



Senate Committee on Education

February 27, 2025

Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 263 Katia Rodriguez | Sandy Hook Promise Action Fund

Chairwoman Erickson and members of the Committee:

My name is Katia Rodriguez, and I serve as the Manager of State Policy at *Sandy Hook Promise*.

Based in Newtown, Connecticut, *Sandy Hook Promise* was founded and continues to be led by families who lost loved ones in the tragic mass shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School on December 14, 2012. On behalf of the organization, I appreciate the opportunity to testify today in strong support of SB 263, the *Students Safe at School Act*.

Sandy Hook Promise envisions a future where children are safe from shootings and violence in their schools, homes, and communities. Our expertise as a nonpartisan violence prevention organization informs the insights and recommendations we offer today.

The *Students Safe at School Act* seeks to achieve the following goals:

- Establish clear, uniform definitions and standards for active shooter drills, differentiating them from active shooter simulations.
- Ensure drills are age-appropriate, trauma-informed, and designed with students' mental health and well-being in mind.
- Establish a requirement for evidence-based violence prevention training for students in grades six through twelve.

Why are each of these elements important for Kansas to consider?

Recognizing the risks of poorly conducted drills, the *National Association of School Psychologists* and the *National Association of School Resource Officers* have issued best practices which emphasize tailoring drills to students' developmental levels, physical abilities, and past traumatic experiences.¹

¹ National Association of School Psychologists. (n.d.). Best practice considerations for armed assailant drills in schools. Retrieved February 25, 2025, from <https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/school-safety-and-crisis/systems-level-prevention/best-practice-considerations-for-armed-assailant-drills-in-schools>

- Unfortunately, the terms “active shooter drill” and “active shooter simulation” are often used interchangeably. However, drills and simulations are *not* the same.
 - When done correctly, drills prepare students and staff to respond effectively to crises without exposing them to harm. They focus on essential safety practices, including safe evacuation, sheltering in place, and following instructions from trusted adults.
- Perhaps without intention, some Kansas schools are conducting what they call active shooter “drills” when in fact, they are conducting active shooter *simulations*.²
 - In contrast to active shooter drills, active shooter simulations mimic aspects of a real-life shooting and are trauma-inducing by nature. These exercises may include simulated gunfire, mock injuries, fake blood, teachers being shot with pellet guns, and law enforcement officers sweeping hallways with weapons drawn.
- By providing evidence-based violence prevention training for students in the classroom, we can better prepare them to recognize visible warning signs of violence, often before it occurs. The benefits of such training extend far beyond the classroom and empower students to have an active role in their safety and wellbeing.

It is also important to acknowledge what SB 263 does not do.

- *It does not require schools to conduct active shooter drills.* Rather, it sets clear standards for schools that elect to conduct these types of drills.
- *It does not prohibit all active shooter simulations.* It merely exempts students from mandatory participation in simulations.
- *It does not discourage school safety training.* Instead, it reinforces the importance of age-appropriate, developmentally suitable methods that prioritize students’ mental well-being.
- *It does not mandate the use of any particular training program.* It does set forth reasonable standards - modeled after federal law - for the use of evidence-based violence prevention training programs.³

Sandy Hook Promise proudly provides schools with evidence-based violence prevention training at no cost to them. However, we are not the only provider of such trainings. Attached to my testimony you will find a list of other training providers – many of whom have been vetted and approved as providers by other states’ departments of education – that offer low-cost and no-cost training options. We would gladly provide this list to the *Kansas Department of Education* so it may be posted and made available as a resource to Kansas school districts.

We have thoughtfully constructed SB 263 to prioritize student safety and well-being while still giving deference to both parental choice and local school board decisions.

² KCTV5 News. (2024, October 3). Kansas City, Kansas Public Schools work to make school shooter drills less traumatic for students. Retrieved February 25, 2025, from <https://www.kctv5.com/2024/10/03/kansas-city-kansas-public-schools-work-make-school-shooter-drills-less-traumatic-students/>

³ Bureau of Justice Assistance. (n.d.). STOP School Violence Program overview. U.S. Department of Justice. Retrieved February 25, 2025 from <https://bja.ojp.gov/program/stop-school-violence-program/overview>

Sandy Hook Promise remains steadfast in our commitment to protecting students and advancing thoughtful, practical, bipartisan solutions. Our focus has, and will continue to be, on student wellbeing, safety, and preparedness in the event of an intruder on campus.

Thank you for welcoming me into your committee and allowing me the opportunity to speak about the importance of SB 263. After having time to give it thoughtful consideration, I ask you to recommend SB 263 favorably for passage.

Evidence-based Violence Prevention

Vendors and Federal Funding

SOURCE: Louisiana Department of Education

Direct link to resource: https://www.louisianabelieves.com/docs/default-source/school-choice/scr-50-student-training-providers.pdf?sfvrsn=9baf6518_4

Link to primary page: <https://www.louisianabelieves.com/resources/library/school-policy>

Suicide Prevention and Violence Prevention

Hope Squad: Suicide prevention/costs ([Home - Hope Squad](#))

Sources of Strength: Suicide prevention/costs ([Sources of Strength](#))

The Jason Foundation (A Promise for Tomorrow): Suicide prevention/no-cost ("[A Promise for Tomorrow](#)" Student Curriculum | [The Jason Foundation, Inc.](#))

Suicide Awareness Voices of Education (LEADS): Suicide prevention/costs ([LEADS: Youth Suicide Prevention Program – SAVE](#))

Jared's Heart of Success (STAR Violence Prevention): Violence prevention/no cost ([Programs \(jaredsheartofsuccess.com\)](#))

Sandy Hook Promise (*Say Something* program): Violence prevention/no-cost ([Say Something Programs Page | Sandy Hook Promise Training Center \(sandyhookpromiselearning.org\)](#))

Sandy Hook Promise (*Say Something* program): Suicide prevention/no-cost ([Say Something — Sandy Hook Promise](#))

Hazeldon Publishing (Lifelines): Violence prevention & Suicide prevention/costs ([Lifelines: A Suicide Prevention Program -- Hazelden](#))

SOURCE: Ohio Department of Education and Workforce

Direct link to resource page: <https://education.ohio.gov/Topics/Student-Supports/School-Wellness/Prevention-Education/Suicide-and-Violence-Prevention-Social-Inclusion>

Approved Suicide Awareness and Prevention and Violence Prevention Programs [Adapt for Life](#)

- There are no-cost options available for this program.

[Ending the Silence](#)

- There are no-cost options available for this program.

[Erika's Lighthouse: A Beacon of Hope for Adolescent Depression](#)

- There are no cost options available for this program.

[Hope Squad](#)

- There are costs associated with this program.

[Lifelines Prevention: Building Knowledge and Skills to Prevent Suicide](#)

- There are costs associated with this program.

[Sandy Hook Promise Say Something](#)

- There are no-cost options available for this program.

[Signs of Suicide \(SOS\)](#)

- There are costs associated with this program.

[Teen Mental Health First Aid \(tMHFA\)](#)

- There are costs associated with this program.

OTHER SOURCES (not associated with use by any one state in particular)*

****each vendor should – for themselves - determine if their resources meet the federal definition for/of “evidence-based.” This determination will help districts/schools determine if - in response to a law requiring evidence-based trainings – they can use the vendor’s materials*****

Harmony SEL: A free online SEL curriculum covering diversity, inclusion, empathy, critical thinking, communication, and problem-solving for Pre-K through 6th grade.

Overcoming Obstacles: A free, research-based online SEL program with lesson plans for K-12, covering topics from self-control to communication and personal resource management.

Erika's Lighthouse: A free program focusing on teen mental health, offering classroom lessons on depression awareness and suicide prevention.

Emotional ABCs: Currently free for full-time teachers and school counselors, this program is particularly effective for kindergarten and preschool-age children.

Centervention: Provides a library of 90+ free SEL resources and activities

FUNDING SOURCE & TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE:
Bureau of Justice Assistance, US Department of Justice

Students, Teachers, and Officers Preventing School Violence (STOP School Violence Act):**
<https://bja.ojp.gov/program/stop-school-violence-program/overview>

National Center for School Safety (official technical assistance provider for those seeking to apply for a grant via the STOP School Violence Act): <https://www.nc2s.org/ta-services/>

**This law requires that trainings/programs be “evidence-based”. A partnership with a vendor that provides evidence-based trainings will better situate a district/school to qualify for a STOP grant.

Evidence-based is defined as follows:

“Evidence-based” means a program or practice that—

1. Demonstrates a statistically significant effect on relevant outcomes based on—
 - i. strong evidence from not less than 1 well-designed and well-implemented experimental study;
 - ii. moderate evidence from not less than 1 well-designed and well-implemented quasi-experimental study; or
 - iii. promising evidence from not less than 1 well-designed and well-implemented correlational study with statistical controls for selection bias; or
2. Demonstrates a rationale based on high-quality research findings or positive evaluation that such program or practice, is likely to improve relevant outcomes, and includes ongoing efforts to examine the effects of the program or practice.