

How one district built a proactive safety strategy after crisis

3 key lessons from Littleton Public Schools' comprehensive approach

After experiencing multiple critical incidents, including a school shooting and suicide contagion, Littleton Public Schools (12,000 students, 23 schools) was forced to rebuild their safety strategy from the ground up. Their prevention coordinator, Jon Widmier, recently shared their hard-won insights that can help your district get ahead of potential crises.

The reality: Your district is always in one of three states

- 1 In crisis — responding to an active incident
- 2 Recovering from crisis — rebuilding and learning
- 3 Preparing for the next crisis — proactive planning and prevention

The takeaway: Don't wait for a crisis to evaluate your safety gaps. Assess where you are now and prioritize the work that strengthens your current position.

LESSON 1

Make student voice central to your strategy

Littleton discovered that when students lose phone access during school hours, they simply shift to Google Docs and email to communicate — including sharing concerning content about self-harm or threats.

Action step: Establish a student mental health advisory committee to review safety protocols. Students often know where the real risks are before adults do.

LESSON 2

Put the right person in the right role

Initially, Littleton’s IT team monitored student communications for safety concerns. But the emotional weight of reading alerts about self-harm, threats, and mental health crises was taking a toll on staff not trained for this work.

The solution: They hired Joanne Hinojos-Baker, someone with hands-on experience working with youth in the court system, specifically for this role. She now builds relationships with students and manages the alerts that come through their monitoring system.

Key insight: Technology can flag concerning behavior, but human expertise is essential for proper intervention.

LESSON 3

Shift from “mental health” to “mental fitness”

Rather than treating mental health as a problem to be solved, Littleton frames it as an ongoing journey like physical fitness. This approach reduces stigma and emphasizes continuous improvement.

Action step: Focus on creating belonging and teaching students skills to navigate their world, rather than just responding to crises after they occur.

What’s next for your district?

As you plan for the upcoming school year, consider:

- 1 Where does your district currently sit in the crisis lifecycle?
- 2 Who on your team is equipped to handle the emotional weight of student safety monitoring?
- 3 How can you make student voices a bigger part of your safety strategy?

Want to see how Littleton uses technology to support their human-centered approach?

Visit bark.us/learn/bcp-webinar to view the full webinar or **contact our team** to discuss how districts like yours are building proactive safety strategies.