THE UNIFIED LIFE SAFETY SYSTEM GUIDEBOOK

Connecting People, Programs, Facilities, Technology, and Partners into One School Safety Operating Model

PREVENTION • PROTECTION • PREPAREDNESS • RESPONSE • RECOVERY • SUSTAINMENT



STRONGER TOGETHER.

SAFER TODAY. READY FOR TOMORROW.

Removing Silos.
Building Connections.
Strengthening Every School.

Authorship and Publication

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This guidebook was developed through the collaborative thinking and contributions of Guy M. Grace, Mike Garcia, and Deborah Grace. It reflects a shared belief that school safety is a connected responsibility involving prevention, people, programs, facilities, technology, response, recovery and sustainment.

Offered as an independent educational practitioner resource, it invites school communities to ask better questions, connect professional expertise and verify whether their existing protective capabilities work under real conditions.

This publication is not a new national standard, certification, code interpretation or substitute for locally adopted plans and professional guidance.

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Executive Summary

School safety is not a single product, plan, grant, drill, department, or person. It is a connected responsibility that must be led, practiced, maintained, verified, and improved over time.

The Unified Life Safety System, or ULSS, is a practical guide for helping schools view safety as a complete operating model. It connects the systems schools already depend on: leadership, prevention, MTSS, BTAM, student services, special education, health services, emergency preparedness, physical security, communications, technology, transportation, daily operations, response, reunification, recovery, maintenance, and sustainment.

Many schools already have strong pieces in place. They may have caring staff, committed leaders, emergency plans, student support teams, locked-door expectations, radios, access control, cameras, visitor procedures, counseling support, nursing services, transportation procedures, and first responder relationships. The challenge is often not the absence of effort. The challenge is connection.

ULSS helps schools ask whether these pieces work together under real conditions. It moves the conversation from possession to performance. The question is not only: Do we have it? The better questions are: Does it work? Who owns it? Has it been tested? Is it maintained? Does it work during different operating modes? Does it protect the whole school community? What happens when it fails? Who fixes it?

This guidebook is designed to help schools move from assumption to verification. A locked-door policy is not the same as a door that closes, latches, locks, and is used correctly. A written emergency plan is not the same as staff knowing what to do during lunch, dismissal, athletics, after-hours events, field trips, or a substitute-led classroom. A technology purchase is not the same as a working safety workflow. A drill is not complete if the gaps it reveals are never corrected.

ULSS is not about blame. It is about seeing the system clearly. It is also not product-first. Technology, locks, cameras, access control, radios, visitor systems, and emergency apps can all support safety, but they must be connected to operational needs, human behavior, training, maintenance, code compliance, cybersecurity, privacy, and lifecycle planning.

ULSS is care-based, not fear-based. It recognizes that prevention and protection both matter. A trusted adult may prevent harm. A working door may delay harm. A clear radio message may reduce confusion. A trained staff member may save a life. A nurse may stabilize a medical emergency. A counselor may support a student in crisis. A special education team may make an emergency plan realistic. A reunification plan may restore family confidence. A corrective action process may prevent the same gap from appearing again.

A mature ULSS is not defined by having every possible product or a perfect score in every area. A mature ULSS is defined by connection, ownership, verification, sustainment, and continuous improvement. The school knows what it has. The school knows who owns it. The school knows how it works. The school tests it. The school fixes what is found. The school supports the whole school community. The school learns and improves over time. That is readiness.

Core ULSS Question

Do our people, programs, facilities, technologies, procedures, and partners work together under real conditions to protect the whole school community?

What ULSS Is

The Unified Life Safety System, or ULSS, is a way to help schools see, connect, and strengthen the safety systems that already exist across the school environment.

ULSS is not intended to replace emergency operations plans, MTSS, BTAM, special education services, health services, school climate work, physical security programs, access control, facilities maintenance, transportation procedures, technology systems, or first responder partnerships.

Instead, ULSS helps schools understand how those pieces fit together.

Most schools already have parts of a unified life safety system in place. They may have an emergency operations plan, a safety team, counselors, nurses, special education staff, MTSS processes, BTAM teams, visitor procedures, door security expectations, access control, cameras, radios, transportation plans, reunification procedures, custodial securement routines, athletic event procedures, and relationships with law enforcement, fire, EMS, and emergency management.

The issue is often not that schools have nothing. The issue is that the pieces may live in separate silos.

Student support may be in one lane. Facilities may be in another. Technology may be in another. Emergency preparedness may be in another. Transportation may be in another. Health services may be in another. Special education may be in another. Physical security may be in another. Response partners may be involved, but not always connected to daily school operations.

ULSS gives schools a way to bring those pieces into one shared conversation.

It helps stakeholders ask:

- Who owns this safety function?
- Who maintains it?
- Who trains it?
- Who tests it?
- Who funds it?
- Who uses it?
- Who is affected by it?
- Who fixes it when it drifts?
- How does it connect to the rest of the school safety system?

This is the purpose of ULSS: to connect people, resources, responsibilities, and life safety systems so schools can move from isolated efforts to shared readiness.

ULSS recognizes that school safety is already being supported by many people. Administrators, teachers, counselors, school psychologists, social workers, nurses, special education teams, facilities staff, IT teams, transportation staff, custodians, coaches, front office staff, substitutes, law enforcement, fire/EMS, emergency managers, families, and community partners all hold pieces of the safety picture.

The challenge is making sure those pieces are connected before a crisis, not discovered during one.

A door that does not latch is not only a facilities issue. It may affect access control, lockdown, fire/life safety, staff behavior, after-hours use, maintenance, and responder access.

A student concern is not only a discipline issue. It may involve MTSS, BTAM, counseling, family engagement, special education, school climate, privacy, and recovery.

A medical emergency at an athletic event is not only a health issue. It may involve AED access, coaches, event staff, EMS entry, radios, parent communication, crowd management, and after-action improvement.

A new safety technology is not only an IT issue. It may involve cybersecurity, privacy, training, permissions, emergency procedures, maintenance, vendor access, funding, and real-world use.

That is why ULSS matters.

It helps schools see how one safety concern often crosses many roles, systems, and responsibilities. It gives stakeholders a shared language for identifying where connections are strong, where gaps exist, and where ownership needs to be clarified.

ULSS does not ask every stakeholder to do every job. It asks every stakeholder to understand how their work connects to the larger life safety system.

The goal is not to create more complexity. The goal is to reduce confusion. The goal is to remove silos. The goal is to connect prevention, protection, preparedness, response, recovery, and sustainment into one working model.

The goal is to help schools understand that life safety is not just a plan, a product, a department, or a drill. It is the combined performance of people, programs, facilities, technology, procedures, communication, maintenance, and follow-through under real school conditions.

ULSS helps schools move from separate efforts to connected systems, assumptions to verification, one-time projects to sustained readiness, product-first thinking to operational need, department ownership to shared responsibility, and compliance-only thinking to real-world capability.

The concept already exists in schools in bits and pieces. ULSS simply helps schools recognize it, organize it, connect it, and improve it.

When stakeholders become aware of ULSS, they can begin to see the whole safety picture more clearly. They can understand how their work affects others. They can identify gaps before they become failures. They can align resources around actual needs. They can strengthen communication between departments. They can better support students, staff, families, and responders.

Most importantly, they can build a school safety system that is not dependent on one person remembering everything or one department carrying the full burden.

ULSS is a shared life safety mindset. It connects the people. It connects the systems. It connects the resources. It connects the responsibilities. It helps schools protect the whole school community by making sure the pieces do not remain separate when they need to work together.

Disclaimer and Use Statement

The Unified Life Safety System Guidebook is intended as a practical planning, discussion, and improvement tool for schools, districts, safety teams, facilities professionals, student services, emergency managers, first responders, and community partners.

This guidebook does not replace local policy, state law, federal law, emergency operations plans, fire code, building code, accessibility requirements, school board policy, legal review, professional judgment, or the authority of local emergency responders and authorities having jurisdiction.

It is not a legal standard, certification program, regulatory requirement, or compliance document. Schools should consult appropriate legal counsel, code officials, fire marshals, building officials, emergency managers, law enforcement, fire/EMS partners, risk management professionals, and other authorities when making decisions involving law, code, liability, student privacy, accessibility, emergency response, or public safety.

Every school is different. A small rural school, large urban high school, early childhood center, charter school, private school, faith-based school, alternative school, career and technical center, or multi-campus district may each apply ULSS differently. Safety cannot be copied and pasted from one school to another.

The ULSS Guidebook is not intended to promote a specific product, vendor, technology, manufacturer, consultant, or service provider. The guidebook encourages schools to define the safety function before selecting a solution. The question should not begin with what product should we buy. The better question is what problem are we trying to solve, who owns it, how will it work, how will it be maintained, and how will we know it is effective.

Some school safety information should be protected. Schools should use care when sharing assessment findings, vulnerabilities, access control details, camera locations, emergency response procedures, law enforcement coordination details, reunification site specifics, cybersecurity information, student information, or other sensitive materials.

ULSS recognizes that student services, special education, health services, counseling, school psychology, social work, MTSS, BTAM, and individualized support planning may involve sensitive

information. Schools must protect student privacy and follow applicable laws, policies, and professional standards.

Any safety improvement involving doors, locks, access control, barricade devices, delayed egress, alarms, fire-rated openings, evacuation, sheltering, accessibility, or emergency responder access should be reviewed for applicable code and life-safety requirements. Security measures should not create new hazards.

The intent of this guidebook is to support safer, more prepared, more connected, and more resilient school communities. It should not be used to blame, shame, rank, politicize, oversimplify, or sell fear.

Part One: The ULSS Mindset

School Safety as a Living Responsibility

School safety is not one product, one plan, one grant, one drill, one department, or one person. It is a living responsibility.

Every school already has pieces of a safety system. There are administrators making decisions, teachers watching over students, counselors supporting those in need, school psychologists and social workers helping students and families, nurses responding to medical concerns, special education teams supporting individual needs, facilities teams maintaining buildings, IT teams protecting systems, bus drivers moving children, coaches supervising events, custodians securing spaces, families trusting the school, and first responders standing ready when called.

The question is not whether schools care. They do. The deeper question is whether all of these pieces are connected, understood, practiced, maintained, verified, and improved under real conditions. That is where the Unified Life Safety System begins.

ULSS is a way to think about school safety as a complete operating model. It is not designed to replace existing plans, programs, standards, or professional roles. Instead, it helps schools see how those pieces fit together and whether they are working as one system.

A locked-door policy is not the same as a door that closes, latches, locks, and is used correctly every day. A written emergency plan is not the same as staff knowing what to do during lunch, dismissal, athletics, after-hours events, field trips, or a substitute-led classroom. A technology purchase is not the same as a working safety workflow. A drill is not complete if it reveals gaps that are never corrected.

ULSS is not about blame. It is about seeing the system clearly. It asks practical questions: Who owns this safety function? Who maintains it? Who trains it? Who tests it? Who funds it? Who fixes it when it drifts? Who knows what to do when the normal school day becomes anything but normal?

A school is not a static building. It changes by the hour. Arrival is different from dismissal. Lunch is different from class time. A basketball game is different from a school day. A summer program is different from a normal schedule. A community event, rental, board meeting, or after-hours activity may create a different safety posture than the one used during the regular school day.

The people inside the school also have different needs. A student with a mobility, medical, sensory, communication, cognitive, emotional, or behavioral need may experience an emergency

differently than others. A substitute teacher, contractor, volunteer, coach, bus driver, or community group may not know the procedures full-time staff take for granted. A family may need information in a different language or format during reunification. A medically fragile student may need specific support during evacuation, sheltering, lockdown, or transportation.

That is why school safety must be viewed as an operating system, not a collection of disconnected efforts. ULSS brings together prevention, protection, preparedness, response, recovery, and sustainment. It recognizes that safety is strongest when school climate, student support, behavioral threat assessment, physical security, emergency preparedness, communications, technology, life safety, and daily operations are connected.

The strength of ULSS is that it does not ask schools to choose between prevention and protection. It recognizes that both are necessary. A trusted adult may prevent harm. A working door may delay harm. A clear radio message may reduce confusion. A trained staff member may save a life. A nurse may stabilize a medical emergency. A counselor may help a student in crisis. A special education team may identify supports that make an emergency plan realistic. A thoughtful reunification plan may restore confidence. A corrective action process may prevent the same gap from appearing again.

The most powerful school safety work is often not dramatic. It is steady, practical, and consistent. It is the door that gets repaired before it fails. The staff member who reports a concern. The counselor who connects a student to support. The nurse who knows the medical plan. The substitute who understands the emergency action. The bus driver who knows what to do during a crisis. The facilities team that checks the opening. The IT team that removes outdated permissions. The administrator who follows up after the drill. The safety team that refuses to let findings sit on a shelf. The board that supports sustainable funding. The community that understands safety is not fear-based. It is care-based.

ULSS should inspire schools to ask better questions, not just buy more things. It should help leaders see that the goal is not to create fear, harden every space without thought, or chase every trend. The goal is to build safer, more prepared, more connected, and more resilient school communities.

A unified life safety approach honors the reality that schools are complex places filled with people, movement, emotion, learning, risk, responsibility, and hope. It also respects that one school is one school. Each campus has its own layout, culture, leadership, hazards, resources, history, student needs, community expectations, and operational realities. Safety cannot be copied and pasted. It must be understood, adapted, owned, practiced, maintained, and sustained.

Call to Action

Do not assume. Verify. Do not isolate. Connect. Do not only react. Prevent and prepare. Do not stop at installation. Maintain and test. Do not let findings fade. Assign ownership and follow through. Do not forget the human side. Protect the whole school community.

Part Two: How to Use This Guidebook by Audience

The Unified Life Safety System Guidebook is designed for many audiences. School safety is not owned by one person, one department, or one professional discipline. It is a shared responsibility that requires leadership, operations, prevention, preparedness, facilities, technology, communications, student support, response partners, and community trust.

Audience	How to Use ULSS	Guiding Question
Superintendents and District Leadership	Use ULSS to organize district strategy, align departments, connect safety to funding, and ensure corrective action follow-through.	Do we have a districtwide structure for managing safety, and are the right departments aligned?
School Boards	Use ULSS for governance, policy, funding, sustainability, and responsible public communication without exposing sensitive details.	Are priorities risk-informed and are improvements supported beyond installation?
Principals and Building Administrators	Use ULSS to connect procedures to daily reality: arrival, dismissal, lunch, recess, substitutes, events, visitors, and drills.	Do staff know what to do, and are gaps from daily operations corrected?
Safety and Security Leaders	Use ULSS to coordinate readiness domains, track corrective actions, verify systems, and connect responders with school realities.	Are assessments and drills leading to owned, verified improvements?
Facilities and Maintenance	Use ULSS to treat doors, openings, lighting, egress, work orders, and building systems as life safety functions.	Do physical systems work, and are repairs verified after correction?
IT and Cybersecurity	Use ULSS to govern permissions, safety platforms, cloud systems, data, vendor access, and technology workflows.	Who has access, what data exists, and what happens if the system fails?
Student Services	Use ULSS to connect MTSS, BTAM, counseling, school psychology, social work, family support, recovery, and student voice.	Are concerns identified early and routed to the right support process?
Special Education Teams	Use ULSS to ensure individual needs are considered during evacuation, lockdown, shelter, communication, transportation, and reunification.	Does the plan work for students whose needs do not fit the standard procedure?
School Nurses and Health Services	Use ULSS to strengthen medical readiness, AED access, emergency medication, field trips, athletics, EMS coordination, and behavioral health crisis support.	Can the school respond to medical needs during all operating modes?
Transportation Leaders	Use ULSS to connect buses, arrival, dismissal, field trips, athletic travel, specialized transportation, and reunification.	How does movement affect safety and accountability?
Athletic Directors and Activity Sponsors	Use ULSS to plan for after-hours realities: events, entrances, AEDs, weather, spectators, EMS access, and securement.	Does the safety posture work after the school day ends?
Front Office Staff	Use ULSS to strengthen visitor management, custody documentation, contractor access, substitute packets, emergency calls, and student release.	Is the front office supported as a daily safety control point?
Law Enforcement, Fire/EMS, Emergency Management	Use ULSS to understand school operations, maps, access points, communications, reunification, and special population considerations.	Are school plans and responder plans coordinated before an emergency?
Vendors, Integrators, and Partners	Use ULSS to align support with operational needs, life safety, interoperability, cybersecurity, training, maintenance, and lifecycle cost.	Does the solution support a real safety workflow without creating new risk?
Families and Community Members	Use ULSS to understand prevention, reporting, visitor procedures, reunification, and how families support safety without needing sensitive details.	How can families support the school before, during, and after an incident?

Part Three: ULSS Readiness Domains Overview

The Unified Life Safety System is organized through readiness domains. These domains help schools understand the major parts of the safety system and how those parts connect. They are not intended to create silos. They are intended to help schools see the full picture.

The domains should be used for discussion, assessment, planning, funding, implementation, training, maintenance, and continuous improvement. They should also be adapted to local conditions. One school is one school. A small rural school, large urban high school, early childhood center, alternative school, church-based school, career and technical center, or multi-campus district may each need to apply the domains differently.

#	Readiness Domain	Guiding Question
1	Governance, Leadership, and Shared Ownership	Who is responsible for leading, maintaining, funding, training, verifying, and improving the safety system?
2	Risk, Threat, Hazard, and Vulnerability Understanding	What do we know, what are we assuming, and what has been verified under real conditions?
3	MTSS, Student Support, and Prevention	How does the school identify student needs early and provide support before concern escalates?
4	BTAM and Concern Management	How does the school identify, assess, manage, and follow up on concerning behavior?
5	School Climate, Culture, and Trusted Reporting	Will students, staff, and families speak up before harm occurs?
6	Student Services, Special Education, Health, and Individual Support Readiness	Does the safety system protect the whole school community, including those whose needs may not fit a standard procedure?
7	Health, Medical, and Behavioral Health Readiness	Can the school identify and respond to medical and behavioral health needs quickly, lawfully, and compassionately?
8	Emergency Preparedness and Incident Management	Can people perform the plan during real school conditions?
9	Physical Environment and Protective Design	Does the physical environment support safe daily operations, emergency action, lawful egress, and responder access?
10	Openings, Access, Egress, and Door Security	Does the full opening support security, life safety, code compliance, and real daily use?
11	Communications and Shared Operating Picture	Can the right people receive the right information quickly enough to act?
12	Technology, Integration, Cybersecurity, and Data Governance	Do technology systems support detection, communication, decision-making, protective action, response, and recovery?
13	Daily Operations, Movement, Transportation, and Operating Modes	Does the safety system work during the way the school is actually being used at that moment?
14	Workforce, Substitute, Volunteer, Contractor, and Community-Use Readiness	Do all adults who operate in the school environment understand their safety responsibilities at the level appropriate to their role?
15	Response, Reunification, Recovery, and Continuous Improvement	How does the school stabilize, reunify, recover, learn, and improve?
16	Sustainment, Funding, Maintenance, and Lifecycle Management	Can the school sustain the safety capability after the purchase, grant, installation, or initial training is complete?

How the domains work

A single safety concern usually touches more than one domain. An unsecured door may involve facilities, access control, staff behavior, athletics, maintenance, after-hours use, and corrective action ownership. A student concern may involve MTSS, BTAM, school climate, family engagement, privacy, and recovery. This is why ULSS is unified.

Part Four: Detailed Readiness Domain Review

The following domain reviews are intended to help school leaders move from concept to action. Each domain includes a detailed summary, practical example, hypothetical, cross-fit considerations, improvement questions, and a thought point. The purpose is not to create a rigid checklist. The purpose is to help schools think clearly about how safety systems actually work.

How to Read Hypothetical Scenarios

The hypotheticals in this guidebook are not intended to read as completed solutions. They are intended to present realistic school conditions where ownership, procedures, communication, training, maintenance, or support systems are unclear.

Each hypothetical should stop at the point where the system is stressed, exposed, or uncertain. The following ULSS Lens / What This Should Prompt section then explains how stakeholders should think through the issue, what questions should be asked, and what cross-fit connections matter before corrective action is assigned.

This approach keeps the scenario honest. ULSS does not magically solve the problem. It gives the school a way to see the problem clearly, connect the right stakeholders, assign ownership, and verify improvement.

How to Read Cross-Fit Considerations

Each domain includes cross-fit considerations because school safety functions rarely live in one lane. In this guidebook, the cross-fit tables are intended to be applied to the practical example and hypothetical in that domain. They should not be read as a generic inventory of every possible related topic. A cross-fit item should be included only when it helps explain why the issue crosses roles, departments, systems, procedures, or resources in the example being discussed.

These explanations are intentionally practical. They are meant to help school stakeholders see the relationship between systems in the scenario, not just recognize terminology. When a cross-fit is named, the safety team should ask why it matters in this case, who owns the connection, how it is tested, what evidence exists, and what corrective action is needed if the connection is weak.

1. Governance, Leadership, and Shared Ownership

Purpose: Governance establishes who owns the school safety system. It creates the structure for leadership, coordination, accountability, decision-making, funding, maintenance, training, verification, and improvement.

Detailed Summary

School safety cannot live with one person or department. It cannot be placed only on the principal, the school resource officer, the facilities director, the counselor, the superintendent, the IT department, or a vendor. Each of those roles may own important pieces, but ULSS requires a shared operating structure.

A strong governance model includes district leadership, school leadership, facilities, IT, security, transportation, student services, special education, health services, counseling, communications, athletics, food service, custodial services, law enforcement, fire/EMS, emergency management, and other local partners where appropriate. This does not mean every person must be involved in every decision. It means the school or district has a clear way to bring the right people together when a safety function touches their area of responsibility.

Governance also creates follow-through. Assessments, drills, audits, incidents, and near misses often reveal gaps. Those gaps only become improvements when someone owns the corrective action, has the authority to address it, and follows through until it is verified.

Practical Example

A district creates a safety leadership team that meets monthly. The team reviews door audit results, emergency drill findings, BTAM trends, MTSS concerns, radio and communication testing, access control issues, transportation concerns, maintenance needs, special population planning, technology updates, and corrective action progress. Each finding is assigned to an owner with a timeline. The team does not just discuss concerns; it tracks whether concerns are being resolved.

Hypothetical Scenario

A school has a side entrance that is frequently left unsecured after athletic practices. The principal assumes athletics owns it. Athletics assumes facilities owns it. Facilities assumes coaches secure it. Coaches assume custodial staff secure it. Custodial staff assume the door is monitored electronically. IT says the door is not connected to door-position monitoring. Everyone is close to the issue, but no one owns the full problem.

ULSS Lens / What This Should Prompt

This scenario should prompt stakeholders to ask where ownership breaks down: athletics use, facilities function, IT monitoring, custodial securement, and school leadership expectations. The issue is not solved by assuming one department owns it; it requires a defined owner, a procedure for practice and event securement, a door-function check, and retesting after corrective action is assigned.

Cross-Fit Considerations

The table below applies the cross-fit concept to the practical example, hypothetical scenario, and ULSS lens in this domain. It identifies only the connections that matter to the situation being discussed and explains why those connections should be considered.

Applied Cross-Fit Area	Why It Applies to This Example / What Stakeholders Should Consider
Athletics and after-hours operations	The unsecured side entrance occurs after athletic practices, so the safety gap is tied to an operating mode outside the normal school day. Athletic procedures must define which doors are used, who monitors them, and who secures them afterward.
Facilities and door hardware	The door may be unsecured because of procedure, but it could also involve a closer, latch, strike, frame, or other opening problem. Facilities must verify that the full opening can close, latch, and secure before the issue is treated only as staff behavior.
Coaches and activity sponsors	Coaches are often the adults present when the building is being used after hours. They need role-appropriate expectations for access, door propping, emergency communication, and end-of-practice securement.
Custodial securement	Custodial staff may be the final adults in the building, but they cannot be expected to own every event access decision unless the process clearly says so. Their securement role must be defined, supported, and verified.
IT and door-position monitoring	If staff believe the door is electronically monitored but IT confirms it is not, the school has an assumption gap. Door monitoring, alert recipients, and response expectations must be clear.
Emergency preparedness and responder access	An unsecured door can affect lockdown, evacuation accountability, after-hours emergency response, and responder entry. Door procedures should align with emergency operations, not just convenience.
Corrective action ownership	The main failure in the hypothetical is not only the door; it is that everyone assumes someone else owns the problem. ULSS requires one owner, a timeline, a fix, and retesting.
Board and community confidence	If the issue becomes public, families and boards will want assurance that the district is not ignoring basic securement. A tracked corrective action process builds confidence without exposing sensitive details.

Improvement Questions

- Who owns school safety at the district and building levels?
- Is there a multidisciplinary safety team?
- Are findings from assessments, drills, and incidents assigned to specific owners?
- Are safety decisions connected to funding, maintenance, training, and lifecycle planning?
- Are vendors supporting the school's safety model, or are products driving the model?

ULSS Thought Point

A school safety system without governance depends on memory, goodwill, and individual effort. A unified life safety system requires ownership, structure, and follow-through.

2. Risk, Threat, Hazard, and Vulnerability Understanding

Purpose: This domain helps schools understand what can realistically happen, where they may be vulnerable, and what they are assuming instead of verifying.

Detailed Summary

Risk understanding is broader than a physical security assessment. It includes threats, hazards, vulnerabilities, school climate, student behavior trends, medical needs, transportation patterns, after-hours use, weather hazards, cyber risk, custody concerns, community risks, and practical operating realities.

Schools are complex environments. The risks they face are not limited to one type of incident. A school may need to prepare for a medical emergency in the gym, a custody dispute in the front office, a student in crisis, a severe weather event, a fight during dismissal, a suspicious person near the playground, an unsecured exterior door, a cyber incident, or a reunification challenge after evacuation.

ULSS asks schools to examine what is written, what is installed, what is practiced, and what is actually happening. A door may be listed as secure but may not latch. A camera may exist but may not show the needed view. A radio may be issued but may not work in the cafeteria. A visitor procedure may function during the school day but fail during evening events. The goal is to move from assumption to verification.

Practical Example

A school conducts a risk and vulnerability review. The review finds that the main entrance is well-managed during normal school hours, but the school has gaps during athletic events, deliveries, after-school programs, and evening community use. The school updates operating-mode procedures and defines which doors are used, who monitors them, how visitors are managed, how emergency communication works, and who secures the building afterward.

Hypothetical Scenario

A school believes it has reliable emergency communication because every administrator has a radio. During a drill, staff discover weak radio coverage in the gym locker rooms, the playground, and one portable classroom. On paper, the school has radios. In reality, the school has communication gaps.

ULSS Lens / What This Should Prompt

This scenario should prompt the school to ask whether communication has been verified where staff and students actually are, not just whether radios were purchased and issued. The team would need to test coverage, identify dead zones, determine backup methods, include outdoor, portable, and locker-room areas in drills, and clarify who owns retesting and corrective action.

Cross-Fit Considerations

The table below applies the cross-fit concept to the practical example, hypothetical scenario, and ULSS lens in this domain. It identifies only the connections that matter to the situation being discussed and explains why those connections should be considered.

Applied Cross-Fit Area	Why It Applies to This Example / What Stakeholders Should Consider
Communication testing	The hypothetical is about assumed radio capability being tested during a drill. Testing in gyms, locker rooms, playgrounds, portables, buses, and exterior areas is what turns possession of radios into verified communication readiness.
Emergency preparedness and drills	The communication gap was discovered during a drill, which shows why drills should be used as verification tools. The finding should update procedures and future exercises, not simply be noted and forgotten.
Physical environment and campus layout	Weak coverage in locker rooms, playgrounds, and portables may be caused by building materials, distance, terrain, or detached structures. Communication planning must match the actual campus environment.
Technology infrastructure	Radio coverage may require technical review, repeaters, channel planning, battery practices, or alternate devices. IT or communications vendors may need to support the operational fix.
Daily operations and supervision locations	The affected areas are places where staff and students actually are during PE, recess, athletics, and transitions. Communication planning must include real supervision locations, not only offices and classrooms.
Special populations and medical needs	If communication fails in remote or exterior areas, students with medical, mobility, sensory, or behavioral needs may be harder to support during an emergency. Backup methods should account for those needs.
Transportation and outdoor movement	Playgrounds, portables, bus loops, and exterior areas are often tied to movement and transportation. Staff outside the main building need reliable ways to communicate with the office and incident command.
Corrective action and retesting	The fix is not complete when the gap is identified. The school must map coverage, define backups, assign ownership, and retest weak areas after changes are made.

Improvement Questions

- What are the most realistic risks for this school or district?
- Are risks reviewed by operating mode, not just during the normal school day?
- Are communication systems tested in all areas of the campus?
- Are student support, MTSS, BTAM, and climate data considered part of the risk picture?
- What is currently being assumed but has not been verified?

ULSS Thought Point

The most dangerous phrase in school safety may be, 'We thought it worked.' ULSS asks schools to verify before the system is tested by a real event.

3. MTSS, Student Support, and Prevention

Purpose: This domain ensures that ULSS includes prevention, early intervention, and student support. Safety is not only about stopping harm during an emergency; it is also about identifying needs, providing support, building connection, and reducing escalation before a crisis occurs.

Detailed Summary

MTSS belongs inside ULSS because student wellness, behavior, attendance, academic struggles, family stress, conflict, trauma, and mental health needs can all intersect with safety. A Multi-Tiered System of Supports helps schools organize academic, behavioral, social, emotional, attendance, and wellness supports.

From a ULSS perspective, MTSS is part of the prevention layer. It helps schools identify patterns early. A student may be struggling academically, missing school, becoming isolated, showing anger, experiencing bullying, or dealing with family instability. Each concern may appear separate, but together they may show a need for support.

ULSS does not turn MTSS into a security tool. Instead, it recognizes that a well-functioning MTSS helps schools care for students, reduce escalation, and connect concerns to the right supports. A school safety model that ignores MTSS may become too reactive.

Practical Example

A middle school notices repeated peer conflict involving several students. The school does not treat the issue only as discipline. The MTSS team reviews attendance, behavior data, academic struggles, counseling needs, family concerns, and supervision patterns. The school provides targeted supports, adjusts supervision, involves families, and monitors progress. If behavior rises to a threat concern, the issue can be routed to BTAM.

Hypothetical Scenario

A student begins missing school, turning in little work, withdrawing from friends, and making concerning comments. One teacher notices attendance. Another notices anger. A counselor hears about isolation. An administrator sees discipline referrals. No one sees the full picture.

ULSS Lens / What This Should Prompt

This scenario should prompt stakeholders to ask whether scattered concerns are being connected through MTSS and student support before they escalate. The school would need a clear pathway for staff observations, data review, family engagement, support assignment, documentation, and referral to BTAM when risk indicators warrant it.

Cross-Fit Considerations

The table below applies the cross-fit concept to the practical example, hypothetical scenario, and ULSS lens in this domain. It identifies only the connections that matter to the situation being discussed and explains why those connections should be considered.

Applied Cross-Fit Area	Why It Applies to This Example / What Stakeholders Should Consider
Attendance, behavior, academic, and wellness data	The hypothetical shows multiple small concerns that only become clear when reviewed together. MTSS connects those indicators before the school treats them as unrelated events.
Counseling, school psychology, and social work	A withdrawn student making concerning comments may need support, assessment, family outreach, or referral. Student support professionals help determine the right intervention path.
Family engagement	Family context may explain changes in attendance, behavior, or wellness. ULSS connects family engagement to prevention while still respecting privacy and professional boundaries.
BTAM escalation pathway	If concerns move from support needs to potential threat indicators, the school needs a clear pathway from MTSS to BTAM. This prevents both overreaction and under-response.
School climate and trusted reporting	Teachers and peers may notice different pieces of concern. A healthy reporting culture helps those pieces reach the student support process early.
Special education and individual supports	If the student has an IEP, 504 plan, health plan, or known support need, interventions and safety planning should align with those existing supports.
Privacy and documentation	Student support concerns require careful documentation and information sharing. The right people need the right information for a legitimate purpose, without unnecessary disclosure.

Improvement Questions

- Is MTSS included in school safety discussions?
- Are attendance, behavior, academic, and wellness concerns reviewed together?
- Are there clear pathways from staff concern to student support?
- Is there a clear connection between MTSS and BTAM when concerns escalate?
- Are interventions monitored for effectiveness?

ULSS Thought Point

Prevention is life safety. A school that sees student needs early and responds with care may prevent harm before emergency systems are ever needed.

4. BTAM and Concern Management

Purpose: Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management provides a structured process for identifying, assessing, managing, and monitoring concerning behavior.

Detailed Summary

BTAM is a critical ULSS capability because it helps schools move from reaction to informed action. It connects reporting, information gathering, risk assessment, intervention, support, documentation, and follow-up.

BTAM is not simply discipline. It is not simply law enforcement. It is not simply mental health. It is a multidisciplinary process that helps schools understand concerning behavior in context. A concerning statement, social media post, behavior change, conflict, or reported threat should not be ignored, minimized, exaggerated, or handled in isolation.

BTAM should connect to MTSS, counseling, school psychology, social work, special education, administration, family engagement, and law enforcement when appropriate. It must also be supported by privacy and documentation practices.

Practical Example

A student makes a concerning post online. The school receives a report through a trusted reporting pathway. The BTAM team gathers information, reviews context, speaks with appropriate individuals, assesses concern, considers support needs, involves guardians where appropriate, coordinates with law enforcement if needed, documents actions, and creates a management plan.

Hypothetical Scenario

A student makes a threat during an argument. The administrator assigns discipline. A counselor talks to the student. The SRO hears about it later. Teachers are not told what they need to know. Parents receive incomplete information. No follow-up plan is created.

ULSS Lens / What This Should Prompt

This scenario should prompt the school to ask whether threats are being handled as isolated discipline, counseling, or law enforcement issues instead of structured concern management. The team would need to define reporting, triage, information gathering, intervention, privacy, communication, and follow-up expectations.

Cross-Fit Considerations

The table below applies the cross-fit concept to the practical example, hypothetical scenario, and ULSS lens in this domain. It identifies only the connections that matter to the situation being discussed and explains why those connections should be considered.

Applied Cross-Fit Area	Why It Applies to This Example / What Stakeholders Should Consider
Trusted reporting	BTAM depends on concerns reaching the right team. In the hypothetical, fragmented reporting leads to fragmented action, so the reporting pathway must be clear to staff, students, and families.
MTSS and student support	A threat concern may also involve unmet needs, stressors, supports, or interventions. BTAM should connect with MTSS when support and management plans are needed.
Counseling and behavioral health	The student may need mental health support, crisis assessment, or ongoing intervention. Counseling and behavioral health roles help ensure BTAM is not only punitive.

Applied Cross-Fit Area	Why It Applies to This Example / What Stakeholders Should Consider
Administration and discipline	Administrative action may be necessary, but discipline alone is not the same as threat management. Administration should be part of a coordinated process, not the only process.
Law enforcement coordination when appropriate	Some concerns require law enforcement involvement, while others do not. ULSS clarifies when and how law enforcement is included without making every concern a police matter.
Family engagement	Guardians may provide important context and may need to support interventions or safety planning. Communication must be timely, lawful, and appropriate to the concern.
Privacy, documentation, and follow-up	The hypothetical breaks down because pieces of the response are not connected. Documentation, case management, and follow-up keep the concern from disappearing after the initial response.
Re-entry and recovery	If the student is removed, hospitalized, suspended, or otherwise separated from school, re-entry planning helps support safety, supervision, services, and reintegration.

Improvement Questions

- Does the school have a trained BTAM team?
- Are staff trained on how to report concerning behavior?
- Is information gathered from multiple sources before decisions are made?
- Are support and intervention considered along with protective action?
- Are cases monitored after the initial response?

ULSS Thought Point

The goal of BTAM is not to label students. The goal is to understand concern, reduce risk, provide support, and protect the school community through informed action.

5. School Climate, Culture, and Trusted Reporting

Purpose: This domain recognizes that school climate and culture are safety functions. Students, staff, families, and community members are more likely to report concerns when they trust the people and systems around them.

Detailed Summary

A school may have strong doors, cameras, radios, visitor procedures, and emergency plans. But if students do not trust adults, if staff do not know how to report concerns, or if families believe concerns will be ignored, important warning signs may never reach the right people.

Trusted reporting can occur through many pathways. A student may tell a teacher, coach, counselor, administrator, SRO, parent, or friend. A staff member may notice a change in behavior, a bullying pattern, a custody concern, a social media issue, or a student in distress. A family member may call the school with a concern. An anonymous reporting system may receive a tip.

ULSS asks whether those concerns have a clear path into the proper support or assessment process. A strong reporting culture does not encourage overreaction. It encourages early action, careful review, and appropriate support.

Practical Example

A high school teaches students how to report concerns and explains what happens after a report is made. Staff are trained to receive reports calmly, document them properly, and route them to the right team. The school reviews reporting trends, bullying concerns, attendance patterns, and climate survey results. When concerns appear, they are connected to MTSS, counseling, administration, or BTAM as appropriate.

Hypothetical Scenario

A student hears another student talk about bringing a weapon to school. The student does not report it because they believe adults will either overreact, do nothing, or reveal who made the report. The school may have a reporting system, but it does not yet have reporting trust.

ULSS Lens / What This Should Prompt

This scenario should prompt stakeholders to ask whether the reporting system is trusted enough for students to use it. The school would need to examine student voice, trusted adults, anonymity options, response consistency, and whether students see reporting as getting help rather than creating trouble.

Cross-Fit Considerations

The table below applies the cross-fit concept to the practical example, hypothetical scenario, and ULSS lens in this domain. It identifies only the connections that matter to the situation being discussed and explains why those connections should be considered.

Applied Cross-Fit Area	Why It Applies to This Example / What Stakeholders Should Consider
Student voice and trusted adults	The hypothetical turns on whether a student feels safe reporting a possible weapon concern. Students need trusted adults and clear ways to share concerns before harm occurs.
Anonymous reporting	Some students will not report unless they can do so safely or anonymously. Anonymous reporting should connect to real triage and response, not just collect tips.
BTAM	A report involving a possible weapon or threat must have a pathway to structured concern management. BTAM helps the school assess context and determine protective action.
MTSS and counseling	Not every report is only a threat issue. The student involved may also need support, intervention, or services, so prevention systems must be connected.
Family communication	Families may need to be involved depending on the concern, but communication must protect student privacy and avoid rumors or unnecessary alarm.

Applied Cross-Fit Area	Why It Applies to This Example / What Stakeholders Should Consider
Staff training	Adults who receive reports must know how to respond calmly, document accurately, and route the concern quickly. A trusted report can be lost if the adult does not know the process.
Community trust	If students believe reports are ignored or mishandled, trust weakens. Responsible follow-up reinforces that reporting is about help, safety, and prevention.

Improvement Questions

- Do students know how to report concerns?
- Do staff know how to receive and route concerns?
- Are reporting pathways clear, trusted, and accessible?
- Are reports connected to MTSS, BTAM, counseling, or administration when needed?
- Does the school culture support help-seeking before crisis?

ULSS Thought Point

A school safety system is stronger when people trust it enough to use it. Reporting is not only a procedure. It is a relationship.

6. Student Services, Special Education, Health, and Individual Support Readiness

Purpose: This domain ensures that the school safety system protects the whole school community, including students and staff whose needs may not fit a standard emergency procedure.

Detailed Summary

Student services and specialized supports are part of the life safety system. They carry information that may be essential during prevention, preparedness, response, reunification, and recovery.

Some students may have mobility needs. Some may need medication or medical equipment. Some may have sensory or communication needs. Some may require behavioral support. Some may be young children who cannot process emergency instructions the same way older students can. Some may be English learners or have families who need translated communication. Some may have complex custody situations. Some may be in foster care, experiencing homelessness, or facing family crisis.

ULSS does not require sensitive information to be broadly shared. It requires that the right people have the right information, at the right time, for the right safety purpose. Standard procedures may not work for everyone. A lockdown, evacuation, shelter, reunification, bus transfer, or emergency communication plan must account for individual needs.

Practical Example

A school reviews emergency plans for students with mobility, sensory, medical, communication, and behavioral needs. The safety team works with special education, nursing, counseling, transportation, administration, and families where appropriate. The school identifies assistance roles, backup staff, medication considerations, evacuation needs, sheltering concerns, communication supports, and reunification procedures.

Hypothetical Scenario

During a lockdown drill, a student with sensory needs becomes distressed, leaves the designated area, and is difficult to redirect. Staff realize the standard lockdown procedure does not fully account for this student.

ULSS Lens / What This Should Prompt

This scenario should prompt the school to ask whether standard emergency actions work for students with individual needs. The team would need to review supports, privacy-appropriate information sharing, staff roles, substitute awareness, family input, and how to practice without causing unnecessary distress.

Cross-Fit Considerations

The table below applies the cross-fit concept to the practical example, hypothetical scenario, and ULSS lens in this domain. It identifies only the connections that matter to the situation being discussed and explains why those connections should be considered.

Applied Cross-Fit Area	Why It Applies to This Example / What Stakeholders Should Consider
Special education and individualized planning	The hypothetical involves a student whose needs do not fit a standard drill procedure. The student team must help adapt the plan while preserving safety and dignity.
School psychology, counseling, and behavioral support	A sensory or behavioral response during a drill may require support strategies, preparation, debriefing, or behavioral planning rather than punishment.
Family engagement	Families may know triggers, calming strategies, communication needs, and practical supports. Their input can make the emergency plan more realistic.
Emergency preparedness	Lockdown, evacuation, shelter, and reunification procedures must account for individual needs. The drill should reveal whether the plan works for this student.
Substitute awareness	A plan that depends only on the regular teacher may fail when a substitute is present. Role-appropriate information must be available without violating privacy.
Privacy and confidentiality	Individual support information should be shared only with people who need it for safety or care. ULSS balances confidentiality with practical readiness.
Corrective action and retesting	The drill finding should lead to an updated support plan, staff training, and a future check that the adjustment works.

Improvement Questions

- Are individual student needs considered in emergency planning?
- Are students with mobility, medical, sensory, communication, cognitive, emotional, or behavioral needs accounted for?
- Are substitute teachers given role-appropriate information?
- Are transportation and reunification plans realistic for students with individual needs?
- Are privacy rules respected while still supporting safety?

ULSS Thought Point

A safety plan that works only for the average person is not a complete safety plan. ULSS must protect the whole school community.

7. Health, Medical, and Behavioral Health Readiness

Purpose: This domain addresses the health and medical side of school life safety. Schools respond to medical and behavioral health concerns far more often than many high-profile security events.

Detailed Summary

Health readiness is not separate from school safety. A medical emergency in a classroom, cafeteria, athletic field, bus loop, playground, or evening event can become a life-safety incident within seconds.

This includes school nursing, AED access, emergency medication, allergy response, seizure plans, diabetes care, injury response, overdose response where applicable, suicide prevention, behavioral health crisis response, and post-incident mental health support.

Medical readiness must work during the normal school day and during different operating modes. A school nurse may be present during the day but not during an evening basketball game. Emergency medication may be accessible during school hours but harder to locate during after-school programs. AEDs may be installed but not known to coaches, substitutes, or event staff. EMS may know the main entrance but not the best access point for the athletic field.

Practical Example

A school reviews medical readiness across operating modes. It checks AED locations, staff training, emergency medication procedures, nurse coverage, athletic event response, playground injuries, bus incidents, field trip medical plans, and EMS access points. The school discovers that most staff know the AED near the main office, but fewer know the AED near the gym. Coaches receive updated training and signage is improved.

Hypothetical Scenario

A student has a severe allergic reaction during an after-school club. The nurse has left. The club sponsor is unsure where emergency medication is kept. The office is closed. EMS is directed to the main entrance, but the student is near a side activity entrance.

ULSS Lens / What This Should Prompt

This scenario should prompt the school to ask whether medical readiness still functions after the office closes and the nurse is gone. The team would need to review emergency medication access, sponsor and coach training, EMS entry points, communication procedures, parent notification, and how after-hours programs are included in operating-mode planning.

Cross-Fit Considerations

The table below applies the cross-fit concept to the practical example, hypothetical scenario, and ULSS lens in this domain. It identifies only the connections that matter to the situation being discussed and explains why those connections should be considered.

Applied Cross-Fit Area	Why It Applies to This Example / What Stakeholders Should Consider
School nursing and health plans	The allergic reaction example depends on whether emergency medication procedures are clear when the nurse is not present. Health planning must extend beyond the health office.
After-hours clubs and activities	The incident occurs after school, when normal staffing and office access may change. Medical readiness must be built into after-hours operating modes.
AED and emergency medication access	Staff must know where life-safety medical resources are, who can access them, and what procedures apply during events and activities.
EMS access and communication	Responders need the correct entrance and location quickly. Event staff must know how to direct EMS and communicate with incident command or the office.
Coaches/activity sponsors	Adults supervising activities need role-appropriate medical response guidance. They may be the first adults present when the emergency begins.
Parent/guardian communication	Medical emergencies require timely, accurate family communication. Procedures should identify who calls, what information is shared, and how documentation occurs.
After-action improvement	After a medical event or drill, the school should review what worked, what delayed care, and what procedures need correction.

Improvement Questions

- Are AEDs accessible, marked, maintained, and known by staff?
- Are emergency medications accessible under proper procedures?
- Are medical procedures clear for athletics, field trips, buses, and after-hours events?
- Are behavioral health crisis procedures clear?
- Are mental health supports available after incidents?

ULSS Thought Point

Medical readiness is life safety. The best emergency plan is incomplete if it does not account for the health needs of the people inside the school.

8. Emergency Preparedness and Incident Management

Purpose: This domain turns written plans into practiced capability. Emergency preparedness is not just having an emergency operations plan. It is knowing whether people can perform the plan under real conditions.

Detailed Summary

Emergency preparedness must be all-hazards. Schools must be prepared for lockdown, secure, hold, evacuation, shelter, fire, severe weather, medical emergencies, utility failures, transportation incidents, custody disputes, fights, missing students, community violence, cyber incidents, reunification, and continuity of operations.

A plan that works during a tabletop discussion may not work during lunch, recess, dismissal, athletics, field trips, substitute-led classrooms, or after-hours activities. ULSS asks schools to test plans against real operating conditions.

Preparedness includes role clarity. Staff should know what actions to take, who is in charge, how to communicate, how to account for students, where to move, when to secure, how to support individual needs, and what to do after the immediate action ends. Emergency preparedness also includes coordination with responders.

Practical Example

A district conducts a reunification exercise involving school administrators, teachers, transportation, law enforcement, fire/EMS, district communications, student services, special education, and parent notification procedures. The exercise identifies traffic-flow issues, student accountability gaps, and confusion over staff roles. Each issue is assigned to an owner, the plan is updated, and the process is retested.

Hypothetical Scenario

A lockdown drill is marked complete. During the drill, several substitute teachers do not know the procedure, one classroom door does not lock, a PA announcement cannot be heard in the gym, a student with mobility needs is not accounted for, and outdoor staff do not receive the alert.

ULSS Lens / What This Should Prompt

This scenario should prompt the school to treat the drill as a diagnostic exercise, not a completed checkbox. Each gap - substitutes, door function, PA audibility, mobility support, and outdoor alerting - would need an owner, corrective action, and retesting.

Cross-Fit Considerations

The table below applies the cross-fit concept to the practical example, hypothetical scenario, and ULSS lens in this domain. It identifies only the connections that matter to the situation being discussed and explains why those connections should be considered.

Applied Cross-Fit Area	Why It Applies to This Example / What Stakeholders Should Consider
Substitute readiness	The drill reveals substitutes do not know the procedure. Emergency preparedness must include temporary staff because they may be responsible for students when an incident occurs.
Openings and door security	A door that does not lock during a lockdown drill is an emergency preparedness issue and a door hardware issue. The plan depends on the opening working.
Communications	If the PA cannot be heard in the gym or staff outside do not receive the alert, the emergency action is not reaching everyone who must act.
Special populations and individual needs	A student with mobility or other needs must be accounted for in the procedure. The drill should test whether supports are realistic.
Outdoor areas and operating modes	Staff supervising outside or in non-classroom areas may not receive the same alerts as classroom staff. Plans must work beyond the traditional classroom setting.
Corrective action tracking	The drill should not be marked complete until findings are assigned, corrected, and retested. ULSS treats the drill as evidence, not a checkbox.
First responder coordination	If gaps affect access, accountability, or communication, response partners may need updated information or participation in future exercises.

Improvement Questions

- Is the emergency operations plan current and usable?
- Are roles clear for administrators, teachers, support staff, substitutes, transportation, and district leadership?
- Are drills used to verify readiness, not just meet requirements?
- Are after-hours events, athletics, and field trips included?
- Are corrective actions documented, assigned, and retested?

ULSS Thought Point

A plan is not readiness until people can act on it. ULSS turns emergency preparedness from a document into a practiced capability.

9. Physical Environment and Protective Design

Purpose: This domain focuses on how the campus and building environment support safe daily operations, emergency response, lawful egress, supervision, access management, and responder access.

Detailed Summary

The physical environment shapes school safety every day. It affects how students arrive, how visitors enter, how staff supervise, how emergency vehicles access the site, how people evacuate, how people shelter, and how responders navigate the campus.

Protective design does not mean turning schools into fortresses. It means creating and maintaining environments that support safety, dignity, learning, supervision, and emergency action. ULSS looks at the full site, not just the front entrance.

A school may have a secure main vestibule but still have gaps at side doors, playground gates, athletic entrances, portables, delivery areas, staff entrances, mechanical rooms, roof access points, bus loops, parking lots, and after-hours event spaces. The physical environment also changes by operating mode.

Practical Example

A school completes a physical environment review and discovers that the front entry is well managed, but parent drop-off creates traffic congestion and uncontrolled pedestrian movement. The school adjusts traffic flow, separates bus and parent movement where possible, improves signage, assigns supervision points, communicates expectations to families, and reviews emergency vehicle access during arrival and dismissal.

Hypothetical Scenario

A high school adds cameras near an athletic entrance because of after-hours concerns. The cameras improve visibility, but the entrance still has poor lighting, unclear signage, unlocked gates, multiple propped doors, and no written procedure for who secures the area after events.

ULSS Lens / What This Should Prompt

This scenario should prompt stakeholders to ask whether the school addressed the full event environment or only added visibility. The team would need to review lighting, gates, door procedures, supervision, communication, securement responsibility, and the after-hours operating mode.

Cross-Fit Considerations

The table below applies the cross-fit concept to the practical example, hypothetical scenario, and ULSS lens in this domain. It identifies only the connections that matter to the situation being discussed and explains why those connections should be considered.

Applied Cross-Fit Area	Why It Applies to This Example / What Stakeholders Should Consider
Transportation and traffic flow	The example focuses on drop-off and pedestrian movement. Transportation patterns shape supervision, emergency access, and daily life safety.
Supervision and staffing	Traffic or pedestrian changes only work if staff are assigned to the right places and understand their roles during busy periods.
Emergency vehicle access	Arrival and dismissal congestion can block fire, EMS, or law enforcement access. Physical design must preserve emergency access when the campus is crowded.
Signage and wayfinding	Families, visitors, buses, and responders need clear direction. Signage can reduce confusion and unsafe movement.

Applied Cross-Fit Area	Why It Applies to This Example / What Stakeholders Should Consider
Accessibility and individual needs	Traffic and pedestrian plans must work for students, staff, and visitors with mobility, sensory, or medical needs.
Communications	Staff outside during arrival or dismissal need a way to communicate with the office and receive emergency instructions.
Corrective action and monitoring	Changes to traffic flow or supervision should be observed after implementation to confirm they actually reduce risk.

Improvement Questions

- Does the campus layout support supervision and safe movement?
- Are arrival and dismissal areas reviewed as life safety environments?
- Are exterior areas adequately lit and visible?
- Are community-use and after-hours spaces reviewed separately from school-day operations?
- Are facility findings assigned, funded, corrected, and retested?

ULSS Thought Point

The physical environment is always teaching people how to move, enter, gather, supervise, and respond. ULSS asks whether the environment is supporting safety or quietly creating gaps.

10. Openings, Access, Egress, and Door Security

Purpose: This domain focuses on doors and openings as life safety systems. Doors are not simply security devices. They affect access control, lockdown, evacuation, fire protection, accessibility, daily movement, emergency responder access, and maintenance.

Detailed Summary

A door is only protective when the full opening works and people use it correctly. ULSS treats the opening as the entire system: the door, frame, hinges, closer, latch, lock, strike, glass, key cylinder, credential reader, electrified hardware, power transfer, door position switch, request-to-exit function, signage, inspection process, maintenance process, and user behavior.

Schools often focus on one part of the opening. They may ask whether a door has a lock, a reader, or a camera. ULSS asks deeper questions: Does the door close? Does it latch? Does it lock? Can people exit freely? Does it meet fire and accessibility requirements? Can authorized responders access it? Can staff secure it quickly under stress? Is it maintained?

A door that does not close is not secure. A lock that violates egress requirements is not acceptable. An access-controlled opening that is routinely propped is not functioning as intended. A classroom door that requires staff to step into danger to lock it may not support real emergency action.

Practical Example

A school conducts a door audit and finds several exterior doors that appear closed but do not latch. Staff also report that one door is often propped during morning arrival because it is

inconvenient to keep reopening it. ULSS addresses the full issue: facilities repairs the doors, administration updates arrival procedures, supervision is assigned, door-position monitoring is considered, staff are reminded why propping creates risk, and the doors are rechecked after the fix.

Hypothetical Scenario

A school installs access control on several exterior doors. During the day, the doors are credentialed and controlled. However, one door does not close fully because the closer is weak. Another has damaged weatherstripping that prevents latching. A third is propped during deliveries. The district believes it improved access control, but the physical openings and daily behaviors may still be defeating the intended security function.

ULSS Lens / What This Should Prompt

This scenario should prompt stakeholders to ask whether electronic access control is supported by the physical opening and daily behavior. The team would need to check closers, latching, weatherstripping, propping, schedules, credentials, and maintenance/IT coordination.

Cross-Fit Considerations

The table below applies the cross-fit concept to the practical example, hypothetical scenario, and ULSS lens in this domain. It identifies only the connections that matter to the situation being discussed and explains why those connections should be considered.

Applied Cross-Fit Area	Why It Applies to This Example / What Stakeholders Should Consider
Facilities and maintenance	The hypothetical shows that access control depends on the mechanical condition of the opening. Closers, latches, strikes, frames, and weatherstripping must be maintained.
Access control and credentials	Electronic access control cannot compensate for a door that does not close or latch. Credential schedules and permissions must align with the physical opening.
Staff behavior and human factors	A propped door can defeat otherwise strong security. Procedures must address why staff prop doors and how the school will provide workable alternatives.
Deliveries and operating modes	Delivery periods are a distinct operating mode. The school needs a procedure for moving goods without leaving the building unsecured.
Fire/life safety and free egress	Door improvements must maintain code compliance, free egress, accessibility, and emergency responder access. Security cannot create a new life-safety hazard.
IT and door-position monitoring	If the door is monitored, someone must receive and act on alerts. If it is not monitored, staff should not assume that it is.
Vendor/integrator coordination	Facilities, IT, and integrators must work from the same operational requirement: the full opening must close, latch, lock, report where needed, and support daily use.
Proof-of-life testing	After repair or procedure changes, the opening should be retested during the relevant operating mode, not only checked once when the building is quiet.

Improvement Questions

- Do exterior doors close, latch, lock, and secure consistently?
- Are classroom doors able to support lockdown while maintaining free egress?
- Are fire-rated openings maintained properly?
- Are key systems and credentials controlled?
- Are door fixes retested after repair?

ULSS Thought Point

A door is not secure because it exists. A door is secure when the full opening works, supports life safety, and is used correctly every day.

11. Communications and Shared Operating Picture

Purpose: This domain focuses on whether the right people can receive the right information quickly enough to act during daily operations, emerging concerns, and emergencies.

Detailed Summary

Communication is one of the most important parts of ULSS. During an emergency, confusion costs time. During daily operations, poor communication allows small issues to become larger problems. During recovery, unclear communication can damage trust.

ULSS treats communication as more than devices. Radios, phones, PA systems, intercoms, mass notification tools, emergency apps, and parent messages are only useful if people know when to use them, how to use them, who receives the message, what the message means, and what action should follow.

Communication must account for real school conditions. A PA message may not be heard outside. A text alert may not reach someone supervising recess. A radio may not work in the locker room. A substitute may not be included in an app. A bus driver may not know the campus emergency status. A parent message may be sent before the school has confirmed student accountability.

Practical Example

A district tests radio coverage across every campus. The test includes classrooms, offices, gyms, cafeterias, locker rooms, playgrounds, portables, bus loops, athletic fields, and mechanical spaces. The district finds weak areas, documents gaps, identifies backup methods, evaluates technical improvements, and retests after changes.

Hypothetical Scenario

During a severe weather event, the front office sends an email to staff with shelter instructions. Teachers in classrooms receive it. Staff supervising lunch do not. PE is outside and cannot hear the PA. A substitute teacher does not have email access. Bus drivers are arriving for dismissal and are not aware the school has shifted into shelter.

ULSS Lens / What This Should Prompt

This scenario should prompt the school to ask whether the message reached all people affected by the action, including people outside classrooms. The team would need to review layered alerts, PA audibility, radio use, substitute access, bus driver communication, outdoor supervision, and action-oriented message templates.

Cross-Fit Considerations

The table below applies the cross-fit concept to the practical example, hypothetical scenario, and ULSS lens in this domain. It identifies only the connections that matter to the situation being discussed and explains why those connections should be considered.

Applied Cross-Fit Area	Why It Applies to This Example / What Stakeholders Should Consider
Outdoor and non-classroom areas	The severe weather example shows that staff outside, in cafeterias, in PE, or in buses may not receive classroom-based messages. Communication must reach where people actually are.
Redundant communication methods	Email alone is not enough during fast-moving conditions. PA, radio, text alerts, outdoor notification, and direct staff roles may all be needed.
Substitute readiness	Substitutes may not have access to email or emergency apps. They need simple, role-appropriate communication guidance and backup procedures.
Transportation coordination	Bus drivers arriving for dismissal must know when the school changes status. Transportation cannot be isolated from emergency communication.
Special populations and language access	Messages may need to account for hearing, visual, cognitive, language, or developmental needs so that instructions lead to action for everyone.
Incident command	Communication should support a shared operating picture. The people coordinating the response must know who has been notified and who still needs information.
Testing and corrective action	The school should test communication during real conditions and correct gaps when messages do not reach the intended people.

Improvement Questions

- What are the primary and backup communication methods?
- Are radios tested in all areas where students and staff may be located?
- Can substitutes receive emergency instructions?
- Are parent messages coordinated with student accountability and verified facts?
- Do communication systems tell people what action to take?

ULSS Thought Point

Communication is not complete when a message is sent. Communication is complete when the right people understand the message and know what action to take.

12. Technology, Integration, Cybersecurity, and Data Governance

Purpose: This domain focuses on whether safety technology supports real operational workflows. Technology should help schools detect, communicate, decide, act, respond, reunify, recover, and improve.

Detailed Summary

Technology can be a powerful part of school safety, but disconnected technology can create confusion, false confidence, cost burdens, and operational gaps. ULSS does not begin with technology. It begins with the safety function.

A school may have access control, video surveillance, intrusion detection, visitor management, duress alerts, emergency apps, maps, and mass notification. But if each system is managed separately, with different owners, outdated permissions, no testing schedule, and unclear workflows, the school may have tools without capability.

This domain also includes cybersecurity, privacy, and data governance. Safety technologies may store or transmit sensitive data: student information, visitor records, video, emergency contacts, building maps, access logs, staff credentials, BTAM-related documentation, and incident records. These systems must be protected and governed.

Practical Example

A school defines an after-hours forced-door workflow. If a critical exterior door is forced open after hours, the system sends an alert to designated staff, allows authorized camera verification, triggers a response protocol, documents the event, and identifies who contacts law enforcement if needed. The technology supports a defined action sequence.

Hypothetical Scenario

A district purchases a new emergency notification app. Staff download it at the beginning of the year. New staff are not added, former staff are not removed, substitutes are not included, and many users turn off notifications. The app is not connected to PA procedures, radio protocols, or incident command roles.

ULSS Lens / What This Should Prompt

This scenario should prompt the district to ask whether the app is being sustained as a capability or merely owned as a product. The team would need to review user management, notification settings, substitute inclusion, PA/radio/incident command integration, testing, training, privacy, and failure modes.

Cross-Fit Considerations

The table below applies the cross-fit concept to the practical example, hypothetical scenario, and ULSS lens in this domain. It identifies only the connections that matter to the situation being discussed and explains why those connections should be considered.

Applied Cross-Fit Area	Why It Applies to This Example / What Stakeholders Should Consider
Governance and ownership	The emergency app problem is not only technical. Someone must own user lists, testing, procedures, and follow-through after installation.
User permissions and HR connection	Former staff, new staff, substitutes, and role changes affect who receives alerts. HR and IT must be connected to keep access current.
Emergency preparedness workflows	The app must connect to what people are supposed to do during lockdown, secure, shelter, reunification, or other actions. Alerts without action guidance can create confusion.
Communications redundancy	No single app should be the only pathway. PA, radios, phones, text alerts, and manual procedures should be aligned as backups.
Cybersecurity and privacy	Emergency platforms may contain staff data, student-related information, maps, and incident records. Permissions, retention, and vendor access must be governed.
Training and substitutes	Staff must know how to use the platform, and substitutes or temporary users need appropriate access or alternative instructions.
Maintenance and lifecycle	Software renewals, user verification, updates, and testing schedules must be planned so the tool remains a capability over time.
Failure-mode planning	The school should know what happens if the app fails, the network is down, or users do not receive notifications.

Improvement Questions

- What safety function is each technology intended to support?
- Who owns each system operationally and technically?
- Are user permissions reviewed regularly?
- Are cybersecurity and privacy risks reviewed before purchase?
- Does the technology reduce confusion or add complexity?

ULSS Thought Point

Technology should not define the school safety model. The school safety model should define what technology is needed, how it is used, and how it is sustained.

13. Daily Operations, Movement, Transportation, and Operating Modes

Purpose: This domain focuses on how school safety changes throughout the day, week, and year. Schools do not operate in one fixed condition.

Detailed Summary

Operating modes are one of the most important ULSS concepts. Many safety gaps do not appear during normal classroom time. They appear during transitions, special events, after-hours use, transportation movement, athletics, deliveries, substitute-led classrooms, contractor work, field trips, or community activities.

A school may have strong visitor procedures during the regular school day, but weak access control during a weekend tournament. A school may keep doors secure during class time, but prop doors during morning arrival. A school may have communication procedures for administrators, but not for recess supervisors, bus drivers, coaches, or staff outside the building.

Transportation is part of the life safety system. Bus loading, parent drop-off, student parking, pedestrian crossings, special transportation, field trips, athletic travel, and reunification transportation all affect safety.

Practical Example

A school maps its operating modes and discovers that the strongest safety posture exists during the normal classroom day. The weakest periods are arrival, dismissal, athletic events, after-school activities, and evening rentals. The school develops operating-mode procedures for each vulnerable period, identifying doors, supervisors, communications, visitor flow, student accountability, EMS access, and securement.

Hypothetical Scenario

During the school day, all visitors enter through the main office. On Saturday, the school hosts a youth basketball tournament. Multiple exterior doors are unlocked for teams, spectators, officials, concessions, custodial staff, and volunteers. The AED is inside the building, but event volunteers do not know where it is.

ULSS Lens / What This Should Prompt

This scenario should prompt stakeholders to ask whether weekend and event operations have their own safety posture. The school would need to define approved entrances, door monitoring, AED access, EMS routes, communications, volunteer roles, crowd management, and end-of-event securement.

Cross-Fit Considerations

The table below applies the cross-fit concept to the practical example, hypothetical scenario, and ULSS lens in this domain. It identifies only the connections that matter to the situation being discussed and explains why those connections should be considered.

Applied Cross-Fit Area	Why It Applies to This Example / What Stakeholders Should Consider
Event access control	The weekend tournament changes the school's access posture. Approved entrances, door monitoring, and securement responsibilities must be defined for the event.
Athletics and activity staff	Coaches, officials, volunteers, and event workers may be the adults present. They need role-appropriate expectations for emergencies, doors, medical response, and communication.
AED and medical readiness	If event volunteers do not know where the AED is, the school has a life-safety gap. Medical readiness must be included in event operations.

Applied Cross-Fit Area	Why It Applies to This Example / What Stakeholders Should Consider
Communications	Event staff need reliable ways to communicate with administration, custodial staff, EMS, or law enforcement if something happens.
Crowd and visitor management	Spectators and teams create different movement and supervision needs than the school day. Entry, seating, restrooms, and emergency movement should be considered.
Custodial securement	After events, someone must be responsible for locking, checking doors, and restoring the building to the correct security posture.
EMS and responder access	Responders may need different access points during tournaments or evening events. Event plans should identify entrances and routes.
Operating-mode corrective action	The school-day procedure may be strong, but the event mode is weak. ULSS requires a plan specific to how the building is being used at that moment.

Improvement Questions

- Has the school identified its major operating modes?
- Are arrival and dismissal reviewed as safety operations?
- Are after-school, athletic, rental, and summer operations included in safety procedures?
- Are doors used differently during different operating modes?
- Are custodial and maintenance securement procedures clear?

ULSS Thought Point

A school does not have one safety posture. It has many. ULSS helps schools understand how safety changes by time, place, activity, and use.

14. Workforce, Substitute, Volunteer, Contractor, and Community-Use Readiness

Purpose: This domain recognizes that school safety depends on many adults beyond full-time teachers and administrators.

Detailed Summary

Schools are supported by substitutes, coaches, volunteers, contractors, vendors, renters, food service staff, custodians, bus drivers, after-school providers, event staff, and community groups. School safety procedures often assume that trained full-time staff are present, informed, and ready. In reality, schools frequently operate with adults who may not know the building, the students, the procedures, or the safety expectations.

A substitute may not know how to lock a classroom door. A coach may not know how to communicate during a medical emergency. A contractor may prop a door while moving equipment. A volunteer may not understand visitor procedures. A community group may use the building after hours without knowing emergency exits, shelter locations, AED locations, or whom to call.

ULSS does not suggest that every adult needs the same level of training. It does require role-appropriate readiness. People should understand what they are responsible for, what they should not do, how to report concerns, how to communicate, and what actions to take during common emergency conditions.

Practical Example

A school creates a one-page substitute safety guide. It includes emergency actions, classroom door procedures, communication methods, student accountability steps, medical alert basics, where to find help, and what to do if a concern is reported. The guide does not overwhelm the substitute with the entire emergency operations plan. It provides the critical information needed to act safely during the school day.

Hypothetical Scenario

A contractor arrives during the school day to repair equipment. The contractor enters through a side door opened by a staff member and props it while moving tools. Staff nearby assume the contractor is authorized. The contractor assumes the school is monitoring the door.

ULSS Lens / What This Should Prompt

This scenario should prompt the school to ask whether contractors and vendors have a controlled access process. The team would need to define check-in, identification, escort or supervision expectations, door propping rules, emergency awareness, and a school contact responsible for the work area.

Cross-Fit Considerations

The table below applies the cross-fit concept to the practical example, hypothetical scenario, and ULSS lens in this domain. It identifies only the connections that matter to the situation being discussed and explains why those connections should be considered.

Applied Cross-Fit Area	Why It Applies to This Example / What Stakeholders Should Consider
Contractor check-in and identification	The hypothetical begins when a contractor enters through a side door without a controlled process. Check-in and identification confirm authorization and accountability.
Door security expectations	Contractors may prop doors for convenience unless expectations are explicit. Door-use rules must be communicated before work begins.
Facilities oversight	Facilities often coordinates contractor work and must connect access needs with school-day safety procedures.
Front office and visitor management	If contractors arrive during school hours, the front office or designated contact should know who is in the building and why.
Staff assumptions and human factors	Staff nearby assume the contractor is authorized and the contractor assumes the school is monitoring the door. ULSS addresses these assumption gaps with clear process.

Applied Cross-Fit Area	Why It Applies to This Example / What Stakeholders Should Consider
Access control and keys/credentials	If contractors need temporary access, credentials or keys should be issued, limited, tracked, and recovered according to policy.
Emergency awareness	Contractors should know basic emergency actions, whom to contact, and how to avoid interfering with egress, lockdown, or response.
Corrective action after incidents	If contractor access creates a gap, the process should be reviewed, revised, communicated, and spot-checked.

Improvement Questions

- Do substitutes receive usable emergency guidance?
- Do coaches and activity sponsors understand emergency communication, medical response, and securement procedures?
- Are volunteers screened, checked in, and supervised appropriately?
- Are contractors given clear access and door-security expectations?
- Do renters and community groups receive emergency instructions?

ULSS Thought Point

A school safety system is only as strong as the people operating it in that moment. ULSS extends readiness to the adults who may be present when something happens.

15. Response, Reunification, Recovery, and Continuous Improvement

Purpose: This domain focuses on the full incident lifecycle. Response is not the end of school safety.

Detailed Summary

A school emergency does not end when the immediate threat is gone, the fire alarm stops, the lockdown is lifted, or EMS leaves the scene. The aftermath matters. Students may need support. Staff may need support. Families need clear information. Facilities may need restoration. Operations may need to continue elsewhere. Documentation may be needed. Lessons must be captured and acted on.

Response includes first-minute protective action, internal notification, external notification, incident command, law enforcement coordination, fire/EMS coordination, student accountability, staff accountability, medical response, transportation decisions, and parent communication.

Reunification is a major life safety function. It must account for student release, custody concerns, family communication, traffic, transportation, language access, special needs, documentation, emotional distress, and security at the reunification site. Recovery includes mental health support, communication, continuity of operations, facility restoration, grief response when applicable, trauma-informed support, staff wellness, and long-term community confidence.

Practical Example

After a reunification exercise, the school identifies four gaps: parent traffic flow was unclear, student release documentation was slow, staff did not fully understand their roles, and families with language needs did not receive instructions quickly enough. Each gap is assigned to an owner, the plan is updated, and the process is retested.

Hypothetical Scenario

A school experiences a significant threat that results in evacuation. Students are safe, but reunification becomes confusing. Parents arrive at multiple locations. Staff are unsure who has been released. Social media rumors spread faster than official communication. A student with a custody restriction is nearly released to an unauthorized adult.

ULSS Lens / What This Should Prompt

This scenario should prompt stakeholders to ask whether the school is ready for the full incident lifecycle after immediate protective action. The team would need to review reunification sites, student release documentation, custody controls, parent messaging, rumor control, transportation, mental health support, and after-action ownership.

Cross-Fit Considerations

The table below applies the cross-fit concept to the practical example, hypothetical scenario, and ULSS lens in this domain. It identifies only the connections that matter to the situation being discussed and explains why those connections should be considered.

Applied Cross-Fit Area	Why It Applies to This Example / What Stakeholders Should Consider
Student accountability	The reunification hypothetical shows staff uncertainty about who has been released. Accountability procedures must be clear, documented, and practiced.
Custody verification	A student with a custody restriction is nearly released to an unauthorized adult. Reunification procedures must include custody documentation and release controls.
Parent and family communication	Parents arriving at multiple locations and rumors spreading show the need for clear, timely, accessible messages before and during reunification.
Transportation and traffic flow	Reunification can fail if traffic blocks access or families are directed poorly. Transportation and law enforcement partners should help plan movement.
Language access and special populations	Families and students with communication, language, mobility, medical, or support needs may require additional reunification procedures.
Mental health and recovery	After a significant threat, students and staff may need support. Recovery planning should begin before the incident ends.
Media and community trust	Rumors can move faster than official information. A public information process helps protect accuracy and confidence.
After-action and corrective action	ULSS requires the school to review what happened, assign owners, fix gaps, and retest the reunification process.

Improvement Questions

- Are response roles clear during the first minutes of an incident?
- Is reunification planned, practiced, and understood?
- Are custody concerns included in reunification procedures?
- Are mental health recovery and staff wellness planned?
- Are after-action reviews conducted after drills, incidents, and near misses?

ULSS Thought Point

The incident is not over when the immediate danger ends. ULSS continues through accountability, reunification, recovery, learning, correction, and restored confidence.

16. Sustainment, Funding, Maintenance, and Lifecycle Management

Purpose: This domain ensures that safety improvements remain functional over time. School safety cannot depend on one-time purchases, one-time grants, one-time trainings, or one-time assessments.

Detailed Summary

Sustainment is what keeps a safety system from quietly degrading. Every safety function requires long-term ownership. Doors need inspection and repair. Radios need batteries, testing, and replacement. Cameras need maintenance and software support. Access control requires credential management and programming updates. Visitor systems need user updates and procedures. Emergency apps require user maintenance and testing. AEDs require inspection. Emergency supplies expire. Training must be refreshed. Plans must be updated. Staff turnover must be addressed. Corrective actions must be tracked.

Many schools receive funding to install equipment but struggle to maintain it. A grant may pay for cameras but not long-term software renewal. A project may install access control but not fund future repairs. A training may be effective in year one but fade as staff change. A door audit may identify issues that remain unresolved because no budget path exists.

ULSS treats funding, maintenance, and lifecycle management as readiness functions. Sustainability should be considered before implementation, not after systems begin to fail.

Practical Example

A district creates a safety lifecycle schedule. The schedule identifies each major safety system, the responsible department, testing frequency, maintenance needs, expected replacement cycle, funding source, and documentation process. The schedule includes doors, access control, cameras, radios, visitor management, emergency apps, AEDs, emergency supplies, key systems, credentials, maps, and training refreshers.

Hypothetical Scenario

A school receives grant funding for video surveillance. The cameras are installed and initially work well. Three years later, several cameras are offline, software renewals are unclear, storage capacity is limited, and no one knows whether replacement costs belong to IT, facilities, safety, or the school budget. The school purchased equipment but did not sustain capability.

ULSS Lens / What This Should Prompt

This scenario should prompt leadership to ask whether grant-funded improvements have a lifecycle owner and funding path. The team would need to review software renewals, maintenance, storage, permissions, replacement cycles, responsible departments, and how capability will be verified over time.

Cross-Fit Considerations

The table below applies the cross-fit concept to the practical example, hypothetical scenario, and ULSS lens in this domain. It identifies only the connections that matter to the situation being discussed and explains why those connections should be considered.

Applied Cross-Fit Area	Why It Applies to This Example / What Stakeholders Should Consider
IT and system maintenance	Offline cameras and unclear software renewals show that the system needs technical ownership after installation.
Facilities and physical environment	Camera usefulness can change when buildings, entrances, lighting, or construction conditions change. Facilities must be part of lifecycle review.
Funding and lifecycle costs	The grant paid for installation, but sustainment requires renewals, storage, repairs, replacement, and staff time. These costs must be planned before purchase.
Governance and ownership	The hypothetical shows no one knows whether IT, facilities, safety, or the school budget owns the system. Governance defines responsibility before the system degrades.
Cybersecurity and permissions	Video systems require access control, user review, vendor permissions, retention rules, and data protection throughout their lifecycle.
Operational workflow	Cameras should support a defined safety purpose, such as after-hours verification, visitor flow, or incident review. If the purpose is unclear, maintenance priorities become unclear.
Vendor support and service agreements	Sustainment may require vendor response times, warranties, software support, and replacement planning. These expectations should be defined.
Proof-of-life testing	Camera status, views, storage, and access should be tested regularly. A camera that is installed but offline is not a reliable capability.

Improvement Questions

- Who owns each safety system after installation?
- Are maintenance responsibilities documented?
- Are software renewals and licenses budgeted?
- Are replacement cycles identified?
- Are safety systems tested on a schedule?
- Are grants written with sustainment in mind?

ULSS Thought Point

A safety improvement is not complete when it is installed. It is complete only when it is owned, maintained, tested, funded, and sustained over time.

Part Five: Cross-Cutting ULSS Requirements

The readiness domains organize the work. The cross-cutting requirements make the work reliable, lawful, inclusive, realistic, and sustainable. These requirements should appear throughout every ULSS assessment, plan, project, training, grant request, vendor discussion, and after-action review.

Code Compliance and Life Safety

All safety measures must support fire code, building code, accessibility, free egress, emergency responder access, and lawful operation. Security cannot create a new life-safety hazard.

Example: A school considering a classroom barricade device reviews whether the device affects free egress, fire code, ADA, emergency access, unauthorized use, and staff usability.

All-Hazards Thinking

ULSS is not limited to active assailant concerns. It includes medical emergencies, fires, weather, utility failures, cyber incidents, custody disputes, fights, bullying, self-harm, transportation incidents, community violence, after-hours events, and reunification challenges.

Example: A school safety team reviews lockdown, severe weather sheltering, AED response, fire evacuation, reunification, and bus incidents as part of one readiness cycle.

Accessibility and Individual Needs

Safety plans must include students and staff with disabilities, medically fragile students, young children, English learners, substitutes, visitors, contractors, and others who may need support during emergency action.

Example: A student using a wheelchair has an evacuation support plan with assigned backup staff and reunification considerations.

Human Factors and Practical Drift

Systems drift. Staff change. Doors get propped. Radios go uncharged. Keys are shared. Credentials are not removed. Procedures fade. People normalize shortcuts.

Example: A door alarm sounds so often that staff ignore it. ULSS treats alarm fatigue as a safety risk and reviews the workflow.

Proof-of-Life Testing

Schools must verify that systems and procedures work. This includes doors, locks, radios, alerts, cameras, access control, intercoms, PA systems, visitor procedures, maps, emergency apps, and reunification plans.

Example: A panic button is tested and found to route to an outdated notification list. The list is corrected and retested.

Operating Modes

Schools operate differently during arrival, dismissal, lunch, recess, athletics, after-school programs, evening events, rentals, summer programs, field trips, deliveries, maintenance, and emergencies.

Example: A school discovers its visitor process works during the day but not during evening athletics and creates an event operating plan.

Interoperability and Connected Workflows

Access control, video, duress, radios, maps, PA, mass notification, visitor management, fire alarm, intrusion, and responder coordination should support connected workflows.

Example: A forced-door alert after hours triggers notification, camera review, a response protocol, and documentation instead of simply generating an alarm.

Cybersecurity, Privacy, and Data Governance

Modern safety systems create sensitive data. Schools must manage permissions, retention, video access, visitor data, student information, vendor access, cloud systems, emergency maps, and AI-supported tools where applicable.

Example: A former employee still has access to an emergency app. ULSS treats permission removal as a safety function.

Maintenance and Lifecycle Management

Every system must be maintained, inspected, updated, repaired, trained, and eventually replaced. A safety improvement that cannot be sustained can become a false sense of security.

Example: A camera project includes software renewals, replacement planning, user permission review, maintenance responsibilities, and testing.

Corrective Action Ownership

Every identified gap should have an owner, timeline, priority, funding path, and verification step. Findings only matter if they become action.

Example: A drill reveals that the PA cannot be heard in the gym. The finding is assigned to facilities/IT, corrected, and retested.

Community Trust and Transparency

Schools should communicate safety work in a way that builds confidence without exposing sensitive security details.

Example: A district reports that it is improving reunification, door verification, communications, and student support without publishing sensitive vulnerabilities.

Part Six: Implementing ULSS Without Overwhelming the School

The Unified Life Safety System is a broad model, but it should not feel impossible to begin. Schools do not need to fix everything at once. They need a practical way to organize the work, identify what matters most, assign ownership, and improve over time.

ULSS should not begin with a purchase. It should begin with a conversation. It should begin with the right people looking honestly at how the school operates, what is working, what is assumed, what is drifting, and what needs attention.

1. Establish the ULSS Safety Team

Identify who should guide the work. Include leadership, daily operations, facilities, emergency preparedness, student support, special education or individual needs, health/medical response, communications, IT/cybersecurity, transportation where applicable, and response partners where appropriate.

2. Map the Existing Safety System

Identify what already exists: EOPs, MTSS, BTAM, student services, health procedures, access control, doors, cameras, radios, visitor management, transportation, reunification, and first responder coordination.

3. Review the Readiness Domains

Use the domains as a practical discussion guide. Ask what exists, who owns it, whether it is documented, practiced, maintained, tested, and improved.

4. Identify Operating Modes

Review arrival, dismissal, lunch, recess, athletics, after-school programs, rentals, summer programs, field trips, deliveries, maintenance, and emergency conditions.

5. Verify Critical Life Safety Functions

Test doors, radios, PA/intercom, alerts, access permissions, cameras, visitor procedures, AEDs, emergency medication, reunification procedures, maps, and substitute guidance.

6. Prioritize by Risk, Not Pressure

Prioritize based on life safety, code, likelihood, consequence, individual needs, operating modes, sustainment, and whether the fix creates new risks.

7. Create a Corrective Action Matrix

Turn findings into owned action. Each gap should have a domain, priority, owner, support needed, timeline, funding path, status, and verification step.

8. Identify Quick Wins and Long-Term Needs

Quick wins build momentum. Long-term planning builds capability. Both matter.

9. Align Funding With the Full Lifecycle

Before buying or requesting funds, ask who owns it, who maintains it, what training is required, what data is created, what cyber review is needed, what ongoing costs exist, and how it will be tested.

10. Communicate the Work Responsibly

Build community trust without exposing sensitive details. Share that safety is being managed as an ongoing responsibility.

11. Build a Review Cycle

Use monthly, quarterly, annual, and after-action review cycles to keep the system alive.

12. Start Small, Then Mature

Schools should not wait until they can do everything before they do something. Start with ownership, operating modes, verification, and corrective action.

Sample First 90 Days of ULSS Implementation

Timeframe	Focus	Suggested Actions
Days 1-30	Organize and Map	Identify safety team; review current documents; map systems and owners; identify operating modes; start corrective action matrix; identify immediate life-safety issues.
Days 31-60	Verify and Prioritize	Conduct exterior door checks; test radios and key communication systems; review access permissions and key control; review substitute emergency guidance; check AED/emergency medication readiness; review MTSS/BTAM connection points.
Days 61-90	Improve and Sustain	Complete quick-win corrections; create longer-term priorities; review funding and grant opportunities; update training needs; communicate general progress to leadership; schedule future verification; plan tabletop, drill, or reunification exercise.

Part Seven: ULSS Readiness Questions Checklist

This checklist is designed to help school leaders, safety teams, facilities staff, student services, emergency managers, first responders, board members, and community partners ask better questions. The goal is not simply to answer yes or no. The goal is to understand what exists, who owns it, whether it has been trained and tested, whether it is maintained, and what action should happen next.

1. Governance, Leadership, and Shared Ownership

Core question: Who is responsible for leading, maintaining, funding, training, verifying, and improving the safety system?

- Who owns school safety at the district and building levels?
- Is there a multidisciplinary safety team?
- Are findings from assessments, drills, and incidents assigned to specific owners?
- Are safety decisions connected to funding, maintenance, training, and lifecycle planning?
- Are vendors supporting the school's safety model, or are products driving the model?

2. Risk, Threat, Hazard, and Vulnerability Understanding

Core question: What do we know, what are we assuming, and what has been verified under real conditions?

- What are the most realistic risks for this school or district?
- Are risks reviewed by operating mode, not just during the normal school day?
- Are communication systems tested in all areas of the campus?
- Are student support, MTSS, BTAM, and climate data considered part of the risk picture?
- What is currently being assumed but has not been verified?

3. MTSS, Student Support, and Prevention

Core question: How does the school identify student needs early and provide support before concern escalates?

- Is MTSS included in school safety discussions?
- Are attendance, behavior, academic, and wellness concerns reviewed together?
- Are there clear pathways from staff concern to student support?
- Is there a clear connection between MTSS and BTAM when concerns escalate?
- Are interventions monitored for effectiveness?

4. BTAM and Concern Management

Core question: How does the school identify, assess, manage, and follow up on concerning behavior?

- Does the school have a trained BTAM team?
- Are staff trained on how to report concerning behavior?
- Is information gathered from multiple sources before decisions are made?
- Are support and intervention considered along with protective action?
- Are cases monitored after the initial

5. School Climate, Culture, and Trusted Reporting

Core question: Will students, staff, and families speak up before harm occurs?

- Do students know how to report concerns?
- Do staff know how to receive and route concerns?
- Are reporting pathways clear, trusted, and accessible?
- Are reports connected to MTSS, BTAM, counseling, or administration when needed?
- Does the school culture support help-seeking before crisis?

6. Student Services, Special Education, Health, and Individual Support Readiness

Core question: Does the safety system protect the whole school community, including those whose needs may not fit a standard procedure?

- Are individual student needs considered in emergency planning?
- Are students with mobility, medical, sensory, communication, cognitive, emotional, or behavioral needs accounted for?
- Are substitute teachers given role-appropriate information?
- Are transportation and reunification plans realistic for students with individual needs?
- Are privacy rules respected while still supporting safety?

7. Health, Medical, and Behavioral Health Readiness

Core question: Can the school identify and respond to medical and behavioral health needs quickly, lawfully, and compassionately?

- Are AEDs accessible, marked, maintained, and known by staff?
- Are emergency medications accessible under proper procedures?
- Are medical procedures clear for athletics, field trips, buses, and after-hours events?
- Are behavioral health crisis procedures clear?
- Are mental health supports available after incidents?

8. Emergency Preparedness and Incident Management

Core question: Can people perform the plan during real school conditions?

- Is the emergency operations plan current and usable?
- Are roles clear for administrators, teachers, support staff, substitutes, transportation, and district leadership?
- Are drills used to verify readiness, not just meet requirements?
- Are after-hours events, athletics, and field trips included?
- Are corrective actions documented, assigned, and retested?

9. Physical Environment and Protective Design

Core question: Does the physical environment support safe daily operations, emergency action, lawful egress, and responder access?

- Does the campus layout support supervision and safe movement?

- Are arrival and dismissal areas reviewed as life safety environments?
- Are exterior areas adequately lit and visible?
- Are community-use and after-hours spaces reviewed separately from school-day operations?
- Are facility findings assigned, funded, corrected, and retested?

10. Openings, Access, Egress, and Door Security

Core question: Does the full opening support security, life safety, code compliance, and real daily use?

- Do exterior doors close, latch, lock, and secure consistently?
- Are classroom doors able to support lockdown while maintaining free egress?
- Are fire-rated openings maintained properly?
- Are key systems and credentials controlled?
- Are door fixes retested after repair?

11. Communications and Shared Operating Picture

Core question: Can the right people receive the right information quickly enough to act?

- What are the primary and backup communication methods?
- Are radios tested in all areas where students and staff may be located?
- Can substitutes receive emergency instructions?
- Are parent messages coordinated with student accountability and verified facts?
- Do communication systems tell people what action to take?

12. Technology, Integration, Cybersecurity, and Data Governance

Core question: Do technology systems support detection, communication, decision-making, protective action, response, and recovery?

- What safety function is each technology intended to support?
- Who owns each system operationally and technically?
- Are user permissions reviewed regularly?
- Are cybersecurity and privacy risks reviewed before purchase?
- Does the technology reduce confusion or add complexity?

13. Daily Operations, Movement, Transportation, and Operating Modes

Core question: Does the safety system work during the way the school is actually being used at that moment?

- Has the school identified its major operating modes?
- Are arrival and dismissal reviewed as safety operations?
- Are after-school, athletic, rental, and summer operations included in safety procedures?
- Are doors used differently during different operating modes?
- Are custodial and maintenance securement procedures clear?

14. Workforce, Substitute, Volunteer, Contractor, and Community-Use Readiness

Core question: Do all adults who operate in the school environment understand their safety responsibilities at the level appropriate to their role?

- Do substitutes receive usable emergency guidance?
- Do coaches and activity sponsors understand emergency communication, medical response, and securement procedures?
- Are volunteers screened, checked in, and supervised appropriately?
- Are contractors given clear access and door-security expectations?
- Do renters and community groups receive emergency instructions?

15. Response, Reunification, Recovery, and Continuous Improvement

Core question: How does the school stabilize, reunify, recover, learn, and improve?

- Are response roles clear during the first minutes of an incident?
- Is reunification planned, practiced, and understood?
- Are custody concerns included in reunification procedures?
- Are mental health recovery and staff wellness planned?
- Are after-action reviews conducted after drills, incidents, and near misses?

16. Sustainment, Funding, Maintenance, and Lifecycle Management

Core question: Can the school sustain the safety capability after the purchase, grant, installation, or initial training is complete?

- Who owns each safety system after installation?
- Are maintenance responsibilities documented?
- Are software renewals and licenses budgeted?
- Are replacement cycles identified?
- Are safety systems tested on a schedule?
- Are grants written with sustainment in mind?

Cross-Cutting Verification Questions

- Life safety and code: Does this safety function support fire code, building code, accessibility, free egress, and responder access? Could it create a new hazard?
- Accessibility and individual needs: Does this work for students, staff, and visitors with mobility, sensory, medical, communication, cognitive, emotional, or behavioral needs?
- Operating modes: Does this work during arrival, dismissal, lunch, recess, athletics, rentals, after-hours, summer programs, field trips, and emergencies?
- Human factors: Where might people bypass, forget, ignore, misunderstand, or normalize risk?
- Proof-of-life testing: Has this been tested? What was found? What was corrected? Was it retested?
- Cybersecurity and privacy: What sensitive data is created, stored, or shared? Who has access? What happens if the system is unavailable?

- Maintenance and lifecycle: Who maintains this? What does it cost over time? What happens when it breaks, expires, or needs replacement?
- Corrective action: If a gap is found, who owns the fix? What is the timeline? How will completion be verified?
- Community trust: What can be communicated to staff, families, boards, and partners, and what should remain protected?

Simple ULSS Meeting Prompt

What safety function are we reviewing today, how does it actually work under real school conditions, who owns it, when was it last tested, what gaps exist, and what action needs to happen next?

Part Eight: ULSS Corrective Action Matrix

A Unified Life Safety System is only as strong as its follow-through. Assessments, drills, audits, walkthroughs, tabletop exercises, incident reviews, and staff observations can all reveal important findings. A finding does not improve safety by itself. A finding becomes meaningful only when it is assigned, corrected, documented, and verified.

Corrective Action Purpose

Identify the gap. Assign the owner. Complete the action. Verify the fix. Sustain the improvement.

Recommended Matrix Fields

- Finding or gap
- Related ULSS domain
- Risk priority
- Recommended action
- Owner
- Support needed
- Timeline
- Funding or resource need
- Status
- Verification step
- Date verified
- Notes

Sample Corrective Action Matrix

Finding or Gap	Domain	Priority	Recommended Action	Owner	Verification Step
Exterior Door 12 does not consistently latch.	Openings/Door Security	High	Inspect closer, latch, strike, frame alignment, and door condition. Repair and retest.	Facilities	Door closes, latches, locks, and secures during follow-up checks.

Finding or Gap	Domain	Priority	Recommended Action	Owner	Verification Step
Staff are propping a side door during morning arrival.	Operating Modes	High	Review arrival procedure, assign supervision, communicate expectations, and monitor compliance.	Principal	Door remains supervised and unpropped during arrival spot checks.
Radio coverage is weak in the gym and portable classrooms.	Communications	High	Conduct radio coverage test, identify technical or procedural fixes, and establish backup communication.	Operations/Safety	Successful radio test from gym, portables, playground, and office.
Substitute teachers do not consistently receive emergency guidance.	Workforce Readiness	Moderate	Create one-page substitute safety guide and require front office distribution.	School Admin	Random substitute check confirms guide was received and understood.
AED near the gym is not clearly marked for after-hours users.	Medical Readiness	High	Improve AED signage and include AED location in event safety instructions.	Athletic Director	Event staff can identify AED location during spot check.
Emergency app user list includes former employees.	Technology/Data Governance	High	Review user permissions, remove inactive users, and create recurring access review.	IT Director	Current user list matches active employee roster.
Reunification plan does not fully address custody restrictions.	Reunification/Recovery	Critical	Review student release procedures, custody documentation access, staff roles, and privacy safeguards.	Student Services	Tabletop exercise confirms custody verification process.
Evening athletic events use multiple unlocked entrances.	Operating Modes/Event Safety	High	Create event access plan identifying approved entrances, door monitors, EMS access, and securement responsibilities.	Athletic Director	Event walkthrough confirms approved entrances are monitored.
Visitor management does not account for contractor access during school hours.	Contractor Readiness	Moderate	Establish contractor check-in, identification, access, escort, and door-security expectations.	Facilities	Contractor spot check confirms procedure is followed.
PA/intercom message cannot be heard clearly in cafeteria during lunch.	Communications	High	Test PA audibility, adjust equipment or procedures, and identify backup communication.	IT/Facilities	PA test confirms message is audible during lunch conditions.
Emergency plans for medically fragile students are not reviewed for field trips.	Student Services/Health	High	Update field trip planning to include medical needs, medication access, transportation, and emergency contacts.	Nurse	Field trip checklist includes medical readiness review.
Door-position alerts are generated, but no one is assigned to respond after hours.	Technology/Door Security	High	Define alert recipients, escalation procedure, response expectations, and documentation process.	Safety Director	After-hours alert test confirms notification and response workflow.
Severe weather shelter plan does not include outdoor recess areas.	Emergency Preparedness	Moderate	Update shelter procedure for playground, PE, and outdoor supervision locations.	Principal	Drill confirms outdoor staff receive alert and move students properly.
Access credentials are not reviewed on a recurring schedule.	Technology/Data Governance	Moderate	Establish quarterly credential review with HR, IT, and facilities.	IT Director	Quarterly credential review completed and documented.
Reunification traffic flow has not been tested with transportation and law enforcement.	Reunification	High	Conduct tabletop or functional exercise focused on traffic, buses, parent arrival, and emergency access.	Safety Director	Exercise completed with after-action findings and updates.

Avoiding Common Corrective Action Failures

- No owner: Every finding must have a named owner or department.
- No timeline: Every finding should have a timeline based on risk.

- No verification: Every finding should include a verification step.
- No funding path: Each finding should note whether it needs maintenance funds, operational funds, capital funds, grant support, or vendor support.
- No sustainment: Recurring checks, training, maintenance, or review cycles should be added where needed.
- Too many priorities: Critical and high items should be limited to issues that truly require prompt attention.

Part Nine: ULSS Maturity Model and Readiness Dashboard

The Unified Life Safety System is designed to help schools improve over time. It should not be used as a punitive scorecard, a public ranking system, or a way to shame schools for gaps tied to funding, staffing, facility age, community context, or operational complexity. The purpose is to help schools understand where they are, where they are improving, and what needs attention next.

Score	Maturity Level	Meaning
1	Emerging	Some pieces exist, but ownership, documentation, training, testing, maintenance, or follow-through may be inconsistent.
2	Developing	The school has begun organizing the safety function. Owners are being identified, procedures are being documented, and gaps are being recognized.
3	Operational	The safety function is documented, assigned, trained, and generally reliable under normal conditions.
4	Sustained	The safety function is maintained over time through recurring training, testing, lifecycle planning, budget support, and documented follow-through.
5	Continuously Improving	The safety function is mature, sustained, and actively improved using data, drills, incidents, near misses, assessments, stakeholder feedback, and changing conditions.

Confidence Level

Confidence	Meaning
Assumed	The school believes the function exists or works, but it has not recently verified it.
Documented	The school has written procedures, records, or documentation, but limited recent testing.
Tested	The school has tested the function through a drill, audit, tabletop, inspection, or system check.
Verified	The school tested the function, identified gaps, corrected them, and confirmed the correction worked.

Sample Readiness Dashboard

Readiness Area	Maturity	Risk	Trend	Leadership Summary Language
Governance	3	Moderate	Improving	Safety roles and corrective action tracking are being strengthened.
Door Security	2	High	Improving	Exterior door verification and repair tracking are current priorities.
Emergency Communications	3	High	Stable	Communication systems are being tested and coverage gaps reviewed.

Readiness Area	Maturity	Risk	Trend	Leadership Summary Language
MTSS/BTAM	3	Moderate	Improving	Student support and concern-management pathways are being aligned.
Medical Readiness	2	High	Improving	AED awareness and after-hours medical procedures are being reviewed.
Reunification	2	High	Developing	Reunification planning and family communication procedures are being strengthened.
Sustainment	1	Moderate	Developing	Lifecycle planning for safety systems is being developed.

A low score is not failure. A low score may mean the school has honestly identified a gap. The danger is not a low score. The danger is assuming a higher level of readiness than actually exists.

Part Ten: Specialized Add-On Modules

The main readiness domains provide the core model, but some school environments or functions need deeper treatment. These add-on modules can be developed or used as needed depending on school type, risk, and operating reality.

Add-On Module	Focus
Athletics and Event Safety	Games, practices, tournaments, spectators, EMS access, AEDs, parking, crowd management, weather, locker rooms, concessions, and after-hours access.
Early Childhood and Childcare Safety	Young children, supervision ratios, developmentally appropriate drills, stroller evacuation, family reunification, and communication needs.
Special Education and Individualized Emergency Planning	IEPs, 504 plans, mobility needs, sensory needs, communication needs, behavioral needs, medical supports, and reunification considerations.
Medical Readiness and Emergency Health Planning	AEDs, emergency medications, allergies, seizures, diabetes, overdose response where applicable, EMS access, and athletic medical response.
Reunification and Family Communication	Student release, custody verification, traffic flow, parent messaging, language access, special needs, documentation, and recovery.
Door Security and Openings Verification	Doors, frames, latches, locks, closers, hinges, glass, keys, access control, fire code, ADA, lockdown, egress, and responder access.
Access Control and Credential Governance	Credential issuance, user roles, permissions, key control, visitor access, after-hours use, former staff removal, and access reviews.
Substitute and Temporary Staff Readiness	One-page guides, emergency actions, classroom door procedures, communication methods, student accountability, and reporting expectations.
Contractor and Construction-Phase Safety	Temporary entrances, blocked exits, contractor access, changed traffic flow, utility impacts, maps, and staff communication.
Field Trip and Off-Site Activity Safety	Medical needs, communication, transportation, emergency contacts, accountability, weather, reunification, and parent notification.
Transportation and Dismissal Safety	Bus loops, parent pickup, student parking, pedestrian flow, specialized transportation, traffic control, and emergency communication.
Cybersecurity and Safety Technology Governance	Permissions, cloud systems, vendor access, video data, visitor data, mapping data, emergency apps, software renewals, and system failure planning.
School Board Safety Governance	Board-level oversight, funding, policy, risk communication, executive summaries, and responsible public transparency.
Vendor and Product Evaluation	Operational fit, code compliance, interoperability, cybersecurity, privacy, lifecycle costs, training, maintenance, and evidence of effectiveness.
Rural, Remote, Tribal, Private, Faith-Based, and Small-School Adaptation	Limited staffing, delayed responder arrival, community-use overlap, funding constraints, local partnerships, and right-sized readiness.
Staff Wellness and Post-Incident Support	Staff recovery, crisis fatigue, post-incident support, leadership communication, substitute coverage, counseling, and long-term resilience.

Part Eleven: Sample Templates

These templates are intended as starting points. They should be adapted to local policy, staffing, law, code, and operational reality.

ULSS Safety Team Roster

Field	Notes / Local Information
Name	
Role	
Department	
Safety responsibility	
Contact	
Backup	
Meeting cadence	

Operating Mode Matrix

Field	Notes / Local Information
Operating mode	
Doors used	
Supervision	
Visitor process	
Communication method	
Medical response	
Emergency action considerations	
Securement responsibility	

Door Verification Form

Field	Notes / Local Information
Door number	
Location	
Closes	
Latches	
Locks	
Free egress	
Code concern	
Repair needed	
Owner	
Date verified	

Communication Test Log

Field	Notes / Local Information
System tested	
Location	
Result	
Gap	
Owner	
Correction	
Retest date	

Substitute Safety Guide

Field	Notes / Local Information
Emergency actions	
Door procedure	
Communication method	
Student accountability	
Medical alert basics	
Concern reporting	
Who to contact	

Event Safety Planning Form

Field	Notes / Local Information
Event	
Approved entrances	
Door monitors	
AED location	
EMS access	
Weather plan	
Crowd management	
Communication	
Securement	

Student Individual Support Safety Planning Prompt

Field	Notes / Local Information
Mobility	
Medical	
Sensory	
Communication	

Field	Notes / Local Information
Behavioral	
Transportation	
Reunification	
Privacy considerations	

Technology Workflow Review

Field	Notes / Local Information
System purpose	
Owner	
Users	
Permissions	
Data	
Testing	
Backup	
Lifecycle	
Cybersecurity	

Glossary

Term	Meaning
ULSS	Unified Life Safety System. A school safety operating model that connects prevention, protection, preparedness, response, recovery, and sustainment.
MTSS	Multi-Tiered System of Supports. A framework for organizing academic, behavioral, social-emotional, attendance, and wellness supports.
BTAM	Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management. A structured process for identifying, assessing, managing, and monitoring concerning behavior.
Operating Mode	A specific condition or use of the school, such as arrival, dismissal, lunch, athletics, after-hours events, rentals, summer programs, field trips, maintenance, or emergencies.
Proof-of-Life Testing	Verification that a system, procedure, or safety function actually works under realistic conditions.
Practical Drift	The gradual weakening of procedures or systems over time due to habits, staff changes, workarounds, maintenance issues, or normalization of risk.
Full Opening	The complete door system, including door, frame, hinges, closer, latch, lock, strike, glass, key cylinder, reader, electrified hardware, monitoring, egress, code compliance, and user behavior.
Shared Operating Picture	A common understanding among the right people of what is happening, what actions are needed, and who is responsible.
Corrective Action	A documented step to address a finding or gap, assigned to an owner with a timeline and verification method.
Sustainment	The ongoing maintenance, funding, training, testing, updating, and replacement needed to keep a safety capability functional over time.

Closing Call to Action

The Unified Life Safety System is a guide for helping schools see the whole picture. It honors the complexity of schools. It respects the responsibility of school leaders. It connects the work already being done. It helps schools move from disconnected efforts to a unified life safety system.

The closing message of ULSS is simple but important: every stakeholder matters. School safety does not improve when people are placed into separate lanes and left to solve problems alone. It improves when people understand how their work connects to the work of others.

ULSS should inspire schools to take down silos without taking away professional expertise. Each role has a lane, but those lanes must connect. A counselor does not need to become a security director. A custodian does not need to become an emergency manager. A vendor does not need to run the school safety program. A student does not need to carry adult responsibility. But each person may see, know, maintain, support, report, or influence something that matters to life safety.

The strongest school safety systems are built on respect. Respect for the teacher managing the classroom. Respect for the custodian who knows the building after everyone leaves. Respect for the nurse who understands medical risk. Respect for the counselor, school psychologist, and social worker who understand student needs. Respect for the security director, SRO, administrator, and responder partners who help manage threat and emergency conditions. Respect for the parent who knows the child. Respect for the student who knows the culture. Respect for the vendor or service provider who supports a system that must work when needed.

ULSS is not about making every person responsible for everything. It is about making sure no important life safety function is left disconnected, unsupported, or assumed.

Every Role Has a Piece of the Life Safety Picture

Schools are living communities. People move through them, learn in them, eat in them, compete in them, gather in them, work in them, heal in them, and sometimes face crisis in them. Because schools are human systems, life safety depends on more than hardware, policies, or emergency language. It depends on people seeing the value of their role and the value of the roles around them.

The following stakeholder guide is not a hierarchy. It is a reminder that ULSS works best when every stakeholder understands what they contribute, what they need from others, and how their work connects to prevention, preparedness, protection, response, recovery, and sustainment.

Typical School Stakeholders and Their ULSS Connection

The table below can be used as a closing reflection, a training prompt, or a stakeholder discussion tool. It is designed to show that every role has value and every role connects to the broader life safety system.

Internal Leadership, Student Support, and Operations

Stakeholder	Why This Role Matters	ULSS Connection / Call to Action
Superintendent and District Leadership	District leaders set the tone for whether safety is treated as a connected operating responsibility or a set of isolated projects. They align departments, support funding, authorize priorities, and help ensure that safety is sustained beyond one initiative, one grant, or one person.	Use ULSS to bring cabinet-level functions together: instruction, operations, student services, IT, communications, transportation, facilities, and safety. Ask whether known gaps have owners, timelines, resources, and verification steps.
School Board	The board supports governance, policy, funding, and public trust. Board members do not need sensitive tactical details, but they should understand whether the district has a responsible process for managing safety and sustaining improvements.	Use ULSS to ask better oversight questions: Are we funding the lifecycle? Are corrective actions tracked? Are prevention and protection both included? Are we supporting the whole school community?
Principal and Building Administrators	Building leaders live where policy meets reality. They see arrival, dismissal, lunch, recess, substitute coverage, student concerns, parent concerns, drills, discipline, staff culture, and daily operating pressures.	Use ULSS to connect staff expectations, student support, door procedures, emergency practice, visitor management, communications, and corrective actions at the building level.
Security Director or Safety/Security Leader	The security or safety leader often sees the connections between facilities, access control, emergency preparedness, technology, responders, drills, and corrective actions. This role helps the system see itself.	Use ULSS to coordinate rather than control everything. Bring the right stakeholders together, verify systems, support risk-based priorities, and keep findings from fading.
SRO or Law Enforcement Partner	The SRO or law enforcement partner may understand threat response, legal concerns, community context, student relationships, and responder coordination. Their role is important, but they are not the entire safety system.	Use ULSS to connect law enforcement knowledge with school climate, BTAM, emergency preparedness, access, reunification, and daily school operations while respecting school-based roles and student support systems.
Fire/EMS and Emergency Management Partners	Fire, EMS, and emergency management partners bring life safety, medical response, incident command, evacuation, sheltering, reunification, continuity, and community response expertise.	Use ULSS to connect responder planning to real school conditions: maps, access points, radio pathways, AED locations, special populations, after-hours events, and reunification traffic flow.
Counselors	Counselors often see student stress, peer conflict, family	Use ULSS to connect counseling to MTSS, BTAM, trusted reporting,

	concerns, grief, bullying, mental health needs, and early signs of escalation. They help schools respond with care before situations become crises.	suicide prevention, re-entry planning, recovery, and family engagement.
School Psychologists	School psychologists understand student behavior, learning needs, crisis response, threat assessment support, disability-related considerations, and the emotional impact of incidents on students and staff.	Use ULSS to connect psychological safety, special education, MTSS, BTAM, behavioral health, crisis support, and recovery planning.
School Social Workers	Social workers often understand family systems, housing instability, trauma, community resources, attendance concerns, custody complexities, and barriers that affect student safety and wellbeing.	Use ULSS to connect family support, McKinney-Vento, foster care, custody concerns, community services, MTSS, recovery, and reunification planning.
School Nurse and Health Services	The nurse understands medical needs, emergency medications, AED readiness, allergies, seizures, diabetes, medically fragile students, injury response, and health-related emergency planning.	Use ULSS to connect medical readiness to classrooms, athletics, field trips, buses, after-hours events, special education, EMS access, and reunification.

Instructional, Facilities, Technology, Transportation, and Program Roles

Stakeholder	Why This Role Matters	ULSS Connection / Call to Action
Special Education and 504 Teams	These teams understand students whose mobility, sensory, communication, cognitive, behavioral, emotional, or medical needs may require adaptations during emergency actions.	Use ULSS to ensure evacuation, lockdown, shelter, transportation, communication, and reunification plans are realistic for the whole school community while protecting privacy.
Teachers	Teachers are closest to students throughout the day. They see changes in behavior, classroom culture, peer conflict, student needs, door function, drill problems, and emergency procedure gaps.	Use ULSS to connect classroom reality to reporting pathways, MTSS, BTAM, emergency actions, accountability, communication, and corrective action.
Front Office Staff	Front office staff are often the daily gateway for visitors, families, deliveries, custody questions, student release, phone calls, and emergency messaging.	Use ULSS to connect visitor management, custody documentation, contractor access, parent communication, emergency calls, student release, and reunification documentation.

Facilities, Maintenance, and Operations	Facilities and operations teams maintain the built environment. Doors, locks, closers, lighting, gates, fire/life-safety systems, utilities, work orders, and construction conditions all affect readiness.	Use ULSS to treat maintenance as life safety. Connect work orders, door audits, egress, ADA, fire code, access control, securement, and lifecycle planning.
Custodians	Custodians often know the building in ways others do not. They see after-hours use, unsecured doors, leaks, broken hardware, unusual conditions, and areas that are used differently than expected.	Use ULSS to include custodial knowledge in securement procedures, after-hours readiness, door checks, event cleanup, building condition reporting, and emergency planning.
IT and Cybersecurity Teams	IT supports the digital side of safety: access control, cameras, emergency apps, visitor systems, radios, networks, credentials, permissions, cloud systems, and data protection.	Use ULSS to connect technology to workflows, permissions, cybersecurity, privacy, user management, system testing, and backup procedures.
Transportation Staff and Bus Drivers	Transportation is part of life safety before and after the school day. Drivers and transportation leaders see student movement, bus behavior, traffic, specialized transportation needs, field trips, and reunification challenges.	Use ULSS to connect arrival, dismissal, communication, student accountability, special transportation, emergency rerouting, field trips, and reunification.
Athletic Directors, Coaches, and Activity Sponsors	Athletics and activities often happen after the office is closed and the normal school-day posture has changed. Coaches and sponsors may be first to handle medical emergencies, weather, access, crowd issues, or student travel concerns.	Use ULSS to connect event access, AEDs, EMS entry, weather response, locker rooms, spectators, communication, travel, and end-of-event securement.
Food Service Staff	Food service staff understand cafeterias, food delivery, kitchen hazards, allergies, meal service, large student gatherings, and operations during sheltering or extended events.	Use ULSS to connect cafeteria supervision, allergy management, deliveries, kitchen safety, emergency feeding, utilities, and communication with incident command.
Substitutes, Volunteers, and Temporary Staff	These adults may be present when something happens but may not know the building or procedures. They should not be expected to know what has not been provided to them.	Use ULSS to provide role-appropriate guidance: emergency actions, communication, door procedures, student accountability, reporting concerns, and where to get help.

Students, Families, External Partners, Vendors, and Service Providers

ULSS also recognizes stakeholders beyond school employees. Students, families, responders, community partners, vendors, and service providers all influence readiness. They should be respected, informed appropriately, and connected to the system in ways that fit their role.

Stakeholder	What They May See or Support	ULSS Connection / Call to Action
Students	Students often know the real culture of the school. They may know where bullying occurs, which adults are trusted, which doors are propped, where supervision is weak, or when a peer is struggling.	Students should not carry adult responsibility, but their voice matters. ULSS should support trusted reporting, student voice, belonging, help-seeking, and a culture where speaking up is seen as protection, not betrayal.
Parents and Guardians	Families know their children in ways schools may not. They may understand medical needs, emotional triggers, custody concerns, communication needs, transportation issues, or changes in behavior.	Use ULSS to connect families to reporting pathways, reunification expectations, visitor procedures, medical planning, student support, and responsible emergency communication.
Parent Organizations and Community Volunteers	These groups often support events, fundraising, activities, mentoring, and school culture. They may be present during operating modes that differ from the regular school day.	Use ULSS to provide clear expectations for check-in, access, supervision, emergency actions, communication, and when to report concerns.
Local Law Enforcement Agencies	Law enforcement partners support response, threat information, emergency planning, site familiarity, and sometimes prevention relationships through SRO or community policing models.	Use ULSS to connect law enforcement to school-based procedures, BTAM when appropriate, access points, maps, reunification, after-hours operations, and respectful coordination with student support systems.
Fire Department and EMS	Fire and EMS partners bring expertise in fire/life safety, medical response, evacuation, rescue, EMS access, event medical response, and code-related considerations.	Use ULSS to connect fire/EMS to AED locations, medical plans, fire lanes, emergency access, severe weather, reunification, special populations, athletics, and after-hours events.
Emergency Management	Emergency managers understand planning cycles, incident command, continuity, community hazards, resource coordination, exercises, and recovery.	Use ULSS to connect school plans to local emergency management systems, community hazards, reunification, continuity of operations, training, and after-action improvement.
Mental Health and Community Service Providers	External providers may support students and families with	Use ULSS to connect support services to MTSS, counseling,

	behavioral health, crisis intervention, trauma recovery, substance-use concerns, housing instability, and family needs.	social work, recovery, re-entry, and family support while protecting privacy and appropriate information sharing.
Vendors, Integrators, and Service Providers	Vendors and service providers may install, maintain, monitor, inspect, train, or support systems that schools rely on: doors, access control, cameras, radios, emergency apps, visitor management, fire/life safety systems, networks, and software.	Vendors should not define the school safety mission. They should support it. ULSS asks vendors to understand operational needs, code requirements, cybersecurity, privacy, training, maintenance, lifecycle costs, failure modes, and local school realities.
Architects, Engineers, and Construction Partners	Design and construction decisions can shape access, supervision, egress, emergency response, traffic, ADA, fire/life safety, and temporary construction-phase risk.	Use ULSS to connect design decisions to daily operations, emergency actions, life safety, responder access, construction phasing, staff communication, and future maintenance.
Insurance, Risk Management, and Legal Partners	These stakeholders help schools understand liability, documentation, policy alignment, claims, contracts, risk transfer, privacy, and compliance considerations.	Use ULSS to connect risk management with documentation, corrective action, procurement, policy review, incident records, and responsible oversight.

Taking Down Silos Without Losing Expertise

Removing silos does not mean removing professional boundaries. Schools still need confidentiality, chain of command, role clarity, legal compliance, and respect for specialized expertise. A school nurse, counselor, SRO, teacher, custodian, vendor, parent, and student should not all receive the same information or make the same decisions.

What ULSS asks is different. It asks schools to make sure the right people are connected at the right time, for the right reason, with the right level of information, so the life safety system works.

A silo is not the same as expertise. Expertise should be respected. Silos should be reduced. The goal is not to blur every role. The goal is to connect roles where life safety depends on coordination.

Stakeholder Reflection Questions

- What part of the school safety picture does my role see that others may not see?
- Who needs to know when I see a gap, concern, or pattern?
- What information do I need from others to do my part well?
- Where are we assuming another person or department owns something?
- What safety functions depend on more than one role working together?
- Where might confidentiality or security-sensitive information require careful sharing rather than broad sharing?
- What is one silo we can reduce without disrespecting professional boundaries?

- What is one life safety function we should verify rather than assume?
- How do we make sure findings become owned corrective actions?
- How do we show respect for every role while still holding the system accountable?

The ULSS Respect Statement

Every role matters. The person who teaches, protects, counsels, heals, transports, maintains, cleans, supervises, responds, designs, installs, supports, leads, learns, or raises a child may hold a piece of the life safety picture.

ULSS asks stakeholders to respect one another because school safety is too important for silos, assumptions, or role-based dismissal. The custodian who notices a door problem matters. The student who reports a concern matters. The nurse who knows the medical plan matters. The teacher who sees a behavior change matters. The counselor who supports a student matters. The school psychologist who understands crisis impact matters. The SRO who understands response coordination matters. The vendor who maintains a critical system matters. The parent who knows the child matters. The administrator who assigns ownership matters.

No one role is the whole system. But every role can strengthen or weaken the system depending on whether the connections are understood.

Final Call to Action

ULSS is not about perfection. No school will ever eliminate every risk. But every school can become more intentional, more connected, more prepared, and more honest about what is working and what needs attention.

The work is not always dramatic. It is steady, practical, and consistent. It is the door that gets repaired before it fails. The staff member who reports a concern. The counselor who connects a student to support. The nurse who knows the medical plan. The substitute who understands the emergency action. The bus driver who knows what to do during a crisis. The facilities team that checks the opening. The IT team that removes outdated permissions. The administrator who follows up after the drill. The safety team that refuses to let findings sit on a shelf. The board that supports sustainable funding. The community that understands safety is not fear-based. It is care-based.

Do not assume. Verify. Do not isolate. Connect. Do not only react. Prevent and prepare. Do not stop at installation. Maintain and test. Do not let findings fade. Assign ownership and follow through. Do not forget the human side. Protect the whole school community.

School safety is not something we finish. It is something we lead, practice, maintain, verify, and improve every day.

PRACTICE AND PEOPLE

The Connection Is the Capability

Understanding why different forms of expertise must reach one another.

A school does not become safer merely because every department has a plan, every leader has a title, or every system has been purchased. The protective value emerges when the work of those people and systems meets at the moment it is needed.

Consider a student whose attendance and well-being have changed. A teacher notices difficulty concentrating. A counselor sees a need for support. A family knows the circumstances at home. An administrator sees absences. These are not competing explanations. They are pieces of one situation. Trusted reporting, MTSS, behavioral threat assessment and management when appropriate, and follow-through can connect them before the concern becomes a crisis.

Now consider a facilities employee who notices a door does not latch after evening athletics. The technology team knows the door is not monitored. A custodian assumes another department secures that entrance. A coach believes someone else will follow up. The physical opening and each person may function exactly as expected within their own lane, while the combined protective capability remains incomplete.

> **THE ULSS OPPORTUNITY**
>
> Do not replace the expertise of the people involved. Connect it. Ask who sees the condition, who receives it, who owns the response, how it is corrected, and what evidence shows the correction worked.

Human understanding is part of every layer

A student, teacher, school psychologist, nurse, custodian, facilities specialist, transportation employee, public-safety responder or family member may hold information that nobody else possesses. Their contributions differ, and professional boundaries still matter. ULSS should give them respectful pathways to connect observations and act within their roles.

The aim is to strengthen established practice, not to announce another national model. School communities should compare these ideas with their own emergency operations plans, student-support systems, professional guidance, applicable law and the conditions of the people who live and work there.

> **AN INVITATION TO EVERY PRACTITIONER**
>
> What does your role see that another role may never see? Who needs that information? What would make the connection dependable after the people who built it have moved on?

SUSTAINABILITY AND CONTINUITY

When the People or Systems Change

A connected system must survive turnover, construction, busy days, and the unexpected.

A district may build excellent working relationships among a security director, principal, facilities supervisor, counselor, dispatch center, and fire department. Then a leader retires, staff rotate, a software platform changes, or a construction project reshapes the campus. What happens to the agreements everyone believed were understood?

This is not a reason to replace personal relationships with bureaucracy. It is a reason to make critical coordination durable: clearly defined decision authority, trained alternates, current maps, accessible instructions, named system owners, practical maintenance arrangements, and exercises that include the people who actually carry out the work.

Three conditions worth examining

Changing condition	Questions for the school
A trusted leader becomes unavailable	Who takes over the critical decision, how do they know, and which public-safety partners need notice?
A building or network is altered	Which dependent safety functions must be retested, including door behavior, wireless signals, access and notification?
School use changes after hours	Who receives alerts and has the authority, equipment, training and practical ability to act?

An accurate system inventory can be important. So can a current EOP, cross-trained staff, accessible operating instructions, a funded maintenance plan and a realistic exercise. None alone proves readiness. The evidence lies in the handoffs, particularly when a usual person, route, building function or communication pathway is unavailable.

> **VERIFICATION BEATS ASSUMPTION**
>
> A capability is sustained when people can demonstrate its function, identify limitations, correct discovered gaps and verify the repair. That responsibility remains after the initial project or grant is complete.

USING THE GUIDEBOOK

Maturity Is a Conversation, Not a Rating

How to use the maturity and confidence scales without mistaking a score for safety.

The five maturity levels on pages 56–57 are an illustrative internal reflection tool, not a national benchmark, accreditation, product certification or comparison of districts. A number cannot describe the full conditions of a school, and a high number must never substitute for recent, credible operational evidence.

A school may be strong in prevention and trusted reporting yet have an unresolved radio coverage gap. Another may have excellent doors and access control but fragile after-hours staffing. Neither should be reduced to an overall score. Different hazards, physical conditions, population needs and operating modes change what is relevant.

Keep maturity and confidence separate

Maturity question	Evidence question
How well is the capability organized, owned and sustained?	What actual observations, inspections, role demonstrations or controlled tests support the conclusion?
What is improving or deteriorating?	What changed since the last test, and was the affected function checked again?
What remains uncertain?	What limitations or gaps are known, who owns them, and what interim protection exists?

An honest low rating may be the beginning of meaningful improvement. An unsupported high rating can conceal risk. If a school chooses to use scores internally, the discussion should include context, evidence, ownership, correction and retesting. Confidential site-specific findings should not be placed in a public companion guide.

> **IMPORTANT INTERPRETATION**
>
> The examples in this guidebook are teaching tools. They are not compliance thresholds, legal interpretations or claims that a particular technology or score guarantees a protective outcome.

SELECTED AUTHORITIES AND SUPPORTING PRACTICE

Research and Further Reading

These authoritative materials support examination of the readiness domains; they do not endorse this independent guidebook.

The underlying guidebook reflects collaborative practitioner synthesis. The following resources offer supporting guidance, standards-related context, and additional perspectives. They are not presented as the source for every example or independent practitioner interpretation. Verify current editions and local requirements before operational decisions.

[01] CISA — K–12 School Security Guide (3rd edition)

Systems-based school security assessment and physical protection planning.

Official resource ↗ www.cisa.gov

[02] PASS — Safety and Security Guidelines, Seventh Edition

Layered K–12 school security components and recommendations; not binding law.

Official resource ↗ passk12.org

[03] U.S. Department of Education — Emergency Planning

High-quality, collaborative school emergency operations planning and continuing review.

Official resource ↗ www.ed.gov

[04] SchoolSafety.gov — Federal School Safety Resources

Interagency resources on prevention, preparedness, threat assessment and school well-being.

Official resource ↗ www.schoolsafety.gov

[05] FEMA — National Incident Management System

Incident command, coordination and interoperable emergency management responsibilities.

Official resource ↗ www.fema.gov

SOURCE USE

Adopted laws, code editions, agency rules and authorized local emergency procedures govern local implementation. A technical source can inform a decision without being a mandate to purchase a product or adopt this guidebook.

SOURCES AND CREDIBLE PARTNERSHIPS

Additional Educational Sources

Useful starting points for prevention, privacy, student support and operational interoperability.

[06] U.S. Secret Service NTAC — National Threat Assessment Center

Public research and prevention resources concerning targeted violence.

Official resource ↗ www.secretservice.gov

[07] U.S. Department of Education — Student Privacy

FERPA and other privacy guidance when sharing student information for legitimate safety purposes.

Official resource ↗ studentprivacy.ed.gov

[08] CISA — SAFECOM Interoperability

Governance, procedures, technology, training/exercises and routine use across responders.

Official resource ↗ www.cisa.gov

[09] Make Our Schools Safe — Alyssa's Law Guidance

Educational consideration of school panic alert systems and operational implementation.

Official resource ↗ makeourschoolssafe.org

[10] Virginia DCJS — School Safety Inspection Checklist

A state-specific example of a standardized CPTED-oriented school inspection process.

Official resource ↗ www.dcjs.virginia.gov

KEEP LEARNING

The guidebook should evolve through carefully documented source updates, field evidence, student and staff experiences, appropriate professional review and lessons from communities. Correct what new evidence requires without losing the human purpose of the work.

VIRGINIA LOCAL CONTEXT

Connecting ULSS to Virginia Schools

A Virginia practitioner orientation to existing laws, state resources and multidisciplinary school safety work.

Virginia already has a school safety framework that can support meaningful ULSS conversations. Code of Virginia § 22.1-279.8 requires annual school safety audits and addresses physical-security conditions, patterns of student safety concerns, and related emergency planning. The statutory inspection framework incorporates Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) and technology considerations. This guidebook does not establish a new Virginia audit or alter those requirements.

The Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS) maintains its School Safety Audit Program and an updated 2026 School Safety Inspection Checklist. The updated checklist page describes zone-based inspections and annual certification collection beginning in August 2026. Districts should verify current agency instructions, deadlines and local procedures directly.

Use existing processes to ask connected questions

Existing Virginia activity	ULSS conversation worth having
School safety inspection / CPTED	Do the building, grounds, access, supervision and actual operating modes create conditions the school has overlooked?
School safety and climate evidence	Do student, staff and family concerns reach a trusted, responsive support or assessment process?
Crisis / emergency management plan review	Do the plan, people, building and responders still fit one another after staffing or facility changes?
Emergency telecommunications and technology	Do messages reach classrooms, exterior fields, buses and people who need accessible warnings? Who verifies?

LOCAL IMPLEMENTATION

Consult current Virginia statute, DCJS guidance, division policies, emergency management partners and the relevant AHJ. Completed school-specific assessments and vulnerabilities should remain in authorized protected records.

VIRGINIA FIELD CONVERSATION

One School, Many Connected Responsibilities

A hypothetical Virginia secondary school during an evening community event.

A school division hosts a Friday evening athletic tournament. Students, visitors and coaches use facilities differently than during class time. The main office is closed. An exterior entrance used for deliveries does not consistently latch. A medical issue arises in a remote gym, and the coach is unsure which entry door responding EMS personnel will use.

The easy response would be to call this an athletics problem, a facilities problem, or a communications problem. ULSS invites the team to consider the actual connections: who assigned the after-hours operating posture, who inspects the opening, who knows the EMS approach, who communicates with dispatch, who understands the students' needs, and who verifies the corrections before the next event?

Use the scenario with the people who work there

Partner	Reason to include them
Administration / athletics	Event entry rules, supervision, visitor flow, crowd movement and school leadership succession.
Facilities / custodial staff	Door condition, lighting, exit function, accessible routes and end-of-event securement.
Nursing / student services	AED and first-aid access, medical accommodations and staff training after hours.
IT / safety / communications	Working radios, notification coverage, authorized maps and coordination with the responsible recipient.
Fire / EMS / emergency management	Agreed responder access, actual location identification, authority and appropriately controlled exercises.

This is a learning scenario—not a claim about a particular Virginia school. The purpose is to identify an existing process that could prevent the gap, assign an owner to each observed issue, and confirm that the completed correction works in the operating conditions that originally exposed it.

Virginia sources to consult

[VA-01] Code of Virginia § 22.1-279.8 — open official page

[VA-02] Virginia DCJS — School Safety Inspection Checklist — open official page

[VA-03] Virginia DCJS — School Safety Audit Program — open official page

THE PEOPLE BEHIND THE GUIDEBOOK

About the Authors

Different experiences. Shared responsibility for safer schools.

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Guy M. Grace brings more than four decades of experience in security and emergency preparedness, including service in the U.S. Army Military Police and leadership as Director of Security and Emergency Planning for Littleton Public Schools in Colorado. He has overseen and responded to varied incidents and worked with school districts and practitioners across the United States. His continuing research and national collaboration include the Partner Alliance for Safer Schools (PASS), the National Council of School Safety Directors (NCSSD), and the interconnected responsibilities of Unified Layered School Safety. His practitioner perspective draws from prevention, facilities, technology, emergency management, and lessons shared by students, staff, families, and responders. No single incident defines his work.

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K–12 SCHOOL SAFETY, IDENTITY AND ACCESS PRACTITIONER

Mike Garcia brings more than two decades of experience across physical security, cybersecurity, and work with the education and government sectors. Through national K–12 responsibilities with HID, he has helped school leaders examine identity, access management, physical security, and the connection between people, procedures, and technology. His professional work has included school-safety education and participation with PASS and NCSSD. He advocates for school security that is multidisciplinary, practical, and grounded in operational needs rather than a product-first approach. His perspective helps connect technical capabilities with governance, daily school use, and sustainable implementation.

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Deborah E. Grace is a nationally certified school psychologist with more than 30 years of experience serving children, families, and schools. Her professional work includes mental-health and victim-support settings as well as school psychological evaluation, intervention, consultation, special-education collaboration, and crisis response. She brings knowledge of Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports (MTSS), student well-being, behavioral and mental-health needs, developmental readiness, and the importance of listening to students and families. Her perspective helps keep prevention, support, accessibility, and psychological well-being visible alongside physical and technological protective capabilities.

> *Shared authorship, independent purpose. These professional backgrounds provide context for the guidebook's collaborative perspective. Affiliations and positions do not imply sponsorship, organizational approval, or endorsement of its interpretations.*