



K-12 EDUCATION

BEST PRACTICES IN SCHOOL SAFETY AND SECURITY

Hanover Research highlights best practices for school safety and security with a focus on the evaluation of safety and security policies, practices, and products.



INTRODUCTION

School safety and security continue to be high priorities for district and school leaders, federal and state policy makers, and local communities. Safety and security have become increasingly embedded in the national psyche in the wake of high-profile school shootings, resulting in the emergence of new school safety products, services, and best practices. With “no one-size-fits-all solution to th[e] complex problem” of school safety and security, educational leaders are left to navigate an overwhelming amount of school safety and security information to determine the best investments to make for their districts.

As districts continue to invest resources in school safety and security, it is increasingly imperative for them to understand best practices in school safety and how to conduct regular evaluations of their efforts. In this research brief, Hanover provides best practices for building a secure school climate and evaluating safety and security policies to help students, parents, teachers, and staff feel safe at school.

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I. BEST PRACTICES IN SCHOOL SAFETY AND SECURITY

To best support students' and staff's wellbeing at school and effectively navigate traumatic events, education leaders and their communities are focused on developing effective emergency plans, building and technology design, security staffing, and risk assessment and response planning for their schools.



EMERGENCY PLANS

Emergency plans should contain four main sections: **prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery**. Ideally, districts should develop emergency plans using input from local agencies (e.g., law enforcement and fire departments), mental health organizations, regional media agencies, and internal departments such as security, facilities, transportation, mental health, student services, legal, and finance. Districts should allow schools' emergency plans to fit their unique needs rather than issuing one plan for all district buildings.

SAMPLE COMPONENTS OF AN EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS PLAN



PREVENTION

The prevention plan section outlines the measures in use to prevent crime, violence, accidents, and disruptive events as well as those designed to minimize the negative impact of those events that cannot be prevented.



PREPAREDNESS

The plan contains a specific and separate preparedness plan to provide specific guidance to staff in the event of an emergency, crisis, or disaster.



RESPONSE

The plan contains a specific response plan which helps to ensure the preparedness plan is implemented while staff are functioning under what may be stressful and chaotic conditions. This plan establishes a system for crisis team members to document their actions during the response phase.



RECOVERY

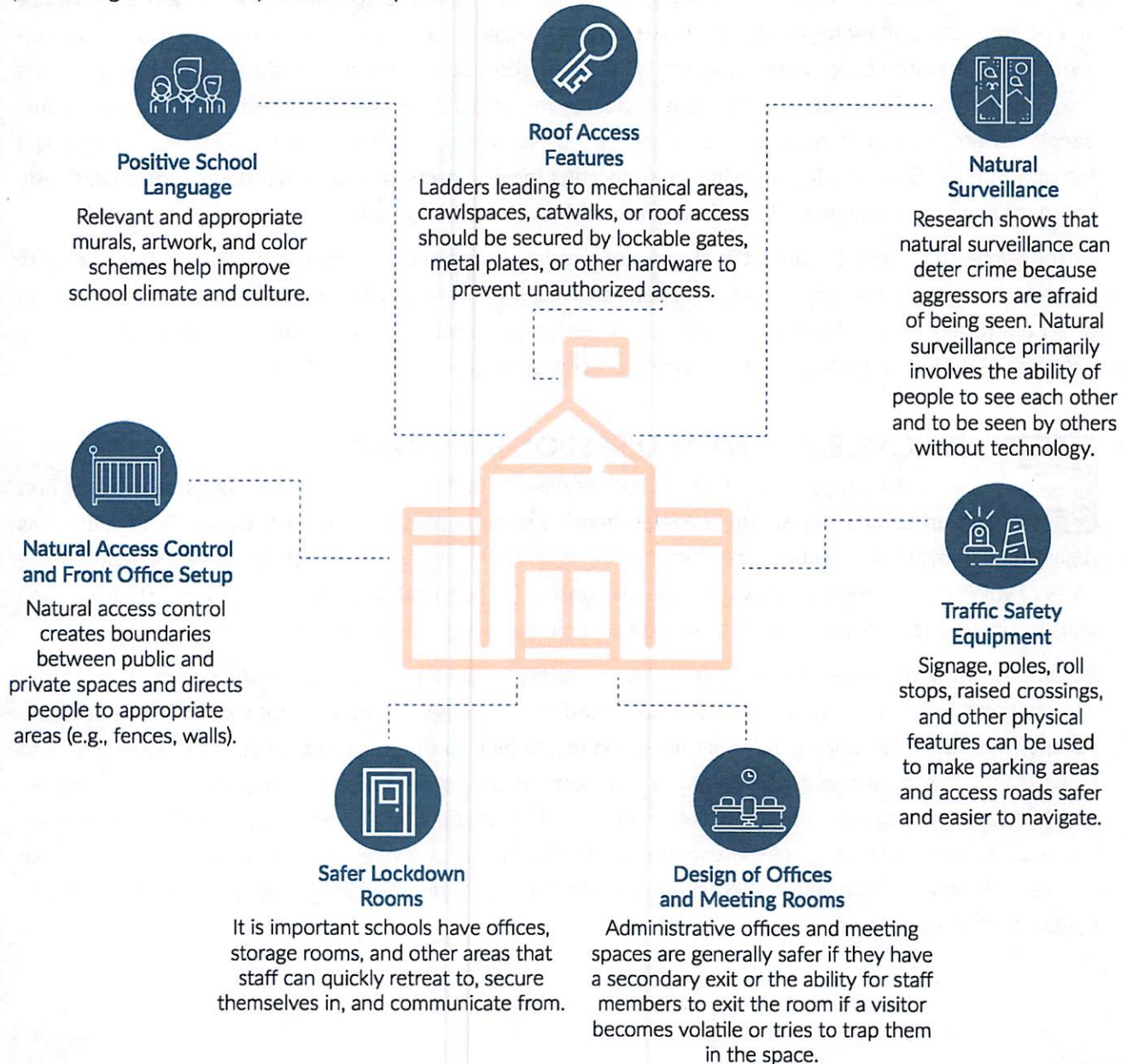
The plan contains a specific written recovery plan which outlines specific measures to be implemented to help students, staff, parents, and public safety responders cope with the emotional aftermath of traumatic incidents.

Source: Safe Havens International



BUILDING DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

Physical security features, including strategic technology deployments, can be valuable as deterrents to potential threats, as mitigating factors when school campuses encounter threats, and as monitoring tools to detect concerning behaviors. Physical and technological security measures can range from relatively simple and non-intrusive tools (e.g., motion-activated lights, locks on doors) to more complex and intrusive mechanisms (e.g., metal detectors, social media tracking software, infrared detection). The figure below describes seven building design features and considerations for promoting school safety and security.



Source: Safe Havens International and Indiana School Safety Specialist's Academy, Indiana Department of Education

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To complement a building's physical architecture and property features, security technologies are a recommended component of any comprehensive safety strategy. Such technologies can include, but are not limited to, emergency communication systems, electronic building and property access control, video surveillance, and alarms to detect emergencies (e.g., fire, carbon monoxide) or security breaches.



SECURITY STAFFING

As an additional layer of protection and security, **many schools employ staff such as school resource officers, security guards, and hall monitors to conduct in-person surveillance and perform disciplinary tasks.** Notably, some research suggests that having onsite security staff at a given school may increase school-based violence, crime, disruption, and disorderly conduct. Other research finds “no evidence that visible security measures, including the presence of security personnel, have any sizeable effects on academic performance, attendance, or postsecondary aspirations among U.S. middle and high school students.” **Given the lack of evidence supporting these impacts, schools and districts should cautiously approach any proposal to invest in onsite security staff or law enforcement.**

At the same time, experts suggest that any positive impacts resulting from the presence of any security personnel as part of a broader safety plan depend significantly on personnel selection. The National Association of School Resource Officers recommends careful selection of officers for assignments, with provisions for a minimum of 40 hours of specialized training on policing strategies for school settings.



RISK ASSESSMENT AND RESPONSE PLANNING

According to guidance from the Partner Alliance for Safer Schools, **a risk assessment “is the first step toward developing a comprehensive security plan and thus a prerequisite for decisions regarding deployment of security solutions.”** Districts and schools can use threat assessments to determine areas of vulnerability, identify individuals who may pose a future threat, and select appropriate strategies and interventions to address those vulnerabilities or deter individuals from harmful behaviors.

Regardless of the presence of security features and safety technology or the successful completion of a risk assessment, districts and schools require accurate and comprehensive **plans and protocols for using available security measures, minimizing potential risks, and responding to threats in real time.** Plans are essential to direct responding personnel regarding the specific actions they should take in emergencies, how resources should be deployed to minimize the negative impacts of an emergency, and when and how to communicate with stakeholders about emergency responses. Districts and schools need to consider an array of possible threats and hazards, from active shooters in a school to natural disasters occurring during school hours to fights between students.

II. SCHOOL SAFETY AND SECURITY EVALUATIONS

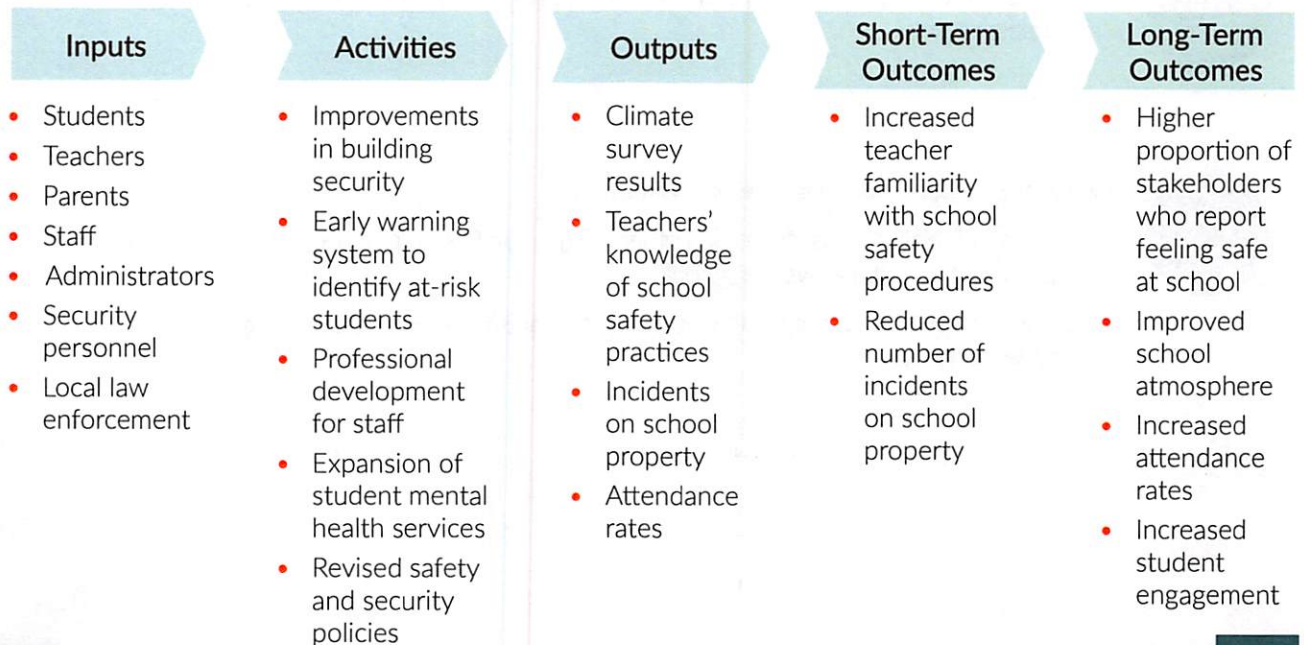


OVERVIEW OF THE EVALUATION PROCESS

Districts should regularly conduct evaluations of their safety and security policies, practices, and products. These evaluations can identify improvement areas, reduce crime and violence, minimize liability risks, and improve a district's relationship with its community as it relates to safety and security. School safety and security evaluations may include a review of:

- School emergency and crisis preparedness planning;
- Security, crime, and violence prevention policies and procedures;
- Physical security measures;
- Professional development training related to safety and emergency planning;
- School security and school police staffing and operational practices;
- Communications and social media strategy, crisis communications, and community building techniques; and
- School-community collaboration and partnerships with public safety agencies.

Districts can use logic models to guide their evaluation of safety and security efforts. Logic models ensure that evaluators understand the “big picture,” as well as the key evaluation questions to ask and how to structure the overall evaluation design. More specifically, logic models map out inputs, activities, outputs, and short- and long-term outcomes of a program. The figure below presents a sample logic model districts could use to evaluate programming related to safety and security.



II. SCHOOL SAFETY AND SECURITY EVALUATIONS

To evaluate the inputs of the logic model described above, districts might administer surveys to stakeholders, conduct interviews with stakeholders, review documentation, or observe processes in practice. Ideally, evaluations should be based on both qualitative and quantitative analysis. The figure below describes potential data sources districts may include in their evaluation.



Document Analysis

Analysis of policies, procedures, emergency and crisis guidelines, and other safety-related documents



Surveys and Interviews

Surveys and structured interviews with staff, students, parents, first responders, and other members of the school community



Data Analysis

Crime and discipline data review



Facility Assessment

Examination of physical facilities and grounds, physical security measures, and related issues



Communication and Social Media Evaluation

- Analysis of related news, crime, and other information from public sources that may indicate how the community views the schools
- Review of crisis and other communications mechanisms, social media strategy, and related areas

Source: National Crime Prevention Council



EVALUATING POLICIES AND PROCESSES

In an evaluation of school safety and security, districts should begin with a review of their policies and plans. The National Crime Prevention Council recommends that districts evaluate policies related to nine key areas. Examples of criteria that districts should consider in each of the key areas include:

1. Key Control

- Keys should be kept under strict inventory and secured.
- Master keys should be limited; holders must sign for them.

2. Building Management

- Policies should spell out responsibility for opening and closing security checks.

3. Student Behavior

- The district should have a code of conduct established.
- The code of conduct should spell out a procedure for violations and penalties.

4. Faculty/Staff

- Faculty should be trained in classroom management techniques.
- Faculty/staff should know procedures for reporting crimes.

5. Parents

- Parents should be involved in developing discipline procedures and the code of conduct.

6. Security

- If the district uses ID badges, all faculty, staff, and students should be required to wear them.

7. Crisis Management

- Each school should have a crisis management plan in place.

8. Law Enforcement Coordination

- Staff should regularly meet with local law enforcement regarding school issues and potential areas of concern.

9. Policy Development and Volunteering

- Parents and students are encouraged to get involved appropriately in school safety and security.

Source: National Crime Prevention Council

II. SCHOOL SAFETY AND SECURITY EVALUATIONS

The National Crime Prevention Council further recommends that districts evaluate three areas related to school safety and security programs: **processes, outcomes, and impacts**. Importantly, this evaluation framework assumes that districts have an action team in place to lead safety and security initiatives. In each area, districts should consider various questions such as:



- How well is the school safety and security action team functioning as a group?
- Are there changes that would make the team's meetings, events, and deadlines more effective?
- Does the action team lack a certain type of expertise and could benefit from an additional recruit or two?



- Did the action team accomplish the tasks spelled out in the action plan?
- Did the advocacy efforts lead to new funding opportunities or partnerships with businesses?













- Did safety and security changes in the school environment have an effect on crime?
- Did changes to the school environment affect how safe students, parents, and faculty feel inside the school?
- Can safety and security upgrades be correlated to positive changes in the school or community, such as increased school attendance rates or fewer disciplinary actions?

Source: National Crime Prevention Council

Checklists allow districts to consistently assess across schools and years whether a specific practice related to safety and security is met at the district and/or school levels. For example, the Colorado Department of Education has developed a **School Safety Audit Checklist** that provides a practical example of how districts can evaluate their school safety and security policies and plans. The checklist also includes criteria for evaluating districts in the areas of staff training; student, parent, and community involvement in school safety; the role of law enforcement in school safety; and standards for on-campus security personnel. The figure below provides a sample of criteria used to evaluate these areas. Similarly, the State of Louisiana provides a **School Safety and Security Evaluation Framework** and the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency publishes **Safety and Security Assessment Criteria**.

II. SCHOOL SAFETY AND SECURITY EVALUATIONS

		Yes	No	Implement	Improve
 Development/ Enforcement of Policies	<input type="checkbox"/> A visitor policy is in effect, requiring a sign-in procedure for all visitors, including visible identification.				
	<input type="checkbox"/> Disciplinary consequences for infractions to the Code of Conduct are fairly and consistently enforced.				
 Intervention and Prevention Plans	<input type="checkbox"/> Students have access to conflict resolution programs.				
	<input type="checkbox"/> Students may seek help without the loss of confidentiality.				
 Staff Development	<input type="checkbox"/> Administrators and staff (including security and law enforcement personnel) are trained in conflict resolution methods.				
	<input type="checkbox"/> Administrators and staff are trained in personal safety.				
 Opportunities for Student Involvement	<input type="checkbox"/> Students are represented on the School Safety Team.				
	<input type="checkbox"/> Students are adequately instructed in their responsibility to avoid becoming victims of violence.				
 Level of Parent and Community Involvement	<input type="checkbox"/> The community supports the school's programs and activities that teach safety and non-violence.				
	<input type="checkbox"/> Parents are an integral part of the school's safety planning and policymaking.				
 Role of Law Enforcement	<input type="checkbox"/> Incidents of crime that occur on school property or at school-related events are reported to law enforcement.				
	<input type="checkbox"/> The school has developed an effective partnership with local law enforcement.				
 Standards for Security Personnel	<input type="checkbox"/> Pre-employment background checks are conducted for security personnel.				
	<input type="checkbox"/> Security personnel have clearly defined roles and responsibilities.				
 Procedures for Data Collection	<input type="checkbox"/> All violations of state and federal law are reported to law enforcement.				
	<input type="checkbox"/> The incident reporting system is reviewed and updated annually.				
 Safety and Security of Buildings and Grounds	<input type="checkbox"/> School grounds are fenced.				
	<input type="checkbox"/> Basement windows are protected with grill or well cover.				
 Development of Emergency Response Plans	<input type="checkbox"/> The school has a crisis management plan.				
	<input type="checkbox"/> The school has established a well-coordinated emergency plan with law enforcement and other crisis response agencies.				

Source: Colorado Department of Education

Further, districts can evaluate their policies and practices by conducting full-scale exercises and drills. Such exercises may include practicing responses to lockdowns, chemical incidents, biological incidents, acts of violence, and acts of terrorism. The National Center for Education Statistics encourages schools and districts to evaluate whether students and staff regularly participate in drills to enact and understand emergency situations. Specific metrics could describe the percentage of students and staff that participate in emergency drills or the number of emergency drills completed annually.

Districts should also evaluate their responses to full-scale exercises and actual security breaches. Districts can use the following questions to guide this type of evaluation:

DID THE DISTRICT:

- Notify the appropriate people at the onset?
- Activate resources immediately to meet the needs of the students, families, and staff?
- Provide regular informational updates and maintain open communication with educators, other staff, and parents?
- Speak through one spokesperson to provide factual information to the media?
- Provide mental health resources for those in emotional distress and identify and follow up with vulnerable students and staff during the recovery period?
- Identify during the aftermath any cues that could be traumatic reminders of the crisis and monitor behaviors among students and staff?



EVALUATING SCHOOL FACILITIES

Districts should conduct a safety and security assessment of physical school environments.

In such an assessment, districts should identify "locations that may be conducive to crime, as well as any gaps in security equipment and procedures." Districts may work with an external evaluator who has expertise in crime prevention and related laws and regulations to accomplish this assessment.

When evaluating school facilities, districts should assess several features of buildings. For example, districts should consider barriers and fences, access to doors, the security of locks, access to windows, lighting, and lines of sight for surveillance of various areas within each district building. Areas of buildings to inspect include play or athletic areas; classrooms; driving and parking areas; and hallways, stairways, bathrooms, and other common areas.



EVALUATING STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

The Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency publishes a set of **Safety and Security Assessment Criteria**. The Commission recommends that districts assess student assistance and behavioral health supports as part of their safety and security evaluations. The figure below provides examples of criteria that districts could consider when evaluating this area.



Student Assistance Programs (SAP)

- ☐ All K-12 students, including students in special education, have access to the services of the SAP team.
- ☐ SAP is coordinated with other school initiatives to address the needs of students (e.g., Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS)).



Behavioral Health Services

- ☐ The school entity has a system in place for assessing the services that are needed, and what is not currently available (i.e., a needs assessment).
- ☐ Group counseling or group interventions (Tier 2 MTSS) are available for students at risk for behavioral health concerns or with identified areas of need.



School Climate

- ☐ There is a team structure in the school to review climate-related data and develop an improvement plan that addresses training, systems, and practices.
- ☐ The survey collects data from multiple sources and is a comprehensive survey of stakeholders (i.e., student, teacher, parent) and their perceptions of school climate measured over time.

Source: Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency



EVALUATING OTHER FACTORS

In addition to evaluating policies and processes, facilities, and student support services, districts can track key performance indicators (KPIs) related to safety and security. **KPIs for safety and security often describe the number of unsafe incidents, total expenditures, and personnel related to districts' safety and security.** The Council of the Great City Schools (CGCS) highlights the following KPIs that district leadership should prioritize when assessing overall safety and security of the district:

- Incidents—assault/battery incidents per 1,000 students
- Incidents—people incidents per 1,000 students
- Safety and security expenditures per 1,000 students
- Percent of safety and security expenditures allotted into district budget
- Safety and security staff per 1,000 students
- Training hours per safety/security personnel
- Crisis response teams—drills per team
- Crisis response teams—teams per academic site
- Health/safety inspections—sites inspected annually
- Health-safety violations per site
- Incidents—bullying/harassment per 1,000 students
- Incidents—intrusion/burglary incidents per site
- Intrusion/burglary alarm systems—percent of sites

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Hanover guides K-12 leaders in tackling academic and administrative challenges to ensure that students, parents, and staff have the tools they need to ensure all students succeed. Our comprehensive solutions use a multi-methodological approach including data analytics, survey research, benchmarking, best practice identification, and in-depth interviews and focus groups to help K-12 leaders in every department manage their toughest challenges.

ACADEMIC SOLUTIONS

- **College & Career Readiness:**
Support on-time student graduation and prepare all students for post-secondary education and careers.
- **Program Evaluation:**
Measure program impact to support informed, evidence-based investments in resources that maximize student outcomes and manage costs.
- **Safe & Supportive Environments:**
Create an environment that supports the academic, cultural, and social-emotional needs of students, parents, and staff through a comprehensive annual assessment of climate and culture.

ADMINISTRATIVE SOLUTIONS

- **Family and Community Engagement:**
Expand and strengthen family and community relationships and identify community partnerships that support student success.
- **Talent Recruitment, Retention & Development:**
Attract and retain the best staff through an enhanced understanding of the teacher experience and staff professional development needs.
- **Operations Improvement:**
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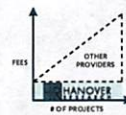
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