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Governor Hutchinson Receives School Safety Commission's Final Report

30 recommendations in all; emphasizes mental health and prevention

LITTLE ROCK – Five months to the day after the Arkansas School Safety Commission presented its preliminary report to Governor Asa Hutchinson, the commission submitted its final report to the governor this afternoon at a news conference at the State Capitol.

The Commission's five subcommittees made 30 recommendations that range from having an armed presence at schools to the design of school facilities to a focus on the effective use of counselors, which will allow better engagement with students in need of mental health services.

Recommendations regarding the mental health aspect include reviewing the roles and responsibilities of school counselors in order to provide increased time with students; conducting school climate surveys across all campuses in all districts; developing and implementing an action plan based on the findings of those school climate surveys; and providing training in Youth Mental Health First Aid to all personnel who interact with students.

"I appreciate Dr. May's leadership of the School Safety Commission and the members' diligent work to improve security in our schools," Governor Hutchinson said. "In July, I directed the Commission to apply a greater focus on the mental health needs within our schools and to reduce the heavy administrative burden we place on our school counselors.

"I am pleased that the Commission addressed those concerns in their final report, and I am confident that these recommendations, while not mandatory, will be a useful tool for our superintendents and principals as we seek to better secure our schools and create the safest

environment possible for our children, our teachers, and our faculties."

The Governor was joined at today's news conference by Dr. Cheryl May, director of the Arkansas Criminal Justice Institute and chair of the Arkansas School Safety Commission, along with several members of the Commission, and Dr. Ivy Pfeffer, Deputy Commissioner of the Arkansas Department of Education.

The full report and executive summary can be found [HERE](#) and [HERE](#).

The Commission recommended that no campus should ever be without an armed presence when staff and children are attending class or a major extra-curricular activity. The Commission recommended further that when financially possible, school districts should hire at least one School Resource Officer (SRO) who has had specialized training for each campus. Governor Hutchinson maintains his position that no teacher will be required to carry a weapon.

The Commission also recommended that districts should:

- Establish District Safety and Security Teams for all districts.
- Designate one staff member as a School Safety Coordinator.
- Enhance training for school nurses and staff in emergency medical response.
- Establish and maintain a comprehensive, common communication plan for school officials, students, parents, law enforcement agencies, and other stakeholders.
- Enhance physical security — from infrastructure to bus transportation — including a revision of the state's Academic Facilities Partnership Program to allow districts to submit eligible campus safety and security upgrade projects for state financial assistance.

"I am grateful for Governor Hutchinson's leadership and passion for our children's safety," Dr. May said. "On behalf of the Commission, we thank all those who contributed to the Commission's work, including the many presenters and the staff and students at the schools we visited. As Chair, I am especially grateful for the hard work and dedication of the Commission members and ADE staff who supported our efforts. We hope this report will help Governor Hutchinson and the Arkansas Department of Education to build upon the many good efforts currently under way in Arkansas and will contribute to the Governor's vision of keeping our children safe in school."

Governor Hutchinson created the Commission by executive order on March 1. Over the past several months, members of the Commission traveled to 12 schools across the state to evaluate mental health practices and policies, safety and security policies, emergency plans and policies, and the design of schools – including concepts such as single-point entry and electronic-access

badges.

“I want to thank the Arkansas School Safety Commission for its thorough review of school safety methods and its recommendations for making our public schools safer,” Arkansas Department of Education Commissioner Johnny Key said. “ADE is reviewing the report and will collaborate with Governor Hutchinson’s office regarding the implementation of recommendations that will improve the safety of all Arkansas public school students.”

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