



Ensure Access to Sexual Violence Policies:

RAINN's Recommendations for Effective State Legislation on Sexual Violence Policy Notification in Schools

Edited May 2025

Sexual violence happens in schools. In that moment of crisis, survivors do not know what to do. Unfortunately, school policies and any potential resources are hidden deeply in websites, buried in handbooks, or a distant memory of an orientation years in the past. In one case, RAINN spent over 30 minutes looking for a public K-12 school's sexual violence policy, only to find it on a webpage titled "jobs." For a student, friend, parent, teacher, or staff member seeking information in a moment of crisis, such inaccessibility and deprioritization of information is unacceptable.

Survivors on school campuses nationwide know that the resources and policies that schools put in place for survivors of sexual violence do not reach the people they are intended to serve. While schools maintain sexual violence policies and may have procedures in place to support a student experiencing the aftermath of an assault, these resources are often difficult to access and understand. State lawmakers must pass laws to ensure this vital information reaches students, parents, faculty, staff, and leadership so that everyone knows what to do in the case of a sexual violence.

Help Survivors Stop Searching, Start Healing, and Keep Learning

Sexual violence remains a pervasive issue in K-20 educational institutions. Among undergraduate students, **26.4% of females and 6.8% of males experience rape or sexual assault through physical force, violence, or incapacitation.**¹ Meanwhile, **21% of middle schoolers reported that they experienced unwanted physical touching on school grounds.**²

Unfortunately, many schools fail to notify their students of the process for reporting

¹ Cantor, D., Fisher, B., Chibnall, S., Townsend, R., et al. "Report on the AAU Campus Climate Survey on Sexual Assault and Sexual Misconduct." Association of American Universities, January 17, 2020

² Rinehart, S., Doshi, N., Espelage, D. "Sexual Harassment and Sexual Violence Experiences Among Middle School Youth." University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, April 6, 2014.

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sexual violence, what will happen if they choose to do so, or how to access any resources. Only a third of students felt “very knowledgeable” about where to get help and how to report sexual violence.³ Similarly, **only 17.7% of students were aware of what occurs after an incident is reported.**⁴ Without knowing what happens or how to do so, survivors and witnesses may not report the assault, leaving the perpetrator to get away with no accountability and harm again.

Meanwhile, the impact of sexual violence on academic success can be severe. Students who experience sexual assault are more likely to earn lower GPAs, **struggle with emotional self-regulation, and drop out of school altogether.** The university **dropout rate is approximately 14.4% higher for students who experience sexual victimization compared to the average.** Similarly, 14.3% of women who experienced sexual violence in their first semester of college ended the semester with a GPA below 2.5.⁵

Transparent sexual violence policies impact the academic and emotional well-being of student survivors and their peers. Students and staff need to know what to do about a sexual assault before it happens. Just like they run a fire drill to know what to do in a crisis, knowing where to go and who to go to ahead of time makes it more likely they will be able to access those resources when they are in the middle of the trauma of sexual violence.

Tell Schools to Prioritize Communicating Sexual Violence Policies Proactively And Clearly

A dangerous gap exists between the policies and resources schools have for cases of sexual violence, and the survivors of sexual violence who need them. States can close this gap by requiring educational institutions to create accessible, transparent sexual violence policies that outline the resources available and how to report sexual violence. As shown in Figure 1, **no state statute effectively and comprehensively**

³ Cantor, D., Fisher, B., Chibnall, S., Townsend, R., et al. “Report on the AAU Campus Climate Survey on Sexual Assault and Sexual Misconduct.” Association of American Universities, January 17, 2020

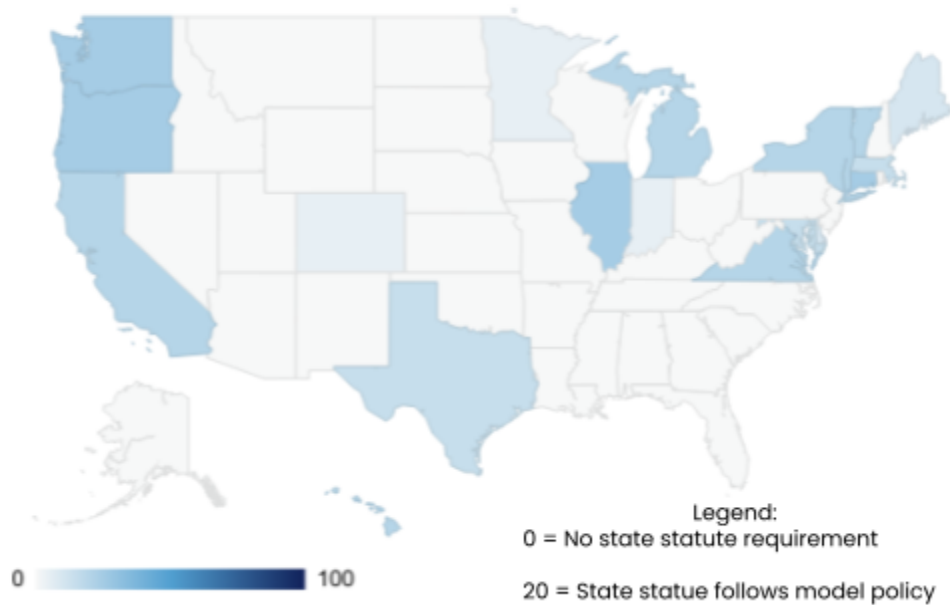
⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Jordan, C., Combs, J., Smith, G., “[An Exploration of Sexual Victimization and Academic Performance Among College Women.](#)” University of Kentucky, Office for Policy Studies on Violence Against Women, July 2014.

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requires educational institutions to proactively notify students, staff, and families about sexual violence policies. In fact, even the states that address school sexual assault policies in their statutes fall severely short of attaining true transparency, clarity, and accessibility.

Figure 1: States Requiring Notification of School Sexual Violence Policies 2025



Lawmakers can ensure that no student's education has to suffer because they experience sexual violence by **requiring public and private K-20 educational institutions to notify students and parents of their sexual violence policies.** As we describe in our recommendations, states must ensure these policies are communicated clearly and understandably, and made accessible to via both annual dissemination and multiple frequently used communication channels (such as websites, handbooks, or community spaces). **It's time for lawmakers to tell schools to prioritize communicating sexual violence policies proactively and clearly.** Our recommendations on how to do this follow below.



RAINN's Recommendations

RAINN offers the following recommendations to policymakers to ensure that victims of sexual violence are protected and supported in our schools.

We recognize that each state's code is unique and complicated. RAINN's policy department can work hand-in-hand with lawmakers and their staff to tailor these recommendations to meet each state's specific needs.

1. Any educational institution that has adopted sexual violence policies and support measures should communicate those in a transparent and easily accessible manner.
2. Survivors and those who support and protect survivors should be informed.
3. Schools should communicate sexual violence policies and support measures in a combination of ways to ensure that in times of crisis the information is easily accessible.
4. The notification should be available in languages that reflect the school's community, so that all survivors are supported.
5. Sexual violence policies and supportive measures offered to survivors by the institution should be clearly stated.

Any educational institution that has adopted sexual violence policies and support measures should communicate those in a transparent and easily accessible manner.

Students of any age are at risk of being a victim of sexual violence, regardless of whether that school is public or private. Perpetrators can be family members, classmates, teachers, school staff, friends, or strangers. That is why it is important that any institution that has policies in place to support survivors should ensure that the information is communicated to survivors and those who support the survivor.

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Sample Statutory Language

“School” means any public or private educational institution, including elementary school, secondary school, and postsecondary college or university, that has adopted policies, procedures, protocols, or guidelines related to sexual violence.

Survivors and those who support and protect survivors should be informed.

When a victim is sexually assaulted, it is traumatic. Victims can be anyone at a school, including students and staff. After an assault, it is extremely difficult for a survivor to navigate day-to-day tasks, such as school or work. Many victims do not report directly to someone in authority, but instead reach out to friends, family, or teachers. It is important to inform survivors and anyone that a survivor turns to for guidance at the school about the sexual violence policies and support measures so they can assist the survivor.

Sample Statutory Language

“Each school shall notify every student, parent of an elementary or secondary school student, staff member, and school volunteer, of the school’s existing sexual violence policies and supportive measures.”

Schools should communicate sexual violence policies and support measures in a combination of ways to ensure that in times of crisis the information is easily accessible.

Schools should provide the sexual violence policies and support measures prior to an incident of sexual violence, because the information is better retained when a survivor is not impacted by the trauma of the crime. It is also important that the information be easily accessible using different methods of delivery. Some survivors

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may not feel safe or comfortable accessing their school records or using their electronic devices to access the information, especially where the perpetrator has access or control to the records or devices. Using different methods to disseminate the information on what the school's sexual violence policies and supportive measures are provides important information to survivors regardless of their situation.

Sample Statutory Language

"By including the policies and supportive measures in existing student, employee, volunteer, or parent handbooks; providing a copy of the policies and supportive measures by e-mail or hard copy to students, employees, volunteers, and parents at the time of enrollment, registration, hiring, or volunteer activity and each academic year thereafter; placing a physical copy of the policies and supportive measures in a public area of the school that is accessible and widely used; and posting the policies and supportive measures in a prominent location on the school's existing webpage."

The notification should be available in languages that reflect the school's community, so that all survivors are supported.

School sexual violence policies and supportive measures should be available in frequently encountered languages to ensure timely and meaningful access for all students, parents, school staff, and school volunteers. Processes should also be in place for survivors and supporters of survivors to access the material in less frequently encountered languages. Where schools have worked to create sexual violence policies and supportive measures for all students and members of the school community, language should not be a barrier for a survivor.

Sample Statutory Language

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“A school’s sexual violence policies and supportive measures should be available in frequently encountered languages. Frequently encountered languages are those that are the primary language of at least 5% of the overall students and employees of the school, or 5% of the population in the county in which the school or institution is located. For less frequently encountered languages, processes should be in place to request an oral interpretation of the policies and supportive measures.”

Sexual violence policies and supportive measures offered to survivors by the institution should be clearly stated.

Many sexual violence policies are written in formal and legally dense language. This can be difficult for students, parents, staff, and volunteers to understand. Often, the policies are focused on the disciplinary process, leaving other supportive measures unclear. Supportive measures protect the safety of all parties, provide reasonable accommodations, and support educational success. When schools are providing the information on their sexual violence policies and supportive measures, they should include contact information for a staff member who can answer questions about the policies and supportive measures; information for off-campus organizations that provide support for survivors; and clearly identify what supportive measures are available to assist survivors with their education goals or employment.

Sample Statutory Language

“Supportive Measures” shall include the current name, title, email, address, and phone number of the person designated by the school to receive reports and provide information regarding sexual violence; the name, telephone number and website address of the nearest Child Advocacy Center and Sexual Assault Service Provider; and the number for a local, state, or national sexual violence hotline. Supportive measures may also include counseling,

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mental health, extensions of deadlines or other class-related adjustments, modifications of work or class schedules, campus escort services, mutual restrictions on contact between the parties, changes in work or housing locations, leaves of absence, increased security and monitoring of certain areas of the school, and other similar measures.

Model Bill for School Sexual Violence Policy Notifications

(1) For purposes of this section:

(a) “Sexual Violence Policies”

- (i) Means any policy, procedure, protocol, guideline, or rule regarding sexual assault, sexual abuse, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking:
 - 1) That occurs on school premises, on school transportation, or at a school-sponsored, off-campus event; or
 - 2) Where a student, school staff, or school volunteer are the purported victim or offender;
- (ii) Shall include, but are not limited to:
 - 1) Options for reporting incidents of sexual assault, sexual abuse, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking to the school or law enforcement;
 - 2) The rights of victims and offenders during any investigation or disciplinary proceedings conducted by the school;
 - 3) The process of investigation and disciplinary proceedings of the school, including any rights of appeal; and
 - 4) After a report has been made to the school, whether the school has an affirmative duty to report to law enforcement.

(b) “Child Advocacy Center” is a center that coordinates the investigation, treatment, and prosecution of child abuse cases by utilizing multidisciplinary teams of professionals involved in child protective and

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victim advocacy services, law enforcement and prosecution, and physical and mental health services.

- (c) “Frequently encountered language” is a language that is the primary language spoken by:
 - (i) At least 5% of the population of overall students and employees in the school;
 - (ii) At least 5% of the population in the county in which the school is located; or
 - (iii) At least 1,000 people in the county in which the school is located.
- (d) “School” means any public or nonpublic educational institution, including elementary school, secondary school, and postsecondary institution, that has adopted sexual violence policies or supportive measures.
- (e) “Sexual Assault Service Provider” is an agency whose major purpose is providing victim advocacy and support services to survivors of sexual violence.
- (f) “Supportive Measures” means individualized measures related to sexual assault, sexual abuse, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking that are:
 - (i) Non-disciplinary or non-punitive, offered to a student, school staff, or a school volunteer to protect the safety of all parties, provide reasonable accommodations, and support educational success;
 - (ii) Supportive measures shall include, where available, the current
 - 1) Name, title, email, address, and phone number of the person designated by the school to receive reports of violations of the sexual violence policies and provide information regarding sexual violence policies and supportive measures;
 - 2) Name, telephone number, and website address for a local, state, or national hotline providing information to victims of sexual assault or sexual abuse; and

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- 3) Name, telephone number, and website address of the nearest Child Advocacy Center and Sexual Assault Service Provider;
 - (iii) Supportive measures may also include, but are not limited to, counseling, health care, mental health care, victim advocacy, legal assistance, extensions of deadlines or other class-related adjustments, modifications of work or class schedules, campus escort services, mutual restrictions on contact between the parties, changes in work or housing locations, leaves of absence, increased security and monitoring of certain areas of the school, or other similar measures.
- (2) A school's sexual violence policies and supportive measures shall be:
- (a) Written in clear plain language;
 - (b) In a color, size and font that enhances readability;
 - (c) Available in frequently encountered languages to ensure timely and meaningful access for students, parents, school staff, and school volunteers with limited English proficiency; and
 - (d) Available, by request, through oral interpretation in less frequently encountered languages.
- (3) Each school shall notify every student, parent, school staff, and school volunteer of the school's existing sexual violence policies and supportive measures by:
- (a) Including the school's sexual violence policies and supportive measures in any student, parent, school staff or school volunteer handbook or catalog, or similar publication listing rights, responsibilities, or standards of conduct;
 - (b) Providing the sexual violence policies and supportive measures directly to the student, parent, school staff, or school volunteer using the process by which the student, parent, school staff, or school volunteer has elected to receive communication from the school;
 - (i) For students and parents, schools shall provide the sexual violence policies and supportive measures at the time of initial

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enrollment or registration, and each academic year thereafter within 30 days of the first day of school;

- (ii) For school staff or school volunteers, schools shall provide the sexual violence policies and supportive measures at the time the school staff is hired or the school volunteer begins and require school staff and school volunteers review the sexual violence policies and supportive measures each academic year thereafter within 30 days of the first day of school;

- (c) Placing a physical copy of the sexual violence policies and supportive measures in a clearly visible location and public area of the school which is readily accessible to and widely used by students, and in a location that is readily accessible to parents, school staff, and school volunteers;

- (d) Posting the sexual violence policies and supportive measures in a prominent location on the school's website that is accessible from the homepage by use of not more than three clicks; and

- (e) The school shall also provide a copy of the policies to the school district, or governing body of the institution, to be posted on that organization's website that is accessible from the home page by use of not more than three clicks.

- (4) To provide notice to a student under 18 years of age, the school shall provide the notice to the student's parent. However, the school may also provide notice to the student in an age-appropriate or developmentally appropriate manner.

Next Steps:

For more information about the laws in your state, please see RAINN's state law database. For additional information about sexual violence generally, please visit RAINN's website. To schedule a call with someone on RAINN's policy team, email policy@rainn.org.