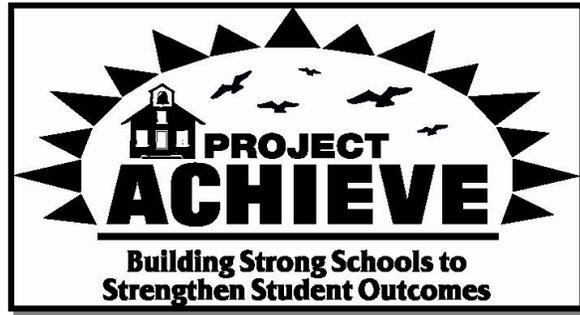

The School Safety Audit and Emergency/Crisis Prevention Audit Protocols

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The Elements or Characteristics in a School Safety Audit

Safe and secure common school areas result most often when there is a comprehensive process to continuously plan, implement, and evaluate the safety and security of the entire school. This occurs when schools conduct scheduled “school safety audits,” remediate identified weaknesses or gaps, and update their practices when, for example, more effective procedures or new technologies become available. These audits also help to prevent crisis situations, and they establish the protocols for an effective “first response” system when crises actually occur (see section below). A comprehensive school safety audit typically addresses the following broad areas (Texas School Safety Center, 2008; Virginia Department of Education, 2000):

- The development and use of policies and procedural documents relevant to school, staff, student, parent, law enforcement, and outside personnel
- The development of school prevention, intervention, and crisis management/response plans and processes (see later section below), and how they are implemented and evaluated
- The security of the school grounds, classrooms, and common areas by school administrators and staff, and school security staff and police before, during, and after school hours
- The physical plant of the school; its lighting, monitoring/surveillance, and alarm systems; its scheduling and traffic patterns for students in common school areas; its staff supervision and deployment patterns and responsibilities; its classroom organization, cleanliness, and safety/security characteristics
- The involvement of students, parents, and relevant community stakeholders in relevant school safety processes; the professional development/training of staff; and the use (with students) of school drills and simulations
- The response times of school or district security and/or law enforcement personnel, along with other first responders, during drill and actual crisis/emergency situations
- How information and data are collected that formatively and summatively evaluate all processes and procedures

Specific to the common areas of a school, the school safety audit analyzes the presence of the following (Texas School Safety Center, 2008; Virginia Department of Education, 2000):

School Exterior and Play/Gathering Areas

School grounds and play/gathering areas are fenced and secure
Staff, visitor, and student parking areas have been designated, have appropriate signage, and are secure

There is one clearly marked and designated entrance for visitors

Signs are posted for visitors to report to the main office through a designated entrance

Restricted areas are clearly marked

All exterior doors are numbered on the outside, and these numbers are clearly visible from the street

Exterior doors, unless designated for entry, lack exterior hardware, and are keyed to allow re-entry

All areas of the school grounds and buildings are accessible to patrolling security and emergency vehicles

Bus loading and drop-off zones are clearly defined

Fire zones are clearly marked

Access to the bus loading area is restricted to other vehicles during loading/unloading

Staff are assigned to bus loading/drop off areas

Parent drop-off and pick-up areas are clearly defined

There is adequate lighting around the building

Lighting is evident and working at entrances and other points of possible intrusion

Parking lots are lighted properly, and all lights are functioning

There is visual surveillance of play areas, bicycle racks, and other exterior areas

Visual surveillance of parking lots from the main office is possible

The perimeter of the school building is clear of debris, obstructions, and safety hazards

Shrubs and foliage are trimmed to allow for good sight lines (3'-0"/8'-0" rule), and to prevent people from hiding behind them

Ground floor windows have no broken panes, and the locking hardware is in working order

Basement windows are protected with grills or well covers that are secure and locked

Access to the roof is restricted with no climbable planting/trees or architecture

The school grounds are free from trash or debris

The school's exterior walls and other surfaces are free of graffiti

School Interiors: Classroom, Common, and Staff Areas

There is a central alarm system in the school

All doors have working locks, and classroom doors have locks that can be activated from the inside

High-risk areas are protected by high security locks and an alarm system

Doors accessing internal courtyards are securely locked from the inside

Mechanical rooms and hazardous storage areas are locked

Classrooms are numbered with reflective material over and at the bottom of each door, and on exterior windows

All interior doors have small break-resistant windows

Convex mirrors (as needed) are in place to see around corners in hallways, and up and down stairwells

The main entrance is visible from the main office
All entries to the building are controlled and monitored/supervised
Signs directing visitors to the main office are clearly posted immediately outside and inside the school
Visitors are required to sign in, and are issued I.D. cards or badges
All full-time, part-time, and visiting staff (including bus drivers) are issued ID cards/badges that are worn and visible
Exit signs are clearly visible and point in the correct (and alternative) directions

The following areas are properly lit: hallways, bathrooms, stairwells, common areas, and classrooms
Locker areas are well lit, and unassigned lockers are secured/locked
Emergency and Fire Drill procedures are posted
There is adequate access to fire extinguishers, first aid supplies, and cardiac defibrillators
Emergency lighting is properly installed and functioning
Bathroom and other school walls are free of graffiti
Hallways, bathrooms, and other common areas are appropriately supervised by staff

There is a telephone/two-way communication system between the main office and classrooms, staff rooms, relevant common school areas, relevant outside school areas (including bus and drop-off areas)
There is a P.A. system that works properly, can be accessed from several areas in the school, and can be heard and understood both inside and outside of the school

Beyond the school safety audits, other environmental characteristics, issues, and factors include the physical lay-out of the different common school areas, the traffic patterns within each setting, the formal and informal scheduling that results in different numbers of students in the settings at different times of the day, and the scheduling and physical deployment of staff relative to presence and supervision.

Crisis Management/Emergency Operations Plans and Processes

Emergency situations often involve one or more common areas of the school—whether the emergency begins in a common area, or the evacuation or gathering/ reunification process involves a common area inside or outside of the school. While a school’s clear goal is to prevent emergencies and crises from occurring, the reality is that unpredictable, unplanned, or uncontrollable crises always can occur, and schools must be prepared. Thus, schools, through their Discipline/PBSS Committee, need to identify possible emergency or crisis situations (e.g., extreme weather conditions, racial harassment, gang fights, a student or faculty member’s death, a hostage event), and complete the analyses and preparations that establish the procedures, training, and resources necessary to stop and stabilize these crises as they are developing or occurring. Schools and districts also need to prepare the crisis response services, supports, and strategies needed to address the security and social, emotional, and behavioral needs of everyone directly or indirectly involved or impacted by the crisis once it is over (e.g., Brock, et.al, 2009; Dwyer & Osher, 2000; Dwyer, Osher, & Warger, 1998).

Every school or district should have a written Crisis Management/Emergency Operations Plan that summarizes all of its crisis preparation, intervention, and response system needs and efforts. Eventually, all of the preparation, training, and response protocols, with their related policies, procedures, and activities, should be compiled into an Emergency Operations Handbook for use at the district and school levels. Some of the most important characteristics or elements of the Plan and, eventually, the Handbook are listed below.

The Plan and/or Handbook:

- Is developed by a district team that includes representatives of its schools’ Discipline/PBSS committees, or by an individual school’s Discipline/PBSS Committee
- Is reviewed and updated on an annual basis
- Is consistent with district, local, and state laws, policies, and procedures

- Establishes a well-coordinated emergency response process developed with and involving law enforcement, district and local emergency management personnel, fire and medical, and other first- and crisis-response agencies and entities
- Prepares the school to respond to natural disasters; transportation and other on-site accidents; acts of violence—especially those involving casualties and fatalities; power outage, fire, chemical, or biohazard incidents; bomb threats, hostage takings, and other intrusions; and other emergency events or circumstances
- Establishes lockdown, lockout, central location assembly, building and site evacuation (including reverse evacuation—outside-in), and weather-related (e.g., drop and cover, tornado, earthquake) procedures that are reviewed and/or practiced with staff and then, as needed, by students on a quarterly basis
- Establishes additional crisis management/emergency training protocols and schedules for students, staff, school and district administrators, and community partnership, as desired or needed
- Includes, in the procedures immediately above, the designation of primary and alternative evacuation sites, (confidential) reunification sites for students and parents that are out of sight from parents, a plan for student-parent reunification, and a plan for sustaining school occupants in the school or at on-site evacuation locations for at least 72 hours
- Includes, in the procedures above, procedures and provisions for individuals with limited mobility or special health (and other) needs
- Includes in the training above all staff—including custodial, secretarial, food service, transportation, and other maintenance staff; and permanent substitute teachers, if possible
- Includes an updated map—shared with law enforcement, fire, hazardous material, and other community partners as needed—of the school’s layout with room numbers, evacuation routes, mechanical rooms and utility shut-offs, hazardous storage areas, telephones and other communication systems, locations of first aid kits, and other site-specific information as relevant
- Establishes a traffic control plan to coordinate on-site emergency and other vehicles and personnel, and the student-parent reunification process
- Establishes an emergency/incident command and responsibility structure and organization that includes a chain-of-command for when the principal and/or other administrators are not present during the emergency
- Concurrent with the command structure, designates on-site and back-up command posts, located in line sight of the campus, for use during emergencies/crises
- Identifies (through or with the district’s permission) a Communications Liaison as part of the command structure—an individual who will coordinate communications during and after the crisis with parents, the community, the local press, and others
- Identifies (through or with the district’s permission) a Parent Casualty Liaison as part of the command structure—one or more individuals who communicate with parents to notify them about student injuries, arrests, casualties, or deaths
- Ensures that there are easy-to-understand briefing/summary cards or checklists outlining the most essential components or procedures above in critical locations in the school (especially at all “command and communication posts”), at central assembly locations, and with district/community support personnel

- Establishes an evaluation and debriefing process (sometimes called an “After Action Review”) that occurs after each crisis/emergency event to determine the effectiveness and efficiency of the multi-faceted response systems, and to make recommendations (as needed) for changes/improvements in these processes—including the need for additional prevention or response training, resources, activities, or elements
- Establishes and prepares a post-crisis response process that addresses the immediate student, staff, family, and community post-crisis needs and activities, as well as their needs and activities for the first weeks, month, quarter, half year, and full year, and anniversary dates post-crisis

There are three types of crises for schools to plan for: a Crisis with Advanced Notice, with Minimal Notice, and with No Notice. A Crisis with Advanced Notice is one that is impending and that a school or district has one or more hours to prepare for. A tornado “watch” occurs when weather conditions exist that may result in tornados, and this Advanced Notice “status” gives schools time, for example, to send students home early, secure students in safe areas, or remind them about tornado signals and procedures. A Crisis with Minimal Notice is one that is imminent and typically cannot be avoided, and that a school or district has less than an hour to prepare for. A tornado “warning” occurs when funnel clouds have been observed by eyewitnesses or on Doppler radar, and this notice results in immediate evacuations of students and staff into secure areas, and emergency-related announcements or notifications to parents and others. A Crisis with No Notification is one that occurs without warning—for example, when a major earthquake demolishes a town leaving significant, widespread damage and a high numbers of fatalities. This calls for the full implementation of all school (and community) emergency procedures, including those related to stabilization, security, triage, casualty, fatality, off-school site evacuation, and parental/family reunification.

In the end, while schools need to incorporate crisis prevention into their PBSS planning, procedures, and activities, crises do occur. Given this, schools and districts need to prepare for the different categories of and specific crises that may occur, and factor in the needed procedures

when they occur with advanced, minimal, or no notice. During a crisis, the ultimate goals are (a) to minimize the impact of the crisis for those directly and indirectly involved; (b) to stabilize the situation as quickly as possible after the crisis has passed; and (c) to provide physical and emotional services and support in the aftermath. Relative to this latter point, schools, districts, and communities need to implement post-crisis responses as quickly as possible. This should address the immediate post-crisis needs of students, staff, and their families, as well as these individuals' needs in the days, weeks, months, and years (e.g., on the anniversary dates) to follow.

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