

How to advocate for school design & student safety

Overview of toolkit

Architects play a major role in designing schools that offer children positive learning environments with enhanced safety and security. By working together, we can build this awareness among key constituencies and help decision-makers, policymakers, and citizens see how school design best practices can keep students safe.

This toolkit contains everything chapters need to educate and inform key players and decision-makers about how architects help advance school safety. Although school safety is primarily a national debate, we need our members to participate in conversations at all levels and communicate the value of design solutions in our local schools.

Use this toolkit to mobilize your community—and your members—on this important issue.

Please contact staff below if you need further assistance.

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Grassroots “calls to action”

The effort’s grassroots plan is all about getting members engaged with elected officials at all three levels of government. Without this, the effort will be unable to advance successfully. We need members’ participation to the greatest extent when a call to action is issued. Therefore, we need components to help promote these calls. To make that as easy as possible, AIA national acquired new technology to help. It is meant to be as user friendly as possible to make “taking action” clear and smooth. More specifically, it is a new online platform that is built around the coordination of three main (existing) technologies—text messaging, social media, and email—all of which everyone is familiar with already.

Notifications for members to take action will be sent via text message by AIA national. However, components and national must first “build the universe” of people that are signed up to receive texts. Therefore, a series of emails (in August) will be sent notifying all AIA members to sign up for “Architect Action Alerts” (text message alerts). In the same emails, members will also be asked to participate in a specific action that will help advance this effort. Once these emails have been sent, future calls to action will be sent primarily by text message.

In the coming months, AIA national will provide components (free of charge) the option of using the text message, social media, and email functions of this new platform for their own efforts regardless of whether it is focused on school safety or another issue. To begin this process, AIA national will share with components which members have signed up for text message alerts during this effort. The more members that sign up for text message alerts, the larger the universe of supporters that each component will have to call on for future calls to action on this or other issues. Therefore, components have a great opportunity to benefit beyond advancing this effort.

GRASSROOTS “CALLS TO ACTION” SCHEDULE

August 13

Where We Stand released, effort officially launches.

August 16

Text message and mass email to all AIA members; call to action to sign online petition focusing on elected officials at all three levels of government.

August 23

Text message and mass email to all AIA members; call to action to sign online petition focusing on elected officials at all three levels of government.

August 28

Text message only to those who have signed up for alerts; highlights actions by AIA components across the country on school safety and will encourage them to “sign up” to get involved with their local component.

September 17

Text message only to those who have signed up for alerts announcing social media call to action campaign focusing on the Federal School Safety Commission and their anticipated report.

September 24

Text message only to those who have signed up for alerts reminding about social media call to action campaign focusing on the Federal School Safety Commission and their anticipated report.

October 9

Text message only to those who have signed up for alerts announcing October 19 CAE Summit on School Safety. Beginning of email campaign focusing on Congress based on the anticipated delivery of the petition to them.

October 19

Text message and mass email to all AIA members regarding impact of activities on this issue throughout the last two months and next steps moving forward, which will highlight CAE Summit and issue new call to action.



Talking points

Below are a series of talking points that you are welcome to use in your communications with elected officials and the media. Please use these messages as starting points for expanding on a particular story or personal experience, or a way to showcase your knowledge and expertise in an area.

- By working with policymakers at all levels, and our communities, together we can develop public policies that will support open and positive learning environments that also safeguard our students and teachers.
- Architects routinely incorporate social, psychological, economic and environmental factors into their building designs.
- For decades, architects have been working with school officials, first responders, and communities to address concerns and to develop comprehensive strategies that can help deter a variety of threats that our nation's schools face, whether it be overcrowded classrooms, bullying, abduction or violence. As a result, architects have an inherent ability to serve as a resource on this important issue.
- While school design cannot guarantee protection or thwart attacks, it can offer early warning, the possibility of refuge and pathways to escape.
- Architects design all buildings with the goal of ensuring the health, safety, and welfare of the public.
- School design must be adaptable to specific yet differing and evolving community concerns, including student health and safety, productive learning environments, and adequate budgets. There is no one-size-fits-all approach.
- Designing and building the schools we need means retrofitting the existing building stock, which requires significant support and resources that go beyond the architecture, engineering, and construction communities.
- Local and state officials need consistent access to a variety of reliable and credible information to help them make informed decisions about securing their schools. A federally funded information clearinghouse would help fill this need.
- Funding is needed that will allow education officials to pursue design solutions that will help schools to be better prepared to meet the challenges they face and to safeguard our children.



Media FAQs

The following FAQs are intended to assist components with specific questions during media interviews regarding school design and student safety.

Q. Is AIA working with the current administration?

A. AIA is working with legislators and agencies at all levels of government and on both sides of the aisle to support advancing school design policies that benefit the well-being and safety of educators and students.

Q. What is AIA's position on gun control?

A. AIA is focusing its efforts on what architects do best—design. Over the last 20 years, architects have been convening critical stakeholders—teachers, administrators, community leaders, parents, students, first responders and more—whose voices need to be heard in the design of schools. This has resulted in the development of design strategies that are intended to help to mitigate issues schools face, including violence. While these strategies can't prevent attacks, they can offer early warning, the possibility of refuge and pathways to escape.

To that end, AIA is pursuing legislative efforts that will support consistent access to design information and to design services by establishing: 1) a federal clearinghouse that would provide informational resources for designing safer schools; and 2) federal funding and grants for school officials to pursue to design safer schools.

Q. How many schools would need to be updated to be considered safe schools?

A. You could check with the Department of Education or National Center for Education Statistics for data.

Q. How much do design services cost?

A. Architects work with clients to determine the budget needed for design. It is dependent, of course, upon the extent of the design, the budget allotted for the project and other varying circumstances.

(Note: Antitrust laws prevent providing costs.)

Q. What design elements would you include?

A. Architects can offer design strategies that create open and positive learning environments that offer a strong sense of community, which can also provide strategies for the issues schools face, including early warning, places to hide and routes to escape. The specific design is typically predicated on the needs of the educators and students at the school but oftentimes includes design elements like metal detectors, open sightlines, multiple barriers to entry, a single entry-point, entry security, and multiple points of egress for escape, to name but a few.

Q. What will AIA's input result in?

A. AIA is committed to pursuing a bipartisan effort to help state and local school officials better access information and funding to design safe and secure schools. To that end, AIA will focus on two main goals:

1. Making architectural and design services for schools an allowable use of funds within existing federal funding and grants, and
2. Establishing a federal clearinghouse of resources on school design best practices for school officials, architects and other design professionals to keep them informed.

Media FAQs (cont.)

Q. Are funds not already available for design services?

A. Funding is needed that will allow education officials to pursue design solutions that will help schools safeguard our students and teachers. AIA has identified three federal grants that would be most appropriate for design services to become an allowable use of their funding. One currently prohibits funds for design services and the other two do not explicitly allow funding for them.

Q. What is the intention of the clearinghouse?

A. Local and state officials need consistent access to a variety of reliable and credible information to help them make informed decisions about securing their schools. A federally funded information clearinghouse would fill this need—especially one that pulls in information from a variety of stakeholders that architects already organize and manage during the design and construction of a school.

Q. Is the plan to have one design standard for all schools?

A. AIA recognizes that one size does not fit all when it comes to schools. In fact, there are many design strategies that can be used to enhance safety and security at our schools.

Architects design schools for our students and teachers by meeting with education officials, teachers, first responders, and the community to understand the specific concerns and challenges the school is facing. Architects create design strategies that help to mitigate these issues. As a result, designs are customized to mitigate a variety of issues and concerns specific to that school.

Q. Can design stop attacks and change outcomes?

A. Design can't guarantee protection or prevent attacks; however, it can offer early warning, the possibility of refuge and pathways to escape.



Member FAQs

Q: How is AIA fulfilling its commitment to advising on best practices and monitoring their effectiveness?

A: AIA has been and will continue to advise policymakers and lawmakers on best practices at both the federal and state government levels. AIA members who specialize in school design have been briefing members of Congress and the Departments of Homeland Security and Education on the resources architects and local school districts need to design and implement safer schools. The Institute is also creating a dialogue nationally on safe school design. For example, AIA's Committee on Architecture for Education (CAE) is holding a symposium on October 19 on this issue to which experts from across the education community will be invited. Events such as this will be the best way to gauge the effectiveness of our proposals and to recalibrate them based on the feedback we receive.

Q: Are there any resources or opportunities for local architects/school districts to get involved on this issue either with the AIA or otherwise?

A: The Institute has a resource page on aia.org regarding safe school design that includes information on activities and events.

You should also look for emails from AIA that will include information on Architect Action Alerts, which members can sign up to receive by texting "AIA" to 40649. Once signed up, you will receive text alerts asking you to take a specific action that will help advance the school safety campaign.

Members who are signed up will also receive pertinent alerts from [local component name if opting to join AIA's Architect Action Alerts at no cost] for actions you can take to advance school safety initiatives for the [local/state] legislative

campaign.

Q: Why is federal public policy needed for AIA to establish a clearinghouse of resources? Isn't funding already available for schools?

A: The design community as well as local and state officials need consistent access to a variety of reliable and credible information to help them make informed decisions about securing their schools. A federally funded and vetted information clearinghouse would help fill this need – especially one that pulls information from a variety of stakeholders that architects already organize and manage during the design and construction of a school.

Also, clarification of the regulations is needed so that education officials can pursue design solutions that will help schools safeguard students and teachers. AIA has identified three federal grants that would be most appropriate for design services to become an allowable use of their funding. One grant currently prohibits funds for design services and the other two do not explicitly allow funding for them.

Q: I'm concerned about this one-stop-shop clearinghouse. Is Congress going to dictate how we design schools? Is the AIA trying to establish a single design strategy for schools through this clearinghouse?

A: AIA recognizes that one size does not fit all and that there are many strategies for enhancing the safety and security of our nation's schools.

AIA envisions the clearinghouse as a place where school districts, architects, policymakers, and other government officials can gain access to an inventory and collection of a variety of design strategies, resources and techniques.

AIA will not by itself establish the clearinghouse on school design. AIA is planning to ask Congress to create the clearinghouse through legislation AIA will propose at the start of the school year.



Writing an Op-ed

Placing an op-ed in your local news outlets using the template provided requires a little more work up-front but pays off in the end. When using this op-ed template, please work closely with the leader in your chapter who will ultimately be the “author” of this piece. It’s imperative that they not only share their personal story or experience related to this issue, but that their story or experience supports the ultimate “ask” in this op-ed.

Step 1: Select a leader in your chapter or perhaps a K-12 architect who is willing to “author” the op-ed.

Step 2: Share the template with the member and show them the highlighted areas they would need to draft themselves. Work with them to ensure the language is clearly stated.

Step 3: Pick the right news outlet. You want your op-ed to reach your target audience of citizens in your community, civic leaders, and elected officials.

Step 4: Determine the best point of contact. Most outlets have a general email account to receive op-ed submissions (e.g. opinion@dailytimes.com), which you can find on the outlet’s site. Always send your piece to the general account. If you have it, send it directly to the editor’s email address too.

Step 5: Craft a compelling pitch. Write three sentences that convince the editor you are offering them a compelling piece of content that they are going to want. A persuasive pitch does at least three things:

1.) Establishes relevance and importance to the outlet’s readers. 2.) Establishes why you (or the author) are qualified to comment on the topic. 3.) Provides a teaser of the main argument in your piece.

Step 6: Submit in the body of email, not as an attachment. There are few, if any, editors who will accept or consider an op-ed submission as an attachment.

Step 7: Include the word count above the headline. Make it easier for the editor and be sure it fits within the outlet’s op-ed parameters.

Step 8: Don’t be afraid to follow-up. If you don’t hear back, follow up.



Op-ed template

OP-ED TEMPLATE (ISSUE AFTER SEPTEMBER 1, 2018)

As architects, we are continuously challenged to design great schools that provide healthy, productive learning environments and allow students to flourish. In the wake of recent high-profile school shootings, however, we are more frequently faced with a set of questions around how we can design schools in a way that places a strong emphasis on the safety of teachers and students. [We/I believe] that we're qualified to provide holistic strategies that can attempt to mitigate a range of issues and violence that threaten our schools today.

The statistics on gun violence in schools are staggering. According to a year-long Washington Post analysis, beginning with Columbine in 1999, more than 187,000 students attending at least 193 primary or secondary schools have experienced a shooting on campus during school hours. Even for students who don't have direct experience with school shootings, the trauma has a ripple effect: it's now considered a best practice in American public schools to have a written protocol in place for how to proceed if a shooter opens fire on school grounds or inside school walls. Nearly 90 percent of schools have them, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. In addition, 70 percent of schools run active-shooter drills with their students.

In light of these statistics, we see it as our responsibility as architects to design and build the schools we need to keep students and teachers safe and retrofit existing building stock whenever possible. This requires significant

support and resources that go beyond the architecture, engineering and construction communities. [I/We] urge policymakers and all architects to work with the communities they serve to enact public policies at every level of government that will support positive places of learning and safeguard our children.

[Two graphs on personal anecdote or experience from architect authoring this op-ed]

The American Institute of Architects, of which I am a member, believes that there are additional measures that can be put in place to support architects in their mission of designing safer schools. We are advocating for a federal one-stop-shop clearinghouse of architectural and design resources that will be accessible by education officials, architects and other design professionals, and will help inform them on how to design safer schools. In addition, we are spearheading the formation of a multi-stakeholder coalition to support a bipartisan effort that makes architectural and design services for schools an allowable use of funds within existing federal funding and grants.

The health, safety and welfare of any building's inhabitants is fundamental to what architects do. We know that there is no one-size-fits-all design solution to school safety, but we know we must do everything we can to prevent senseless violence in our schools. [We/I] believe that the architecture profession has proven it is qualified to take on the leadership challenges of designing healthy, productive learning environments that build community.



Custom media list and resources

Upon request, AIA will provide you with a custom media list, complete with reporter's names and contact info in your specific area. If you would like this list, please email Matt Tinder at mtinder@aia.org or Gaby Suarez at gabrielasuarez@aia.org with the following information:

- Print/Online/TV?
- City/State/Region?

Online resources

aia.org

