

## INTEROFFICE CORRESPONDENCE

Los Angeles Unified School District  
Independent Analysis Unit

### **INFORMATIVE**

**TO:** Members, Board of Education

**DATE:** June 23, 2024

**FROM:** Andrew Thomas, Director, Independent Analysis Unit

**SUBJECT:** **IAU School Safety-related Analyses and Reports since 2020**

In preparation for the discussion of school safety on Tuesday, June 25, this memo describes several Independent Analysis Unit (IAU) reports that provide valuable data and insights to inform your deliberations. These reports analyze safety incidents, student perceptions of safety and connectedness, trends following the return to in-person learning after COVID-19 closures, implementation of the School Climate Bill of Rights, and the landscape of community-based safety initiatives—as well as methods for analyzing how to deploy emergency personnel. Key findings highlight progress in restorative practices (RPs) and Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS), but also ongoing prevalent safety issues like suicidal behavior and fighting, and disparities in safety perceptions among different student groups.

These reports offer recommendations for improving data collection, addressing specific safety concerns, and enhancing the effectiveness of safety initiatives. This information can serve as a foundation for developing evidence-based strategies to create safer and more supportive learning environments across the district. Links to full reports are provided below.

### **Community-Based Safety in L.A. Unified**

Commissioned specifically to inform school safety planning, and presented to the Board in May 2024, the IAU report on Community-Based Safety (CBS) included sections on challenges and recommendations.

Challenges in implementing CBS programs include contracting issues, insurance requirements, and difficulties in estimating costs for vendors.

The report recommends monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of CBS programs (see details below), improving communication with community partners, and enhancing multi-sector collaboration. Specific recommendations are to:

- add a “Community” option to the District’s website navigation,
- enhance online resources for community partners,
- align safety-related task forces and committees, and
- consider the establishment of a network organization to oversee and coordinate community-based safety initiatives.

Access the full report here: [Community-Based Safety and Los Angeles Unified School District: Mapping the Landscape](#).

### **Monitoring and Evaluation Recommendation for Safe Passages**

The IAU recommends the Board request the District to (i) regularly monitor practices, policies, and activities of safe passage providers, (ii) evaluate the program after two and three years of implementation, and (iii) provide updates to the Board on implementation and impact. Such a plan can improve understanding of the safe passages program's implementation and impact, allowing for evidence-based improvements and decision-making. Specifically:

1. The IAU recommends ongoing monitoring of implementation data in several categories:
  - Activities (locations, services, schedules)
  - Awareness/outreach
  - Management (communication, supervision, pay)
  - Qualifications of personnel
2. For evaluation, the IAU proposes five research questions focusing on:
  - Variations in program implementation
  - Comparison to best practices
  - Impact on attendance
  - Impact on feelings of safety
  - Variations in outcomes based on program aspects
3. The IAU recommends an evaluation would use multiple data sources:
  - Implementation data from service providers
  - Interviews and observations with providers and school staff
  - Surveys of providers, staff, and students
4. The evaluation approach would include analysis of variance, correlation studies, and a “practical ideal type” framework to assess program effectiveness and make improvement recommendations.

### **Key takeaways for the June 25, 2024 discussion:**

How should District staff coordinate the monitoring of safe passages activities and collection of implementation data? Should the District undertake an evaluation using internal resources or contract with an external evaluator?

## **School Climate Bill of Rights**

Coming soon is the IAU's implementation analysis of the School Climate Bill of Rights. In May 2023, the L.A. Unified Board of Education marked the 10th anniversary of this landmark resolution and requested an analysis. The IAU conducted a survey of school leaders and teachers to (1) assess staff's attitudes and current knowledge about PBIS/RP, (2) understand how staff use PBIS/RP and

access supports, and (3) identify factors that challenge and support the ongoing implementation of PBIS/RP. (Full report forthcoming).

The IAU's analysis, based on the survey of school leaders and teachers revealed mixed results from past and current implementation efforts:

- Most school leaders and teachers reported they bought into and were confident using RPs, though perceptions about student attitudes were mixed and less positive, and only some teachers reported high levels of proficiency.
- Use of PBIS/RP was not widespread among teachers and even teachers and school leaders who bought into PBIS/RP expressed frustrations with the policy. Many cited lack of time, insufficient training, and resistance to the policy among their colleagues or school leadership as challenges to implementing PBIS/RP.
- As for supports, more teachers utilized online resources than received ongoing professional development. School support from SOSAs in 2023-24 was on track to exceed support in the previous year.
- Elementary schools, accessing professional development, the presence of school-site supports, and use of District supports were all associated with positive implementation metrics such as buy-in and proficiency.

Some key recommendations include:

- Consider mandatory, ongoing training for all.
- Continue to update online resources to provide tools targeted for secondary teachers and more videos modeling how to respond to challenging incidents.
- Revisit past efforts to better document how teachers are using PBIS/RP to allow for more real-time monitoring.
- Hire 20-30 more SOSAs to decrease each SOSA's school load down to 10 schools.
- Elevate and celebrate California PBIS Statewide Recognitions to incentivize implementation (e.g., provide banners for recognized schools).

**Key takeaways for the June 25, 2024 discussion:**

PBIS/RP is a key part of the District's Every School Safe blueprint. It is designed to prevent and resolve conflict as well as repair damage caused by violence. If universally and effectively implemented, PBIS/RP should substantively improve school safety, but is the District doing all it can do and making all appropriate investments to ensure effective and universal implementation of this policy?

## Threats to School Safety

In early 2021, the IAU began a series of reports utilizing iStar data. The first was a report of iStar incidents and trends over five years. Access the full report here: [Threats to School Safety: An Analysis of i-STAR Incidents from 2016-2020](#).

Key findings from the first report include:

1. Seven categories accounted for 80% of all reported incidents, with suicidal behavior being the most prevalent at 40%. Other common incidents included fighting, threats, sex crimes, substance-related issues, bullying, and weapons.
2. Incident rates in L.A. Unified schools were generally equal to or lower than national averages.
3. School-level differences were observed: Middle schools had higher rates of suicidal behavior, fighting, threats, sex crimes, and bullying compared to other school levels. High schools reported the highest rate of substance-related incidents.

The report recommended that District leadership focus on addressing suicidal behavior, risky behavior in middle schools, and gender disparities in aggression and victimization.

## Student Safety and Connectedness

In May of 2021, The IAU analyzed safety-threatening incidents and student perceptions of safety and connectedness in L.A. Unified schools, comparing iStar-reported incidents to School Experience Survey (SES) data from 2018-19. Access the full report here: [Student Feelings of Safety and Connectedness as Related to Safety Incident Reports](#).

Notable findings were that Black students reported lower feelings of safety and connectedness and students feeling unsafe were less likely to feel connected. Higher rates of physically violent incidents and weapons-related incidents were associated with fewer students reporting feeling safe and connected to their school and their neighborhood, respectively.

Notable recommendations were to gather more detailed student feedback on safety and connectedness, improve reporting on weapons-related incidents, and develop better methods to examine suicidal ideation trends.

### Key takeaways for the June 25, 2024 discussion:

How can the District ground conversations about student-safety using both reported incidents (especially high-profile incidents) and student, staff and community voices?

## A Comparison of iSTAR Data from Fall 2019 and Fall 2021

In January of 2022, the Independent Analysis Unit compared safety incidents reported in Fall 2019 and Fall 2021. The analysis aimed to help the Board understand safety trends across the District following the return to in-person learning after COVID-19 closures. Access the full report here: [IAU A Comparison of iSTAR Data from Fall 2019 and Fall 2021](#)

At that time, safety-threatening incidents increased slightly (an increase of 1 more incident per 1,000 students), with suicide risk incidents increasing overall and per 1,000 students, especially in middle school. Suicidal behavior was the most common incident type in both years, followed by fighting/physical aggression and threats. Finally, while physically violent incidents decreased in number, the rate remained stable.

**Key takeaways for the June 25, 2024 discussion:**

Expressing incidents as a rate per 1,000 students better illustrate trends over time. For example, if events decrease, but enrollment decreases, the total prevalence of the incident may remain constant. How can the District implement strategies such as this moving forward to help with public understanding about what types of incidents are occurring in District schools?

The prevalence of suicidal ideation cannot be ignored, even as physically violent incidents may be increasing.

**School Police Patrol Areas: An Analytic Approach to Determine Non-School Based Locations**

In 2020, the IAU conducted a Geographic Information Science (GIS) analysis to determine optimal service site locations for school police officer patrol areas. Such analyses are used in emergency management. The analysis at the time used various drive time criteria. Access the full report here: [Analytical Methods for Possible Service Site Allocations](#)

**Key takeaways for the June 25, 2024 discussion:**

How has L.A. School Police altered their deployment model so they are prepared to respond to emergency incidents within a set response time? Is that the right question?

How can the District and L.A. School Police ground any discussion about maintaining the current policy versus returning to past policy in data such as student outcomes (e.g., suspensions), incidents, and response times? Here we note recent research that shows tradeoffs between school police and student outcomes.