



# School Safety Funds Should Support Positive School Climates

**IDRA Testimony on House Bill 1525: Relating to the public school finance system, submitted by Chloe Latham Sikes, Ph.D., to the House Public Education Committee, March 23, 2021**

Dear Chairman Dutton and Honorable Members of the Committee:

IDRA (Intercultural Development Research Association) is an independent, non-partisan, education non-profit committed to achieving equal educational opportunity for every child through strong public schools that prepare all students to access and succeed in college. We respectfully submit testimony for consideration on HB 1525.

HB 1525 makes several key changes to the reforms from HB 3 (2019) last session. Our focus here is to propose altering the allowable uses in the school safety allotment (SSA) to exclude expenditures on security personnel in favor of practices that promote a positive school climate. Several measures that “harden” schools include surveillance equipment, security camera technology and security personnel, especially an increased presence of law enforcement. Research shows that school law enforcement do not necessarily make schools safer; rather, they can be a catalyst for introducing students to the school-to-prison pipeline through student arrests, citations and other incidents. Students of color and students with disabilities have disproportionately high rates of interactions with school law enforcement.

We propose eliminating the expenditures on security personnel from the SSA allowable uses, and expanding uses to include evidence-based, effective prevention practices that promote positive and safe school climates. These include hiring trained counselors, social workers, social-emotional learning, and restorative justice practices, and promoting culturally-relevant instruction and robust mental-health supports.

## Recommendations for HB 1525

**1. Eliminate expenditures toward security personnel from School Safety Allotment allowable uses.** Strike the language from Page 12, Lines 22-24 that allows the SSA to be used for:

(2) providing security for the district, including:

(A) employing school district peace officers, private security officers and school marshals;

**2. Expand School Safety Allotment allowable uses to include positive school climate practices and reporting requirements.** We recommend that the SSA allowable uses noted on Page 13, starting at Line 8, include language that amends Texas Education Code Sec. 48.115, subsection b(3)(c) as proposed to read:

(c) the prevention, identification, and management of emergencies and threats, using evidence-based, effective prevention practices and including:

- (i) providing licensed counselors, social workers, social-emotional learning coordinators, and individuals trained in restorative discipline and restorative justice practices;
  - (ii) providing mental health personnel and support;
  - (iii) ~~(iii)~~ providing behavioral health services; [and]
  - (iv) ~~(iii)~~ establishing threat reporting systems; and
  - (v) developing and implementing programs focused on social-emotional learning, restorative justice practices, culturally relevant instruction, and providing mental health support.
- (d) The commissioner shall annually publish a report regarding funds allocated under this section including the programs, personnel, and resources purchased by districts using funds under this section and other purposes for which the funds were used.

Schools should be able to use the SSA to fund evidence-based practices that support positive school climates. These practices could help address the extreme mental health and behavioral needs of our students during the pandemic and through their disrupted learning, and help create more positive, safer school climates for everyone in school communities.

IDRA is available for any questions or further resources that we can provide. Thank you for your consideration. For more information, please contact Chloe Latham Sikes, Ph.D., IDRA Deputy Director of Policy, at [chloe.sikes@idra.org](mailto:chloe.sikes@idra.org).

## **Resources**

IDRA Newsletter. (February 2019). [Focus: Fair Discipline](#).

Office for Civil Rights. (2018). [School Climate and Safety – Data Highlights on School Climate and Safety in Our Nation's Public Schools](#), 2015-16 Civil Rights Data Collection. U.S. Department of Education.

Texas Appleseed. (2016). [Dangerous Discipline – How Texas Schools are Relying on Law Enforcement, Courts, and Juvenile Probation to Discipline Students](#). Texas Appleseed.

*IDRA is an independent, non-profit organization led by Celina Moreno, J.D. Our mission is to achieve equal educational opportunity for every child through strong public schools that prepare all students to access and succeed in college. IDRA strengthens and transforms public education by providing dynamic training; useful research, evaluation, and frameworks for action; timely policy analyses; and innovative materials and programs.*