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# Research and Evaluation on School Safety: An Evaluation of State School Safety Centers

## Final Report

**Principal Investigator:**

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**Ashley Boal, PhD**

**December 2024**

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# Project Summary

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Given concerns about violence and other safety threats at school, a common response by state governments is to create their own safety centers. These State School Safety Centers (SSSCs) aim to provide training, technical assistance (TA) and other resources to address school safety needs. However, until now, very little has been known about SSSCs, including the exact number of SSSCs, how they are structured, their areas of focus, and how superintendents, principals, and other users perceive their SSSC. A stronger understanding of SSSC models and perceived impacts can promote cross-state learning, allow for promising approaches and models to be replicated, and ultimately have the potential to improve the safety of students and educators. To address these gaps, the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) funded the *National Evaluation of SSSCs* to conduct the first systematic national exploration into SSSCs. This report summarizes the study goals, evaluation questions, methodology, and outcomes. More detailed study findings are available in the evaluation briefs and reports generated by this study (see the *Artifacts* section of this report for more information on these resources).

## Major Goals and Objectives

The goals of this evaluation included developing a firm understanding of the history, characteristics, structure, activities, and perceived impacts of SSSCs across the U.S. and using this information to identify promising SSSC practices and models for replication, expansion, and evaluation. Ultimately, study findings were intended to contribute to improved functioning of SSSCs, more intentional development of new SSSCs, and more coordinated state efforts to improve local jurisdictions efforts in addressing school safety. To reach these goals, the study addressed the following objectives:

- Document the history of SSSCs across the U.S. following the massacre at Columbine High School, a seminal school safety event, in 1999, and a point in which several SSSCs were started.
- Describe the characteristics, practices, structures, and activities of current SSSCs.
- Assess the perceived impact of SSSC activities from the perspective of diverse interest holders including SSSC intensive service users, state educational agency and state Department of Justice staff, policymakers, school resource officers, district superintendents and school principals.
- Utilize information collected to develop a framework outlining promising structures and practices to facilitate the development and improvement of SSSCs, and to guide future research to examine the impacts and outcomes associated with varied SSSC practices.

## Evaluation Questions

This study addressed five evaluation questions:

1. What is the history of SSSCs across the U.S. over the past two decades (following the massacre at Columbine High School)?
  - a. How should SSSCs be defined to ensure consistency in how states label centers?
  - b. Which states currently have an active SSSC and why were these SSSCs developed?
  - c. Since 2000, which states created and subsequently discontinued a SSSC and why were these SSSCs discontinued?
  - d. Since 2000, which states did not create a SSSC and what motivated this choice?
2. What are the characteristics of current SSSCs including the mission, funding source, regulatory bodies, policy directives, leadership, structural configuration, staffing, and sustainability strategies?
  - a. What do SSSC leaders identify as indicators to suggest their SSSC is achieving intended impacts?
  - b. What are the facilitators and challenges in carrying out SSSC work?
  - c. What do SSSCs need to be more effective in their work?
3. What are the practices, activities, and outputs of current SSSCs?
  - a. What services do SSSCs provide (e.g., technical assistance [TA], training, webinars, professional development opportunities, community outreach)?
  - b. Who are the primary constituents for SSSCs (e.g., state policymakers, district leaders, school leaders, teachers, school safety personnel, law enforcement, students, families)?
  - c. What are the main content areas of services provided (e.g., emergency management, violence, bullying)?
  - d. What tools and products do SSSCs produce?
  - e. How many services are provided each year, by type, and how many individuals engage in services, by type?
4. What do interest holders (e.g., policymakers, superintendents, directors of school safety, law enforcement, school leaders) perceive to be the impact of the SSSC in their state?
  - a. What do key interest holders identify as the impact of their SSSC?
  - b. What do key interest holders identify as successes and opportunities for improvement related to their SSSC?
  - c. To what extent are local SSSC clients (i.e., district superintendents and school principals) aware of and using their SSSC?
5. What characteristics, practices, and activities are common across SSSCs that have achieved positive impacts in their state?

## Evaluation Design, Methods, and Data Analysis

### Evaluation Design

Although randomized controlled trials are often viewed as the “gold standard”, they are not appropriate or possible to implement in every study. Questions such as “what is the history and context of this phenomenon” and “how is this program implemented in the real world” (in contrast to “did the intervention work?”) are best answered by strong descriptive research designs. For studies like this one, in which states cannot be randomly assigned to have or not have implemented an SSSC, and in which the history regarding school safety and related legislature of each state is so unique, methodologies that maximize external validity, practical utility, and deep exploration of contextual nuance are extremely valuable. Given this, this study used a descriptive design to capture the history, characteristics, activities, and user perceptions of SSSCs. Exhibit 1 provides an overview of the key evaluation activities that took place during each study year.

**Exhibit 1. Key Evaluation Activities by Year**

Evaluation Year	Key Evaluation Activities
Year 1 (2021)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Project planning and preparation for data collection</li> <li>• SSSC key informant survey</li> <li>• SSSC director interviews</li> <li>• Development and dissemination of report #1</li> </ul>
Year 2 (2022)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SSSC director interviews</li> <li>• SSSC director survey</li> <li>• SSSC activity Smartsheets</li> <li>• SSSC user interviews</li> <li>• Superintendent and principal survey</li> <li>• Development and dissemination of brief #1</li> </ul>
Year 3 (2023)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SSSC user interviews</li> <li>• Superintendent and principal survey</li> <li>• Development and dissemination of report #2 and brief #2</li> </ul>
Year 4 (2024)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development and dissemination of report #3 and brief #3</li> <li>• Development of the SSSC promising practices framework</li> <li>• Development of study publications</li> <li>• Development of final study report for NIJ</li> </ul>

## Methods

This evaluation employed a variety of data collection strategies to gather a holistic description of SSSC histories, characteristics, and activities, as well as user perceptions of SSSCs. The study used a mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques as needed to inform the evaluation questions.

### SSSC Key Informant Survey

Key informants received survey invitations via Qualtrics. The survey was available from May 5, 2021 to June 30, 2021 and included four sections: (1) background information (e.g., job title, role in school safety for the state); (2) SSSC history (e.g., whether the state has or has ever had an SSSC); (3) characteristics of active SSSCs (e.g., funding sources, staffing, focus areas); and (4) characteristics of discontinued SSSCs (e.g., funding sources, staffing, focus areas). Survey skip-logic guided participants through the relevant portions of the survey such that states with an active SSSC, a discontinued SSSC, or that had never had an SSSC received different questions to understand the state's school safety landscape and context.

### SSSC Director Interviews

Interviews with SSSC directors occurred via 90-minute videoconferences on Zoom from September 2021 to January 2022. The evaluation team recorded all interviews to allow for verification of interviewer notes and extraction of relevant quotes. Most interviews included one SSSC director; however, two states elected to include two individuals who carry out SSSC director responsibilities in a single interview. The interview protocol asked SSSC directors to reflect on their state's school safety landscape, describe the history and structure of their center, outline the services offered by the center, and share their center's accomplishments and challenges.

### SSSC Director Survey

The evaluation team administered a Qualtrics survey to SSSC directors to gather information regarding their center's activities related to five types of services: trainings, TA, resources (i.e., development of original resources), grant administration (i.e., providing funding to organizations to support school safety work), and compliance (i.e., activities to ensure local school districts follow legal requirements). The survey included 23 questions assessing the extent to which the SSSC engaged in each type of service.

### Activity Smartsheets

Upon completion of the SSSC director survey, the evaluation team provided SSSCs with access to a customized workspace in an online, cloud-based platform called Smartsheets. The Smartsheets workspace included tabular sheets (hereafter, "Smartsheets") based on their responses to the SSSC director survey. For each of the five types of services (i.e., trainings, TA,



resources, grant administration and compliance), a Smartsheet allowed SSSCs to retrospectively document the services provided by each SSSC over a 1-year period (January 1, 2021, to December 31, 2021). Each Smartsheet included various write-in and drop-down fields to capture information about each instance of the reported activity. For example, the Smartsheet included fields capturing training or TA title, date(s), length, number of participants, title and type of resources developed, number of grants administered, and number of compliance activities completed.

### Superintendent and Principal Survey

The evaluation team developed and administered the online superintendent and principal surveys via Qualtrics. The two surveys were identical except for referencing districts for superintendents and schools for principals. The survey included five broad sections: (1) demographics; (2) awareness of the SSSC; (3) perceptions of the overall Impacts of SSSC work; (4) engagement with SSSC activities; and (5) use and perceived impacts of SSSC activities. Most items asked respondents to rate their agreement on a 5-point Likert-type scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*).

### SSSC User Interviews

Between September 2022 and March 2023, the evaluation team conducted 30-minute virtual interviews via Zoom with each SSSC user participant (i.e., individuals identified by SSSCs as being frequent service users or representatives from key collaborators such as state departments of education or departments of justice). The SSSC user interview protocol queried awareness of the SSSC, use and perceived impacts of SSSC activities, and SSSC strengths and opportunities for improvement. All interviews were recorded for transcription.

### Data Analysis

Data analyses for this evaluation included quantitative, qualitative, and integrative techniques. Quantitative data analysis primarily relied on descriptive analyses, though some basic inferential analyses were used to explore responses to the superintendent and principal survey. Qualitative data analysis primarily relied on thematic content analysis. The evaluation team used an integrative approach to address most evaluation questions which included examining findings from the quantitative and qualitative analyses to determine how each set of findings contributed to developing a comprehensive understanding of findings related to the particular evaluation question. More information about the evaluation team's analytic approach for each data source is provided below.

### SSSC Key Informant Survey

Descriptive analysis techniques via *Stata* were used to analyze the SSSC Key Informant Survey data. Analyses included aggregate examinations of responses across states to better

understand the SSSC landscape nationally, as well as disaggregated responses for individual states to unpack nuances of specific states.

It is important to note that in this survey, participants were asked whether their state has or ever had “a central location for the state to receive TA, training, and/or resources related to school safety.” In reviewing responses to this item in combination with other items in the survey (e.g., open ended items describing statewide school safety efforts), it became apparent that key informants varied in how they defined SSSCs, resulting in different responses for states carrying out school safety work using similar structures. For example, one key informant may have reported that their state had no SSSC because they don’t have a standalone center, but have a division within their state department of education carrying out school safety work. Meanwhile, another key informant in a state with the exact same configuration may have reported it as an SSSC. Due to these differences in interpretation and the lack of a clear definition of SSSCs in the field, the evaluation team carefully considered each response and uniformly applied the definition developed through this study to classify whether states have an SSSC. This process led to responses from three key informants who indicated their state does not have an SSSC being recoded to indicate their state has an SSSC.

### SSSC Director Interviews

Interview notes underwent thematic content analysis using *Dedoose*. The evaluation team engaged in familiarization by reading all interview notes (Ritchie et al., 2003), and a subset of the team developed a codebook capturing emergent themes. The team then conducted calibration activities to support interrater agreement, refined the codebook, and then coded interview transcripts.

Analysis of the SSSC director interviews began by determining the presence or absence of each code within each interview. For the three states with multiple director interviews, data were aggregated at the state level. Next, the evaluation team carried out descriptive analyses to determine the percentage of states for which each subcode was present. To help contextualize findings, the team engaged in qualitative content analysis of coded excerpts to identify exemplar quotes and further unpack nuances of the coded material.

### SSSC Director Survey

The evaluation team analyzed SSSC director survey data using descriptive statistics. The data were analyzed at an aggregate level to understand services and activities across SSSCs and disaggregated to examine data specific to each state, when appropriate.

### Activity Smartsheets

Data from the Activity Smartsheets were analyzed primarily using descriptive statistics. For each type of support service, Smartsheet data from states were appended and analyzed at an aggregate level and disaggregated to examine data specific to each state, when appropriate.

### Superintendent and Principal Survey

Data from the superintendent and principal survey were primarily analyzed using descriptive statistics, both for respondents in aggregate and by role (i.e., superintendents and principals). For items using a Likert-type scale, the evaluation team calculated the average response for each item. For nominal survey items, the evaluation team computed frequency distributions across response options.

The evaluation team used inferential statistics to explore differences in responses for superintendents and principals. For survey items using a Likert-type scale, a Shapiro-Wilk W test was used to test for normal distribution of data. If the data were not normally distributed, a two-sample Wilcoxon rank-sum (Mann-Whitney) test was used to examine statistical significance. A two-sample t-test was used for normally distributed data. To assess practical significance for normally distributed items that were significant at  $p < .05$ , the team calculated effect size based on mean comparison, using Hedges'  $g$ . For nominal survey items, a chi-square test for independence was used to determine significant association. To assess practical significance for nominal survey items that were significant at  $p < .05$ , the team calculated effect size using Cohen's  $w$ .

### SSSC User Interviews

Of the 50 valid SSSC user interviews,<sup>1</sup> 49 were conducted with individual interviewees. One included two people interviewed together during the same session. To analyze this interview transcript, the evaluation team coded it twice—once for each interviewee's individual answers—resulting in two independently coded interview transcripts. Therefore, the final analysis sample included 51 interview transcripts with SSSC users from 17 states, including high-end users ( $n = 41$ ), state education agency representatives ( $n = 4$ ), representatives from NASRO/NASSLEO or similar organizations ( $n = 3$ ), state department of justice representatives ( $n = 2$ ), and a state policymaker ( $n = 1$ ).

Interview transcripts underwent thematic content analysis using *Dedoose*. After familiarization with the transcript content (Ritchie et al., 2003) the evaluation team developed a codebook of emergent themes. The team then conducted calibration activities to support interrater agreement, refined the codebook, and then coded the interview transcripts.

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<sup>1</sup>From the original sample of 57 interviews, four interviews were eliminated from the sample because the interviewees worked for the SSSC in some capacity; another three were eliminated because the interviewees had no experience with the center.

The evaluation team aggregated the presence or absence of each subcode to the state level, then conducted descriptive analyses to determine the percentage of states for which each subcode was present and explored the relationship between subcode presence and absence. Additionally, analysts engaged in qualitative content analysis of the interview excerpts identified within each subcode to further explore the content and nuance of subcode meaning and identify exemplar quotes.

### SSSC Promising Practices Analysis

The evaluation team conducted an analysis of the findings developed through the analyses described above to identify promising practices for SSSCs. This included examining the percentage of superintendent and principals who reported being aware of and using their SSSC, as well as average perception ratings for each SSSC. In identifying states that may be useful exemplars for the field, the evaluation team sought to draw from states that have achieved high levels of awareness, use, and positive perceptions about their services.

First, the evaluation team ranked SSSCs based on the percentage of superintendents and principals who reported being aware of the SSSC and selected the top five SSSCs. The percentage of respondents who reported being aware of the SSSC for these states ranged from 96% to 100% of survey respondents. Second, the evaluation team ranked SSSCs based on the percentage of superintendents and principals who reported using the SSSC and selected the top five SSSCs. The percentage of respondents who reported using the SSSC for these states ranged from 86% to 98% of survey respondents. Finally, the evaluation team ranked SSSCs based on the average responses to items assessing superintendent and principal perceptions of the SSSC and selected the top five SSSCs. Average perception ratings for these states ranged from 4.0 to 4.6 on a 5-point scale. Several identified states were represented in the top five lists for multiple categories (i.e., awareness, use, and/or perceptions). In particular, two states were categorized in the top five for all three criteria, three states were categorized in the top five for two of the three criteria, and the remaining three states were categorized in the top five for one of the three criteria. Thus, this process led to the identification of eight “bright spot” SSSCs.

After identifying these SSSCs, which demonstrate a high level of user engagement and have achieved positive perceptions among intended users, the evaluation team then reviewed findings from each data source to better understand how the characteristics, structures, and activities of bright spot SSSCs were similar and different from SSSCs generally. This process led to the identification of promising practices that are more common among bright spot states compared to SSSCs generally.

## Expected Applicability of Findings

Findings from this study can be used to support school safety practitioners, researchers, and policy makers to better understand the landscape of SSSCs in the U.S. and provide promising

practices that may support the development and implementation of SSSCs moving forward. Prior to this study, very little was known about SSSCs, including how many were in operation, why they were developed, their structure and characteristics, and their activities. Further, there has never been a study examining perceptions of SSSC impacts nationwide. This evaluation provides initial information to fill this gap.

From a practitioner perspective, findings from this study can be used to better understand the variety of ways SSSCs can function and serve intended users. The study also provides concrete promising practices that practitioners can explore as they consider ways to improve their center. From a researcher's perspective, this study provides an important foundation to inform future research aiming to examine the practices and impacts of SSSCs more rigorously. Finally, from a policymaker's perspective, this study can inform policy moving forward including where SSSCs should be situated in the state, how they should be funded, and what their purview should be.

To ensure findings from this study are shared in a timelier and more accessible fashion, the evaluation team has prioritized the ongoing development and dissemination of evaluation reports and evaluation briefs. The evaluation reports provide a comprehensive description of study activities and findings, while the evaluation briefs translate this content to make it easily accessible for practitioner and policy audiences. Additionally, this project has produced numerous presentations at academic conferences, a publication in a practitioner-oriented magazine, and a SSSC promising practices framework for school safety practitioners. The evaluation team used this wide variety of dissemination strategies to support the use of findings from this study.

# Participants and Collaborating Organizations

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This study drew on data from a variety of participant groups to gather a comprehensive understanding of the history, characteristics, and activities of SSSCs, as well as interest holder perceptions toward their SSSC. This study did not formally include any collaborating organizations, beyond staff from the SSSCs that participated in various aspects of the study such as the director interviews, director survey, activity Smartsheets, and nomination of SSSC users to invite to participate in SSSC user interviews.

## SSSC Key Informant Survey

A purposive snowball sampling process was used to develop the sample for the SSSC key informant survey. The evaluation team conducted outreach to relevant organizations across the country including TA centers, research centers, and professional associations requesting that they identify knowledgeable individuals in each state who work in the field of school safety and understand the state's school safety context. To supplement contacts gathered through our outreach, the evaluation team also reviewed relevant online resources (e.g., websites, legislation, media reports). Once a potential key informant was identified, the evaluation team contacted the individual to assess whether they could provide information about the state's school safety landscape, or if they would recommend an alternative key informant. Key informants were identified for each state and the District of Columbia. Of the 51 individuals invited to participate in the SSSC key informant survey, 43 completed the survey (84%).

## SSSC Director Interviews

The SSSC director interview sample was informed by the SSSC key informant survey. States were eligible for SSSC director interviews if they responded “yes” to the survey item asking if they have an SSSC or responded “no” to this item but described activities aligned with SSSC responsibilities in their responses. The evaluation team identified individuals serving as the SSSC director(s) in each eligible state based on information provided in the SSSC Key Informant Survey regarding SSSC staffing. This resulted in a potential sample of 36 SSSC directors representing 30 states.<sup>2</sup> Thirty-four SSSC directors (94%) representing 29 states (97%) agreed to participate in SSSC director interviews.

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<sup>2</sup> Some states had multiple centers in operation simultaneously, which resulted in more than one interview in some states. More details about this nuance are discussed later in the results section.

### SSSC Director Survey

The 29 states that participated in director interviews were invited to participate in the SSSC director survey. Four states had two operating centers each; all were invited to participate. Therefore, 33 entities representing 29 different states received invitations. Seventeen SSSCs (49%) from 16 states (55%) completed the SSSC director survey.

### Activity Smartsheets

Of the 17 SSSCs who completed the SSSC director survey, nine SSSCs from nine states submitted at least one Smartsheet (53%). More specifically, nine SSSCs submitted data related to training events, four SSSCs submitted data related to TA, nine SSSCs submitted data related to resources, three SSSCs submitted data related to grant administration, and three SSSCs submitted data related to compliance activities.

### Superintendent and Principal Survey

The evaluation team compiled lists of superintendents and principals for each school in the 30 states<sup>3</sup> with an active SSSC using publicly available information, formal requests to state departments of education, or via a third-party organization. To establish a representative sample, statewide email lists were employed as sampling frames. Sample sizes for superintendents and principals in each state were determined using specific parameters: a 95% confidence level, a 10% margin of error, and a 50% population proportion. The sample was created through random sampling based on the calculated numbers of superintendent and principal contacts, stratified by state. The resulting potential sample size across all states after adjusting for bounced emails was 4,167, comprising 1,724 superintendents and 2,443 principals. The overall response rate for all contacts was 20%.<sup>4</sup> Response rates for the superintendent and principal surveys were 26% and 15%, respectively. All 30 states and their respective SSSCs were represented in the final dataset.

### SSSC User Interviews

To identify SSSC users, the evaluation team asked the director of each operational SSSC to provide contact information for individuals in various roles who regularly engage with the SSSC. SSSC directors from 23 states provided contact information for at least one SSSC user. In total, 165 potential interview targets were identified and contacted. From this list of potential interviews, the evaluation team conducted 57 interviews (35% of identified contacts) representing 19 states.

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<sup>3</sup> Thirty states were categorized as having an active SSSC based on the key informant survey. The study team included all 30 in the superintendent and principal survey data collection efforts.

<sup>4</sup> This response rate is typical of other large online survey efforts (Wu et al., 2022).



# Changes from the Original Design

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In general, this study adhered to the original design. Changes from the original design were minimal and included:

- Replacing the lead principal investigator (PI) with the co-PI after the lead PI departed WestEd and could no longer serve in the PI role. Although this change adjusted staffing for the project, the replacement lead PI had been involved since the outset and the original lead PI was maintained as a consultant to provide thought partnership and review deliverables.
- Extending the project period by one year to accommodate the shift in staffing described above and allow sufficient time for planned data collection activities.
- Refining the data collection tools and activities after the proposal submission to ensure the quality and contextual appropriateness of all tools and activities.
- Reducing the study's emphasis on data collected through the activity Smartsheets data collection in reporting due to low participation rates among SSSCs. Although this was a shift, the SSSC director survey provided similar information and achieved a stronger response rate. Thus, the study was able to generally report on the same information as originally planned, though not at the level of detail about specific SSSC activities and participation in activities for all SSSCs that was expected to come from the activity Smartsheets data.



# Outcomes

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This study included extensive data collection and analysis activities producing findings that can inform future development and refinement of SSSCs. It can also serve as a launching pad for more rigorous studies examining the impacts and outcomes associated with SSSC services and supports.

## Activities and Accomplishments

This study is the first comprehensive evaluation of SSSCs. Significant activities and accomplishments include:

- Developed a definition of an SSSC that can be used in the field to ensure a common understanding of the entities that are operating as an SSSC.
- Developed and disseminated a series of evaluation briefs and reports, as well as delivered numerous conference presentations, to ensure findings from this study are widely available and able to be put to use by practitioners, policy makers, and researchers.
- Developed and disseminated a promising practices framework to support school safety practitioners and policy makers as they develop and refine SSSCs across the country.
- Fielded requests from school safety practitioners and policy makers interested in learning more about SSSCs by providing evaluation reports and briefs produced through the study.
- Successfully conducted a variety of data collection activities that gathered information and perspectives from multiple viewpoints including school safety key informants, SSSC directors, superintendents, principals, and those who use SSSC services.
- Carried out data collection, analysis, and dissemination activities on an ongoing basis throughout the project period to ensure findings were disseminated as soon as possible, rather than waiting for the project conclusion.

## Results and Findings

This evaluation sought to address five evaluation questions using a variety of data collection and analysis approaches. The sections below summarize findings related to each evaluation question.

## Evaluation Question 1 – History of SSSCs

The first evaluation question asked, “what is the history of SSSCs across the U.S. over the past two decades (following the massacre at Columbine High School)?” To address this question, the evaluation team first needed to establish which states have or have ever had an operational SSSC. The evaluation team administered a survey to SSSC key informants in each state and the District of Columbia. These key informants were selected due to their knowledge regarding the history of school safety within their respective states. Of the 51 individuals invited to participate, 43 responded. Thus, the evaluation focused on the history of SSSCs within these 43 states.<sup>5</sup>

Despite the widespread use of SSSCs, even among those most familiar with their state’s school safety landscape in their state there are discrepancies in how SSSCs are defined. To promote shared language and understanding in the field, the evaluation team developed a definition of SSSCs:

A SSSC is a state-level resource that is funded either through state appropriations or state/federal grant funds, or some combination of the two, that at a minimum serves the entire state as a central clearinghouse for school safety information and resources, but that also may provide technical assistance, training, and/or develop resources to support local education agency school safety efforts.

Using this definition, it is possible for states to have more than one SSSC if each is functioning in alignment with the definition.

Applying this definition, analyses of key informant data indicate that 31 of the 43 participating states (72%) have or have had an SSSC.<sup>6</sup> Nearly two-thirds of these SSSCs (62%) started between 2010 and 2020 (see Exhibit 2). Approximately 14% started between 2000 and 2009, and 21% started in 1999 or earlier.<sup>7</sup>

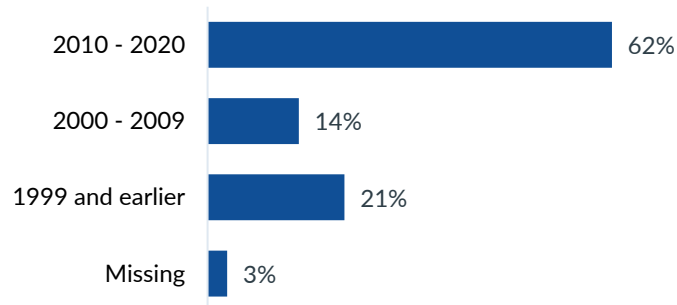
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<sup>5</sup> See [McKenna et al., 2021](#) for information about the states and territories that did not respond to the SSSC key informant survey.

<sup>6</sup> Forty-three key informants responded to the survey and 28 of these respondents indicated that their state either currently has or has had an operational SSSC. However, as aforementioned, upon further analysis of responses from the 14 key informants who reported their state does not have an SSSC, it became evident that three of these states should be categorized as having an SSSC. Thus, a total of 31 states have or have ever had an SSSC.

<sup>7</sup> Percentages based on the 28 key informants who indicated their state had a center and therefore were asked about the center’s start date. The start date for one SSSC (3%) was unavailable.

## Exhibit 2. Starting Year of SSSCs



Key informants in all but one of these states described their SSSC as operational at the time of the survey, suggesting that 30 (70%) of the 43 states included in the study had an active SSSC in the spring of 2021. The key informant for the SSSC that was no longer operational did not provide a rationale for the center closing.

To better understand how SSSCs came into existence, the evaluation team asked SSSC directors of centers currently in operation to reflect on what led to the creation of their states' SSSCs via SSSC director interviews. Directors often reported multiple factors that contributed to the establishment of their center. Across the states with operational SSSCs, most commonly the SSSCs were created in response to a high-profile incident such as a school shooting or natural disaster (48%). Of these SSSCs, directors mainly described the shootings at Columbine High School, Sandy Hook Elementary School, and other less publicized shootings that occurred at schools in their jurisdictions as catalysts for developing their SSSCs. However, directors from a few states shared student suicides related to bullying inspired SSSC development, and a director from one state emphasized Hurricane Katrina as the high-profile incident that led to the creation of their center. Other common ways that SSSCs began included being created by legislative requirements (35%) or in response to interest holder need or advocacy (35%). Directors in fewer states shared that their SSSCs came into existence through grant funding (28%) or that an existing center or office became an SSSC (17%).

Among the 11 states that had never had an SSSC, over a quarter indicated that they opted not to open a center due to lack of funding or capacity (27%). Key informants in another 27% of states were unsure why their state had never opened an SSSC. Additionally, one key informant (9%) described that, in their state, schools control their own safety measures in partnership with local law enforcement. More than one-third (36%) of key informants did not respond to this item asking them to provide a rationale for their state never introducing an SSSC.

For the states that did not have an SSSC, key informants indicated that state agencies, including the department of education, state police department, department of homeland security, department of public health, or department of public safety, already addressed school safety for the state.

## Evaluation Question 2 – Characteristics of Current SSSCs

The second evaluation question asked, “what are the characteristics of current SSSCs including the mission, funding source, regulatory bodies, policy directives, leadership, structural configuration, staffing, and sustainability strategies?” Interviews with SSSC directors representing 29 of the 30 states with operational SSSCs provided insight into their characteristics.

### Mission and Vision

SSSC directors shared multiple missions and visions that guide their centers’ work. Most frequently, SSSCs aim to provide resources, training, and education (72%), followed by creating safer school environments (69%). In nearly a quarter of states (24%), directors shared that their SSSCs serve as school safety “hubs,” meaning centralized sources of resources; expertise; and support for schools, emergency management, and other interest holders. Directors in three states (10%) indicated their mission or vision was to improve student academic performance. A director in one state (3%) described an intention to coordinate planning efforts with criminal/juvenile justice systems and facilitate delivery of services to victims of crime. Although directors in most states described the SSSC mission in very concrete terms focused on the development and dissemination of resources, directors in three states (10%) shared missions or visions that emphasized a broader, more holistic approach to school safety. These directors described that their SSSCs sought to utilize a whole-child approach to ensure student safety.

### Placement of SSSCs

Of the 29 states represented, 23 states (79%) have one center that is housed in one agency or organization, such as a state department or institution of higher education; three states (10%) have one center that is split between at least two departments or agencies; and three states (10%) have two centers that operate independently from one another.

Of the 23 states in which the center is a single agency or organization, only one (4%) of the directors noted their center exists as a standalone agency. Although this center is housed at a statewide nonprofit association and is outside the direct umbrella of the state government, it has a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the state’s department of education and Department of Public Safety that recognizes it as the SSSC. An additional four (17%) centers are housed at a university or other institution of higher education. Although these centers are not housed directly under a government agency, each director cited having MOUs with, strong relationships with, or formal endorsements by relevant state agencies. The remaining 18 states (78%) with a center situated in a single agency or organization have SSSCs that are part of a larger state agency that focuses on more than just school safety. Of these 18, 11 (61%) are housed in their respective states’ education entities, four (22%) are housed in their respective states’ police or public safety departments, two (11%) are housed in their respective states’ departments of justice or criminal justice, and one (6%) is housed in its state’s emergency

management department.

The three states that each indicated they have one center that serves the entire state but is housed under multiple departments or agencies indicated different configurations of departments or agencies that housed the center. The SSSC director for one of these states indicated that the SSSC was developed by the governor as a formal agreement and collaboration between the department of public safety and the department of education. In another of these states, the center is housed in the department of education, while the department of public safety runs specific responsibilities of the center. In yet another of these states, the center is housed within both the department of education and the office of emergency management.

Finally, of the three states with two centers in different state departments or agencies that work independently of one another to serve the whole state, two function such that both centers exist simultaneously and oversee separate aspects of school safety, such as school climate and curricula in one and emergency operation plans in another. In the other state, one center serves as the point of contact for all K–12 schools in the state, while the other center oversees state school safety legislation and administers school safety grants to districts.

### Laws, Policies, and Directives That Influence the Work of SSSCs

When describing the type of content included in their state school safety laws, directors in most states (72%) reported that emergency management requirements are outlined in legislation, such as emergency management plans, response protocols, emergency drills, and assessments. The next most common type of legislation focused on the existence and structure of the SSSC (38%), including the setup, role, and organization of the center. Threat assessment legislation existed in just under a third of the 29 states (31%). Directors in some states mentioned legislation around school policing (21%), mental health (17%), and bullying (14%). Directors in a few states described laws around anonymous reporting (10%), discipline (10%), school climate (10%), school violence (10%), and suicide prevention (10%). In addition, directors in about one third of the states (35%) described other categories of legislation covering a variety of topics, such as mandates for school safety personnel in schools, cybersecurity trainings, human trafficking, and laws around transportation safety.

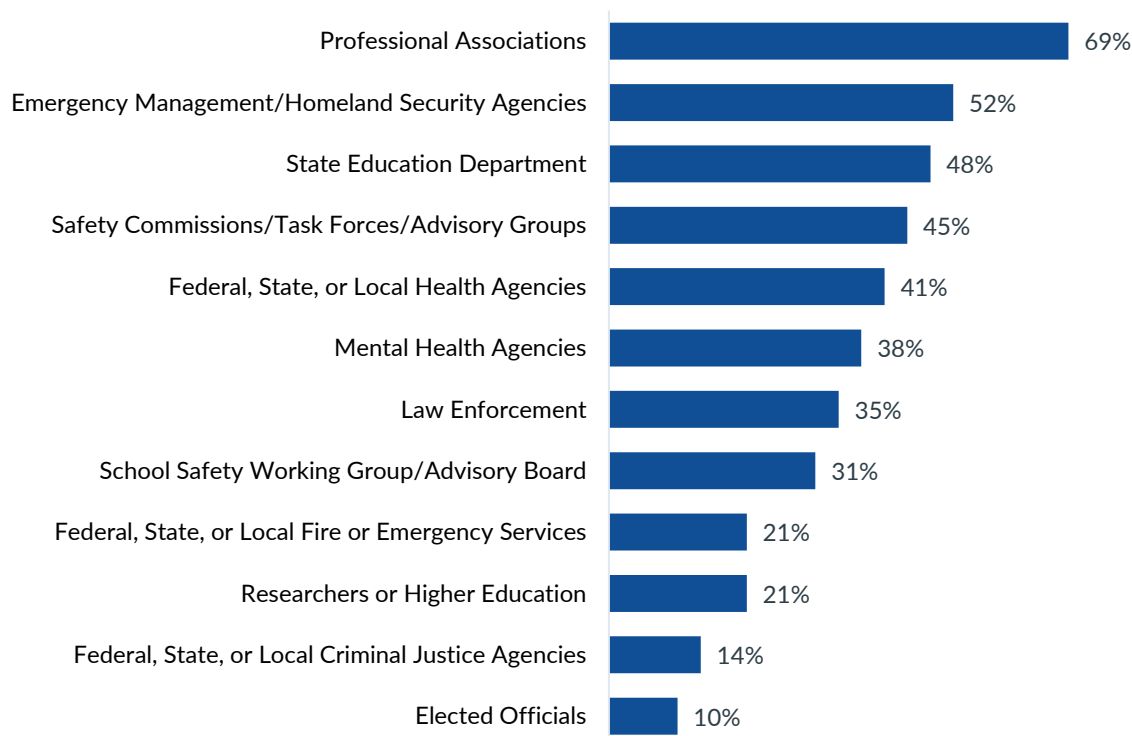
### Funding of SSSCs

According to SSSC directors, more than half of SSSCs receive some level of state-appropriated funding (79%) and federal grants (59%). Directors in nearly half of the states indicated that they receive funding from state grants (45%). Two states (7%) use other types of funding, such as pooled resources from other state departments or membership funds from school districts. Only one state (3%) mentioned receiving private funding. Although some states (34%) only mentioned one source of funding for their center, the majority (66%) mentioned having two or three means of funding the centers' work.

### Collaboration with Other Agencies and Organizations

During the interviews, directors noted that their SSSCs are not the only agencies or groups concerned with school safety in their states (see Exhibit 3). In fact, directors from all 29 states (100%) mentioned that other groups in their state support school safety, even if these other groups are not working as formal SSSCs. Directors in most states reported that professional associations in their states support school safety (69%), followed by emergency management or homeland security agencies (52%). Directors in about half of the states each said that their state education department participates in school safety (48%), and several mentioned school safety commissions, task forces, or advisory groups (45%) that they collaborate with. The next most frequently mentioned agencies were federal, state, or local health agencies; mental health agencies; and law enforcement. Directors in nine states mentioned that school safety working groups or advisory boards work with their SSSCs. In a subset of states, directors mentioned collaborating with federal, state, or local fire or emergency services; researchers or higher education; federal, state, or local criminal justice agencies; or elected officials.

**Exhibit 3. Agencies and Organizations That Collaborate with SSSCs**



In addition, directors in 45% of states described collaborating with other types of agencies, such as the state Department of Child Services and national organizations, foundations, or campaigns around school safety.

When asked about the focus of these collaborations, threat assessment (28%) and mental/behavioral health (28%) were the leading topics that other organizations focus on, followed by emergency management (24%). Other content areas mentioned included school violence (10%), suicide prevention (10%), school climate (7%), school policing (7%), and bullying (7%). The most common type of collaboration between SSSCs and other organizations was co-branding or sharing information externally (38%), such as through a joint newsletter. Other common types of collaboration occurred through training or presentation delivery (35%) and interagency collaboration and coordination (35%), such as co-planning events or initiatives. Directors in a few states also mentioned conveying or exchanging information internally (17%), such as sharing anonymous tips or relevant questions for interest holders.

### Staffing Configuration for SSSCs

Directors were asked to describe not only the staffing at their centers but also how their centers utilize contractors and shared or loaned staff from other agencies. SSSCs in most states (93%) use contractors for various reasons, most commonly to provide specific subject matter expertise on topics or trainings needed in the state. Other directors noted hiring contractors to fulfill grant requirements or to serve as region-specific staff. Directors in more than half of the states (69%) also described having a combination of both full-time and part-time staff, though most staff were full-time. Directors in less than half of the states (48%) noted they have shared or loaned staff with other departments or agencies, such as the Department of Corrections, the Department of Emergency Management, or other outside organizations. Finally, one director (3%) mentioned having interns as part of their staffing.

The key informant survey provided additional details about the number of full-time SSSC employees. According to key informants, most centers have five or fewer full-time employees (54%), 25% have 6 to 10 full-time employees (25%), 11% have 11 to 20 full-time employees, 4% have more than 21 full-time employees, and 7% were unsure.

### Staff Expertise

SSSC staff bring numerous areas of expertise according to SSSC directors. Directors in more than half of the states (59%) identified emergency management/response as an area of staff expertise. Moreover, directors in nearly half of the states identified mental/behavioral health (45%) and law enforcement/criminal justice (45%) as areas of expertise. Directors in more than a quarter (31%) of states identified threat assessment as an area of expertise. Approximately a quarter or less of the states identified education (24%), research and evaluation (17%), school administration (10%), or school climate (3%) as areas of expertise.

Directors in 48% of states cited other areas of staff expertise. The most common other areas of expertise included operations, grant administration, IT support/security, training, and communications. Operations expertise focused on budgets, contracts, development, and compliance; grant administration dealt with allocation, accountability, and transparency of

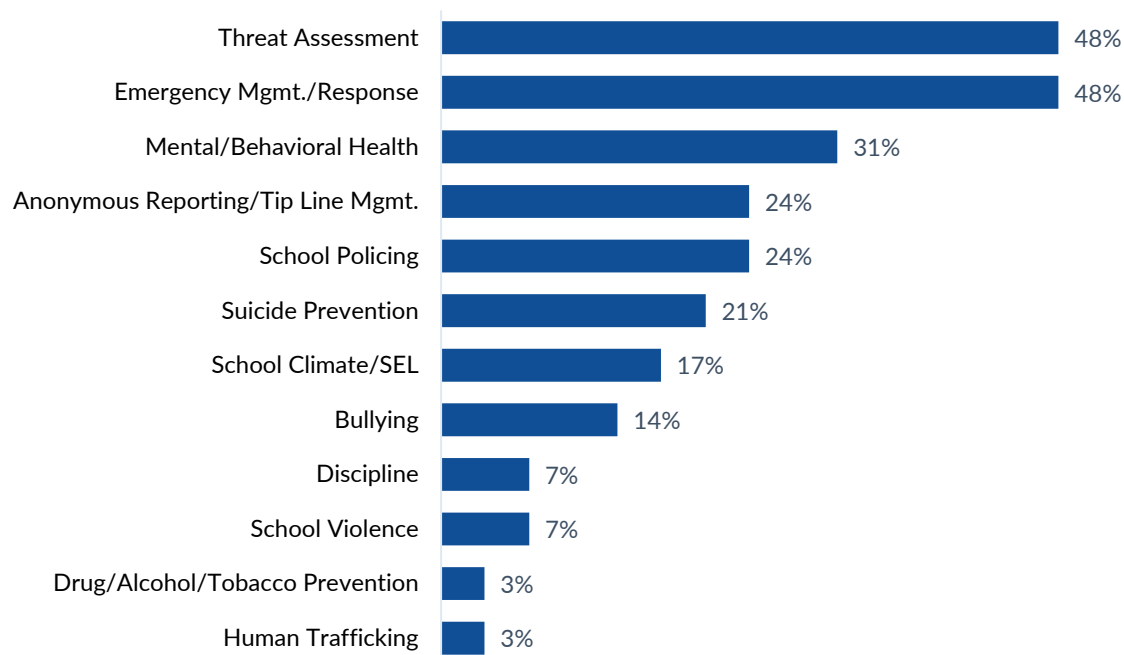


grant funding and financial management; IT support/security included providing support for internal software systems, software to review EOPs, cybersecurity, and statewide data collection, among other types of support. Areas of expertise that were less commonly mentioned included health, transportation, policy and intelligence analysis, school attendance, conference planning, career tech/vocational school, and higher education. Additionally, a subset of responses related to prevention work focused on hazardous material removal, playground safety, restorative practices, and bullying.

### SSSC Topic Areas of Focus

Directors in nearly half of the 29 states indicated that threat assessment (48%) and emergency management/response (48%) were areas of focus for their SSSCs (see Exhibit 4). Nearly a third of states described mental/behavioral health as an area of focus (31%). Further, less than a quarter indicated anonymous reporting/tip line management (24%), school policing (24%), and suicide prevention (21%) as areas of focus. Other responses that were less common included school climate/social-emotional learning (SEL; 17%), bullying (14%), discipline (7%), school violence (7%), drug/alcohol/tobacco prevention (3%), and human trafficking (3%).

#### Exhibit 4. SSSC Topic Areas of Focus



Additionally, directors in 28% of the states described other areas of focus. The other most common areas of focus included equity, social media, policy/legislation, special education, and child welfare. In contrast, the other least common areas of focus included topics related to



school maintenance; classroom curricula; and safety, such as internet safety, violence prevention, crime prevention, site assessments, and the creation/development of school safety guides. Although some centers had specific areas of focus, others had a needs-based focus and stressed flexibility or variation to accommodate field-generated requests.

In describing what generated their SSSCs' areas of focus, directors in 11 of the 29 states (38%) provided a specific reason for their safety center's focus. Of these, the majority of directors indicated that the focus of their center was needs-based (79%) or legislation-directed (59%), and approximately half cited high-profile incidents (52%). Additionally, more than a third (38%) indicated being proactive or preventative as the main reason for their centers' areas of focus.

### Audiences Served by SSSCs

When asked about the audiences their SSSCs serve, directors in the majority of states identified non-administrative school-level personnel (79%), school administrators (59%), and district staff/administrators (52%). In contrast, directors in less than half of the states identified law enforcement/first responders (38%) and students (28%) as their target audiences. Less than a quarter identified parents (24%), school board members (17%), or mental/behavioral health interest holders (14%) as their target audiences.

### Evaluation Question 3 – Activities of Current SSSCs

The third evaluation question asked, "what are the practices, activities, and outputs of current SSSCs?" Directors representing SSSCs in 17 states completed a survey inquiring about the activities of their center. Of these, directors in SSSCs representing nine states completed at least one retrospective activity data collection Smartsheet that asked them to provide details about all services and supports provided during a one-year period. To address Evaluation Question 3, the evaluation team draws on both sources of information to provide a comprehensive picture of SSSC activities, as well as greater detail about the subset of SSSCs for which more data is available. SSSC activities of interest for this evaluation included training, TA, resource development, grant administration, and compliance activities.

### Training

Of the 17 SSSCs that completed the director survey, 15 (88%) conducted trainings between January 1 and December 31, 2021 (see Exhibit 5). The number of training events ranged from 2 to 250, averaging 90 trainings per SSSC.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> The number of training events was missing for one SSSC.

## Exhibit 5. Number of Training Events Conducted by SSSCs



Of the 15 SSSCs that reported engaging in training-related activities, nine (60%) submitted Smartsheet activity data related to training. Among these SSSCs, the centers provided a total of 1,098 training events in 2021, ranging from 2 to 303 training events, with an average of 122 per SSSC. These SSSCs trained a total of 43,614 participants in 2021, ranging from 1 to 1,418 participants, with an average of 40 participants per training.<sup>9</sup> Participants were most often campus/district administrators (87%), local law enforcement (86%), and non-law enforcement school safety professionals (e.g., security guards; 77%).<sup>10</sup> The most common training topics<sup>11</sup> were threat assessment (47%), emergency management (47%), and school policing (43%). Other common training topics were school violence (40%), mental health (40%), and school safety law/legislation (40%). Less than a third of training events addressed bullying (30%), digital/internet safety (30%), youth advocacy/development (28%), drugs/alcohol/substance use (28%), and human trafficking (23%).

The training events were conducted mainly online with live instructors (53%) or in person (47%). Only seven trainings (<1%) were prerecorded and subsequently made available online. One in-person training had an online streaming option. Most training events (64%) involved participants who were instructed by SSSC staff.<sup>12</sup> Contractors/subject matter experts presented or instructed at more than a third of training events (38%). Other instructors/presenters included persons from partner government organizations (3%)—including the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, state departments of education, emergency management, and health and human services—and nongovernment partners such as nonprofit organizations (<1%). Most training events (58%) were funded by state appropriations.<sup>13</sup> Nearly half of training events (43.0%) were funded by federal grants.

<sup>9</sup> The numbers of participants were available for 1,094 training events.

<sup>10</sup> For the item assessing types of training participants, SSSCs could select more than one response option.

<sup>11</sup> For the item assessing training topic(s), SSSCs could select more than one response option.

<sup>12</sup> For the item assessing presenter(s)/instructor(s), SSSCs could select more than one response option.

<sup>13</sup> For the item assessing funding source(s), SSSCs could select more than one response option.

## Technical Assistance

Of the 17 SSSCs that completed the director survey, 16 (94%) reported providing TA throughout the year from January 1 to December 31, 2021. Of these 16 SSSCs, three formally tracked all TA, seven formally tracked some of their TA but not all, and six did not formally track any of their TA. The SSSCs that formally tracked all their TA and formally tracked some of their TA reported the number of TA instances for the year 2021. Across these SSSCs, reported instances of TA ranged from 3 to 1,022, averaging 282 instances per SSSC.

Of the 10 SSSCs that reported engaging in TA-related activities and formally tracking TA to some degree, four (40%) submitted Smartsheet activity data related to TA. Among these SSSCs, a total of 293 instances of TA took place from January 1 to December 31, 2021. The TA addressed a range of topics. The most common TA topic was emergency management (87%), followed by threat assessment (29%) and school safety law/legislation (14%). The most common type of TA was to answer a question or provide guidance (80%).<sup>14</sup> Other types of TA included developing a resource (34%), providing small-group or individualized training (31%), and providing support on an urgent issue (17%). Nearly half of TA (46%) was administered via videoconferencing, and nearly a quarter (23%) via email.<sup>15</sup> Less frequently, TA was administered via phone (15%) or an onsite visit (8%). Data on the modality were not available for 14% of TA instances. TA recipients were largely campus/district administrators (67%), followed by non-law enforcement school safety professionals (e.g., security guards; 29%) and local law enforcement (e.g., municipal police/sheriff, assigned SROs, school police officers; 21%).<sup>16</sup> More than three quarters of TA (77%) was initiated by the organization that was in need of assistance (i.e., they contacted the center). These SSSCs also reported the intensity of each instance of TA on a scale of low, medium, and high.<sup>17</sup> Nearly a third of TA (28%) was of low intensity, nearly half (47%) was medium, and 15% was high. For most TA (81%), the assistance resolved the issue or answered the question, according to SSSC directors. Only a small portion of TA resulted in referral of the organization to another organization or agency (6%) or in ongoing assistance (3%).

Additionally, for the 13 SSSCs that did not formally track all TA, the activities survey included survey items on TA that assessed general aggregate information about their activities. Nearly a quarter of these SSSCs (23%) estimated that staff spent between 11 and 25 percent of their work time providing TA, more than half (62%) estimated between 26 percent and 50 percent, and only two SSSCs (15%) estimated between 51 percent and 75 percent. These SSSCs estimated the percentage of TA delivered through various modalities. On average, these SSSCs delivered nearly half of their TA by email (43%). Other common modalities used to deliver TA were phone calls (29%), and videoconferencing (17%). For the majority of these SSSCs (73%), TA

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<sup>14</sup> For the item assessing type(s) of TA, SSSCs could select more than one response option.

<sup>15</sup> For the item assessing modality(ies) of TA, SSSCs could select more than one response option.

<sup>16</sup> For the item assessing primary recipient(s) of TA, SSSCs could select more than one response option.

<sup>17</sup> intensity of TA refers to the estimated amount of time that was spent on a TA instance. “Low” intensity is defined as less than 2 hours spent, “medium” intensity is defined as 2 to 8 hours spent, and “high” intensity is defined as more than 8 hours spent.

was initiated by an organization or individual in need of assistance contacting the center. TA was also initiated by the center by first identifying the organization in need of assistance through such means as a required data collection (18%) or a partner agency asking the center to support another organization that was in need of support (9%).

### Resource Development and Sharing

Of the 17 SSSCs that completed the activities survey, 15 (88%) reported having developed original resources between January 1 and December 31, 2021. Additionally, nearly all of these SSSCs (82%) reported disseminating resources developed by other organizations. Of these SSSCs, the majority (79%) reported having a formal vetting process to guide dissemination of outside resources. Most (82%) disseminated resources electronically to specific groups (e.g., via email or document sharing platform or portal). SSSCs also shared resources via websites (65%), newsletters (47%), and social media (41%). Only two SSSCs (12%) disseminated resources through printed methods (e.g., mailed, printed and then distributed at an event).

Of the 15 SSSCs that reported engaging in resource-related activities, nine (60%) submitted Smartsheet activity data related to resources. Among these SSSCs, the number of resources per SSSC ranged from 2 to 24, with a total of 106 original resources developed in 2021. The most common types of resources developed were tools (resources such as assessments or templates that help school systems complete tasks; 36%) and videos (36%). Other types of developed resources included newsletters (14%), model procedures or policies or standards (8%), reports or briefs (5%), and a fact sheet (<1%). Resources developed by SSSCs addressed a range of topics, the most common topics being emergency management (59%), mental health (36%), and school safety law/legislation (30%).<sup>18</sup>

More than half of the original resources were developed in response to a need identified by the SSSC or partner organization (e.g., through data collection and/or compliance activity; 64%).<sup>19</sup> More than a third of resources were developed to fulfill a TA request (39%), and the same amount served to support community outreach/marketing (39%). Approximately a third of resources fulfilled a grant or project deliverable (33%), and less than a quarter were developed to meet legislative requirements (20%).

Resources developed by SSSCs were intended for many types of audiences.<sup>20</sup> Most often, audiences were non-administrator school district staff (93%), followed by non-law enforcement school safety professionals (e.g., security guards; 89%) and campus or district administrators (82%). Most resources (71%) were disseminated online via a website.<sup>21</sup> Half

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<sup>18</sup> For the item assessing resource topic(s), SSSCs could select more than one response option.

<sup>19</sup> For the item assessing resource purpose(s), SSSCs could select more than one response option.

<sup>20</sup> For the item assessing audience(s) of a resource, SSSCs could select more than one response option.

<sup>21</sup> For the item assessing resource dissemination method(s), SSSCs could select more than one response option.

(50%) were sent electronically to specific interest holder groups (e.g., via email or document-sharing platform or portal), and less than a quarter (23%) were sent via a newsletter.

### Grant Administration

According to the director survey, 8 of the 17 SSSCs (47%) engaged in grant administration activities between January 1 and December 31, 2021. Across these SSSCs, the number of grant programs administered ranged from one to five, averaging approximately two per SSSC.

Of the eight SSSCs that reported engaging in grant administration-related activities, three (38%) submitted Smartsheet activity data related to grant administration. Among these SSSCs, each SSSC reported administering one grant in 2021: one focused on SRO/school support officer (SSO) funding; another on harassment, bullying, and discrimination; and the third on general school safety. Although SSSCs administered these grant programs in 2021, the programs originated between June 2018 and October 2020. Local school districts were eligible participants for all three grants. Local towns/cities and law enforcement were also eligible to participate in one of the three grants (33%).<sup>22</sup> State/legislative allocations funded all three grants, with annual funding amounts ranging from 2 to 4 million dollars.<sup>23</sup> These SSSCs administered a total of 936 grant awards. For each grant program, SSSCs used a different allocation method: One allocated funding based on an identified need, another utilized a competitive application process, and the third used a formula (e.g., all school districts received a portion based on student enrollment or other factors). These SSSCs served a variety of roles during grant administration. For all three grant programs, SSSCs monitored progress toward grant goals (100%).<sup>24</sup> For two of the grant programs (67%), SSSCs made funding decisions or recommendations on competitive applications. One SSSC reviewed competitive applications for one grant program (33%) but only provided feedback or input; The SSSC did not ultimately make the funding decision. Another SSSC conducted financial accounting or monitoring of expenses and follow-up or evaluation for another grant program (33%).

### Compliance Activities

Of the 17 SSSCs that completed the director survey, 11 (65%) engaged in compliance-related activities between January 1 and December 31, 2021. The number of activities ranged from 2 to 40, with an average of 9 activities per SSSC.<sup>25</sup>

Of the 11 SSSCs that reported engaging in compliance-related activities, three (27%) submitted Smartsheet activity data related to compliance. These SSSCs, representing three states, reported a total of 11 compliance-related activities over the course of 2021. These activities

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<sup>22</sup> For the item assessing eligible grant recipient(s), SSSCs could select more than one response option.

<sup>23</sup> The annual funding amount was missing for one grant program.

<sup>24</sup> For the item assessing type of grant administration activity(ies), SSSCs could select more than one response option.

<sup>25</sup> The number of compliance activities was missing for two SSSCs.

originally became part of the SSSC's duties over the past 19 years, ranging from as far back as March 2001 to more recently as September 2019. The average start date of these activities fell around June 2013, likely resulting from responses to the tragedy that occurred at Sandy Hook Elementary School in December of 2012. More than a quarter of activities (27%) involved training, and the same proportion involved school safety audits (27%). Compliance activities also included emergency plan review (18%), school safety survey administration (18%), and review and approval of school safety consultants (9%). SSSCs utilized common approaches to address compliance. For more than half of activities (55%), SSSCs collected compliance-related data. SSSCs also reviewed and approved various certifications and plans (36%), administered training (27%), provided resources (27%), and published reports (18%).

### Evaluation Question 4 – Interest Holder Perceptions of Current SSSCs

The fourth evaluation question asked, “what do interest holders (e.g., policymakers, superintendents, directors of school safety, law enforcement, school leaders) perceive to be the impact of the SSSC in their state?” To address this question, the evaluation team gathered survey data from principals and superintendents in states with operational SSSCs to understand awareness, use, and perceptions of SSSCs. The team also conducted interviews with individuals who regularly engage with their SSSC to understand perceptions of their SSSC.

#### Awareness of SSSCs

Of the 825 superintendent and principal survey respondents, more than three quarters were aware of their SSSCs (77%). Most commonly, respondents learned of their SSSCs from professional associations (49%) and online sources (website/email; 49%), followed by colleagues (23%); state legislation (22%); and other sources (8%), such as direct interactions with the SSSCs, state agencies, conferences, and as part of their job functions.<sup>26</sup> To understand how awareness varied by role, analyses examined the proportion of superintendents and principals who reported being aware of their SSSCs. Awareness of SSSCs was significantly higher among superintendents (83%), compared to principals (69%;  $p < .001$ ; Cohen's  $w = 0.15$ ).

Beyond general awareness of their SSSCs, SSSC user interviewees provided greater insight into the SSSC resources and services with which they were familiar. Most commonly, interview respondents reported awareness of trainings on a variety of school safety topics and SSSC information and guidance such as websites; newsletters; policy briefs; and informational and guidance documents, including vetted resources from other organizations. Interviewees also reported familiarity with SSSC tools or templates, thought partnership, and legislative work.

#### Use of SSSCs

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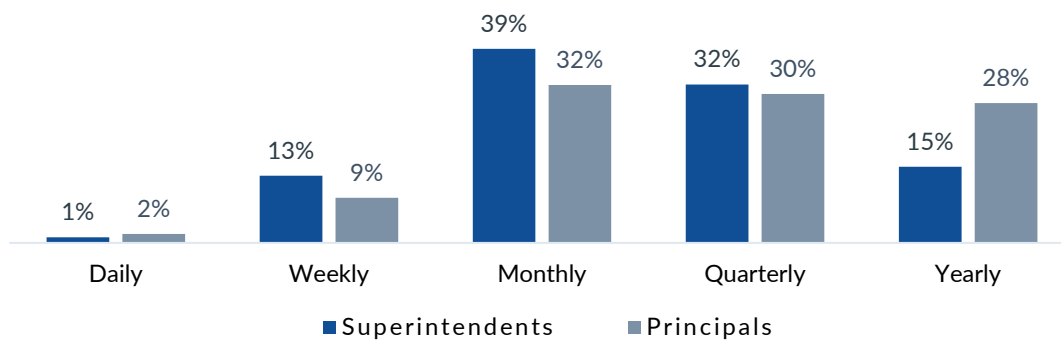
<sup>26</sup>Of the 633 respondents who indicated awareness, 611 (97%) indicated the sources from which they became aware of their state's center.



More than two thirds (69%) of superintendent and principal survey respondents who reported awareness of their SSSC also indicated they had attended, used, or referenced any materials, resources, or products produced by the SSSCs in the last year. This included training, online resources, publications, TA, grant funding, or compliance activities. The majority of SSSC users indicated that they use center supports monthly (37%) or quarterly (31%).<sup>27</sup> Fewer reported daily (1%), weekly (12%), or yearly (19%) engagement with their center.

Engagement with SSSC activities varied by role. More than three quarters of superintendents reported they attended, used, or referenced materials, resources, or products produced by the SSSCs in the past year (79%), compared to approximately half of principals (53%;  $p < .001$ ; Cohen's  $w = 0.27$ ). Superintendents also reported engaging with SSSC materials, resources, or products more frequently, compared to principals ( $p = .02$ ; Hedges'  $g = 0.27$ ). As illustrated in Exhibit 6, a larger proportion of superintendents reported engagement on a weekly, monthly, or quarterly basis, whereas a larger proportion of principals indicated yearly engagement.

#### Exhibit 6. Frequency of Engagement with SSSC Supports by Role



Note: Superintendent  $n = 269$ ; Principal  $n = 111$

SSSC user interviews provided an opportunity to delve further into how often users engaged with SSSC staff, services, and resources. Most explained that they engage with the SSSCs as needed. More specifically, engagement fluctuated depending on their organization's circumstances, connecting with the SSSC more often during times of higher need—such as when developing or modifying a plan or protocol, following a change in state legislation, or in responding to a safety-related incident.

#### Use and Perceptions of Specific SSSC Services

When superintendents and principals who indicated awareness of their SSSC were asked about use of specific SSSC services and resources, most commonly, they reported using online

<sup>27</sup>Of the 554 respondents who indicated use of their center, 380 (69%) indicated how frequently they engage with their center.

resources (62%), followed by training (52%), and TA (40%). Use of SSSC supports related to compliance (31%), grant funding (18%), and other resources (6%) were less common.

For each type of service received, the survey assessed whether the service was easy to access, was useful, met users' quality expectations, addressed current and/or prevalent school safety needs, and made safety work at the schools/districts more comprehensive.<sup>28</sup> Respondents rated their agreement with each statement on a Likert-type scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). As is evident in Table 1, respondents provided consistently high ratings for these statements. There were no statistically significant differences in ratings between superintendents and principals.

**Table 1. Survey Respondent Perceptions of SSSC Services**

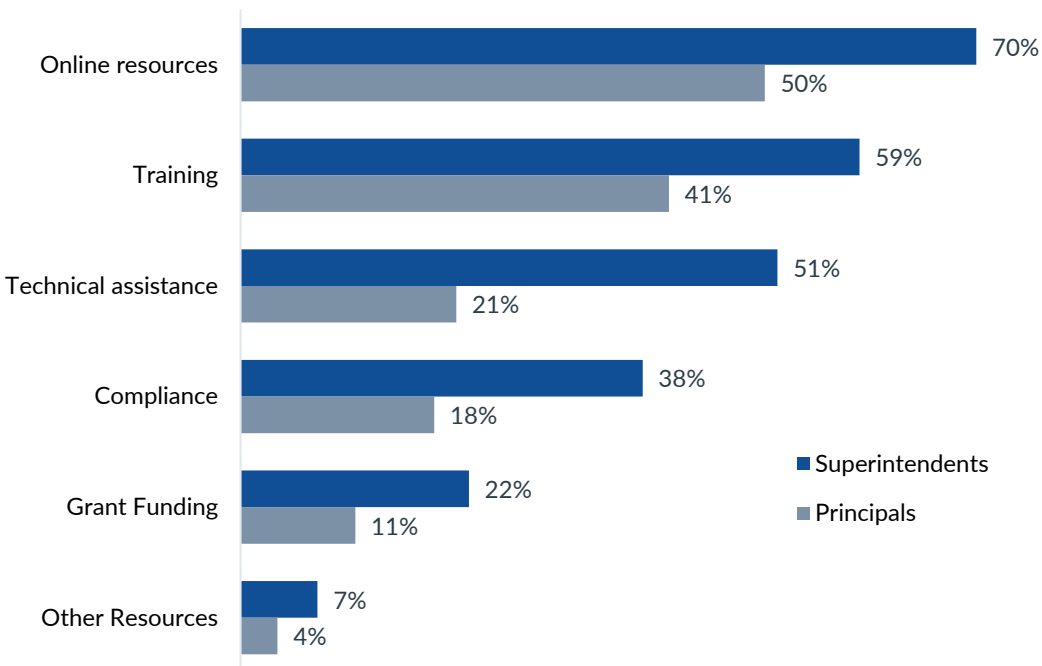
	TA <i>n</i> = 217	Training <i>n</i> = 284	Online Resources <i>n</i> = 337	Other Resources <i>n</i> = 126	Grant Funding <i>n</i> = 92	Compliance <i>n</i> = 163
Easy to access	4.2	4.2	4.2	4.4	4.0	4.2
Useful	4.2	4.3	4.2	4.3	4.4	4.3
Met quality expectations	4.2	4.2	4.1	4.3	N/A	4.3
Addressed current and/or prevalent school safety needs	4.2	4.2	4.1	4.3	4.3	4.3
Made safety work at district more comprehensive	4.1	4.1	4.1	4.3	4.3	4.2

Across these five service types addressed in the survey, although there were no statistically significant differences in ratings between superintendents and principals regarding perceptions of specific services, there was significantly more use of specific SSSC services among superintendents (see Exhibit 7). Compared to principals, significantly larger proportions of superintendents reported using every service type ( $p < .001$ ; Cohen's  $w = 0.14$ – $0.30$ ). While most service types exhibited differences of approximately 10–20 percentage points between superintendents and principals, TA showed the largest variation, with approximately 30 percentage points higher utilization among superintendents.

<sup>28</sup>Survey item language varied slightly across service type. For TA, the first survey item assessed whether the service was easy to request. For grant funding, the first survey item assessed whether the process of receiving the grant was easy, and no survey item assessed meeting quality expectations. For compliance, the first survey item assessed whether the center was easy to work with regarding compliance-related activities.



## Exhibit 7. Stakeholder Use of SSSC Services by Role



In interviews with SSSC users, respondents were asked about their usage and perceptions of SSSC resources and services. The recurring theme among interviewees was their reliance on SSSC resources and services to enhance staff knowledge and capacity or to shape their decision-making processes. This increase in knowledge and capacity was achieved primarily through participation in SSSC training sessions covering a wide array of topics, including both general and site-specific areas, or through the reception of informational resources tailored to support their school safety initiatives. Interviewees frequently highlighted that their own perspectives were informed by training and informational resources, as well as through the provision of TA and engaged thought partnership. Most commonly, they recounted benefiting from SSSC staff answering questions, providing general expertise, acting as a sounding board, sharing valuable field-tested practices, and aiding in the interpretation of legislation and other regulatory guidelines. Furthermore, interview respondents also reported utilizing SSSC resources and services to formulate or refine policies and protocols, such as school or district safety policies and threat assessment protocols. They also utilized these resources in their outreach efforts, most often in the form of sharing informational resources with a diverse audience including colleagues, school and district staff, and parents. The following sections provide additional information from SSSC user interviews regarding specific types of SSSC services.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Both grant funding and compliance support were not common types of service discussed by interview participants and are omitted from this summary.

## TA

When asked about supports that they received from their SSSCs, the majority of interview respondents reported having received TA. Descriptions of TA shared by interview respondents centered on SSSC staff serving as thought partners and subject matter experts across a variety of contexts. SSSC staff assisted with or reviewed plans, policies, protocols, and procedures or consulted on specific circumstances or incidents. Most frequently, interviewees described relying on SSSC staff to answer questions and provide help and advice, characterized by some respondents as someone to “bounce ideas off of” or “poke holes in my thinking” or “help us get over the speed bumps.” SSSC staff often gave this assistance on demand, responding in real time to the needs of their high-end users.

## Training

Engagement in training came up frequently among interview participants. Interviewees reported using SSSC training on a wide variety of topics both in person and online. Most frequently, interviewees utilized SSSC training on threat assessment. Additional training topics reported by representatives from multiple states included crisis intervention and response, disaster planning and relief, adolescent mental health, and SRO courses. Finally, interviewees described a plethora of training support related to specific site-based programs and protocols in place at schools and districts (e.g., incident response, reunification methods).





## Resources

According to interview participants, SSSCs provided an abundance of resources to individuals working on school safety in their states, including informational resources and tools/templates. Informational resources included SSSC newsletters, websites, conferences, best practice documents, policy briefs, and tip sheets for parents. In many cases, the SSSCs developed original resources for use in the field; in others, the centers served as information clearinghouses by providing curated or vetted materials from other sources. Examples of tools and templates—characterized as a product that a person actively uses—included threat assessment protocol tools, site safety assessment tools, emergency operations templates, school crisis planning toolkits, and anonymous tip lines.

## Perceptions of SSSC Impact

The superintendent and principal survey captured perceptions of the overall impact of the work conducted by their SSSCs by asking respondents to rate their agreement with four statements on a Likert-type scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Across these four items, average ratings ranged from 3.7 to 3.8, suggesting that the average response fell between feeling neutral and agreeing with each statement (see Exhibit 8).

## Exhibit 8: Overall Perceptions of the Quality of SSSCs

Statement	Average Rating
 The way in which the center offers its resources and services is accessible for schools/districts.	3.8
 The center assists in improving the overall safety of schools/districts in their state.	3.8
 The center adequately supports schools/districts in their state in meeting state safety requirements.	3.7
 The center adequately supports schools/districts in their state in meeting safety best practices.	3.7

Further investigation revealed that approximately half of respondents agreed with each of the statements, while one quarter to nearly one third were neutral. The statements assessing whether the centers adequately support schools/districts in meeting state safety requirements and in meeting safety best practices produced the highest proportion of neutral responses (29% for each item), suggesting opportunities for SSSCs to strengthen their focus and support in these areas. No statistically significant differences in ratings by role emerged.

Interviewees were also asked if their SSSCs have adequately supported schools and districts in meeting state safety requirements and/or best practices; 26 of the 30 interviewees who answered this question said yes. Of the four interviewees who did not answer in the affirmative, one said their center was too new, one clarified that there are insufficient mental health professionals to do the necessary work in the state, one remarked that the SSSC should not be their state's only effort to provide the school safety support districts need, and one explained that political barriers at the state level hamper SSSC effectiveness. In addition, when asked if their SSSC has assisted in improving overall safety of schools in the state, each of the 43 interviewees who responded to this question answered in the affirmative. Interviewers also queried respondents about the quality, value, accessibility, and relevance of SSSC work and investigated their perspectives on key SSSC successes. Similar to perceptions of survey respondents, almost 95 percent of respondents considered the resources and services provided by their SSSCs to be of high quality.

More than four fifths of interviewees also described SSSC services as useful and accessible, indicating that their SSSCs support the ability of people in their states to carry out school safety work. In addition, most interviewees indicated that SSSC resources and services address current and prevalent needs and that SSSC staff are responsive and knowledgeable. Interviewees described the work of their SSSCs as useful and of high quality, using adjectives such as high

caliber, valuable, robust, tremendous, top notch, and exceptional. They identified three facets of SSSC services and resources as particularly valuable and of high quality:

- helpful informational resources and guidance to support their school safety work;
- excellent trainings to build capacity among school and district staff;
- respected thought partnership of seasoned SSSC experts to answer questions, guide thinking, and share expertise.

Interviewees also conveyed that SSSC resources and services were accessible, relevant, and timely. According to interviewees, SSSCs prioritized accessibility primarily through including a plethora of resources, documents, and FAQs on their websites, as well as by providing flexible training options (e.g., online webinars, asynchronous learning modules) and scheduling trainings to meet the specific needs of individual schools or districts. In addition, they confirmed that SSSCs address current and prevalent needs through continually updating guidance, staying abreast of emerging issues in the field, and increasing their focus on mental health as a key component of school safety.

Interview participants largely characterized their SSSCs as responsive and lauded the expertise and knowledge of center staff. They praised the timeliness of SSSC assistance—often sharing that they could connect with a content expert immediately when needed—and described SSSC staff as exceptionally knowledgeable, possessing a wealth of information, and being industry-leading subject matter experts. Interviewees expressed appreciation for the tailored assistance they receive that is adapted to their needs, challenges, and contexts. Additionally, they recognized SSSC work as grounded in evidence- and research-based practices and described trainings, particularly on the topic of threat assessment, as being built on research-based models.

### Opportunities for SSSC Improvement

Interviews with SSSC users provided opportunities for respondents to share their thoughts on what improvements SSSCs could make, additional services and resources they would like to see the centers offer, and other feedback related to refining and improving SSSCs. Most commonly, interviewees identified structural improvements that would benefit the centers and their users or recommended that SSSCs add new services or resources. More than two thirds of interviewees identified structural improvements SSSCs could make to better support school safety efforts in their states, including the measures listed below:

#### *Increasing Staff Capacity*

Interviewees described a desire for SSSCs to not only be better staffed but also to house more dedicated staff free from competing priorities (often characterized as staff “with fewer hats to wear”). Interviewees discussed the number of dedicated staff as “a limiting factor” and said they are “excellent but spread thin.” Interviewees described potential benefits of additional staff, including the opportunity to provide more training (particularly site-based), an increased

ability to serve rural schools and districts, expansion of SSSC services and resources, and increased SSSC outreach.

### *Improving SSSC Websites*

Although interviewees identified SSSC websites as beneficial resources containing a wealth of valuable information, they also sought improvements to make sites more user-friendly. They requested better organization of materials—including cross-cataloging by myriad factors such as topic area, target audience, and type of resource—to make relevant information easier to find. Similarly, interviewees asked for improved search functions on SSSC websites.

### *Housing SSSCs in a Single Location*

In cases in which a state has an SSSC housed under multiple agencies, interviewees tended to identify this as an area for improvement rather than as a strength. Several suggested consolidating the center and identifying a single lead agency to reduce confusion and streamline operations, as well as to prevent multiple agencies from competing for the same funding streams. In addition, some interviewees advocated for high-visibility stand-alone SSSCs in their states, recognized at the state level by all governmental agencies as being the lead agency for school safety.

### *Bolstering SSSC Marketing and Outreach*

Many interviewees identified the primary challenge with their SSSCs as a lack of awareness within the state about the available resources and services the center can provide. Several shared anecdotes about colleagues who had no idea the centers existed or noted that districts and schools are hiring private vendors to provide products and services not knowing they could access similar—or better—resources from their states' centers, often at no cost.

Recommendations for outreach and marketing included widely distributing materials such as brochures and flyers, staffing a booth at education-related conferences even if school safety is not the primary topic of the convening, and introducing the centers via education-focused listservs and similar email blasts.

### *Adding New Services*

Almost half of interviewees indicated a desire for their SSSCs to add new services or resources. Most commonly, interviewees requested a state-level threat assessment team and/or threat response team composed of school safety experts to relieve some of the burden of school administrators and district staff. Interviewees also proposed that SSSCs provide a “boot camp” for administrators with limited background in school safety to quickly develop their basic competence. Additional suggestions focused on ongoing capacity building, such as facilitating a community of school and district leaders who can connect via listserv and access open office hours with a content expert on a regular basis. Interviewees also desired a statewide database and tracking system for student threat assessment; guidance documents for post-incident use (e.g., student supervision, reunification); mental health resources for students, teachers, and

school-based staff; site assessments with prioritized recommendations; and a vetted list of vendors for identified safety-related needs (e.g., fencing, camera systems, shatterproof glass).

### *Modifying Existing Services*

Interviewees also identified opportunities for SSSC improvement related to modifying existing services or resources or adding or reprioritizing topic areas. Suggestions for modifying existing resources largely centered around increasing user-friendliness, such as adding quick-read, bullet point summaries of key resources; clearly organizing newsletter content by topic areas or grade level; offering separate trainings for different roles or end users; and offering more trainings during non-school hours, over the summer, and online. Suggestions for adding or reprioritizing topic areas almost universally related to mental health, including suicide prevention and intervention, bullying prevention, and the impact of social media on teen mental health.

## **Evaluation Question 5 – Promising Practices for SSSCs**

The final evaluation question asked, “what characteristics, practices, and activities are common across SSSCs that have achieved positive impacts in their state?” The evaluation team addressed this evaluation question by identifying the SSSCs that demonstrated the highest rates of awareness and use among superintendents and principals and were perceived most positively by superintendents and principals. This led to the identification of eight “bright spot” SSSCs. The evaluation team then examined the history, characteristics, and activities of bright spot SSSCs to identify common elements that may help inform other SSSCs as they are developed or refine their approach. These promising practices are organized into four categories – vision and mission, structure and staffing, supports and services, and audience and outreach.

### **Vision and Mission**

#### *Serve as the State’s School Safety Hub as Part of the SSSC Mission*

Universally, bright spot SSSCs viewed being the school safety hub for training and TA as the primary mission of their work. An organization’s mission both shapes and propels its activities, so integrating explicit language within the mission statement about becoming the state’s go-to resource for school safety needs can help keep this objective at the forefront. As the state’s school safety hub, the SSSC’s strong emphasis on developing and disseminating resources, delivering training, and providing TA clarifies its purpose and may promote greater use of the available supports and services.

#### *Respond to the Needs of Interest Holders*

Bright Spot SSSCs, which had the highest levels of user engagement, tended to bring a responsive lens to their work, including a greater focus on prevention. These SSSCs described a primary focus on supporting prevention efforts and anticipating future needs in the field while

still supporting incident response efforts and compliance with legislation. For example, many bright spot SSSCs reported focusing on the systemic implementation and management of anonymous reporting, gathering feedback from the field to inform what supports are most needed, and adjusting accordingly. An SSSC's ability to understand and anticipate needs in the field ensures that supports and services are well aligned to these needs and may help to foster deeper engagement from intended users.

### *Use Data to Understand Quality of Services and Supports*

Bright spot SSSCs consistently prioritize efforts to solicit feedback, relying on data to understand and gauge the quality of their supports and services. For example, bright spot SSSCs implement training satisfaction surveys to capture participant perceptions of the training's quality and relevance. When compared to other SSSCs, bright spots tend to conduct rigorous research and evaluation. Hiring staff with specialized skills in research and evaluation, which is more common in bright spot SSSCs, likely enhances their capacity for comprehensive assessment. They opt for collecting data to gather comprehensive information about the quality, utility, and impact of supports and services rather than gathering feedback informally. This approach equips such SSSCs with a better understanding of their strengths and with opportunities for improvement, increasing the odds that they can adequately support their intended audience.

## **Structure and Staffing**

### *House SSSCs in a Single Agency*

Nearly every SSSC in the U.S. is housed in a single agency, such as a department of justice, department of education, office of public safety, office of emergency management, or institution of higher education. Users from the minority of states with SSSC ownership split between two agencies or organizations consistently report confusion and suggested consolidation into one location. They believe that housing a center within a single agency would clarify the SSSC's purpose and role as well as streamline support. The location of an SSSC within the state does not appear to differentiate bright spot SSSCs from other SSSCs so long as the SSSC is housed in a single agency or organization. Regardless of where SSSCs are housed, collaboration across relevant agencies and organizations is valuable for ensuring a coherent approach to improving school safety in the state.

### *Diversify Funding Streams to Support SSSC Work*

SSSCs that generate the highest levels of user engagement draw on a variety of funding streams to support their work. These include federal and state grant opportunities, state appropriations, and nongovernmental funds. Multiple funding sources uniquely differentiate bright spot states; other states often rely on fewer funding sources. Federal grants supporting bright spot SSSC work came from the U.S. Department of Justice (e.g., Bureau of Justice Assistance, NIJ) and Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Bright spot SSSCs also commonly acquired grant funding from state agencies (e.g., state department of



health and human services, department of justice, department of education, Governor's Office). In addition to grant funding, bright spot SSSCs often received state appropriations to drive their work, which provides a relatively stable funding stream that is not reliant on competitive grants. Finally, several bright spot SSSCs described partnering with universities or foundations to acquire additional funding. Together, this suggests that when SSSCs obtain varied sources of funding to support their work, they may be better equipped to successfully engage intended users.

### *Carefully Consider Staffing to Build a Sufficient Multidisciplinary Team*

Compared to other SSSCs, bright spot SSSCs tended to employ dedicated staff with a wide variety of backgrounds and areas of expertise. The number of full-time staff employed by bright spot SSSCs varies, but nearly all had at least five full-time staff members fully dedicated to the SSSC. The backgrounds and expertise of bright spot SSSC staff extend beyond traditional school safety backgrounds such as law enforcement, criminal justice, threat assessment, and emergency management. In addition to staff with expertise in these customary areas, they also employed staff with expertise in other relevant fields, including education, mental and behavioral health, and research and evaluation. School safety spans multiple fields, and SSSCs that employed a dedicated team with wide-ranging areas of expertise demonstrated higher levels of user engagement.

### *Strategically Collaborate with Other Agencies and Organizations*

Many agencies and organizations work to create safe and supportive school environments for both students and staff. For SSSCs, being aware of other organizations doing related work within their state and actively seeking collaboration can be crucial to mission-driven efforts of improving the safety of schools. Rather than working in a silo, SSSCs may benefit from developing partnerships with outside organizations to leverage their work and communication channels. Bright spot SSSCs work with partners to promote resources and events through existing outreach methods. Examples include sharing training opportunities on another agency's listserv, cosponsoring trainings, and drawing on the expertise of other organizations to strengthen their own work. Strategic collaboration not only provides SSSCs with a wider reach and a more robust bench of expertise but it can also help ensure alignment across guidance and recommendations provided by different organizations and agencies throughout the state.

## Supports and Services

### *Offer a Sufficient Amount and Variety of Supports and Services*

A notable pattern among bright spot SSSCs is the significant volume of training and TA engagements they offer—exceeding those offered by most other SSSCs. Bright spot SSSCs offered an average of 135 training programs and 565 TA instances within a year's time, compared to an average of 90 training programs and 282 TA instances across all SSSCs. Insufficient offerings may prevent potential SSSC users from learning about or accessing services. Frequent training and TA delivery are essential for establishing the SSSC as a



consistent resource in the state and engaging intended users. Recognizing that such efforts are time-intensive, bright spot SSSCs allocate substantial amounts of staff time to training and TA.

Bright spot SSSCs also provide grant funding to districts and schools in their states and assist schools and districts with compliance requirements. In turn, this creates additional avenues for intended users to become aware of the center. Bright spot SSSCs not only deliver a greater volume of supports but also deliver a wider variety of types of supports. Users consistently reported wanting more comprehensive services across a broader range of topics. This feedback was consistent across all SSSCs, indicating the need for every SSSC to consider expanding their support offerings to better serve user needs.

### *Be Knowledgeable and Active in Understanding School Safety Legislation and its Implications*

SSSCs bring a wealth of knowledge about school safety policy, practice, and implications. As policymakers grapple with developing and refining school safety legislation, SSSCs can play an important role in providing information and resources to ensure the creation of sound policy. They can provide content expertise and thought partnership, aiding policymakers in understanding what is feasible and reasonable in a school setting and what is not. Additionally, they can clarify what is supported by school safety research and best practices and what is not. SSSCs can also outline the implications and the possible unintended consequences of a given policy.

Beyond offering thought partnership and content expertise, SSSCs can provide data to inform policy decisions, particularly when SSSCs are conducting their own research and evaluation to understand the school safety statistics and needs. Moreover, SSSCs may play a key role in interpreting policy for districts and schools. Those working on the ground in education (e.g., as teachers or administrators) may not have a clear understanding of how school safety policies impact the day-to-day operations and procedures of their school. SSSCs have a unique opportunity to build relationships and bring value by bridging the gap of translating policy into actionable steps that education systems and educators can take.

## **Audience and Outreach**

### *Focus on a Wider Variety of Audiences Beyond District and School Leaders*

While many SSSCs concentrate their efforts on district staff and school administrators, those identified as bright spots take a more inclusive approach. They include other members of the school and safety community, such as school board members, law enforcement, first responders, parents, and students. This broader scope enables these SSSCs to tailor their services and supports to a more diverse range of needs and perspectives.

This strategy of engaging with a broader audience is not only inclusive but also strategically beneficial. For example, since school boards often approve policies and spending, improving their awareness about the SSSC and equipping them with school safety resources can enable them to make more informed decisions related to this area. Such an approach provides more

touchpoints with different members of the community to increase opportunities for visibility, engagement, and relationship-building.

### *Engage Target Audiences through Technology*

Bright spot SSSCs leverage technology to ensure their centers are well represented, whereas other SSSCs tend to rely on word of mouth to spread awareness about their centers. Bright spot SSSCs tend to use social media more frequently to circulate resources, announce training, and share information. Many of them also have websites that are visually appealing, are easier to navigate, and house a vast amount of information and resources, making it easier for those looking for school safety resources to find what they need.

SSSC users emphasize the importance of user-friendly websites, noting that websites lacking adequate functionality can create a barrier to accessing needed resources. Beyond leveraging technology, bright spot SSSCs are proactive in engaging their audiences through conferences and training. In summary, bright spot SSSCs invest in developing a well-designed, accessible website and implementing strategies to build awareness of their center via social media.

## Limitations

There are a number of limitations that should be considered when interpreting findings from this evaluation. First and foremost, this study does not utilize a causal design and therefore findings do not establish the impact of SSSC existence or specific supports and services on school safety. Rather, this study provides a descriptive overview of SSSC histories, characteristics, activities, as well as awareness and use by intended users and perceptions of SSSCs among those that engage with their center.

Second, although most states are represented in the sample, key informants in eight states and the District of Columbia did not participate in the study. Thus, the number of states with functioning SSSCs may be slightly higher or lower than the estimates provided in this study. However, as a matter of due diligence and completeness, and to fully understand the history of SSSCs and a state's role in school safety, our team used what could be found publicly on the internet (e.g., websites, reports, legislation) to describe the school safety efforts in each of these the states that did not have a key informant response. Information about what was found through this landscape analysis can be found in the [first report for this project](#) (Mckenna et al., 2021).

Third, the key informant data relies on information provided by one individual to determine whether each state has an SSSC. The key informant in each state was carefully selected to ensure they are well connected to the state's school safety landscape, and key informants were invited to nominate others in their state if they did not feel equipped to answer the survey questions. Only one state included a key informant who was unsure about the SSSC history and status; the remaining key informants felt comfortable responding for their state. Related, based

on key informant responses, it became evident that key informants sometimes had conflicting perspectives about what constitutes an SSSC, leading to different reports of whether a state has an SSSC despite similar structure and functioning. To address this limitation and lack of consensus in the field, the evaluation team considered responses to all items in the key informant survey for each participant to identify key features of SSSCs and ensure the decision as to whether an SSSC exists was applied uniformly. This process ensured consistency in categorizing whether states have an SSSC or not, and contributed to developing a comprehensive SSSC definition for future use.

Finally, response rates below 100% for superintendent and principal surveys and SSSC user interviews could lead to an unrepresentative sample. However, the survey response rate was in line with larger online surveys of a similar nature (Wu et al., 2022). The evaluation team also conducted analyses weighted by state to determine if findings were biased due to the varied sample size across states (Schafer & Graham, 2002). The differences between the weighted and unweighted findings were not practically important. Thus, analyses described in this report reflect the unweighted survey sample to allow easier interpretation of the study methodology and findings.

# Artifacts

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Artifacts for this project include reporting products intended for NIJ, school safety practitioners, policy makers, and researchers, data sets for archiving, and dissemination activities.

## Products

This evaluation resulted in four product types: evaluation brief, evaluation reports, an SSSC framework, and academic publications. Via evaluation briefs, the evaluation team sought to present key study findings in an accessible and digestible format for practitioners and policy makers. Via evaluation reports, the evaluation team sought to provide comprehensive information about evaluation methodology and findings for researchers and interested practitioners. Via the SSSC framework, the evaluation team sought to provide promising practices derived from synthesizing key findings across the study's data collection strategies. Finally, via the publications, the evaluation team sought to ensure findings from this study are available to other researchers interested in school safety, as well as school safety practitioners.

## Evaluation Briefs

McKenna, J., Russo, S., Sutherland, H., Boal, A., & Petrosino, A. (2022). *States' school safety centers: A brief look into history, characteristics, and activities*. WestEd.

<https://wested2024.s3.us-west-1.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/11172124/States-School-Safety-Centers-Brief-History.pdf>

McKenna, J. M., Russo, S., Sutherland, H., Muñoz, E., Boal, A., & Petrosino, A. (2023). *The structure, services, and products, of state school safety centers*. WestEd.

[https://wested2024.s3.us-west-1.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/11173908/JPRC\\_Structure\\_Services\\_and-Products-of-State-School-Safety-Centers\\_FINAL\\_ADA.pdf](https://wested2024.s3.us-west-1.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/11173908/JPRC_Structure_Services_and-Products-of-State-School-Safety-Centers_FINAL_ADA.pdf)

Boal, A., Russo, S., Washington, A. Q., White, S., Muñoz, E. C., Sutherland, H., & McKenna, J. M. (2024). *Service users' perceptions of state school safety center supports & services*. WestEd.

[https://wested2024.s3.us-west-1.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/11174824/JCPR-Brief\\_Service-Users-Perceptions-of-State-School-Safety-Center-Supports-Services\\_FINAL-ADA.pdf](https://wested2024.s3.us-west-1.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/11174824/JCPR-Brief_Service-Users-Perceptions-of-State-School-Safety-Center-Supports-Services_FINAL-ADA.pdf)

## Evaluation Reports

McKenna, J. M., Russo, S., Sutherland, H., Boal, A., & Petrosino, A. (2021). *Research and evaluation on school safety: An evaluation of state school safety centers: The history and characteristics of state school safety centers*. WestEd.  
<https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/304120.pdf>

McKenna, J. M., Russo, S., Sutherland, H., Muñoz, E. C., Boal, A., & Petrosino, A. (2023). *Research and evaluation on school safety: The structure, services, and products of state school safety centers*. WestEd. [https://wested2024.s3.us-west-1.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/11173413/NIJ-SSSC\\_Report-2\\_The-Structure-Activities-and-Products-of-State-School-Safety-Centers\\_FINAL-ADA-1.pdf](https://wested2024.s3.us-west-1.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/11173413/NIJ-SSSC_Report-2_The-Structure-Activities-and-Products-of-State-School-Safety-Centers_FINAL-ADA-1.pdf)

Boal, A., Russo, S., Washington, A. Q., White, S., Muñoz, E. C., Sutherland, H., & McKenna, J. M. (2024). *Service users' perceptions of state school safety center supports & services*. WestEd.  
[https://wested2024.s3.us-west-1.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/11174551/SSSC-Report-10.25.23\\_FINAL-ADA-1.pdf](https://wested2024.s3.us-west-1.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/11174551/SSSC-Report-10.25.23_FINAL-ADA-1.pdf)

## SSSC Framework

Boal, A., Russo, S., Sutherland, H., Washington, A. Q., Muñoz, E. C., White, S. R., & McKenna, J. (2024). Recommendations to support awareness, use and perceptions of state school safety centers: A framework. WestEd. [https://wested2024.s3.us-west-1.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/30161916/Recommendations-to-Support-SSSC\\_FINAL-ADA-3.pdf](https://wested2024.s3.us-west-1.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/30161916/Recommendations-to-Support-SSSC_FINAL-ADA-3.pdf)

## Publications

Boal, A., & McKenna, J. (2024). State school safety centers: What do we know about their functioning and user perceptions? *Translational Criminology Magazine, Fall 2024, pages 29-31*.  
<https://cebcp.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/TC24-Fall2024.pdf>

## Data Sets

This evaluation is informed by the data sets listed below.

- SSSC Key Informant Survey Data
- SSSC Director Survey Data
- SSSC Activity Smartsheet Data
- Superintendent and Principal Survey Data
- SSSC Director Interview Data
- SSSC User Interview Data

## Dissemination Activities

The evaluation team shared the evaluation briefs, evaluation reports, framework, and publications listed in the *Products* section of this report with NIJ and SSSC directors. Additionally, these products were disseminated via WestEd.org and the JPRC newsletter. The evaluation team also presented information related to this project via the following conference presentations:

Boal, A., White, S., Russo, S., Sutherland, H., & Washington, A. Q. (2024, November). *Using research to inform practice: A framework for state school safety centers* [Conference Presentation]. 2024 American Society for Criminology Conference, San Francisco, CA.

McKenna, J. M., Boal, A., White, S., Sutherland, H., Russo, S., Muñoz, E., & Washington, A. Q. (2023, November). *An examination of the perceived effectiveness of state school safety centers*. 2022 American Society for Criminology Conference, Philadelphia, PA.

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