

NATIONAL SCHOOL SAFETY AND SECURITY SERVICES®

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National Association of Attorneys General Task Force on School Safety

Teleconference: Response Issues, Part 1
Tuesday, July 17, 2007 @ 2pm EST

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Briefing Topics:

1. National Trends in K-12 School Security and Emergency Preparedness
2. State-Level Policy and Legislation Recommendations for Improving K-12 School Security and Emergency Preparedness
3. Best Practices for K-12 School Security and Emergency Preparedness Planning

Presenter Biographical Summary:

Kenneth S. Trump, M.P.A., is the President of National School Safety and Security Services, a Cleveland-based national firm specializing in school security and emergency preparedness training and consulting. Ken's background includes serving as a school safety officer, investigator, and youth gang unit supervisor for the Cleveland City Schools' safety division, and as a suburban Cleveland school security director and assistant gang task force director. He has authored two books and over 45 articles on school security and crisis issues.

As one of the leading U.S. school safety experts, Ken has 25 years experience in the school safety profession and has worked with school and public safety officials in 45 states. He is one of the most widely quoted school safety experts, appearing on all national news networks and cable TV and in top market newspapers. Ken is a three-time invited Congressional witness, testifying on school safety and emergency preparedness issues.

For additional background, see:
www.schoolsecurity.org/school-safety-experts/trump.html

NATIONAL TRENDS IN K-12 SCHOOL SECURITY AND EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

1. Increased aggressive behavior, crime, and violence impacting K-12 schools.
 - a. There is no federal mandatory K-12 school crime reporting and tracking in this country. Federal statistics on school crime are flawed and are based upon limited academic research studies and self-report surveys. State school crime and violence data is also typically limited to the good-faith reporting of school officials on limited crime and discipline data reporting requirements of states. A growing number of investigative news reports have documented the underreporting of school crimes, violence, and discipline nationwide. For more on school crime underreporting, see:
www.schoolsecurity.org/trends/school_crime_reporting.html
 - b. Emerging specific school violence issues include gang activity, school athletic event violence, school bus violence and security, and others.
2. Ongoing cuts in federal and state funding for school violence prevention, security, school resource officer, and school emergency preparedness planning, training, staffing, and programs.
3. Increased competition for time for the delivery of school violence prevention programs, professional development training time for teachers and support staff, and school emergency planning time due to the pressures upon educators to improve test scores.
4. The majority of schools have written emergency/crisis plans, yet expert assessments of these plans consistently show plans have significant gaps:
 - a. Most school emergency/crisis plans have been sitting on shelves collecting dust without being updated annually (a best practice), and many having not been updated for multiple years.
 - b. School emergency plans have questionable content, many having been put together in isolation without input and involvement of public safety officials.
 - c. Teachers and support staff have not been trained on their specific school crisis plans or on school-specific emergency planning in general. Many superintendents and principals, and in particular the many people new in these positions due to retirement of long-term public servants in these positions, have also not received training on best practices in school emergency preparedness.
 - d. Even reasonably written school emergency plans have not been tested and exercised by school officials in cooperation with their public safety and community partners. While full scale drills are educational, most schools have not even conducted tabletop exercises with their public safety partners to see if what they have on paper would work in a real emergency.

STATE LEVEL POLICY AND LEGISLATION RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVING K-12 SCHOOL SECURITY AND EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

1. Examine state reporting requirements for school discipline and crime incidents. Refine reporting requirements and protocols to establish more accurate data collection mechanisms until federal school crime reporting standards are enacted. Put “teeth” into existing reporting requirements by creating auditing mechanisms to ensure compliance and financial consequences for districts shown to intentionally underreport and non-report.
2. Require local school districts to create, maintain, and update yearly school emergency/crisis preparedness guidelines. States currently requiring schools to have such plans and to update them annually should establish audit mechanisms to make sure that such plans exist, that updates are indeed being made annually, etc.
3. Enact legislation requiring schools to conduct at least three mandatory lockdown drills over the course of each school year. States may consider modifying fire drill requirements as a part of incorporating lockdowns into state drill mandates.
4. Restore funding cuts made in recent years to drug and violence prevention, professional development training, school security, and school emergency planning programs.
5. Enact legislation removing election polling places from K-12 schools. Schools increasingly struggle with access control issues and measures taken year-round to reduce school access should not be undercut by requiring schools to be used as polling places.
6. Anti-terrorism planning should include consideration of schools and school buses as potential future terror targets. Include K-12 education officials and school safety experts in state-level homeland security planning committees, advisory panels, and information-sharing groups. Also involve education officials and school safety experts on permanent K-12 school security and emergency planning advisory panels created for state education departments, state attorneys general, and state emergency management agency offices.
7. Require state homeland security grants awarded to local law enforcement, emergency management agencies, and other public safety officials to include mandatory requirements that these public safety officials actively engage K-12 public and private schools in local emergency planning.
8. Open select state homeland security funding grants to interested K-12 school applicants for emergency preparedness training, tabletop exercises, school bus security, limited equipment (especially communications equipment), and related needs.

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BEST PRACTICES FOR K-12 SCHOOL SECURITY AND EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS PLANNING

Four key strategy areas:

1. Training school administrators, teachers, and support staff (school resource officers and security officers, secretaries, custodians, bus drivers, etc.) on school violence prevention, school security, and school emergency planning best practices
2. Evaluating and refining school security measures
3. Updating and exercising school emergency preparedness plans
4. Strengthening partnerships with public safety officials

Expanded points for four key strategy areas:

1. Training school administrators, teachers, and support staff (school resource officers and security officers, secretaries, custodians, bus drivers, cafeteria workers, etc.) on school violence prevention, school crime prevention practices, school security procedures and awareness, and school emergency planning best practices. The first and best line of defense is a well trained, highly alert school staff and student body.
2. Evaluating and refining school security measures

Security is often equated with equipment such as metal detectors, surveillance cameras, police and security officers, and other physical, tangible measures. While these measures are necessary and play an important role in many school systems, particularly large urban districts with a history of weapons-related incidents and concerns, equipment is only as good as the human element behind it. Parents, the media, and others often call for metal detectors after a high-profile violence incident in schools. We have to remember that prisons have metal detectors, prisoner and visitor searches, and the most restrictive, punitive environments. Prisons still experience incidents of drugs, sexual assaults, weapons, gangs, and even murder. When security equipment is used in schools, it must be viewed as a supplement to, but not a substitute for, a more comprehensive school safety program.

A brief sample of basic school security measures include cost-free and lower cost measures such as, but not limited to, reducing the number of open doors, having functional communications systems, keeping trees and shrubs trimmed to promote natural visibility, and establishing procedures for accurately and timely reporting of school crimes. Security measures can be built into the design of new and remodeled schools.

3. Updating and exercising school emergency preparedness plans

- a. Most schools created emergency/crisis plans after the Columbine attack in April of 1999. Evaluations of school emergency plans nationwide consistently show that while schools have emergency plans and crisis teams named on paper, many plans are sitting on shelves collecting dust. Gaps in emergency plans include questionable content in the plans, a lack of training of school staff on emergency plans, and a lack of exercising plans in cooperation with public safety partners. A written plan sitting on a shelf is only as good as the paper it is written upon.
- b. School emergency plans should address preparedness procedures such as lockdowns, evacuations, parent-student reunification procedures, mobilizing school transportation during the school day, emergency communications protocols with parents and the media, and mobilizing mental health services.
- c. School officials should meet regularly with their public safety partners: Police, fire, emergency medical services, and emergency management agencies to discuss safety, security, and emergency planning strategies.
- d. School crisis teams must be trained.
- e. Schools should have district-level and building level plans.
- f. School emergency plans should be reviewed (in cooperation with public safety partners) and updated at least annually.
- g. Schools must work with public safety officials to identify potential staging areas for media, parents, medical personnel, and others who will respond in an emergency.
- h. School emergency plans must be exercised in order to reach their maximum potential usefulness. While full scale simulation drills are valuable in teaching important lessons, they are very time and labor intensive in their planning. Schools are strongly encouraged, however, to hold tabletop exercises with their district and building crisis teams, public safety and community agency partners, and other key stakeholders. Tabletops, which can be done in a half-day or day of professional development training time, allow schools to work through hypothetical scenarios to see if the plans they have on paper would work in a real emergency.
- i. Schools should practice lockdown drills over the course of a school year as they do fire drills, tornado drills, and other drills. Any drills should be practiced in a realistic manner, such as during lunch hours, not simply when it is convenient and least disruptive to the school day. Schools must practice in the times and manner they would experience in a real emergency.

4. Strengthening partnerships with public safety officials
 - a. School administrators and crisis team members should meet regularly, at least once a year, with public safety partners (police, fire, emergency medical services, emergency management agencies, Red Cross, etc.)
 - b. Public safety partners should be involved in the development and updating of school emergency plans and tabletop exercises.
 - c. Schools should number each entrance/exit door so first responders can easily identify specific entrances/exits when called to respond to an incident and/or to manage a tactical response.
 - d. Schools should provide police and fire departments with updated floor plans and blueprints for their reference for tactical responses.
 - e. Police are strongly encouraged to train and practice the rapid response to active shooter techniques. Schools should make their schools and school buses available after-hours and/or on weekends so SWAT teams can practice responding to scenarios in these settings.

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SUPPLEMENTAL RESOURCES

For additional information related to this presentation see:

Testimony of Kenneth Trump to the House Homeland Security Committee on May 17, 2007, on school emergency preparedness issues:

www.schoolsecurity.org/news/House_Homeland_Security07.html

General Accounting Office report from May, 2007, on gaps in K-12 school emergency preparedness: www.schoolsecurity.org/news/TestimonyAshby.pdf

Testimony of Kenneth Trump to the House Education and Labor Committee on April 23, 2007, on school safety issues: www.schoolsecurity.org/news/House_Education07.html

The Impact of Terrorism on School Safety and Emergency Preparedness Planning
www.schoolsecurity.org/terrorist_response.html

School Deaths, Shootings, & Crisis Incidents
www.schoolsecurity.org/trends/school_violence.html

School Security Assessments
www.schoolsecurity.org/resources/security-assessment-NASSP.html