



December 17, 2012

275 GRANDVIEW AVENUE

Dear Colleagues:

SUITE 200

The Center for Safe Schools has received many telephone calls and emails since Friday. Some schools have contacted the Center to seek guidance, while others contacted us to share their response to the Sandy Hook Elementary School's tragedy.

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Provided below are a list of promising practices for your consideration:

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1. Schools are traditionally very safe places. Reinforce this fact as often as possible.
 - a. Much like airplane crashes, when a shooting happens at a school it is often catastrophic in nature.
 - b. "Knee jerk" reactions to over-fortify and bring in extra armed security into the school may create a future liability issue if schools decide to stop the increased security.
 - c. Over-fortifying may actually traumatize the younger students, especially during the holiday season.
2. Make sure staff who are monitoring locked doors are fully trained in the screening process and do not "blindly buzz" the doors open.
 - a. Consider painting "stand here" foot prints at a location which provides maximum visibility for those monitoring security cameras.
 - b. Allow office staff to deny entry.
 - c. Do not allow "piggy-backing" of persons into your visitor entranceway.
 - d. Reinforce the concept that any adult is able to call for a lockdown when necessary.
3. Provide appropriate information and support to students.
 - a. Do not traumatize or re-traumatize students by allowing unfettered discussion and review of news accounts.
 - b. Prepare staff to respond to students' questions. Consider preparing a written statement to be used by staff members. This will decrease stress on staff to find the "right" answers, and will help to ensure that staff share the same message as approved by the district.
 - c. Have counseling staff available.

WWW.SAFESCHOOLS.INFO

4. Stress that the district has already taken proactive steps to keep your children and staff safe.
 - a. Emphasize that you have an all-hazards plan that identifies procedures for criminal events/attacks, as well as fires and natural events.
 - b. Do not release copies of the all-hazards plan.
 - c. Operational security requires the plan be distributed to only the school and responder organizations.

Considerations for all-hazards plan development/revision:

1. Have all school administrators identified building-specific plans and procedures?
 - a. Do these plans include both securing facilities and potential escape routes/methods during events?
 - b. Is staff familiar with those plans?
 - c. Are students familiar with these processes?
2. Are responders provided with building floor plans and maps as required under Chapter 10 of 22 Pennsylvania School Code?
 - a. Are responders invited in to review building layouts?
 - b. Are responders allowed to train during off hours in the school for free?
 - c. Are door numbers in place to assist responders?
 - d. Keep in mind that **PRE-INCIDENT** communications and collaboration with responders is a necessity!
3. Are all schools doing their intruder drills at the beginning of the school year to train new staff and students? Are drills also held regularly throughout the year?
4. Are schools using locked doors/magnets during the school day?
 - a. Are these expectations enforced?
 - b. Do staff know what to do?
 - c. Are substitutes trained in emergency procedures?
5. Does the building have a culture that supports the concept that security is everyone's responsibility, not just assigned to a committee, administrator or SRO/security person?
 - a. Reinforce that staff are not to prop exterior doors open.
 - b. Be aware that food service and other loading docks are particularly vulnerable.

6. Have a media plan in place.
 - a. Crisis communication is significantly different from day-to-day public relations.
 - b. In a crisis, the superintendent may be too overwhelmed with decisions to handle the media
 - i. Designate a primary, secondary and tertiary Public Information Officer, also known as a PIO.
 - ii. Know your emergency responders' media plan.
 - iii. Work with your county/municipal PIO (if there is one) in advance to prepare for major crises.

Most districts have sent letters, web alerts or e-mails by now, but the following links and references on post-incident stress for children provide additional information which may be helpful to future communications:

- <http://www.ptsd.va.gov/public/pages/ptsd-children-adolescents.asp> and through the National Association of Schools Psychologists
- <http://www.nasponline.org/resources/translations/index.aspx> web site which also has translated educational materials into multiple languages.

Do not be surprised if the incident at Sandy Hook Elementary School leads to new lessons learned once the incident is fully investigated. Some potential lessons may include:

- Elimination or reduction in the amount of glass used in entrance ways.
- Standardization of double door "capture" entrance ways.
- Incorporation of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (also referred to as CPTED) concepts in the building design and remodeling process.

For more information from the Center for Safe Schools or if we can be of further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact Don Smith at 717.763.1661, extension 103 or via e-mail at dsmith@csc.csiu.org.

Sincerely,



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