

2023 SUBCOMMITTEE
MEETING SUMMARYIMPACTS OF
FIREARM VIOLENCE**TUESDAY, JANUARY 24, 2023****2:30 P.M. – 4:30 P.M.**

In the days leading up to the Subcommittee meeting on January 24, 2023, there were three mass shootings in California: one in Half Moon Bay, one in Oakland, and one in Monterey Park. Eighteen people were killed and even more wounded. Given the frequent occurrence of firearm violence in the state, it is more important than ever to learn how to prevent, mitigate, and recover from these incidents.

One particularly salient area of focus related to firearm violence is school shootings. Such events are often heavily covered by the media and cause heightened public concern, especially for parents of young children. Unfortunately, school shootings are far more common than they used to be; in the first six months of 2022, there were seven firearm violence incidents at schools in California.¹

To explore the mental health impacts of firearm violence – and develop strategies to respond to them – the Mental Health Services Oversight and Accountability Commission formed the **Impacts of Firearm Violence Subcommittee** at the August 2022 Commission meeting. The first Subcommittee meeting was held on September 28, 2022.

The Subcommittee met for the second time on January 24, 2023. At the meeting, nationally renowned expert Dr. Melissa Reeves gave a presentation on behavioral threat assessment and management (BTAM) in schools. The presentation highlighted several key themes in this area, including:

- BTAM is based on a cyclical model of five mission areas: Prevention, Protection, Mitigation, Response, and Recovery.
- Recovery leads back into Prevention, as restoring to pre-crisis function involves addressing trauma and fostering a healthy and safe environment.
- There are specific steps to the BTAM process (Identify, Inquire, Assess, and Manage) and each step is vital.

- Although there is no accurate or useful profile of a school shooter, there is almost always planning behavior and warning signs.
- Empowering peers to be aware of the signs and report their concerns, breaking the “code of silence” in schools, is key to an effective BTAM process.
- The BTAM process often results in increased supportive services, like counseling, and decreased discipline, like suspension or expulsion.
- An effective BTAM program requires a multidisciplinary team, collaboration between partners, agreed-upon definitions and procedures, and training for all.
- Case management must be individualized, contextualized, and compassionate; it must engage the individual and their family as partners in the process.
- Best practices in prevention include building social-emotional learning skills into the curriculum and building an emotionally safe, caring, and positive school climate.

Following the presentations, Subcommittee Chair Keyondria Bunch facilitated a panel discussion about how to foster a positive and safe school environment. The panel included three participants: Michele Custer, Licensed Educational Psychologist, Chair of the California Association of School Psychologist’s Legislative and Advocacy Committee, and adjunct faculty at California State University, Sacramento; Jayce Kaldunski, senior at El Dorado High School, member

of student leadership, and peer advisor; and Jerry Wernli, Officer in the City of Roseville Police Department and School Resource Officer at West Park High School. Several discussion items emerged from this discussion, including:

- The key to fostering a positive school climate is in building relationships between students, teachers, staff, and other partners (including parents and law enforcement).
- Punishment alone does not change behavior; positive behavioral intervention and appropriate supports change behavior.
- In a state as diverse as California, it is important to engage a cultural broker who understands differences in cultural norms and behaviors.
- Families and caregivers are valuable partners in the case management process; they can provide information that otherwise is not available and they play a vital role in the student’s success.
- Law enforcement needs to be an integrated partner from the very beginning. Their role is not primarily to arrest or to hand out punishment; it is to provide information, participate in the assessment and management process, and contribute to keeping the campus safe.
- BTAM teams must be multidisciplinary because information is stored in silos that only one partner or group has access to; in a team setting, that information can be shared to inform decision-making.

CONCLUSIONS

Behavioral threat assessment and management is a necessary process to keep schools safe, but there is not a consistent standard for BTAM in California. Our schools would benefit from the adoption of legislation regulating the presence and quality of a BTAM program in every school district across the state. Further, there are other settings in which a BTAM process would reduce risk and improve climate, including the workplace and any other location or organization that regularly brings large groups of people together. Finally, there are lessons from BTAM that can apply broadly beyond any specific program, including the value of relationship building, the importance of bringing partners together from multiple disciplines and functions, and the crucial understanding that fostering a positive and supportive climate is one of the most effective methods of preventing violence.



NEXT STEPS

Commission staff are planning further opportunities to engage the public on this project, including youth. These opportunities may include listening sessions, forums, and future Commission and Subcommittee meetings. The Commission is committed to carrying out this work with partner and community engagement at every step, involving those who are most impacted in the information-gathering, analysis, and decision-making processes.

The Commission will host a hearing on the progress of this project at a full Commission meeting later this spring.

To see speaker bios, presentation slides, and the agenda for this meeting, visit the [Subcommittee meeting's webpage](#). The Impacts of Firearm Violence Subcommittee welcomes any further suggestions on direction for this project at courtney.ackerman@mhsoc.ca.gov. More information about the Commission's work can be found at www.mhsoc.ca.gov.

SOURCES

1. Center for Homeland Defense and Security. (n.d.). CHDS school shooting safety compendium. <https://www.chds.us/ssdb/data-map/>

