigns to house and administer the school tip line varies among the states (*Figure 22*).

The largest number of states with laws establishing statewide school safety tip lines charged either the state Attorney General’s office or the state law enforcement or homeland security department with administering the tip line. Other entities charged with operating tip lines include state school safety centers or school security institutes, state education departments, the governor’s office, and a research institute.

Laws in the three states that established tip lines in a subset of schools generally assigned administration of the tip lines to individual entities or governing bodies of the subset of schools identified. In Missouri, each individual college or university in the state was charged with administering the tip line; in North Carolina, the governing body of each secondary public school has the responsibility for the tip line. Illinois, unlike other states with tip line-establishing laws, charged two entities with administering the tip line for Chicago Public Schools: the Chicago Board of Education and the Chicago Police Department.

### » Establishes a Statewide Tip Line: 12 States

- Colorado
- Indiana
- Florida
- Kentucky
- Maryland
- Michigan
- Nevada
- Oklahoma
- Oregon
- Pennsylvania
- Utah
- Wyoming

### » Establishes a Tip Line for a Subset of Schools: 3 States

- Illinois
- Missouri
- North Carolina

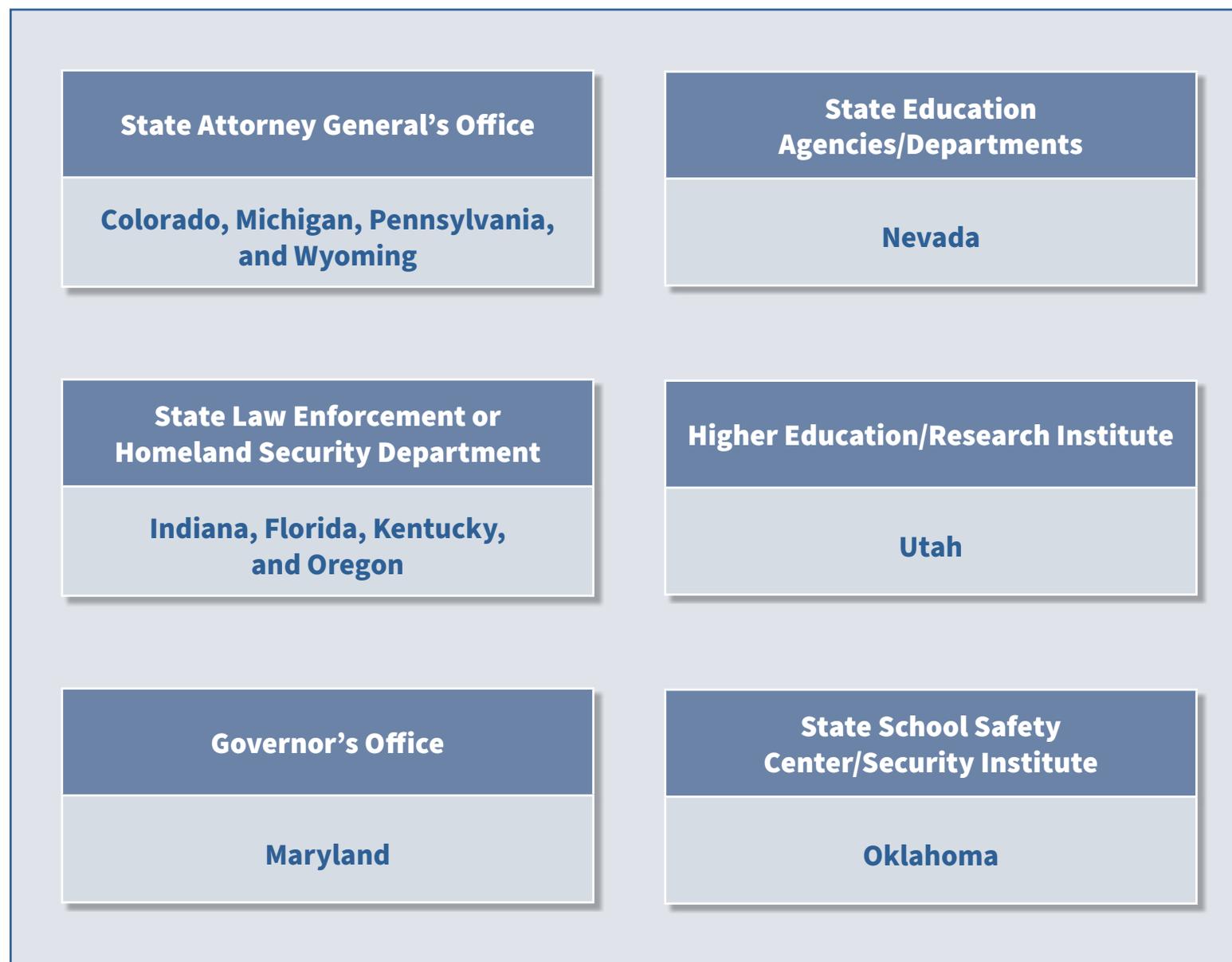


## Tip line operations

Authorized users of the reporting system and the means by which they can submit tips are sometimes, but not always, specified in law. For example, Oregon law states that its school safety reporting system should allow for the submission of tips via telephone calls, text messages, and a mobile device application, as well as electronically through the internet (Or. Admin. R. 257-095-0030 (2020)). *Figure 23* summarizes what reporting options are explicitly required or mentioned in state laws that establish statewide tip lines, as well as what has been implemented according to a review of each state’s public website.<sup>14</sup>

Ten of the states in *Figure 23* specifically note on their websites that their tip lines are **set up to receive reports 24 hours a day, 365 days a year**.<sup>15</sup> Only three of those states, however—Michigan, Nevada, and Utah—have language in their state laws that require continuous access to their tip lines. For instance, Nevada requires the support center to “be available to receive reports and notifications and staffed with trained personnel 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, including holidays and other days when school is not in session” (Nev. Rev. Stat. Ann. § 388.14557 (LexisNexis 2020)). In states where the laws do not require the tip lines to be continuously operational, the reporting system may be staffed only Monday–Friday during regular business hours.

**Figure 22. Entity Responsible for Administering the Tip Line, as Identified in State Legislation**





**Figure 23. Explicit Requirements in State Laws Establishing Statewide Tip Lines**

| State Website & Statutory Reference   | Legislative and Regulatory Language: Format Accepted   | Implemented Formats According to Websites |     |     |      |        | State Website & Statutory Reference                                   | Legislative and Regulatory Language: Format Accepted | Implemented Formats According to Websites |     |     |      |        |  |
|---|--|---|-----|-----|------|--------|---|--|---|-----|-----|------|--------|--|
|   |  | Phone                                     | Web | App | Text | E-mail |   |  | Phone                                     | Web | App | Text | E-mail |  |
| <b>Michigan</b><br>Mich. Comp. Laws Serv. § 388.1767b (LexisNexis 2020)                     | Phone number that transmits voice, text, photographic, and other messages and information                  |   |     |     |      |        | <b>Utah</b><br>Utah Code Ann. § 53B-17-1202 (LexisNexis 2020) et seq. | Not specified  |   |     |     |      |        |  |
| <b>Oregon</b><br>Or. Rev. Stat. § 339.329 (2020); Or. Admin. R. 257-095-0000 (2020) et seq. | Telephone calls, text messages, electronically through the internet, and an application on a mobile device |   |     |     |      |        | <b>Wyoming</b><br>Wyo. Stat. Ann. § 9-1-603 (2020)                    | Not specified  |   |     |     |      |        |  |
| <b>Nevada</b><br>Nev. Rev. Stat. Ann. 388.1455 (LexisNexis 2020) et seq.                    | Phone call, website, mobile telephone application, and text messaging application                          |   |     |     |      |        | <b>Kentucky</b><br>Ky. Rev. Stat. Ann. § 158.4451 (LexisNexis 2020)   | Phone call, e-mail, mobile device application        |   |     |     |      |        |  |
| <b>Colorado</b><br>Colo. Rev. Stat. § 24-31-606 (2020)                                      | Not specified  |   |     |     |      |        | <b>Oklahoma</b><br>Okla. Stat. tit. 74, § 51.2d (2020)                | Telephone tip line                                   |   |     |     |      |        |  |
| <b>Maryland</b><br>Md. Code Regs. 01.01.2018.21 (2020)                                      | Electronic tip system  |   |     |     |      |        | <b>Indiana</b><br>Ind. Code Ann. § 10-21-1-4.5 (LexisNexis 2020)      | Application  |   |     |     |      |        |  |
| <b>Pennsylvania</b><br>24 Pa. Cons. Stat. § 13-1303-D (2020) et seq.                        | Not specified  |   |     |     |      |        | <b>Florida</b><br>Fla. Stat. § 943.082 (LexisNexis 2020)              | Application compatible with Android and iPhones      |   |     |     |      |        |  |

Notes: States are listed in order of most to fewest number of formats implemented. Links to state tip line websites were reviewed and active as of July 6, 2020. Information gathered from public websites for each school safety tip line.



Of the 15 states with laws explicitly creating tip lines through legislation or regulation, 14 have language specifying that **reporting to the tip lines is to be anonymous or confidential**.<sup>16</sup> The language in Michigan's, Oregon's, and Wyoming's laws specifies that efforts should be made to keep caller information confidential, while also equipping responders to follow up with callers, if necessary. For example, Oregon's law specifies rules supporting that the tip line must include "provisions that protect the personally identifiable information of a person reporting information without compromising opportunities for follow-up contact from local law enforcement contacts or service providers to provide further information to or obtain further information from the person" (Or. Rev. Stat. § 339.329.3a (2020)).

**Coordination or communication with appropriate entities, such as local law enforcement entities or public safety officials**, about tips is specified in all 12 states that have laws establishing statewide tip lines. In addition, Illinois's legislation specifies coordination with law enforcement to operate the Chicago Public Schools' tip line. Some states offer further guidance within their state laws. For example, Pennsylvania mandates that procedures be established for how information will be forwarded to the "appropriate law enforcement agency, school official or organization, as determined by the office" (24 Pa. Cons. Stat. § 13-1303-D (2020)).

Some state laws that establish school safety tip lines **explicitly include reports of criminal activity in addition to reports about concerns or threats of harm and violence**. For example, Colorado's Safe2Tell program is required to "establish and maintain methods of anonymous reporting concerning unsafe, potentially harmful, dangerous, violent, or criminal activities in schools or the threat of those activities" (Colo. Rev. Stat. § 24-31-606 (2020)). Florida's FortifyFL tip line has a similar mandate: "The department shall competitively procure a mobile suspicious activity reporting tool that allows students and the community to relay information anonymously concerning unsafe, potentially harmful, dangerous, violent, or criminal activities, or the threat of these activities, to appropriate public safety agencies and school officials" (Fla. Stat. Ann. § 943.082 (LexisNexis 2020)).



*Of the 15 states with laws explicitly creating tip lines through legislation or regulation, 14 have language specifying that reporting to the tip lines is to be anonymous or confidential.*





Missouri’s tip line is intended to capture certain types of specified threats, such as those “concerning unsafe, potentially harmful, dangerous, violent, or criminal activities, or the threat of such activities” (Mo. Rev. Stat. § 173.1200 (2020)). North Carolina’s tip line is designed to receive “anonymous information on internal or external risks to the school population, school buildings, and school-related activities” (N.C. Gen. Stat. § 115C-105.51 (2020)). Illinois requires the Chicago hotline to accept “anonymous phone calls for information that may prevent violence” (105 Ill. Comp. stat. Ann. 5/34-21.8 (LexisNexis 2020)).

## Reporting requirements

The states of Colorado, Indiana, Kentucky, Maryland, Michigan, Nevada,<sup>17</sup> Oregon, Pennsylvania, and Wyoming have included public **reporting requirements** in their laws establishing their school safety tip lines.<sup>18</sup> These reports cover a variety of data points, but they most often include the number and types of tips received in a given year (*Figure 25*). While not required, a report may also cover the volume of tips by day of the week, the methods used to submit tips, how tips are reported, and the outcome or disposition of the reported incidents.

## Resources to support tip line implementation

Although many state legislatures have appropriated funding to broadly support school safety—through establishing school safety centers, implementing school safety plans, or generally promoting and conducting school efforts—in their laws that authorized and established the tip lines, only four states designated state funding specifically for the purpose of supporting the tip lines (see *Figure 26*).

### Figure 25. Examples of Reporting Metrics in Selected States

Annual reports for 2018–2019 were available online from five states:<sup>19</sup> Colorado, Michigan, Oregon, Pennsylvania, and Wyoming.<sup>20</sup> These reports include information such as the following.

- » **The number and type of reports received.** Colorado, Michigan, and Wyoming noted suicidal threats as the top type of tip received, with other top categories including the same three tip types: drugs, bullying, and self-harm.<sup>21</sup> Pennsylvania and Oregon’s top tip type was bullying or cyber-bullying.<sup>22</sup> Two states, Colorado and Wyoming, report on number of tips received by day of the week, finding that Tuesday–Thursday were days with higher tip counts; Oregon’s report notes that the day of the week with the most tips was Thursday.<sup>23</sup>
- » **How reports are submitted.** Colorado, Oregon, Pennsylvania, and Wyoming present how often each method is used. In general, the most common methods used were web or mobile browsers, except in Pennsylvania, where the vast majority of reports came through their mobile application (83%).<sup>24</sup> Telephone was the least common method used, with less than 10% of total reports in every state except Colorado, which reported that 23% of its reports were received by phone.<sup>25</sup> Michigan’s annual report does not provide further detail on the methods used to report but notes increases in the use of the web and mobile app after updates (130% and 9%, respectively).<sup>26</sup>
- » **Response to reports received.** Michigan’s annual report is distinct from the others in that it includes the outcomes for approximately a third of tips received. Most commonly these reported outcomes involved notification of parents (60%), further monitoring of the situation (37%), or engagement in school counseling (35%). Although rare, 50 tips (3%) resulted in confiscations of weapons.<sup>27</sup>



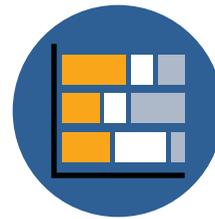
Other states have not appropriated a specific amount of funding, but rather created avenues for monies to be routed to support the establishment and operation of the legislatively created tip lines. For instance, the state of Michigan created the “student safety fund” within the state’s treasury (Mich. Comp. Laws Serv. § 752.917 (LexisNexis 2020)), Nevada established the “SafeVoice Program Account” from the state general fund (Nev. Rev. Stat. Ann. 388.1457 (LexisNexis 2020)), and Colorado created the “Safe2Tell Cash Fund” (Colo. Rev. Stat. § 24-31-610 (2020)). Therefore, the funding for the creation or maintenance of a tip line is dependent on whether the state has appropriated monies. In Indiana, a school corporation can apply to the board of education for a grant that offsets the costs of creating an “active event warning system” (Ind. Code Ann. § 10-21-1-4.5 (LexisNexis 2020)). School safety tip lines may also be supported by relying on existing systems.

**Figure 26. States Designating Funding Specifically for the Purpose of Supporting Their Tip Lines Through the Authorizing Laws**

| State                 | Amount                 | Frequency             | State Laws Designating the Scope of Funding   |
|-----------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|---|
| <b>Oregon</b>         | \$1,000,000            | One-time              | “To establish and operate the tip line”(2016 Or. Laws 74)   |
| <b>Florida</b>        | \$300,000<br>\$100,000 | One-time<br>Recurring | “Appropriated from the General Revenue Fund to the Department of Law Enforcement to competitively procure proposals for the development or acquisition of the mobile suspicious activity reporting tool pursuant to s. 943.082, Florida Statutes” (2018 Fla. Laws 3)  |
| <b>Utah</b>           | \$1,770,000            | Recurring             | From the state’s education fund to the University of Utah for the purpose of operating its SafeUT Crisis Text and Tip Line (2019 Utah Adv. Legis. Serv. 446 (LexisNexis)).<br><br>University Neuropsychiatric Institute is not allowed to “charge a fee to the State Board of Education or a local education agency for the use of the SafeUT Crisis Line”; however, the Institute <i>is</i> allowed to charge an institution of higher education for use of the SafeUT Crisis Line (Utah Code Ann. § 53B-17-1204 (LexisNexis 2020)). |
| <b>North Carolina</b> | \$5,000,000            | One-time              | Appropriated during the 2018–2019 fiscal year for the creation and implementation of its tip line (2018 N.C. Sess. Laws 5)  |



## STATE LAWS TO EXPLORE THE CREATION OF A SCHOOL SAFETY TIP LINE



In addition to the 15 states previously discussed, three states have passed state laws to explore the creation of tip lines through feasibility or pilot studies: Arizona, Arkansas, and Connecticut. The laws in each of these states further specify the entity responsible for conducting the tip line feasibility assessment:

- **Arizona:** Department of Education (enacted May 18, 2016)<sup>28</sup>
- **Arkansas:** University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences Psychiatric Research Institute (enacted April 16, 2019)<sup>29</sup>
- **Connecticut:** Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection (enacted June 13, 2014)<sup>30</sup>

The Arizona legislature was interested in determining where the tip line should be housed, estimating the cost of the program, and evaluating how tip lines have been implemented in other states. Connecticut’s law further assesses referral entities, training for operators, other state tip lines, and legal issues related to tip line administration. No report or further information on the findings of the feasibility initiative in Arizona could be located through internet searches.

In 2019, the Arkansas state legislature passed legislation to create the pilot program implementing the “AR Safe Schools” tip line, citing a survey administered by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention that noted that Arkansas reports some of the highest numbers of school safety incidents in the nation<sup>31</sup> (Ark. Code Ann. § 6-18-111 (2020)). Previously, Arkansas had legislated that all public schools have a panic button alert system (2015 Ark. Acts 950). In the 2019–2020 school year, that requirement was met through the Rave Panic

Button system in all public schools, according to a July 2019 memorandum from the commissioner of the Arkansas Department of Education.<sup>32</sup> The same memo stated that the Rave resources available to public schools would now include Rave Eyewitness, a school tip line for anti-bullying. Arkansas’ definition of bullying has remained unchanged since its original passage in 2007: bullying is the “threat or incitement of violence by a student against another student or public school employee.”<sup>33</sup>

In regard to funding, Arkansas established the “ARSafeSchools Fund” for the creation and maintenance of the school safety tip line, which consists of revenue from “(1) Moneys obtained from private grants or other sources that are designated to be credited to the fund; and (2) Any other funds authorized or provided by law” (Ark. Code Ann. § 6-18-112 (2020)). Part of this funding must be used to train staff in the operation and maintenance of the school safety tip line (Ark. Code Ann. § 6-18-111 (2020)).

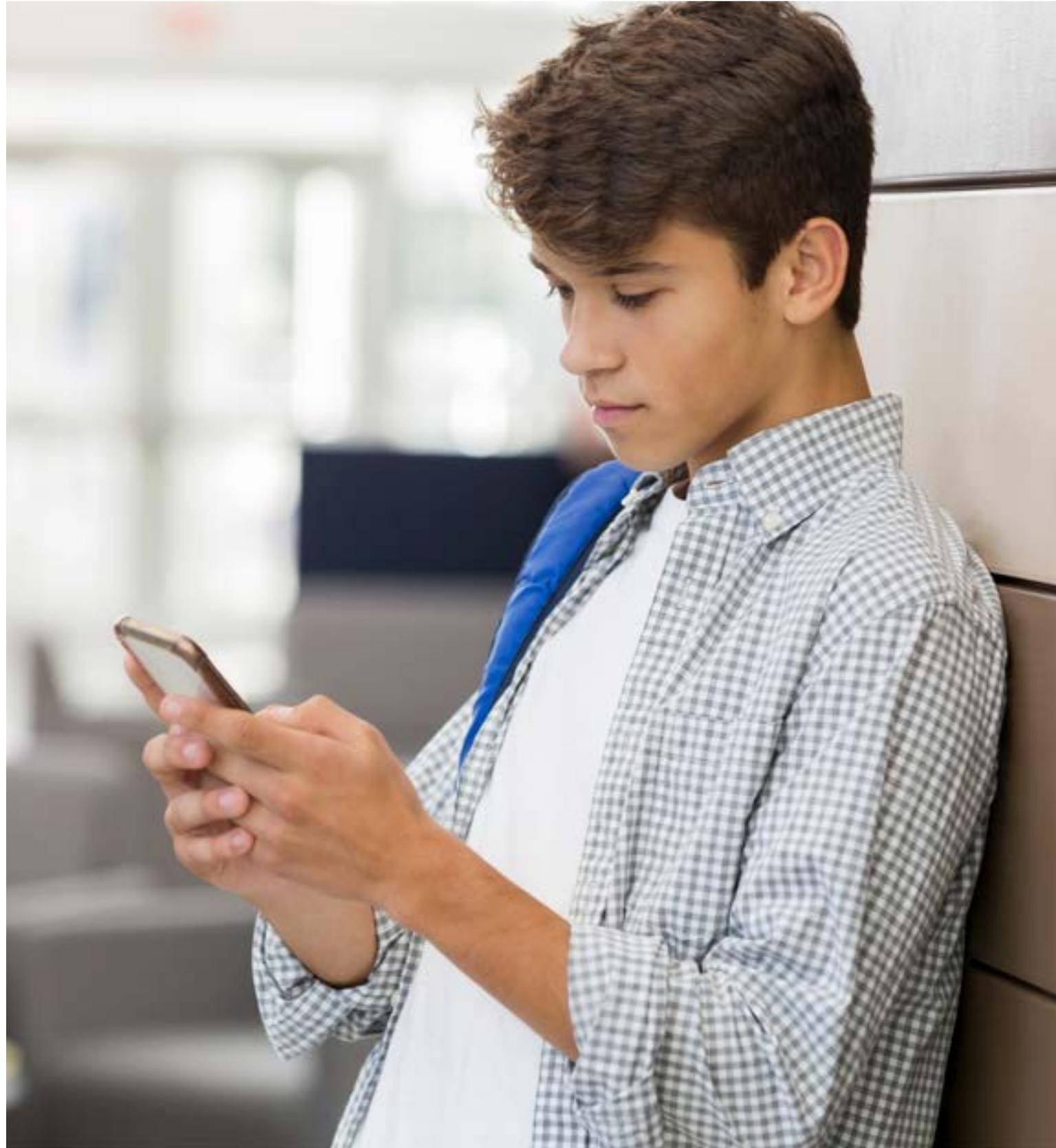




## CONCLUSIONS

**Future research may explore what processes these entities have implemented and how effective they have been to inform future programming and new state-level law.**

The number of states that have authorized or required the creation of school safety tip lines through legislation and regulation has doubled in recent years, specifically since the Parkland shooting. Many of these state laws require coordination among various departments at the local and state level without specifying processes. Future research may explore what processes these entities have implemented and how effective they have been to inform future programming and new state-level law. As many tip lines are established without any corresponding funding for implementation or enforcement, more research is needed to identify how they are resourced and to assess the long-term sustainability of these funding sources.





## ENDNOTES

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- 5 All state laws were identified by applying the following two Boolean search strings within the LexisNexis statutes and regulations databases for all 50 states and the District of Columbia: **Search String #1:** text (school! or education! Or instruction! /40 (report! or app! or tip! or safe! or mobile or info! /8 line or tool or system or report! or activity) /50 safe! or suspicious! or suspect! or dangerous! /6 activity or behavior! or act!). **Search String #2:** text (anonym! or mobile or tip or info! or safe! or crisis or unsafe /35 report! or anonym! or tip or “tip line” /29 (suspicious! or harm! or danger! or violent! or criminal! or threat! /7 act! or behavior) /100 school! or education!) and not heading (compact or offender or correctional or workplace). All laws are current as of May 17, 2020
- 6 The following states mentioned school safety tip lines only within the context of appropriated funding: **California** (per 2002 Cal Stat. 42); **Kansas** (per 2019 Kan. Sess. Laws 68; 2015 Kan. SB 7; 2013 Kan. S.B. 171; 2011 Kan. Sess. Laws 118; 2009 Kan. Sess. Laws 124; 2010 Kan. Sess. Laws 165; 2007 Kan. Sess. Laws 167; 2005 Kan. Sess. Laws 174; 2004 Kan. Sess. Laws 123; 2001 Kan. Sess. Laws 144; 2000 Kan. Sess. Laws 130; 1999 Kan. Sess. Laws 160); **Washington State** (per 2002 Wash. Sess. Laws 371; 2003 Wash. Sess. Laws 10); **West Virginia** (per 2006 W. Va. Adv. Legis. Serv. 6). These appropriations laws were identified by applying the following Boolean search string in the LexisNexis session law database of all 50 states and the District of Columbia: text (appropriate or appropriation or fund! or revenue or money or dollar or account /30 (“tip line” or “tipline” or “hotline” or “safevoice” or “safe voice” or “safe-to-tell” or “safe2tell” or (anonymous! or confidential! or suspicious! /8 report! or tip! or tool) or “saferoh” or “school safety and crisis line”). To be counted here, the laws have to explicitly meet the inclusion criteria specified above, by directly stating these requirements or elements in the text of the law. Note that here and throughout this brief, all session laws, statutes, regulations, and regulatory text documents are generally formatted according to the BlueBook citation style.
- 7 This brief did not include states such as Tennessee, which imply the existence of reporting procedures or protocols through the creation of a threat assessment team but do not actually mention or require the creation of a reporting mechanism that is capable of receiving tips of perceived or actual threats to school safety. Tenn. Code § 49-6-2701 (2020); La. Rev. Stat. Ann. § 17:410 (2020).



- 8 This brief did not include state laws that require the person issuing the tip to identify themselves, by virtue of the notification process. While anonymity or confidentiality of the individual reporting the tip does not have to be explicitly mentioned or guaranteed, state laws that required the identification of the person offering a tip were excluded.
- 9 This brief did not include state laws that establish tip lines solely for the purpose of identifying threats against a single individual student or school staff person, such as anti-bullying, suicide prevention, or domestic violence tip lines: e.g., Conn. Gen. Stat. § 10-222d (2020); Mass. Ann. Laws ch. 71, § 37O (LexisNexis 2020).
- 10 This brief did not include local-level laws or non-codified policies such as tip lines that are mentioned on a state board of education's website but not included within state laws put into place by elected state lawmakers. Similarly, this brief did not include state laws that authorize or require school districts, individual schools, or local boards of education to create their own tip lines (e.g., N.Y. Educ. Law § 2801-a (Consol. 2020); S.C. Code Ann. § 59-63-140 (2020)), because such laws do not promote a tip line that is uniformly designed and implemented throughout the state.
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<https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/252537.pdf>
- 14 To locate tip line websites for each state, we conducted a Google search using key words from the legislation or regulation (e.g., "SafeOregon") or each state's name with terms such as "school safety tip line OR hotline OR reporting system."
- 15 The two states that did not mention continuous access on their websites at the time of this brief were Florida and Kentucky. That is not to say that these state tip lines were not set up to receive tips 24/7, but rather that their websites did not mention it.
- 16 The language that mentions the establishment of Oklahoma's state tip line is brief and does not discuss anonymity or confidentiality: "The Oklahoma School Security Institute may develop a telephone tip line whereby reports of activity that may compromise school safety can be called in and disseminated to the appropriate parties for additional investigation should it be warranted." Okl. Stat. tit. 74, § 51.2d (2020). However, Oklahoma School Security Institute states on its website that the texting feature of this tip line is anonymous.  
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- 17 The publicly available report found for Nevada covers only two quarters of data (January–June 2018) and thus will not be further discussed. The report can be retrieved from  
<https://www.leg.state.nv.us/Division/Research/Library/Documents/ReportsToLeg/2017-2019/176-18.pdf>
- 18 Although other states do have reporting requirements to their boards or government officials, they are not specific to the tips received by the tip lines and are not included in this section of the brief.
- 19 Annual reports were retrieved on July 21, 2019.
- 20 A 2017 annual report was available online for Michigan's tip line ([https://www.michigan.gov/documents/ok2say/2017OK2SAYAnnualReport\\_reduced\\_625938\\_7.pdf](https://www.michigan.gov/documents/ok2say/2017OK2SAYAnnualReport_reduced_625938_7.pdf)); however, it is not discussed further, as a more recent report was not found.



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# COST- AND COST-BENEFIT ANALYSES



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## INTRODUCTION

**This guide is designed to help stakeholders assess the fiscal implications involved in tip line planning and implementation.** Tip lines require a sophisticated and complex set of operations for proper functioning, each requiring careful consideration and commanding variable costs. These factors vary by jurisdiction, adding further complexity to determining the cost of a tip line. The information provided below describes key factors that decision-makers should consider when determining the cost of a tip line vis-à-vis that of other school safety solutions.

## THE VALUE OF A TIP LINE

**School stakeholders and decision-makers may need to demonstrate both the cost and the fiscal value of a tip line.** Although the benefits of tip lines—such as averting harm to students—are important, school stakeholders and decision-makers may need to consider the relative benefit of investing limited resources into a tip line instead of into alternative school safety solutions. Documenting tip line cost and benefits, and subsequently analyzing cost data, facilitates this comparison.

**Applying fundamental principles of cost and cost-benefit analysis can build a credible fiscal case to funders.** At this time, no independently derived, non-vendor estimates of tip line costs and the degree to which benefits outweigh the costs are available.

**This brief describes two fiscal approaches to assessing the costs and benefits of a tip line.** We first delineate key considerations involving tip line operations, including mechanics and resource requirements, followed by the purpose and process of cost and cost-benefit analyses.

## TIP LINE MECHANICS

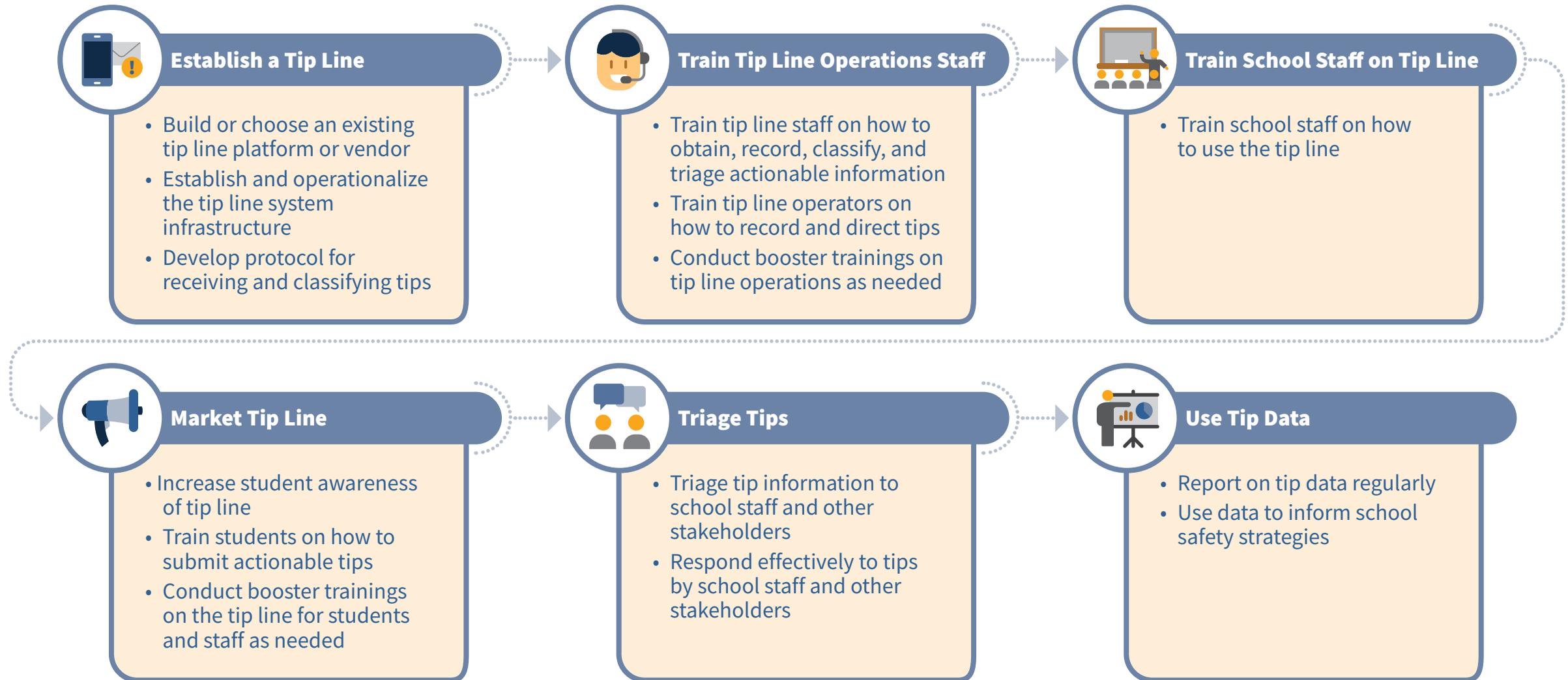
**The mechanics of using a tip line are straightforward:** A student or member of the school community with a concern submits the tip via telephone, text, e-mail, online submission, or social media app; a tip line vendor or staff member reviews relevant details; and the tip is appropriately routed for further action. What is not straightforward is ensuring (1) that the tip line is marketed appropriately to students and the school community to promote awareness and use and (2) that school staff, behavioral or mental health professionals, or law enforcement officers—or a combination of these people—respond effectively. These functions require careful forethought and oversight.<sup>1</sup>

**Effective tip line operations require careful planning and implementation** (*Figure 27*). Failure to carefully plan for and deploy each component of a tip line may compromise operations. For example, the best-laid plans for a tip line will be rendered inconsequential if the tool is inadequately marketed to students and students therefore do not use it. Similarly, a failure to train students and staff on how to report actionable information may yield copious tips that school stakeholders are unable to effectively respond to, thereby diminishing the credibility of the tip line.

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<sup>1</sup> See the Blueprint section for more details about the implementation and sustainability of tip lines.

**Figure 27. Tip Line Planning and Implementation**



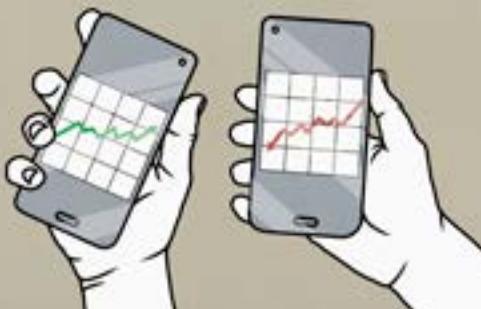


## RESOURCE REQUIREMENTS

**Establishing and maintaining a tip line requires resources.** Because school systems must fiscally justify expenditures on school safety measures, accurately assessing the costs of a tip line is essential. Detailed cost analyses can help decision-makers plan carefully for expanding and replicating models, demonstrate funding needs to external stakeholders, and create reliable budgets.

**How jurisdictions plan and implement tip lines can vary greatly.** For example, tip line staff training, both on content and delivery, will depend in part on the tip line staffing strategy. All else being equal, a tip line that relies on call center staff trained to triage incoming tips will be less resource intensive than a tip line that relies on trained clinicians to field incoming tips and provide real-time counseling and support services to youth experiencing crises. Owing to this variability in tip line operations, estimating cost requires careful attention to detail.

**Given the variability among tip line components and implementation, there may be no one-size-fits-all cost estimate for a tip line, and no single estimate may be able to monetize the benefits of a tip line that applies across jurisdictions.** Rather, jurisdictions likely need a reliable approach that they can use to assess the costs of starting up and operating a tip line, as well as a way to monetize the tip line benefits. Jurisdictions that seek to fully justify a tip line may wish to pursue an economic evaluation.



*Tip lines require resources, and schools will need to fiscally justify the resources they request.*

## ESTIMATING COST: TWO TYPES OF ANALYSIS

**Two types of analysis may be most useful for decision-makers who are considering implementing or modifying a tip line: cost analysis and cost-benefit analysis.** Because little evidence exists involving costs of tip lines, this brief takes the first step by outlining how to conduct both. *Figure 28* illustrates the differences between them.

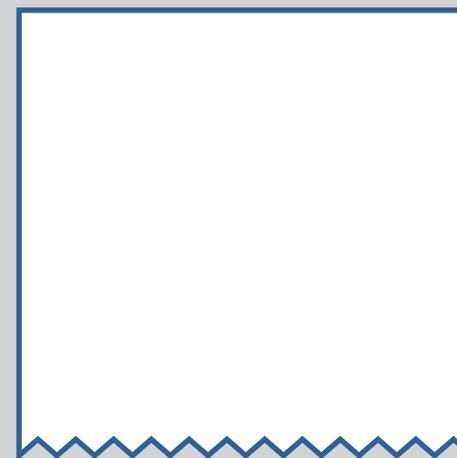
**Figure 28. Cost and Cost-Benefit Analyses: Questions and Data Sources**

### Cost Analysis

A cost analysis can be used to assess **how much a tip line costs**.

To calculate tip line costs, you need to know

1. the quantity of resources used in the tip line and
2. the unit cost of each resource.



### Cost-Benefit Analysis

A cost-benefit analysis can be used to determine **whether a tip line is worth it**.

#### Plan A: Adopt a Tip Line



\$\_\_\_\_\_ per crisis averted

#### Plan B: Other Approach



\$\_\_\_\_\_ per crisis averted



**Cost analysis** requires the systematic documentation of costs and then the use of those data to characterize the value of resources required to support the tip line. This kind of evaluation is fundamental to economic evaluation; the results can be instructive and persuasive. The results of cost analyses can be used to

- compare the cost implications of different “what-if” scenarios, such as contracting with a tip line vendor or building a homegrown tip line;
- show the relative contribution of stakeholder resources to the tip line; and
- demonstrate to funders the shortfall between current funding and what is needed to appropriately support the tip line.

Data required for conducting cost analyses can be found from financial records for the tip line, the school district, any organization or vendor sponsoring the tip line, or a combination of these.

**Cost-benefit analysis** estimates whether the benefits of the tip line outweigh its costs. Data on outcomes are monetized (e.g., the value of an averted incident) and then paired with results from the cost analysis to calculate the overall monetary benefit.

One key consideration is that cost-benefit analysis requires a comparison: cost-beneficial compared to what? Requisite data are therefore needed both for the tip line and the alternative school safety solution that the tip line is being compared to.

For example, the comparison might be one or more nearby districts that do not have a tip line, or it might be the same school district a year or two before the tip line was implemented. If the driving question involves what kind of tip line to implement (rather than whether to implement one at all), then the appropriate comparison may be one or more districts that have alternative tip line implementation approaches.

## COST ANALYSIS: RESOURCES TO BUILD AND MAINTAIN A TIP LINE

### Terminology

**Assessing the cost of a tip line demands the systematic collection, organization, and analysis of data.** *Figure 29* introduces key concepts integral to that process.

The resources needed for a tip line will depend on its maturity. During the tip line **start-up** phase, which lasts from the time a tip line model is identified to the go-live date of the tip line, costs will be focused on building or adapting an existing model and engaging stakeholders. After the go-live date, **ongoing** costs will be incurred as the tip line carries out its operations.

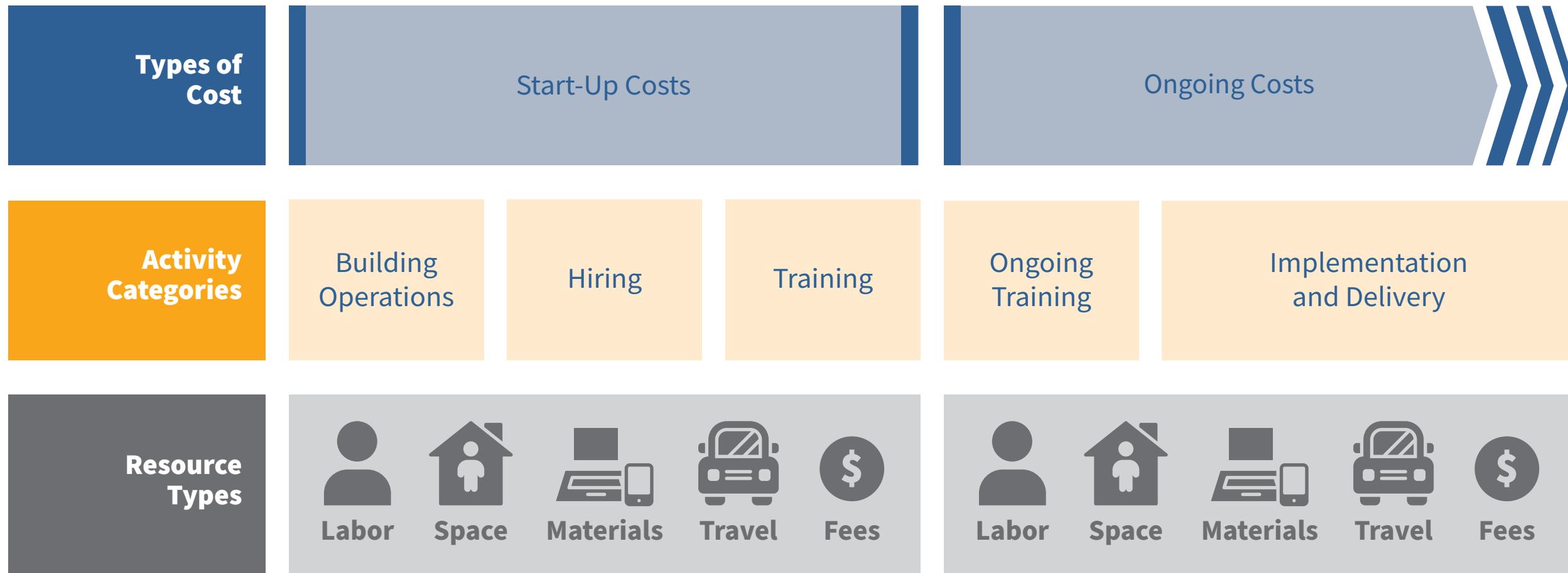
**Figure 29 illustrates possible activity categories.** For example, in the start-up phase, staff must be trained; they may also need booster trainings during ongoing tip line operation. Performing tip line activities requires **resources** such as labor and technology.

**Finally, the costs of the cost analysis itself—research and monitoring—should be excluded or separately estimated.** This is because the purpose of these costs is to understand the program rather than support its operation.

### Top-down approach

To conduct cost analysis, the evaluator will use either a top-down or a bottom-up approach. In a top-down approach, total costs are determined in aggregate and then divided by some measure of output to calculate a crude average cost. For example, the total costs of the tip line could be estimated by combining

**Figure 29. Cost Analysis**



### Bottom-up approach

information from financial records, administrative data, and stakeholder interviews, and then the average cost per tip could be calculated by dividing total costs by the number of tips. A top-down approach is usually feasible, but it also usually provides little insight beyond a simple average.

A bottom-up approach produces more accurate and insightful results. However, this approach can require significantly more study resources. The bottom-up approach—also known as activity-based costing—consists of four tasks: (Task 1) deciding what activity categories should be included in the analysis, (Task 2) ensuring that all resource categories are accounted for, (Task 3) collecting the data on the unit cost and quantity of each resource, and (Task 4) combining the data. As such, while activity-based costing is usually more accurate than a top-down approach, it can be time-intensive for both the evaluators and the tip line site. *Figure 30* shows an example of the four tasks of estimating costs using activity-based costing.

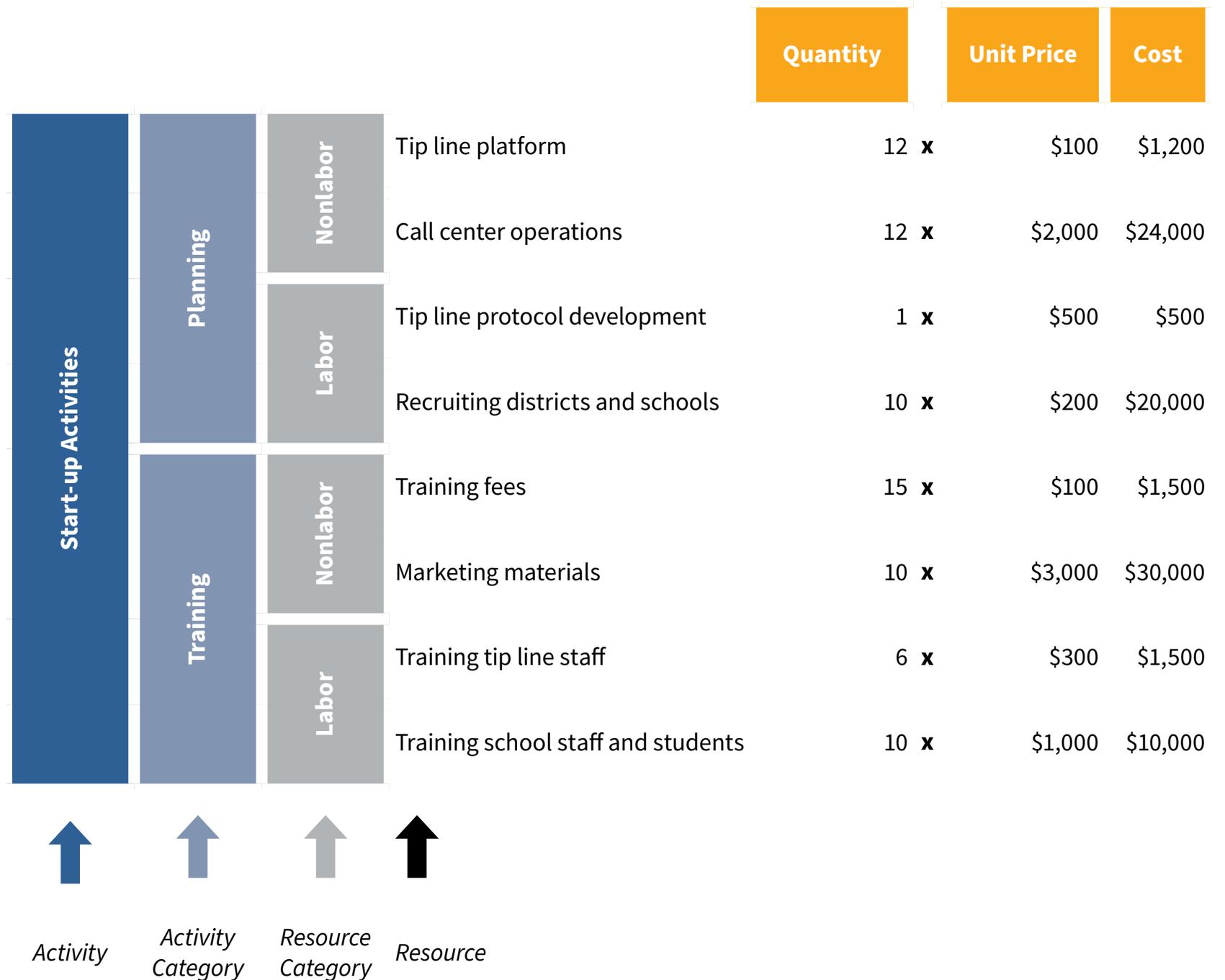


**Task 1. Determine the activities and activity categories.** The activity categories must each have some distinct and significant meaning in tip line operations, sum up to all the functions of a tip line, and be a manageable number (we recommend seven or fewer) so that the results can be interpreted and are useful. Start-up costs, for example, may have several activity categories: acquiring or developing tip line infrastructure, developing policies and procedures, hiring, planning, and training.

**Task 2. Systematically document resources for each activity category.** Every activity identified in Task 1 requires resources (Task 2) to perform the activity. Tip line triage, for example, likely requires labor to staff the tip line; phone, computer, and data systems used by the labor; the office space used by the labor; and the administrative and collateral overhead used to support these resources.

**Task 3. Collect data.** Data on the unit price of the resource (e.g., the wage of the call center staff) will come from financial records, statements, and reports. Data on the quantity or intensity of that resource's use (e.g., six call center staff at 50% time) will need to be collected from systems that track labor and resource use. Alternatively, it may be necessary to prospectively track labor and other resource use over some period of time or ask stakeholders to approximate resource use for a given output (e.g., a typical call received), period (e.g., a typical week), or both.

**Figure 30. Bottom-up Approach: Simplified Example of Activity-Based Costing**



**Task 4. Combine price and quantity for each activity.** If Tasks 1–3 were carried out systematically and completely, then Task 4 is quite simple: unit prices and quantities are multiplied to estimate resource-level costs and then summed to estimate total costs. Costs estimated this way can then be characterized by start-up or ongoing, at the resource level or in aggregate, and in total or at a unit level (e.g., per incident, per tip).

**Bottom-up costing is meaningful because it provides an accurate assessment of required resources.** For example, bottom-up costing can estimate the cost of receiving one tip through the tip line, including the costs of each of the activities associated with that unit of output.

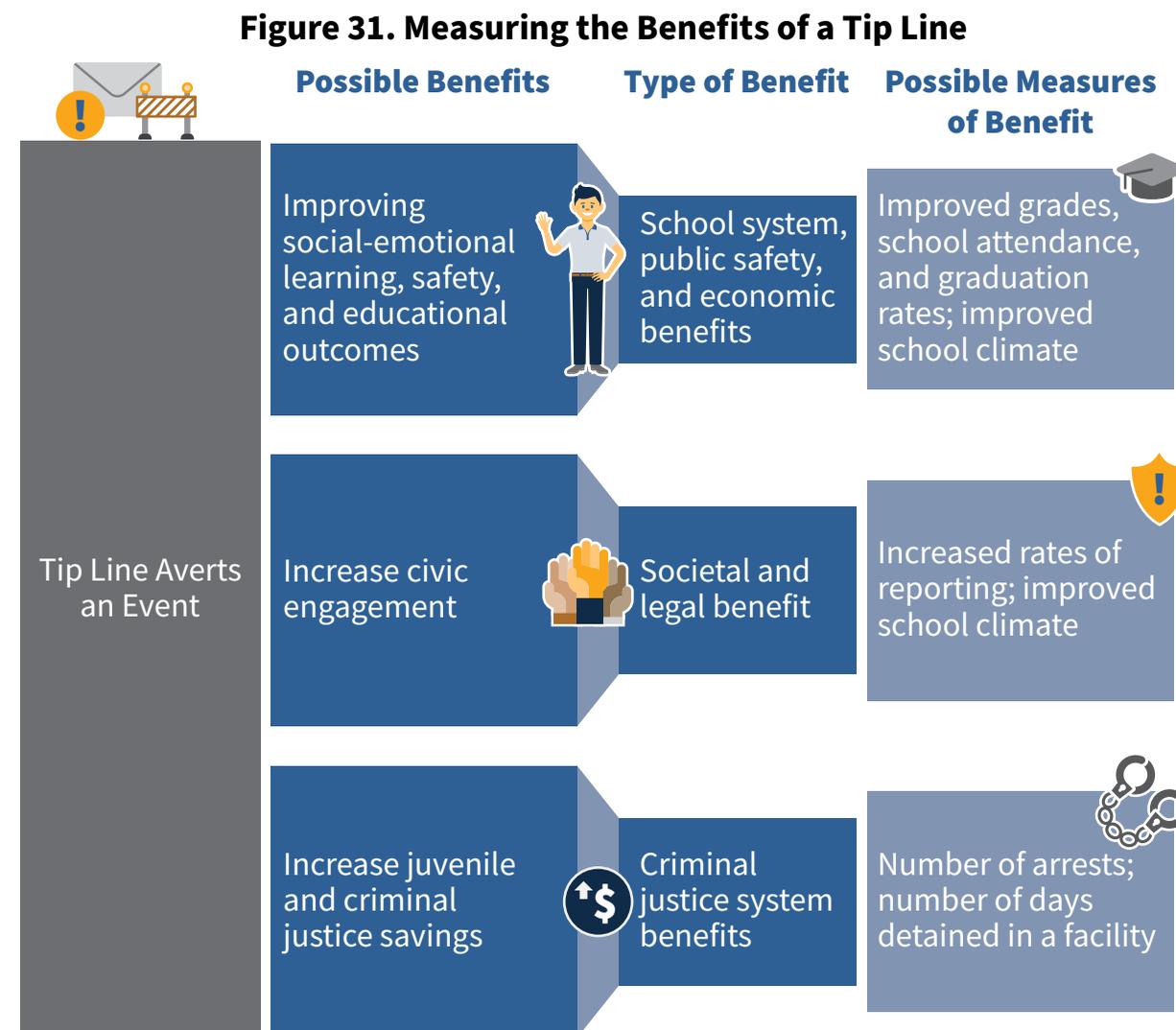
## COST-BENEFIT ANALYSIS: MONETIZING THE BENEFITS OF A TIP LINE

**Performing a full cost-benefit analysis of a tip line will require an evaluator with some training and experience.** This section outlines the considerations in conducting this kind of analysis.

**Moving from a cost analysis to a cost-benefit analysis requires identifying the analytical perspective (e.g., school system, justice system, societal) and determining the relevant benefits.** For example, an averted event may result in improved education, increased civic engagement, or juvenile and criminal justice savings. For each benefit, a measure and data source must be identified. For improved education, for example, possible measures may include improved school attendance, probability of graduating, or school grades.

**Some measures are straightforward to monetize.** For example, local juvenile and criminal justice costs are often made available by jurisdictions. Other measures can be difficult to monetize, such as improved education. There are some literature estimates on the long-term costs of absences, suspensions, and dropouts. Depending on the time period and analytical perspective of the analysis, these estimates could be applied in the cost-benefit analysis.

Figure 31 gives an example of how to organize this information.





## CONCLUSIONS

The cost of a tip line is a pertinent piece of information for jurisdictions considering adopting tip line technology. Results from a cost analysis can help stakeholders compare the tip line costs with the costs of other school safety solutions and assist with budgeting expectations. Meanwhile, a cost-benefit analysis can further demonstrate whether the resulting effects of the tip line outweigh its expenses. Jurisdictions that compare the cost-benefit analyses of tip lines and other school safety approaches will be able to better understand which approach is most appropriate for their respective financial constraints and can most positively affect the safety, health, and wellness of their school communities.





# RESOURCES

|  Tip Line URL |  School Safety Center                   |  Tip Report |  Additional Resources                              |
|--|---|--|---|
| <b>Alabama</b>   | <a href="http://alabamaachieves.org">Prevention and Support - Alabama Department of Education (alabamaachieves.org)</a>   |  | <a href="#">School Safety - Office of the Governor of Alabama</a>   |
| <b>Alaska</b>  |   |  | <a href="http://alaska.gov">School Health, Safety, and Alternative Education - Education and Early Development (alaska.gov)</a>       |
| <b>Arizona</b>   | <a href="http://azed.gov">Welcome to School Safety &amp; Social Wellness   Arizona Department of Education (azed.gov)</a> |  |   |
| <b>Arkansas</b>  |   |  | <a href="http://arsafeschools.com">Home - Arkansas Center for School Safety Arkansas Center for School Safety (arsafeschools.com)</a> |
| <b>California</b>  | <a href="#">Safe Schools - Learning Support (CA Dept of Education)</a>  |  |   |
| <b>Colorado</b>  | <a href="http://safe2tell.org">S2T CO   Make a Call. Make a Difference (safe2tell.org)</a>                                | <a href="http://colorado.gov">Home   School Safety Resource Center (colorado.gov)</a>          | <a href="http://safe2tell.org">Results   S2T CO (safe2tell.org)</a>   |
| <b>Connecticut</b>   |   |  | <a href="http://ct.gov">School Security Program (ct.gov)</a>  |



|                 |    |  |    |
|-----------------|---|--|---|
|                 |   | <a href="#">Home / School Safety (doe.k12.de.us)</a>                               | <a href="#">Comprehensive School Safety Program (CSSP) - Delaware Emergency Management Agency</a>   |
| <b>Florida</b>  | <a href="#">FortifyFL (getfortifyfl.com)</a>  | <a href="#">Office of Safe Schools (fldoe.org)</a>                                 |   |
|                 |   | <a href="#">School Safety Resource Center (gadoe.org)</a>                          | <a href="#">School Safety   Georgia Emergency Management and Homeland Security Agency</a>   |
| <b>Hawaii</b>   |   | <a href="#">Hawaii DOE   Safety at School (hawaiipublicschools.org)</a>            |   |
| <b>Idaho</b>    | <a href="https://schoolsafety.dbs.idaho.gov/see-tell-now/submit-a-tip/">https://schoolsafety.dbs.idaho.gov/see-tell-now/submit-a-tip/</a> | <a href="#">Welcome to School Safety &amp; Security (idaho.gov)</a>                |   |
| <b>Illinois</b> |   | <a href="#">Home (ilschoolsafety.org)</a>  |   |
| <b>Indiana</b>  | <a href="#">Indiana School Safety Hub: Report a Threat</a>  | <a href="#">Indiana School Safety Hub: Home</a>                                    |   |
| <b>Iowa</b>     |   |  | <a href="#">School Safety   Iowa Department of Education (educateiowa.gov)</a>  |
| <b>Kansas</b>   |   | <a href="#">Kansas Safe and Secure Schools Unit (ksde.org)</a>                     | <a href="#">Kansas State Department of Education &gt; Agency &gt; Fiscal and Administrative Services &gt; School Finance &gt; School Bus Safety &gt; School Safety Hotline (ksde.org)</a> |



|                      |  Tip Line URL                          |  School Safety Center |  Tip Report |  Additional Resources |
|----------------------|---|---|--|--|
| <b>Kentucky</b>      | <a href="#">Home Page (ky.gov)</a>  | <a href="#">Kentucky Center for School Safety (kycss.org)</a>   |  | <a href="#">2020 KOHS Annual Report FINAL.pdf (ky.gov)</a>   |
| <b>Louisiana</b>     |   | <a href="#">Home - Louisiana Center for Safe Schools (la.gov)</a>                                       |  |  |
| <b>Maine</b>         |   | <a href="#">Maine School Safety Center   Department of Education</a>                                    |  |  |
| <b>Maryland</b>      | <a href="https://schoolsafety.maryland.gov/pages/tipline.aspx">https://schoolsafety.maryland.gov/pages/tipline.aspx</a> | <a href="#">Maryland Center for School Safety Home Page</a>   | <a href="#">Reports, Documents, and Data (maryland.gov)</a>                                    |  |
| <b>Massachusetts</b> |   |   |  | <a href="#">Safe &amp; Supportive Schools - Student and Family Support (SFS) (mass.edu)</a>              |
| <b>Michigan</b>      | <a href="#">Ok2Say - OK2Say (michigan.gov)</a>  |   | <a href="#">Ok2Say - Publications (michigan.gov)</a>   | <a href="#">MSP - Office of School Safety (michigan.gov)</a>   |
| <b>Minnesota</b>     |   | <a href="#">Minnesota School Safety Center - School Safety Center (mn.gov)</a>                          |  |  |
| <b>Mississippi</b>   |   | <a href="#">School Safety   The Mississippi Department of Education (mdek12.org)</a>                    |  |  |
| <b>Missouri</b>      |   | <a href="#">MSBA Center for Education Safety - MSBA (mosba.org)</a>                                     |  |  |
| <b>Montana</b>       |   |   |  | <a href="#">Safe School Environment (mt.gov)</a>   |



|  Tip Line URL |  School Safety Center |  Tip Report |  Additional Resources |
|--|---|--|--|
| <b>Nebraska</b>  | <a href="#">Nebraska School Safety – Nebraska Department of Education</a>                               |  |  |
| <b>Nevada</b>  | <a href="#">Safe Voice Nevada (safevoicenv.org)</a>   | <a href="#">School Safety (nv.gov)</a>   |  |
| <b>New Hampshire</b>   |   |  | <a href="#">NH School Safety Resources</a>   |
| <b>New Jersey</b>  | <a href="#">School Safety Resources - The New Jersey Center For School Safety (njSAFEandsecure.org)</a> |  |  |
| <b>New Mexico</b>  |   |  | <a href="#">Safe Schools – New Mexico Public Education Department (state.nm.us)</a>                      |
| <b>New York</b>  | <a href="#">The New York State Center for School Safety   nyscfss.org</a>                               |  |  |
| <b>North Carolina</b>  | <a href="#">Center for Safer Schools   NC DPI</a>   |  | <a href="#">Say Something Anonymous Reporting System   NC DPI</a>  |
| <b>North Dakota</b>  |   |  | <a href="#">School Safety/Security   North Dakota Department of Public Instruction (nd.gov)</a>          |



|                       |  Tip Line URL |  School Safety Center |  Tip Report |  Additional Resources   |
|-----------------------|--|---|--|--|
| <b>Ohio</b>           |  |   |  | <a href="#">Prevention Action Alliance – Leading healthy communities in the prevention of substance misuse and the promotion of mental health wellness</a> |
| <b>Oklahoma</b>       | <a href="#">OSSI Tipline Report (ok.gov)</a>   | <a href="#">Office of School Safety and Security   Oklahoma State Department of Education</a>           |  | <a href="#">Oklahoma School Security Institute - Home</a>  |
| <b>Oregon</b>         | <a href="#">Safe Oregon   Feel Safe. Be Safe.</a>  | <a href="#">Safe Oregon   Feel Safe. Be Safe.</a>   | <a href="#">Results - Safe Oregon</a>  | <a href="#">Oregon Department of Education : School Safety and Prevention System (SSPS) : Mental Health &amp; Well-Being Resources : State of Oregon</a>   |
| <b>Pennsylvania</b>   | <a href="#">Home - Safe2Say Something (safe2saypa.org)</a>                                     | <a href="#">Center for Safe Schools</a>   | <a href="#">2020-2021-Annual-Report-FINAL.pdf (safe2saypa.org)</a>                             |  |
| <b>Rhode Island</b>   |  | <a href="#">School Safety - South Carolina Department of Education - 8/27/21 9:48 AM</a>                |  |  |
| <b>South Carolina</b> |  |   |  |  |
| <b>South Dakota</b>   |  |   |  | <a href="#">School Safety, SD Department of Education</a>  |
| <b>Tennessee</b>      |  | <a href="#">School Safety (tn.gov)</a>  |  |  |



|  <b>Tip Line URL</b> |  <b>School Safety Center</b> |  <b>Tip Report</b> |  <b>Additional Resources</b> |
|---|--|---|---|
| <b>Texas</b>  | <a href="#">Home   Texas School Safety Center (txstate.edu)</a>  |   | <a href="#">Sandy Hook Promise - Say Something Trainings   Texas School Safety Center (txstate.edu)</a>         |
| <b>Utah</b>   | <a href="#">SafeUT Help For Students   SafeUT</a>  | <a href="#">School Safety Center (SSC) (utah.gov)</a>   | <a href="#">More About SafeUT   SafeUT   Crisis Chat and Tip Line</a>   |
| <b>Vermont</b>  | <a href="#">SCHOOL SAFETY - IT'S EVERYONE'S RESPONSIBILITY   Vermont School Safety Center</a>                  |   |   |
| <b>Virginia</b>   | <a href="#">VDOE :: Division &amp; School Safety (virginia.gov)</a>  |   | <a href="#">Virginia Center for School and Campus Safety   Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services</a> |
| <b>Washington</b>   | <a href="#">School Safety Center   OSPI (www.k12.wa.us)</a>  |   |   |
| <b>West Virginia</b>  | <a href="#">School Safety (wv.gov)</a>   |   | <a href="#">Safe School Helpline (state.wv.us)</a>  |
| <b>Wisconsin</b>  | <a href="#">Home   SPEAK UP, SPEAK OUT Wisconsin (widoj.gov)</a>   | <a href="#">Office of School Safety   Wisconsin Department of Justice (state.wi.us)</a>               |   |
| <b>Wyoming</b>  | <a href="#">Safe2Tell Wyoming School Safety Tip Line</a>   | <a href="#">Reports   Safe2Tell Wyoming</a>   | <a href="#">Health &amp; Safety - Wyoming Department of Education</a>   |