



SECTION 6

Training School Personnel

Introduction

In 2023, the Colorado Human Trafficking Council’s (the Council) Education Task Force (ETF) built on the 2018 Prevention Task Force’s (PTF-2018) recommendation that primary prevention strategies addressing human trafficking should be integrated into schools across Colorado. In 2023 the Council adopted a three-phase training plan, created by the ETF, for equipping school systems with tools to address human trafficking. The first phase focused on building buy-in from school communities; the second phase centered on training school staff; and the third phase aimed to provide age-appropriate prevention training to middle school students.

The 2025 Prevention Task Force (PTF-2025) built on the ETF’s work and devised a plan to satisfy the first two phases of its recommendations. To create buy-in for phase one, the PTF-2025 applied to present school-specific introductory training on human trafficking at conferences targeting audiences such as superintendents, school administrators, school counselors and school mental health professionals. The goal was to encourage these school

personnel to train their staff in human trafficking awareness and prevention, helping to avoid potential trafficking of youth in their schools.

To complete the second phase, the PTF-2025 elected to reach out directly to district superintendents with a pitch letter recommending the delivery of introductory training on human trafficking to educators, leadership, counselors, bus drivers, nurses and other staff in each school, focusing particularly on middle schools. The logic here was the same: to create buy-in with superintendents and demonstrate the value of training all their district middle school personnel on human trafficking to help prevent youth from becoming victims of trafficking.

Training Plan Implementation: Phase One and Two

Colorado is a “local control” state for public education, and as result a large portion of the decision-making authority is delegated to individual school districts and their locally elected school boards. The rationale for this local control model is that local communities are best equipped to make decisions about their schools, as they are closest to the students, families and educators they serve.

PTF-2025 members conducted a thoughtful discussion of tactics on how to initiate phase one. Suggestions included a “boots on the ground” approach that would ask Council members to reach out directly to administrators and community school organizations in their regions or spheres of influence to create buy-in with those schools. The Human Trafficking Team (HTT)—designated staff from Colorado’s Division of Criminal Justice, Office for Victims Program—pointed out that a similar approach has been in place with limited success. Additionally, the Laboratory to Combat Human Trafficking successfully delivers training to individual schools around the state and is collaborating with the Aurora Public School District to deliver training to its staff. Similarly, in 2023 the nonprofit organization Love146 partnered with Denver Public Schools (DPS) through the Human Trafficking Youth Prevention Education grant, administered by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ Administration for Children and Families Office on Trafficking in Persons, to deliver its “Not a Number” prevention curriculum to staff and students of DPS high schools over a five-year period.

These are promising accomplishments, and the Council believed that by leveraging its presence as a statewide council, it could build on these successes by reaching out to each district directly to provide the state's school districts with human trafficking training with a focus on middle schools. The PTF-2025 determined that creating buy-in by presenting at statewide conferences, coupled with direct contact to superintendents, would be the most effective approach to reach its goal.

Conference Applications

The PTF-2025 continued to research conferences held around the state with audiences including school administrators, school counselors, social workers and school district superintendents, with the specific intent to educate school personnel on human trafficking prevention. The PTF-2025 submitted applications for several opportunities and received invitations to present at the Colorado School Counselor Association conference in October 2025 and the Colorado Society of School Psychologists in November 2025. The Colorado Association of School Executives contacted the HTT with interest in having the Council present at a future conference. The association's selection process differs from typical requests for proposals in that a panel of board members conducts research for presenters based on the theme for its conference each year.

There are multiple opportunities for upcoming conferences in 2026, such as those hosted by the Colorado Association of School Boards, the Colorado Education Association, the Colorado School Social Work Association and the Colorado School Safety Resource Center. The HTT will continue to pursue opportunities with these organizations as they become available.

The school-specific human trafficking module emphasizes the importance of meeting students where they are and asking questions in a trauma-informed manner to assist students in seeking help. By presenting at conferences with an audience of school administrators and key personnel, the Council hopes they will be inspired to include human trafficking training as a part of their school districts' professional development requirements.

Pitch Letter to Superintendents

There are 200 school districts and boards of cooperative education services (BOCES)¹⁶ throughout Colorado. A list of the districts is available as Appendix 2. The PTF-2025 discussed the most efficient and effective method to reach all districts and receive an optimal number of responses, weighing electronic mail versus direct postal mail. The task force considered the sheer volume of emails superintendents receive and the likelihood that they would read the email. It also accounted for the costs and time associated with physically mailing letters and ultimately decided that e-mail would be more efficient and have the highest potential for successfully reaching the superintendents.

The PTF-2025 carefully crafted a letter to superintendents outlining what human trafficking looks like in Colorado and the importance of training front-line professionals, particularly middle school personnel, who have close relationships with students and are uniquely positioned to identify early warning signs of trafficking. The letter invites superintendents to contact the HTT to learn more and scheduling training for their district. The PTF-2025 then presented the draft letter to the Council for its approval and for signature by both the chair and vice chair of the Council. Please refer to Appendix 3 for a copy of the letter.

The HTT reviewed the list of districts and divided them among PTF-2025 members, with careful consideration for the districts in which members have constituents or connections. Each task force member e-mailed the pitch letter to their designated districts, introducing themselves and the Council's goal. The feedback as of the writing of this report has been very positive. The HTT has met with eight district superintendents to review the training and schedule delivery to their staff. Most of the responding superintendents represent districts in rural Colorado, which shows great interest in the topic.

¹⁶ A BOCES is an administrative body that serves as a cooperative agency for multiple local school districts to pool resources and provide educational programs and services. Its boards are typically composed of representatives from the school boards of the participating member districts. Definition from Colorado BOCES Association. Last accessed October 10, 2025, <https://www.coloradoboces.org/>.

Brush School District received the first training in mid-September, and Weld RE-4¹⁷ is scheduled for training in November 2025. Buffalo RE-4 in Logan County and Cañon City School District are scheduled for December 2025 training. Cherry Creek School District (CCSD) has committed to training its school counselors and mental health professionals in February 2026. Following this training, CCSD will work with the HTT to implement a schedule for training the remainder of its staff in the coming year. Buena Vista School District has also committed to receiving training in February 2026, and finally, Poudre School District has scheduled training for March 2026. Peyton School District's training is pending for the 2025–2026 school year.

The HTT will continue to follow up with school districts mentioning that some neighboring districts have already received and/or scheduled training. The intention is to build momentum by demonstrating that other districts have participated in the training with the hope of encouraging other districts to follow. Overall, the pitch letter has had a promising start with the potential for continued activity in the coming year.

Conclusion

Historically, the Council has taken the position that the best way to prevent human trafficking of youth is to introduce human trafficking training to students in schools. Through research and expertise, previous task forces determined that the most effective way to approach this challenge was to first create buy-in from school administrators and, once that was established, work with school leadership and district superintendents to schedule training delivery to school staff. The long-term goal is to eventually train middle school students on developing healthy relationships and how to protect themselves in potentially risky situations.

¹⁷ "RE" signifies a reorganization of small school districts into larger, more comprehensive ones, as defined by the Colorado Department of Education. Morris Danielson (2002). A Report on a History of Colorado School District Organization (Jhon Penn; Revised November 2021). Colorado Department of Education, Field Services. Last accessed on October 10, 2025, <https://hermes.cde.state.co.us/islandora/object/co%3A3A35166>.

The first step of creating buy-in is two-fold and can be accomplished simultaneously. The PTF-2025 worked from the training plan adopted by the Council and the ETF, continuing their research of statewide conferences that cater to school leadership. Applying to participate in these types of conferences will continue into 2026 with hopes of participating in more.

After careful consideration of the best approach for direct communication with the school districts, the task force determined that a pitch letter signed by Council leadership and sent directly by the Council members to superintendents was the most efficient and effective way to reach its goal. The letters were sent to all 200 districts and BOCES, and the response was quite positive, with eight districts reaching out within weeks of receiving the letter.

The Council's goal is to engage as many school districts as possible in training, creating momentum and inspiring other districts to do the same. Once enough districts have received the training, the Council will be positioned to move into the final phase of training middle school students about healthy relationships and how to avoid risky situations that could lead to trafficking.