K-12 School Security Practices Guide

April 2013

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1. Background

The National Center for Education Statistics reports that a total of 132,217 elementary and secondary schools (traditional, charter, and private) were operating in the United States during the 2009-2010 school year.[1] Approximately 52.3 million students were enrolled at these schools.[2] Elementary and secondary schools are relatively open-access, limited egress community congregation points for children. In general, schools are designed to provide a warm and inviting environment to encourage learning.

Unfortunately, student populations may be at risk of mass casualties from natural disasters and man-made hazards. Schools are susceptible to being damaged by weather-related events, and infectious diseases could spread easily among students, teachers, and staff. In addition, school environments have been successfully targeted by armed attackers in the past. In some schools, security responses to the threat of armed attacks such as barring windows and controlling access points with metal detectors are criticized for resembling a prison environment rather than a learning environment. The potential consequences of a mass casualty incident in schools can be mitigated by implementing a "whole of community" comprehensive emergency management strategy. A comprehensive emergency management strategy uses a multi-disciplined, team approach at the district and school levels to coordinate efforts with community partners such as first-responders, parents, school neighbors, and public and mental health professionals to provide a safe environment for learning.

Released on January 16, 2013, "Now is the Time: the President's plan to protect our children and our communities by reducing gun violence," establishes four common-sense steps to better protect our children and communities from tragic mass shootings.[3] According to the President's plan, "we need to make our schools safer, not only by enhancing their physical security and making sure they are prepared to respond to emergencies like a mass shooting, but also by creating safer and more nurturing school climates that help prevent school violence." This guide provides security practices for consideration by communities to deter threats, address hazards and risks, as well as minimize damage from school incidents, including mass casualty events. The security practices include a spectrum of options for consideration, from programmatic and procedural considerations to technological enhancements that school administrators may consider implementing based upon the most likely threats to their school district and their available resources. The security practices guide includes options for consideration in developing a security plan that builds from existing comprehensive assessment efforts (e.g., culture and climate, school threat assessment) and blends a number of security practices to achieve an effect where threats are either deterred or delayed and detected in advance of creating harm. In the case of a detected threat, a security plan should provide for timely assessment of the threat, create time for selecting an appropriate response to a threat and facilitate transition into an effective recovery, if necessary. To be cost effective, the security plan should implement solutions that serve multiple safety, security, and school emergency management objectives while ensuring a nurturing school environment.

The first step to develop a comprehensive school security program is to identify the threats that potentially jeopardize the physical well-being of the individuals in the school community. The next section will review some potential threats a school community may face.

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[1] Table A-12-1, NCES
[2] Tables A-3-1, A-4-1, and A-5-1, NCES
[3] http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/wh_now_is_the_time_full.pdf

2. **Threats and Vulnerabilities**

Identifying and evaluating any known or potential threat(s) to a given facility is a preliminary component of a security assessment. The results of a security assessment will guide the process of developing a security plan. A proper security plan will aim to deter or mitigate a threat by reducing the school community's vulnerability to the identified threat. As numerous events over the past several years have demonstrated, elementary and secondary schools can face both internal and external threats of violence. Internal threats of violence can come from students, teachers, or staff members who are accepted members within the school facility and whose access to the school is authorized by school administrators. Internal threats may be mitigated by school policies and procedures as outlined in Section 3: Mitigation and Prevention. External threats of violence can come from individuals who are not directly affiliated with the school, and who appear at the facility without authorized access and with the intent to inflict harm on the school community.

2.1   **Threats**

2.1.1   **Natural Hazards/Accidents**

Effective, comprehensive school emergency management plans use an all-hazards approach to assess and address natural hazards, such as infectious diseases and illnesses, fire, and seismic and weather-related events (e.g., hurricanes, tornadoes, flash floods). Such hazards can affect the safety of elementary and secondary school employees and students, as well as the facility's ability to carry out normal operations.

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- In May 2011, a tornado that struck Joplin, Missouri, destroyed approximately 2,000 buildings, including Joplin High School. The school was so badly damaged that it could not be used when the new school year started three (3) months later.[4]

2.1.2   **Targeted Violence**

In addition to threats posed by extreme acts of nature or man-made accidents, elementary and secondary schools are vulnerable to pre-planned attacks of targeted violence committed by individuals using a variety of tactics to inflict harm on a school community. Individuals who target a school to inflict harm could use firearms; improvised explosive devices (IEDs); vehicle-borne IEDs (VBIEDs); chemical, biological, or radiological attacks; or arson that may result in a number of casualties and/or damage to school facilities. Perpetrators may have a wide variety of weapons and tactics available to achieve their objectives and may demonstrate the ability to plan and conduct complex attacks against multiple targets. Attacks can be carried out by individuals, small teams of a few perpetrators, or larger groups acting in a coordinated fashion. Although a terrorist attack directly targeting a kindergarten-12th grade (K-12) school has not occurred in the United States, terrorist attacks on schools have happened in other areas of the world and terrorist groups remain intent on attacking vulnerable targets within the United States. The following sections discuss the specific threats of most concern to elementary and secondary schools.

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[4] http://www.colorado.edu/hazards/research/qr/submitted/paul_2011.pdf

2.1.2.1   Targeted Violence in School Settings

Individuals who target a school to commit an act of violence could use conventional firearms, automatic weapons, explosives (such as those used in the Beslan, Russia school hostage incident in which several hundred school children were killed), or similar weapons to harm individuals or take hostages.[5] The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) analyzed 154 active shooter events in the United States between 2002 and 2012 that included three (3) or more individuals being shot. Active shooter events occurred in an academic setting 17% of the time.[6] As the following examples demonstrate, deliberate attacks on elementary and secondary schools pose a real threat that can inflict considerable harm.

- In December 2012, a lone gunman forced his way into an elementary school in Newtown, Connecticut and then shot and killed 20 students and six (6) teachers and administrators before killing himself.[7]
- In March 2005, a high school student went on a shooting rampage on an Indian reservation in Bemidji, Minnesota, killing seven (7) people at his school, including five (5) students, a teacher, and a security guard. The suspect then killed himself after exchanging gunfire with police. It was the Nation's worst school shooting since the Columbine massacre in 1999 in which 15 people (including the two shooters) were killed.[8]

2.1.2.2   Improvised Explosive Device

An IED or "homemade bomb" can be constructed of commonly available materials, construction explosives (e.g., dynamite), or stolen military-grade explosives. An IED can be carried into an elementary or secondary school by an individual and detonated (e.g., a suicide bomber) or can be deposited in an unnoticed location for detonation by a timer or remote control. More than 30 IEDs were found around Columbine High School, inside cars, and in the suspects' homes immediately after the 1999 shooting.[9]

2.1.2.3   Vehicle-Borne Improvised Explosive Device

Elementary and secondary schools are also vulnerable to VBIED attacks – IEDs loaded into a vehicle (car, truck, motorcycle, or bicycle). The vehicles can be parked close to an elementary or secondary school and placed where large numbers of people gather, or they can be crashed through barriers and detonated. VBIEDs are much larger and more dangerous than IEDs carried by an individual.

2.1.2.4   Arson

Intentional fires can be set by using highly flammable materials (e.g., gasoline) tossed into an elementary or secondary school. Accelerants that promote the spread and intensity of a fire can be applied beforehand and then ignited. Arson is a threat both during and after normal hours of operation.

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[5] Lynch, D., "The enemy is at the gate': Russia after Beslan". *International Affairs*, 81(2005): 141–161.
[6] Joint Intelligence Bulletin– Recent Active Shooter Incidents Highlight Need for Continued Vigilance 2012
[7] http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2013/03/28/president-obama-we-have-not-forgotten-what-happened-newtown
[8] http://www.wce.wwu.edu/Depts/SPED/Forms/Kens%20Readings/Violence/Vio%20School%20shootings%20stun%20reservation%20Borja%20 2005.pdf
[9] Stretesky, Paul B., and Michael J. Hogan. "Columbine and student perceptions of safety: A quasi-experimental study." *Journal of Criminal Justice* 29.5 (2001): 429-443.

2.1.2.5   Chemical or Biological Attack

Chemicals that can be used as weapons include toxic industrial chemicals (e.g., ammonia, hydrogen fluoride, chlorine) and chemical warfare agents (e.g., sarin, VX nerve agent). These hazardous materials may be located on school property, adjacent to school property, or brought onto school property where they are released or dispersed by explosives. Although the latter are not readily available, some chemical warfare agents have been procured and used by terrorists. Biological pathogens (e.g., anthrax, botulin, plague) can be introduced into a facility through its heating, ventilation, and air-conditioning (HVAC) system, or can be spread by contact (e.g., through contaminated letters delivered by mail). In addition, many schools have chemistry labs with small to moderate quantities of dangerous chemicals that could be exploited or become an additional threat as a result of fire or other natural hazard that may disrupt the containment of these chemicals. It is important to ensure proper and secured storage for any chemicals present in a school.

2.1.3 Cyber Threat

Review your school website for personal or sensitive facility information that could be seen, accessed, and used by individuals intending to harm the school community. In addition, monitor and report suspicious "probing activity," intrusion or hacking to your website, servers or other electronic systems.

2.2   Vulnerabilities

This section identifies key common vulnerabilities associated with elementary and secondary schools. While not all of these potential vulnerabilities are applicable to all elementary or secondary schools, they have been identified as priority focus areas for elementary and secondary school management and security personnel to review. Taken together, the sheer size of the country's school system, the predictability of school schedules and holidays, and their attractiveness as a "soft target," can leave schools vulnerable to a number of threats. These vulnerabilities create several industry-wide security and protection related challenges.

- **Prevention of attacks.** Predictable school schedules and well publicized school holidays allow individuals to conduct surveillance at times when they will be less likely to be detected either because no one is present at the school or because there are so many people present that the individual would be able to blend into a crowd. In addition, the perception that schools are "soft targets" and have little security may make them a more attractive target for individuals looking to carry out an attack on a large group of individuals.
- **Disease control and prevention**. Since schools are centers of community life, members of the community may intentionally or accidentally expose a school community to an infectious disease. It is imperative that educators and administrators work with state and local health officials to establish health policies and procedures to prepare for, respond to, and recover from a potential pandemic.
- **Natural disaster/mass casualty events**. The unpredictability of natural disasters and threats to safety from outside the school community make it difficult to prepare for them. Effective planning, to the extent possible, and preparedness training for potential natural disasters and other external threats to school safety enables school personnel to identify their roles for evacuation and/or relief efforts that may be necessary in the event of an unforeseen catastrophe.

2.2.1 Open Access

- **Relatively open access to school grounds and buildings.** All schools require relatively easy access for students and staff during school hours and during large after-school events. Depending on the size of the school and the school population, building and fire codes usually require multiple egress doors

in case of an emergency evacuation. In addition, many school buildings in the United States have been constructed to achieve an inviting and open-to-the-community feeling, with multiple buildings, big windows, multiple entrances and exits, and little opportunities for privacy. These layouts may not lend themselves to simple implementation of many common protective measures; however, many districts and schools have successfully addressed the aforementioned "openness" and implemented substantial access control and monitoring systems.

- **Proximity of schools and neighboring facilities, especially in urban areas**. Many schools are located in urban areas in close proximity to homes and small businesses. These surrounding characteristics of a school need to be considered when working to maintain effective perimeter security. Appropriate fencing may lend to more effective perimeter security. Schools need to be able to effectively respond to threatening incidents in the surrounding community that require a school to activate emergency operations procedures, such as lockdowns.
- **Limited or no vehicle access controls**. The layouts of most schools and school grounds permit close proximity of vehicles to buildings and areas where students congregate. These include parking areas, driveways on school grounds (including long avenues of approach for bus access), and nearby streets. Some schools have no vehicle barriers near the main entrances, other vulnerable parts of the buildings, or student gathering areas.
- **Lack of vehicle inspection**. There are virtually no security controls on the contents of vehicles entering parking areas at elementary and secondary schools. A potential perpetrator of an attack could transport many types of weapons or explosives to the school grounds in a vehicle.
- **Lack of control of vendor and contractor personnel.** Individuals who deliver parcels, food supplies, or stock vending machines are often given unescorted access to schools and the contents of the packages they carry are not inspected.
- **Lack of inspection of student articles.** Except for schools that experience significant gang, drug, and other criminal activity, there is generally no inspection of parcels, book bags, or other items that students bring into schools.
- **Unprotected utilities.** School grounds are generally not secured, leaving HVAC units and other critical building utility supply components (e.g., water, electric power, natural gas service) easily accessible.

2.2.2 Large Concentrations of Students Outside School Buildings

Large concentrations of students frequently gather in open areas outside school buildings for physical education classes, recess, assemblies, ceremonies, and daily arrival and departure. These events often occur at regularly scheduled, well-advertised times, which increase a school's vulnerability to attack because a potential attacker is well aware of the event and amount of people who are likely to be present.

2.2.3 Limited Security Control of After-School Events

Schools are used for a variety of functions after school hours, such as craft fairs, fundraisers, religious services, etc. In addition, some schools may share facilities – such as auditoriums, music/theater facilities, pools, stadiums, or other sports facilities – with the local community. Individuals attending these events are often allowed unscreened access to buildings and facilities.

2.2.4 Limited Security on School Buses

Each year, public school buses travel an estimated 4.3 billion miles, transporting more than 25 million children on more than 55 million daily trips to and from school.[10] There is limited security on school

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[10] DHS Potential Indicators of Terrorist Activity, Common Vulnerabilities, and Protective Measures: School Bus Systems, 2007.

buses. In some areas, buses are equipped with "panic alarms" to allow drivers to alert local police to incidents such as unruly students; however, these are not universally employed. School buses are often inadequately secured when not in service (e.g., at night). In addition, in the absence of identity (ID) checks, it is possible for individuals to pose as authorized bus drivers.

2.2.5   Natural and Other Hazards

Many natural and other hazards can affect the safety of elementary and secondary school employees and students, as well as a school's ability to carry out normal operations. Elementary and secondary schools' emergency operations plans (EOPs), security plans, and business continuity plans can provide the basis for responding to and quickly recovering from unexpected or catastrophic events. When evaluating these types of plans, potential or probable scenarios based on the elementary and secondary schools' geographic location should be considered. Common hazards for elementary and secondary schools include infectious diseases and illnesses, as well as regional natural hazards including tornadoes, floods, and hurricanes.

3. **Prevention, Protection, and Mitigation**

Prevention, protection, and mitigation address what schools, districts, and community partners can do to reduce or eliminate risk to life and property. These processes may differ depending on whether the threat of harm is from an internal threat or individual affiliated with the school (i.e. student or employee), an external threat or individual not directly affiliated with the school, or other natural hazards/manmade threats.

This section will highlight threat assessments, identify potential attack indicators, recommend protective measures in coordination with community partners, and discuss reporting procedures and long-term prevention programs. A significantly important element of an effective security program incorporates a process to achieve and maintain situational awareness and understanding about what is occurring in or around your school environment. Situational understanding and the ability to discover internal threats to the school community can be achieved and maintained by fostering a culture where staff, teachers, and administrators consciously evaluate available information from the school environment to identify and assess potential threats of violence to the school community. Similar to meteorologists relying on sensor data to accurately forecast the weather, the school administrators must rely on human and some technological sensors collecting and reporting school environmental data for them to identify and assess potential threats. The sensors in a school environment are not all technological; the majority of the best sensors are humans. In a school setting sensors can be the whole community surrounding the school, school staff, teachers, school resource officers, and students. A security threat assessment can be conducted to gather information and identify potential threats, assess the nature of the threat, and select the most appropriate course of action to manage and mitigate that threat in order to maintain a safe school environment for students and teachers.

In 2002, the United States Secret Service in partnership with the U.S. Department of Education identified a number of planning and behavioral indicators that demonstrate a student may be thinking about, or preparing to commit, an act of violence at his or her school.[11] This study, referred to as the Safe School Initiative, analyzed 37 attacks at K-12 schools in order to better understand the pre-attack behaviors and communications of 41 students who carried out these attacks. The Safe School Initiative also identified

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[11] *See* Vossekuil, B., Fein, R., Reddy, M., Borum, R., & Modzeleski, W. (2002). *The Final Report and Findings of the Safe School Initiative: Implications for the Prevention of School Attacks in the United States.* U.S. Department of Education, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, Safe and Drug-Free Schools Program and U.S. Secret Service, National Threat Assessment Center, Washington, D.C.; *see also* Fein, R., Vossekuil, B., Pollack, W., Borum, R., Modzeleski, W., & Reddy, M. (2002). *Threat Assessment in Schools: A Guide to Managing*

steps that schools can take to identify, assess, and manage students who pose a risk to the school. School administrators can educate personnel on how they may assist in preventing violence from internal threats, such as when a student, teacher, or staff member threatens to commit some violent act on the school community. Administrators may communicate the importance of reporting suspicious or concerning behavior to school officials or law enforcement personnel and develop a process to receive and respond to such reports appropriately. A threat assessment can help school administrators evaluate threats and individuals who pose a threat to the school community, and can ensure that steps are taken to effectively prevent and mitigate a potential threat.

Local law enforcement in cooperation with the larger community may be best poised to identify external threats to a school community. A good relationship that encourages communication between school administrators and local law enforcement should facilitate the flow of information about potential threats to a school from persons in the larger community. A school resource officer may serve as an effective point of contact or liaison between school officials and local law enforcement.

3.1   Threat Assessments

The security practices ultimately developed should target the threats deemed most likely to occur or have the potential to result in the greatest damage. Potential threats to elementary and secondary schools often originate from disaffected individuals associated with the school, such as students and teachers, but can also originate from individuals from outside the community. A behavioral threat assessment team may be staffed with a combination of faculty, staff, and administrators, including a guidance counselor, mental health professional, and/or school resource officer. This team can identify and assess students and staff who may pose a threat to the school or individuals at the school. The behavioral threat assessment team should employ a variety of resources, many of which are discussed later in this document, to help mitigate the threat and prevent an act of violence from disrupting the school community. Although a school's behavioral threat assessment team may be less able to detect threats which originate from individuals who are not directly affiliated with the school, positive relationships with local law enforcement can facilitate information sharing and allow school administrators to be aware of potential external threats. In addition, an effective school security program that deters violence can help prevent external threats to the school community from developing.[12] Since schools confront a variety of threats, a comprehensive strategy combining risk-informed prevention, protection, and preparedness activities, along with a developed capacity to recover from adversity will allow schools to manage and mitigate the most serious threats to their safety and security.

3.2   Potential Attack Indicators

Attack indicators are observable behaviors that may precede an attack; such indicators may include witnessing a potential perpetrator engage in suspicious surveillance, training, or other pre-attack planning activities. Potential indicators can be grouped into the following categories: individual behavior indicators, surveillance indicators, imminent attack indicators, and surrounding area indicators.

The Safe School Initiative found that school-based attacks are rarely impulsive acts; rather, they are typically planned in advance. Most attackers in this study engaged in behavior prior to the attack that concerned at least one adult; and prior to most incidents, attackers had revealed their intentions to other students. However, only 31% of the attackers were known to have acted violently toward others at some point prior to the attack; and only 27% of student attackers had a prior arrest history.[13] Understanding

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[12] *Threatening Situations and to Creating Safe School Climates*. U.S. Department of Education, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, Safe and Drug-Free Schools Program and U.S. Secret Service, National Threat Assessment Center, Washington, D.C.
[13] http://www.secretservice.gov/ntac/ssi_final_report.pdf

behaviors that are unusual, concerning, or suspicious, as well as behaviors that may be indicative of surveillance or imminent attack, are essential in the efforts to protect school communities from violence.

3.2.1 Individual Behavior Indicators

Individuals internal to a school community who threaten to carry out some attack may engage in a number of behaviors that raise concern in others who know the individual. These behaviors should be evaluated in the context of an individual's life and current situation, such that an individual who displays several of these concerning behaviors and is also dealing with a negative life event may be of concern and warrant some level of intervention.[14]

With respect to active shooter situations, investigations and analysis show that many active shooters were described as social isolates, harbored feelings of hate and anger, and/or had some reported contact with mental health professionals. Mental illness is commonly referenced as a potential contributing factor, but its causal impact on the attack can only be speculated upon. Common catalysts or triggers observed include: loss of significant relationships, changes in living arrangements, major adverse changes to life circumstances, and/or feelings of humiliation or rejection on the part of the shooter. Other indicators that could apply to faculty or staff include changes in financial status and/or loss of job.[15]

Some individual behavior indicators include:

Individual Behavior Indicators
• Socially isolated
• Threats of violence against others
• Unsolicited focus on dangerous weapons
• Unstable emotional responses
• Intense anger and hostility
• Loss of significant relationships
• Feeling either arrogant and supreme, or powerless
• Expressions of paranoia or depression
• Increased use of alcohol or drugs
• Depression or withdrawal
• Talk of suicide
• Increased absenteeism

3.2.2 Surveillance Indicators

Individuals may also engage in behaviors that indicate they are conducting surveillance. Indications of potential surveillance include reports of persons in the vicinity of an elementary or secondary school inquiring about the facility, its operations, and/or its protective measures.

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[14] http://www.secretservice.gov/ntac/ssi_final_report.pdf
[15] Joint Intelligence Brief – Recent Active Shooter Incidents Highlight Need for Continued Vigilance, 2012

Some potential indicators that an elementary and secondary school may be under surveillance include:

Surveillance Indicators – Suspicious Persons
• Persons attempting to gain access into the school or who are located in the school building with no legitimate purpose
• Persons using or carrying video/camera/observation equipment in or near the facility over an extended period
• Persons parking, standing, or loitering in the same area over a multiple-day period with no apparent reasonable explanation
• Persons excessively inquiring about practices pertaining to the school and its operations or the school's supporting infrastructure (telecommunications, electric, natural gas, water)
• Persons observed or reported to be observing school receipts or deliveries
• Threats by telephone, mail, or e-mail and/or increase in reports of threats from known reliable sources
• A noted pattern of false alarms requiring a response by law enforcement or emergency services

3.2.3 Imminent Attack Indicators

These indicators may demonstrate that an attack is imminent and immediate action needs to be taken. Indicators of an imminent attack include people or vehicles that demonstrate unusual or suspicious behavior, or unattended suspicious packages that require an immediate response. If an attack seems imminent and an immediate action is required, call 911 (local law enforcement) and activate the school EOP.

Some potential indicators of an imminent attack include:

Imminent Attack Indicators
• Reports from students about a classmate(s) threatening violence that includes specific dates/times/locations/targets
• Suspicious persons in crowded areas wearing unusually bulky clothing that might conceal explosives
• Unexpected or unfamiliar delivery trucks arriving at the facility
• Unattended packages (e.g., backpacks, briefcases, boxes) or suspicious packages and/or letters received by mail
• Vehicles approaching the school at an unusually high speed or steering around barriers and traffic controls

3.2.4 Surrounding Area Indicators

These surrounding area indicators relate to activities in the area or region surrounding an elementary or secondary school and may demonstrate that an attack is being prepared. The indicators might appear at an elementary or secondary school itself, or may appear in the communities surrounding a school. The indicators should be considered and factored into decisions regarding security. The surrounding area indicators are generally identified by or reported to local law enforcement. As stated earlier, an elementary or secondary school can establish communication channels with law enforcement to gain awareness of potentially threatening situations in the area and help piece together information from their facility with information from the surrounding area.

- An increase in reporting of buildings being left unsecured or doors left unlocked, when they are normally secured and locked at all times
- Theft or unauthorized possession of employee identification cards, uniforms, or security communications
- Unfamiliar contract workers attempting to access unauthorized areas
- Unusual or unexpected maintenance activities (e.g., road repairs) near the school
- Sudden increases in power outages designed to test the backup systems or recovery times

3.3 Protective Measures

As discussed earlier, a school's security environment features layers of protective measures, established in collaboration with community partners, to best deter, delay, and detect threats. These security layers also allow schools to consider a threat as soon as possible and to more effectively respond to, further deter, eliminate, or mitigate that threat.

Technological sensors such as surveillance cameras or alarms (fire, smoke, tornado, and intrusion detection) may inform decision making. Barriers, in the form of locked doors, bollards, or even school resource officers and teachers should be utilized to delay a threat and create time to afford more effective decision making. For example, a locked door delays intrusion which creates time to better assess an unauthorized person's intentions and to make a better response decision. A pre-arranged or well-rehearsed response to identified threats is also a mechanism to manage time during a crisis (e.g. fire drill) and allows a more effective response under time constraints.

As information is received during an emergency situation, a number of factors influence an individual's decision making ability. Time, or the lack of time, is a principle factor, and potential disruptor, in effective decision making. During a crisis, the more time available to evaluate information, in general, the better the decision the individual makes in response to that crisis. Strategies to improve responses during a crisis should focus on time management. An effective security plan should maximize the amount of time available for leaders to make a decision. A strong security plan will provide school and community leaders with appropriate opportunity and time during a crisis to make important decisions that will impact the welfare of their community.

Protective measures should be comprehensive; integrating equipment, personnel, procedures, and information sharing to ensure that all employees and all students are involved. Including all school employees in security operations, and properly training them to observe and recognize threats, increases the number of eyes on the ground and improves the chances of detecting a threat. Many different protective measures are available for deployment at a school and in the areas surrounding a school. Some are applicable to a wide range of schools and against a number of threat streams, while others are designed to meet the unique needs of a specific school or a specific threat stream. In addition, some protective measures may be tactical in nature, while others may address long-term strategic needs. Some protective measures are designed to be implemented on a permanent basis to serve as routine protection for a facility. Such measures are sometimes referred to as "baseline countermeasures." Others are either implemented or increased in their application only during times of heightened alert.

Based on data collected as part of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Enhanced Critical Infrastructure Protection Program, protective measures employed by elementary and secondary schools to address vulnerabilities to both intentional acts (e.g., attacks or sabotage) and natural disasters have been concentrated primarily in the areas of security management, information sharing, and dependencies.

Refer to Appendix 1 to view a baseline security practices checklist, some of which have been adopted by various elementary and secondary schools, which can be used to address the vulnerabilities summarized in Section 2.2.

3.4   Reporting Procedures

The Nationwide Suspicious Activity Reporting (SAR) Initiative (NSI) provides law enforcement with a tool to help prevent and detect criminal activity, including those related to schools. This initiative establishes a national capacity to gather, document, process, analyze, and share SAR information.[16] To benefit from the SAR Initiative, a school should create a common reporting system and develop guidance for students and staff to report suspicious activity to their school as well as local law enforcement agencies. An alert school community plays a critical role in keeping schools and communities safe.[17] Also, consider creating an anonymous way for people to report suspicious activity. In addition, it is critical that law enforcement officers at all levels of government – Federal, State, local, tribal, and territorial – who observe suspicious behaviors or receive reports from concerned civilians, private security, and other government agencies share this information with state and major urban area fusion centers, the FBI, and other law enforcement agencies to help prevent future attacks from occurring.

3.5   Long-Term Prevention Programs

Long-term prevention programs may also be useful in mitigating and preventing threats from students at schools. Many schools have curricula and programs aimed at preventing children and youth from initiating harmful behavior. Social problem-solving or life skills programs, anti-bullying programs, mentoring programs, character education, and school-wide discipline efforts are common across the Nation as a means to reduce violent behavior and develop self-esteem among students. In a 2011 report released by the U.S. Department of Education, some seven (7) million U.S. students ages 12 through 18, or 28% of all such students, reported they were bullied at school; about 1.5 million of these students, or 6%, reported they were cyber-bullied in the 2008-2009 school year.[18] It is imperative that the school and community send a unified message that bullying is unacceptable. Schools should routinely conduct assessments in school to determine how often bullying occurs, where it happens, and how adults intervene. These assessments coupled with awareness campaigns, clear school-wide rules, and a bullying reporting system can establish a climate in which bullying is not tolerated.[19] In addition, districts and schools can work to build mental health support systems for students and staff to facilitate the development of and nurture a safe, healthy school environment. Law related education programs may also be beneficial as a way to familiarize students with local law enforcement and their specific mission within the community. Furthermore, these efforts support a comprehensive school EOP and can be used to build immediate, short- and long-term recovery efforts.

4. Preparedness

Effective crisis planning begins with leadership at the top. Every governor, mayor, legislator, superintendent, and principal should work together to make school crisis planning a priority. Top-down leadership helps set the policy agenda, secure funds, and brings the necessary people together across agencies.[20] Participation of leaders at the grassroots level is also critical because they will help inform the

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[16] More information on the Nationwide SAR Initiative (NSI) is available at: http://nsi.ncirc.gov/
[17] http://www.dhs.gov/if-you-see-something-say-something-campaign
[18] http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2011/2011336.pdf
[19] More information on bullying prevention is available at: http://www.stopbullying.gov/
[20] http://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/safety/emergencyplan/crisisplanning.pdf

greater school community of the planning process. Moreover, schools and districts should open the channels of communication well before an emergency incident. Relationships need to be established in advance so that students, staff, and emergency responders are familiar with one another and the adults have an effective working relationship. Effective school emergency management stems from close collaboration, coordination, and communication between schools, public and mental health officials, traditional first responders (e.g., law enforcement, fire officials), and other relevant partners in the community including hospitals and faith-based centers. Schools and districts should cultivate a relationship with city emergency managers, public works officials, and health and mental health professionals sooner, rather than later. EOPs should be developed in partnership with other community groups as well, including law enforcement, fire safety officials, and emergency medical services. These groups have already developed EOPs and can be helpful in the development of school plans. All school districts and individual schools should create a crisis team whose key function is to identify the types of crises that may occur in the districts and schools and define what events would activate the EOP. The team may consider many factors such as the school's ability to handle a situation with internal resources and its experience in responding to past events.[21]

4.1   Establishing Crisis Response Teams

The process of developing and maintaining an EOP is complex; therefore, before a plan is developed, school district crisis response teams should be assembled. These teams are composed of a variety of professionals with expertise in emergency management (e.g., police, fire, and emergency medical services personnel) and include community partners (e.g., public and mental health professionals) and school-based staff (e.g., facilities and cafeteria managers, nurses, disability specialists, counselors, teachers, and administrators). Crisis response teams should be responsible for: establishing relationships with community partners; coordinating vulnerability assessments; developing training activities; conducting exercises to support and improve the EOP; establishing and enforcing a school and school district's EOPs; and guiding and supporting the development of an individual school district's EOP. These teams should exist on both the school district level, as well as a single school level. The staff in charge of prevention in a school (counselors, teachers, health professionals, administrators) should be part of the crisis response team that is responsible for creating a specific EOP for that specific school.[22]

4.2   Creating an Emergency Operations Plan

An effective EOP facilitates a safety and security program. Children and youth rely on and find great comfort in the adults who protect them. As a result, teachers and staff must know how to help their students through a crisis and return them home safely. Knowing what to do when faced with a crisis can be the difference between calm and chaos, between courage and fear, and between life and death.[23] To best prepare school staff for a crisis, create an EOP, and conduct training exercises. Together, the EOP and training exercises will prepare staff to effectively respond and help minimize loss of life. Facility readiness requires that leadership develop and exercise response plans that apply general preparedness and response protocols to specific types of emergencies and facility capabilities (including security resources). EOPs need to be customized to communities, districts, and schools to meet the unique needs of local residents and students. School specific EOPs should consider predetermined security perimeters, plans to create a command post during an incident, media liaisons, parent liaisons, a Joint Information Center (JIC), police staging areas, alternative sites for evacuation and a parent reunification plan. Additionally, it is incredibly important to review, update, and practice the EOP regularly. Good plans are never finished; they can always be updated based on experience, research, and changing vulnerabilities.

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[21] http://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/safety/emergencyplan/crisisplanning.pdf
[22] Ibid.
[23] Ibid.

4.2.1 Define Roles and Responsibilities

Define roles and responsibilities of school staff as well as community partners. Define what should happen, when, and at whose direction—that is, create an organizational system. For district and school responsibilities, this process can involve many of the school staff—important tasks will be neglected if one person is responsible for too many functions. School staff could be assigned roles based on their skills and using the Incident Command System (ICS) detailed in the National Incident Management System (NIMS) such as: school commander, public information officer, safety officer, and liaison officer. Both individuals and backups should be assigned to these roles. Also, be aware of roles that outside agencies play, the responsibilities they will assume, and how they will interact with school staff. It is especially important to determine who will communicate with families and the community during an incident and how they will communicate. Create a JIC where information can be shared and message sharing can be centralized. This will support media requests such as press conferences, and provide a single accurate outlet for information. Many schools and emergency responders use ICS to manage incidents. ICS provides a structured way for delegating responsibilities among school officials and all emergency responders during crisis response. The Emergency Management Institute developed the Introduction to ICS for Schools (IS-100.SCa for Schools) course in collaboration with the U.S. Department of Education. The course is designed primarily for K-12 school personnel.[24]

4.2.2 Notification Procedures

One of the first steps in planning is to develop a mechanism to notify students and staff that an incident is occurring and to instruct them on what to do. Schools should consider implementing a mass notification system. Mass notification systems can advise staff, students, and visitors of an impending threat. Addressable notification systems can provide notifications to the entire school or send messages to specific locations, such as a portion of the building. Addressable notification systems can help control the flow of personnel by directing them to go in a different direction or to follow a specific emergency procedure. Also, consider implementing a classroom communication system that can provide a rapid means for staff and students to alert the administration that a serious incident is taking place. Such communications systems can consist of a push-to-talk button installed on a wall, an identifiable telephone system, or other system. In regards to active shooter situations, often, the first indication of an incident are the first shots which may not be heard by administrators. Vulnerability is greater if the administration cannot quickly receive information from faculty, students, and staff.[25] There should be specific methods for communicating an incident internally to students, staff, and school visitors and separate methods for communicating an incident externally to media, families, neighbors, and the community. Methods of communication should be implemented based on the unique needs of each school, district, and situation.

4.2.3 Evacuation, Lockdown, and Shelter-In-Place Policies and Procedures

When an incident occurs, quickly determine whether students and staff need to be evacuated, locked down or assume shelter in place. Evacuation requires all students and staff to leave the building. While evacuating to the school's field makes sense for a fire drill that only lasts a few minutes, it may not be an appropriate location for a longer period of time. The evacuation plan should include backup buildings to serve as emergency shelters, such as nearby community centers, religious institutions, businesses, or other schools. Evacuation plans should include contingencies for weather conditions as well. Evacuation procedures should also include designated areas to provide specific needs. Evacuation procedures should include establishing a parent reunification site where parents gather if they have come to the school or a special triage area if the situation requires it.

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[24] http://training.fema.gov/EMIWeb/IS/courseOverview.aspx?code=IS-100.SCa
[25] http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/st/bips07_428_schools.pdf

Lockdowns are called for when a crisis occurs outside of the school and an evacuation would be dangerous. A lockdown may also be called for when there is a crisis inside and movement within the school may put students in jeopardy. All exterior doors are locked and students and staff stay in their classrooms. Windows may also need to be covered.

Shelter-in-place requires students and staff to immediately find a room with no or few windows, and take refuge there. All windows, exterior doors, and other openings to the outside should be closed and locked. In addition, all fans, heating, and air conditioning systems should be turned off if possible to prevent any materials or agents from circulating through school ventilation systems.

Active shooter situations are unpredictable and evolve quickly. Because active shooter situations are often over within 10 to 15 minutes, before law enforcement arrives on the scene, individuals must be prepared both mentally and physically to deal with an active shooter situation. In the event of an active shooter situation, it is imperative to quickly determine the most reasonable way to protect your own life. If there is an accessible escape path, attempt to evacuate the premises. If evacuation is not possible, find a place to hide where the active shooter is less likely to find you. As a last resort, and only when your life is in imminent danger, attempt to disrupt and/or incapacitate the active shooter.[26]

4.2.4 Plans for Diverse Needs of Children and Staff

EOPs should provide for the needs of students, staff, and visitors with disabilities and other functional and access needs. This is especially important when considering communication and evacuation procedures. Special attention is also needed for children with limited English proficiency. Outreach documents for families may be needed in several languages.

4.2.5 Consider Necessary Equipment and Supplies

Provide staff with the necessary equipment to respond to a crisis. Consider whether there are enough master keys for emergency responders so that they have complete access to the school. Get the phones or radios necessary for communication. Redundancy is important; consider a second telephone service that is available to allow communications in the event of an incident. Request and maintain contact information for families in advance of an incident. Maintain a cache of first aid supplies. Prepare response kits for secretaries, nurses, and teachers so they have easy access to supplies. For example, a nurse's kit might include student and emergency medicines, as well as first aid supplies. A teacher's kit might include a crisis management reference guide, as well as an updated student roster.

4.2.6 Common Vocabulary

It is imperative that school staff and emergency responders understand each other's terminology. Work with emergency responders to develop a common vocabulary. The words used to give directions for evacuation, lockdown, and other actions should be clear and not hazard specific. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) recommends using plain language to announce the need for action, for example, "evacuate" rather than "code blue." Plain language allows everyone in the school building including new staff, substitute teachers, and visitors to understand what type of response is called for.

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[26] http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/active_shooter_booklet.pdf

4.2.7 Accountability and Reunification System

As soon as a crisis is recognized, it is important to account for all students, staff, and visitors. Emergency responders treat a situation very differently when people are missing. In addition, a method should be in place for tracking student release to their parents and ensuring that students are only released to authorized individuals. A parent reunification system or early release system should be in place for various emergency situations. Different emergencies will be responded to in different ways; a single solution may not work for every incident.

4.2.8 Communication with External Entities

It is important to address how the school will communicate with all of the individuals who are directly or indirectly involved in the crisis. Plan how to communicate with families, community members, and the media. Consider writing template letters and press releases in advance so staff will not have to compose them during the confusion and chaos of an incident. Also consider creating an automated emergency alert system where parents can be notified via phone/text/email about incidents that are occurring.

4.2.9 Emergency Drills

Preparedness includes emergency drills and crisis exercises for staff, students, and emergency responders. Many schools have found tabletop exercises very useful in practicing and testing the procedures outlined in their EOP. Training and drills can help identify issues and problems that need to be addressed in the EOP. It might also be prudent to have teachers trained on how to manage students during a crisis, especially those experiencing panic reactions.

5. Response

A crisis is the time to follow the EOP, not to make a plan from scratch. This section provides broad action lists for teachers, administrative staff, and other school staff located throughout the school. It is important to note that these action lists are a broad overview of how to respond. Each list can be modified and edited to reflect the specific action plans outlined for each school. More detailed lists can be developed by school assessment teams in coordination with community partners. During a crisis, leaders need to project a calm, confident, and serious attitude to assure people of the seriousness of the situation and to trust the directions being given. It is also important to communicate accurate and appropriate information. Use the channels of communication identified in the EOP.

5.1 Teachers

Action List for Evacuation – Teachers (in assigned classrooms)
o   Determine whether a crisis exists and if so, the type of crisis, the location of the crisis, and the magnitude of the crisis
o   Notify appropriate emergency responders
o   Notify administrative staff so all students and staff can be notified of incident
o   Move all students in an orderly fashion to the designated evacuation location.
o   Account for all students. Make note if students are missing
o   Stay in communication with other school staff
o   Follow emergency response instructions

Action List for Lockdown – Teachers (in assigned classrooms)
- o Determine whether a crisis exists and if so, the type of crisis, the location of the crisis, and the magnitude of the crisis
- o Notify appropriate emergency responders
- o Notify administrative staff so all students and staff can be notified of incident
- o Consider locking all doors and windows, covering windows, barricading doors, and moving all students to a designated lock down area of the room farthest away from windows and doors
- o Account for all students; make note if students are missing
- o Stay in communication with other school staff
- o Follow emergency responder instructions
- o Participate in student release system plans if necessary

Action List for Shelter-In-Place – Teachers (in assigned classrooms)
- o Determine whether a crisis exists and if so, the type of crisis, the location of the crisis, and the magnitude of the crisis
- o Notify appropriate emergency responders
- o Notify administrative staff so all students and staff can be notified of incident
- o Consider locking all doors and windows, covering windows, barricading doors, and moving all students to a designated lock down area of the room farthest away from windows and doors
- o Account for all students; make note if students are missing.
- o Stay in communication with other school staff.
- o Follow emergency responder instructions

5.2   Administrative Staff

Action List for Evacuation – Administrative Staff (principal, vice principal, secretaries, etc.)
- o Determine whether a crisis exists and if so, the type of crisis, the location of the crisis, and the magnitude of the crisis
- o Notify appropriate emergency responders
- o Follow evacuation procedures and quickly exit building to designated evacuation location
- o Consolidate accountability information
- o Communicate with emergency responders and school staff
- o Communicate with appointed public liaison
- o Participate in student reunification system plans if necessary

Action List for Lockdown – Administrative Staff (principal, vice principal, secretaries, etc.)
- o Determine whether a crisis exists and if so, the type of crisis, the location of the crisis, and the magnitude of the crisis
- o Notify appropriate emergency responders
- o Follow lockdown procedures and provide oversight of entire lockdown
- o Consolidate accountability information
- o Communicate with emergency responders and school staff
- o Communicate with appointed public liaison
- o Participate in student reunification system plans if necessary

- o Determine whether a crisis exists and if so, the type of crisis, the location of the crisis, and the magnitude of the crisis
- o Notify appropriate emergency responders
- o Notify administrative staff so all students and staff can be notified of incident
- o Consider locking all doors and windows, covering windows, barricading doors, and moving all students to a designated lock down area of the room farthest away from windows and doors
- o Turn off all fans, heating, and air conditioning systems
- o Account for all students; make note if students are missing
- o Stay in communication with other school staff
- o Follow emergency responder instructions

5.3   Other Staff

Action List for Evacuation – Other Staff (nurses, janitorial staff, teacher aids, counselors, etc.)

- o Determine whether a crisis exists and if so, the type of crisis, the location of the crisis, and the magnitude of the crisis
- o Notify appropriate emergency responders
- o Notify administrative staff so all students and staff can be notified of incident
- o Follow evacuation procedures and quickly exit building to designated evacuation location
- o Provide support where needed (direct student traffic, provide medical support, etc.)
- o Participate in student release system plans if necessary

Action List for Lockdown – Other Staff (nurses, janitorial staff, teacher aids, counselors, etc.)

- o Determine whether a crisis exists and if so, the type of crisis, the location of the crisis, and the magnitude of the crisis
- o Notify appropriate emergency responders
- o Notify administrative staff so all students and staff can be notified of incident
- o Follow lock down procedures
- o Provide support where needed (direct student traffic, provide medical support, etc.)
- o Participate in student release system plans if necessary

Action List for Shelter-In-Place – Other Staff (nurses, janitorial staff, teacher aids, counselors, etc.)

- o Determine whether a crisis exists and if so, the type of crisis, the location of the crisis, and the magnitude of the crisis
- o Notify appropriate emergency responders
- o Notify administrative staff so all students and staff can be notified of incident
- o Follow lock down procedures
- o Turn off all fans, heating and air conditioning systems
- o Provide support where needed (direct student traffic, provide medical support, etc.)

6. Recovery

The goal of recovery is to return to learning and restore the infrastructure of the school as quickly as possible. Focus on students and take as much time as needed for recovery. School staff can be trained to deal with the emotional impact of a crisis, as well as to initially assess the emotional needs of students, staff, and responders. One of the major goals of recovery is to provide a caring and supporting school and community environment.

6.1   Assemble a Crisis Intervention Team and Assess Emotional Needs of Staff, Students, Facilities, and Responders

A Crisis Intervention Team is composed of individuals at either the district or school level involved in recovery. Service providers in the community may want to assist after a crisis. With prior planning, those with appropriate skills and certifications may be tasked to assist in recovery. Assess the emotional needs of all students and staff, and determine those who need intervention by a school counselor, social worker, school psychologist, or other mental health professional. In addition, available services need to be identified for families who may want to seek treatment for their children themselves.

6.2   Keep Students, Families and the Media Informed

Be clear about what steps have been taken to tend to student safety after the crisis has occurred. Let families and other community members know what support services the school and district is providing or what other community resources are available. Messages to students should be age appropriate. Create a JIC where information sharing is centralized.

6.3   Return to the "Business of Learning" as Quickly As Possible

Experts agree that the first order of business following a crisis is to return students to learning as quickly as possible. This may involve helping students and families cope with separations from one another with the reopening of school after a crisis.

6.4   Provide Stress Management

Trauma experts emphasize the need to create a caring, warm, and trusting environment for students following a crisis. Allow students to talk about how they felt and what they experienced during the traumatic event. Younger children, who may not be able to fully express their feelings verbally, may benefit from participating in creative activities, including drawing, painting, or writing stories. Engage older adolescents in group discussion, and address any issues of guilt. In addtion, provide on-site counselors for a minimum of one week after the incident.

6.5   Restore Infrastructure

Restoring infrastructure is essential to the restoration of the teaching and learning environment. Restoring damaged infrastructure after an emergency incident is a positive, tangible sign of recovery for students and staff. Restoring infrastructure after an incident provides an opportunity to evaluate incident response and implement new and effective protective measures if necessary.

6.6   Evaluate

Evaluating recovery efforts will help prepare for the next crisis. Use several methods to evaluate recovery efforts. Conduct brief interviews with emergency responders, families, teachers, students, and staff. Focus groups may also be helpful in obtaining candid information about recovery efforts. Evaluate what worked, what did not, and how operations or EOPs can be improved. Update and strengthen the EOP so that in a crisis, no child is left behind. It may also be prudent to conduct a community briefing within 48 hours of the incident. In addition, it may be helpful to conduct after action reports with school district personnel and first responder commanders within one week of the incident.

Additional Resources

Bullying Prevention
http://www.stopbullying.gov/

Active Shooter Preparedness
http://www.dhs.gov/active-shooter-preparedness

President's Plan to Protect our Children and Our Communities by Reducing Gun Violence
http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/wh_now_is_the_time_full.pdf

If You See Something, Say Something
http://www.dhs.gov/if-you-see-something-say-something-campaign

Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools (REMS): Technical Assistance Center
http://rems.ed.gov/

U.S. Secret Service National Threat Assessment Center (NTAC)
http://www.secretservice.gov/ntac.shtml

FEMA: Prepare. Plan. Stay Informed
http://www.ready.gov/

Primer to Design Safe School Projects in Case of Terrorist Attacks and School Shootings
http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/st/bips07_428_schools.pdf

Educational Facilities Vulnerability/Hazard Assessment Checklist
http://www.acefacilities.org/Resources/documents/ACEF%20-Vulnerability-Hazard%20Assessment%20Checklist.pdf

DHS Protective Security Advisors
http://www.dhs.gov/protective-security-advisors

Critical Infrastructure Vulnerability Assessments
http://www.dhs.gov/critical-infrastructure-vulnerability-assessments

Nationwide Suspicious Activity Reporting (SAR) Initiative (NSI)
http://nsi.ncirc.gov/

Student Reports of Bullying and Cyber-Bullying: Results from the 2009 School Crime Supplement to the National Crime Victimization Survey
http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2011/2011336.pdf

Safe Havens International: A Non-Profit Campus Safety Organization
http://www.safehavensinternational.org/

Photo Sources

Picture 1: Brach, Patricia, FEMA Photographer. Houston, Texas. March, 9, 2009.
http://www.fema.gov/photodata/original/40283.jpg.

Picture 2: Risk Management Series: Design Guide for Improving School Safety in Earthquakes, Floods, and High Winds, FEMA P-424 / December 2012, Federal Emergency Management Agency, page 151.
http://www.fema.gov/library/viewRecord.do?id=1986

Picture 3: Safe Havens International
http://www.safehavensinternational.org/

Picture 4: Jun, Elissa, FEMA Photographer. Joplin, Missouri. August 19, 2011.
http://www.fema.gov/photodata/original/50245.jpg.