

School Preparedness Now

Safer Schools For a Better Tomorrow Initiative

The goal is to increase district-level preparedness to improve continuity of learning for PreK-12 schools and minimize impact of school-related disruptions and emergencies.

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We're on the Web!
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www.state.nj.us/education/schools/security/task/

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School Preparedness Now is a newsletter that provides New Jersey school districts with relevant, up-to-date, and practical information on safety & preparedness for schools and local communities.

For more information contact the K-12 School Security Task Force at ssbt@doe.state.nj.us.

NJ In the News: Unannounced Drills (UADs) ... Where are we now?

New Jersey schools have been practicing school security drills for nearly 3 years. More recently, with the help of district superintendents and the county prosecutors' offices, the Office of School Preparedness and Emergency Planning (OSPEP) began conducting unannounced drill (UADs) observations. The UADs are intended to provide another lens to school administrators by

practicing during unplanned times.

Across the state, here's a look at the UADs completed from April to December 2013:

- 19 Counties
- 47 Districts
- 110 Schools, incl.
 - 74 Public
 - 7 Charters
 - 29 Non-Public

What resulted from these visits was an opportunity to identify areas in need of improvement and highlight innovative ways school administrators were practicing to accommodate special needs populations, facility limitations, resources, and other challenges that required them to think outside the box.

Hot Topics: Lessons Learned from Recent School Attacks

One year later, we remember the Sandy Hook Elementary School tragedy and still try to make sense of the horrific violence that took place. More importantly, we try to draw lessons from these significant events that will help us to: 1) Recover and resume a semblance of 'normalcy;' 2) Identify what we can do differently to mitigate senseless acts of violence; and 3) Determine which procedures, tools, and communication protocols

we need to respond to an incident, if ever our community is affected.

The NJ Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness conducted an analysis of over a dozen school attacks around the country which occurred after the Sandy Hook shooting.

This analysis helped to highlight the following 7 lessons:

1. Rapid response by law enforcement is

critical. Be sure to develop a relationship with local law enforcement. How are police notified of an emergency?

2. Teachers, students, and employees at the school are our first line of defense. Schools should know how long it takes for emergency responders to get to the school when an emergency occurs.

...cont'd p.2

Hot Topics (...cont'd)

“Many times what we perceive as an error or failure is actually a gift. And eventually we find that lessons learned from that discouraging experience prove to be of great worth.”

-Rich E. Goodrich



3. Active shooter training before the crisis can save lives. Practicing security drills and vetting various scenarios will help a school be most prepared.

4. In a crisis, emergency planning and communication never work as expected. Remember to develop and practice alternate plans.

5. Technology can help, but only if it is used properly. Staff should be trained in the use of any communication tools. In addition, these tools should be used in conjunction with local police procedures.

6. School Resource Officers (SROs) can be valuable in a crisis, but funding is sometimes an issue. Having an SRO in school(s) is a local decision. Work with local police departments to determine whether an SRO will be the best use of resources for that community and how to share costs, if applicable.

7. The message from the school leadership must be timely, consistent, and accurate. School staff and students should be trained on what and how the emergency alert will be delivered and what is the expected response from all building occupants. Train, train, train.

Integrating these lessons into updates on safety and security plans is necessary to learn and minimize loss of life and property.



Promising Practices: Top Five Lessons from UADs

As regional planners conducted unannounced drills (UADs) throughout the state, these planners had the opportunity to observe significant lessons learned by school administrators. Five top lessons emerged as themes throughout the schools visited.

The top 5 lessons learned from UADs are:

#1 Communicating with parents. Administrators shared that involving parents on key district safety items that pertain to their role in preparedness and response is essential, including talking to their children about monthly drills, receiving alerts and knowing what to do with the information, parent reunification procedures,

and increased parent buy-in to school security updates.

#2 Student accountability. How we account for students during an emergency will help emergency responders and school administrators assure the safety of all. Some schools use red/green cards during evacuations. Other schools complete a form after incidents to submit to the main office.

#3 Drilling with local police. Local police bring a different perspective to school safety that can help schools augment their planning efforts. Staff revealed that drilling with local police helped

them to better understand what to expect during an incident and how to respond appropriately.

#4 Staff training. During UAD debriefs, most schools realize a gap exists between district plans and what is practiced. Many assumptions can be made that will hamper staff and student preparedness during an actual incident. Closing these gaps is critical.

#5 Drilling during “inconvenient times”. Although hesitant at first, administrators admitted that when they drilled during passing, lunch and other “less ideal” times, they found they tested their plan and procedures more genuinely.



A Special Update from the State: One Year After the Tragic Sandy Hook Elementary School Shooting *New Jersey highlights efforts in School Preparedness*

Over the past several years, New Jersey has made several significant strides in the area of school safety, security and preparedness. Since October 4, 2006, the state established The Governor's K-12 School Security Task Force (SSTF) to focus on the issues impacting the K-12 school community and how agencies interfacing with schools, including law enforcement, could work more collaboratively to ensure our schools continue to be safe and secure learning environments. The K-12 SSTF has been a key stakeholder in developing two significant policies to help school districts improve school safety. First, the [Drill Law](#) (N.J.S.A. 18A:41-1) which required schools to practice 1 Fire Drill and 1 Security Drill per month went into effect November 2010. Second, [LEA Minimum Requirements](#) for School Safety and Security Plans (N.J.A.C. 6A:16-5.1) were released in August 2011. These requirements provide school districts a list of items to include and assess as part of safety planning. Following these important changes to school security in the state, the K-12 SSTF announced an initiative entitled, [Safer Schools for a Better Tomorrow](#) (SSBT), on April 20, 2012. The goal of the initiative is to "increase district-level preparedness to improve continuity of learning for K-12 schools and minimize impact of school-related disruptions and emergencies".

Post the tragic events of the Sandy Hook Shooting in Newtown, CT on December 14, 2012, the state further provided technical assistance, refresher trainings, and additional guidance to school districts to help schools update and revise plans in light of the changing face of school security. Some of the state-wide school preparedness efforts include:

Regional Refresher Trainings

In the months of February and March 2013, Two (2) public and two (2) non-public refresher trainings were hosted by the State Department of Education (DOE) on the [Drill Law](#) and [LEA Minimum Requirements](#).

Online Resources

Updates to the department's [school security website](#), as well as the K-12 SSTF's [SSBT website](#) are conducted regularly to provide up-to-date, relevant information to end-users.

Drill Observations

Regional planners from the DOE's Office of School Preparedness and Emergency Planning (OSPEP) conduct announced and unannounced drill observation to provide schools with guidance and feedback. Several cabinet-level officials have joined the OSPEP Team during these visits (see p.4).
**This is an ongoing effort.*

County Roundtables

Between January and March 2013, regional planners attended an Executive County Superintendent roundtable meeting in all 21 counties to provide a debrief on school security and answer any questions regarding the state's mandates and efforts.

Upcoming

Several key items are forthcoming to move forward the state's preparedness efforts. These include: a District-wide School Safety and Security Plan Model Template, a State Executive School Security Meeting, County-Based School Security Mini-Conferences, and other tools and resources such as a promising practice catalog and a threat scenario catalog to help guide drill practice.

Undoubtedly, New Jersey is setting the bar on school preparedness across the country. We thank our dedicated staff in schools and partners on the local and state level for their continued commitment to making sure all of our students are safe.



Lt. Patrick Kissane, President of the New Jersey Association of School Resource Officers (NJASRO), presents an award at the 2013 NJASRO Symposium on School Safety in Atlantic City, NJ to NJ DOE's Office of School Preparedness and Emergency Planning, for the department's dedication and commitment to New Jersey's schools' and children's safety.



Sergeant First Class Dunham of the Office of Emergency Management presenting at a New Jersey Department of Education Refresher Training for non-public schools on School Safety & Preparedness in Bergen County (4/9/13).

A Special Interview with Acting Attorney General John Hoffman

On September 18, 2013, black SUVs arrived at Hartford Elementary School in Mount Laurel carrying a cadre of state officials to observe an unannounced drill (UAD). Among the distinguished guests was Acting Attorney General John Hoffman. At the beginning of the year, Commissioner Cerf and Director Dickson, of NJ Department of Education (DOE) and Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness (OHSP), respectively, announced to superintendents that members of the K-12 School Security Task Force and other state officials would frequent schools to observe how schools responded to simulated emergencies. Officials walked the halls looking for compliance with safety procedures set by districts based on guidance from the state. As stated in the [February 26, 2013 broadcast memo](#), “the visits have two goals: 1) to provide targeted support to individual schools; and 2) to share information learned with others across the state to support our collective effort” to find the right balance within schools as they work to implement school security practices set forth by *N.J.S.A., 18A:41-1, et seq.*

Two months later, on November 18, 2013, a similar visit was conducted at John P. Stevens High School in Edison. This visit held special meaning for Acting Attorney General Hoffman as he observed the drill at his alma mater. After the drill, the Attorney General reminisced about his time at J.P. Stevens, the positive learning environment the faculty and staff provided, and the invaluable education he received, providing the foundation to a legal career.

Afterward, we had an opportunity to ask Acting Attorney General Hoffman a few questions. Here’s what he had to say about school safety & preparedness in New Jersey:

Q: Was this your first drill observation in New Jersey? What made you want to observe a drill?

A: Hartford Elementary School in Mount Laurel was my first drill observation. As we all witnessed during the Newtown, Connecticut school massacre, random acts of violence can strike anywhere and at any time. I have made it a priority during my tenure as Attorney General to observe, first-hand, the policies and procedures schools have implemented to keep our children safe.

Q: For this drill, only the superintendent and county prosecutor were in the know. Not even the principal was aware of this visit. What do you see is the value, if any, in these types of UADs?

A: I believe UAD visits are incredibly valuable to test school preparedness. While we can never have enough preparation, UADs allow us to replicate as closely as possible an actual emergency situation. These types of visits allow school administrators, law enforcement and local leaders to determine which plans worked well and identify aspects of strategy that need fine-tuning.

Q: Did you have any expectations of what you would see during the drill observation? How, if at all, did what you observe differ from what you expected?

A: After speaking with officials from DOE and the OHSP, I expected the school security drills to run smoothly. Both the NJDOE and OHSP explained the hard work the school districts and each individual school put into preparing, practicing and evaluating security plans. Both drills I observed not just met, but exceeded my expectations in the manner with which they were professionally conducted.



State Coordinator and Regional Planners from the NJ Department of Education Office of School Preparedness and Emergency Planning conduct an entrance meeting with school administrators during an unannounced drill observation in Burlington County where cabinet level officials, Director Edward Dickson (OHSP) and Attorney General Hoffman, attended.

Special Interview (...cont'd)

Q: How did Hartford Elementary and J.P. Stevens High School perform during the drill?

A: Both Hartford Elementary and J.P. Stevens HS performed their safety drills in an exemplary and distinguished fashion. Each school was extremely well organized, followed all the appropriate protocols, and most importantly, the students remained calm and adhered to directions from their teachers without hesitation.

Q: Based on the lessons we've learned from incidents across the U.S., do you foresee any changes necessary to how New Jersey is planning and practicing their responses to emergencies?

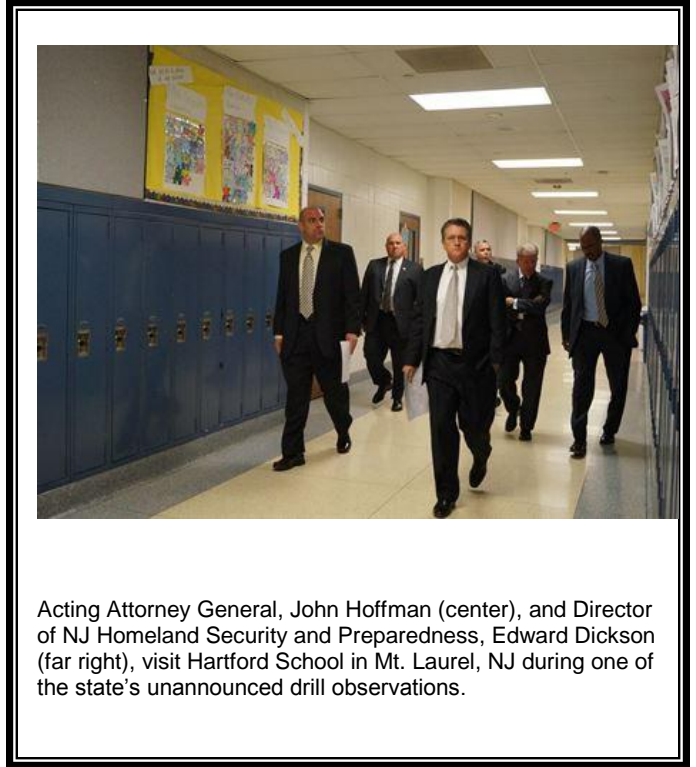
A: Based on lessons we learned from incidents across the country, we know that we cannot let our guard down. The actions of lone offenders continue to be a high priority for this office. By their very nature, random acts of violence are unpredictable and can happen at any time and anywhere. The recent Paramus, New Jersey mall shooting certainly bares evidence of such erratic and violent behavior. With that in mind, we continually work with our county prosecutors, county superintendents of schools, school principals and local police chiefs to reinforce planning and exercise requirements and to encourage local law enforcement to every extent possible to be a visible entity in the school environment.

Q: What role do you think NJ DOE's Office of School Preparedness should take to assist districts with school safety and preparedness?

A: NJDOE has embarked upon a series of efforts to improve school security planning. Among them are: "Safer Schools for a Better Tomorrow"; regional training initiatives for law enforcement and school districts; development of a school security website; audits and critiques of school security drills; and supporting county and municipal law enforcement/school official conferences. NJDOE continues to monitor and evaluate these efforts and routinely attends county superintendent roundtable meetings to discuss the results of their efforts.

Q: Last, if there was one thing you could share with schools about preparing for the unpredictable, what would that be?

A: We need to impress upon our principals and teachers that a threat to the school can occur at any time, and to remain ever vigilant. Our teachers need to be prepared to act intuitively when there is a presence in the school environment intent on doing harm. This is accomplished through meaningful planning and exercising and training with local and county law enforcement. The time to plan is not in the midst of an event – the time is NOW.



Acting Attorney General, John Hoffman (center), and Director of NJ Homeland Security and Preparedness, Edward Dickson (far right), visit Hartford School in Mt. Laurel, NJ during one of the state's unannounced drill observations.

For more information on unannounced drills or school security audits, in general visit the state's school security website at:

<http://www.state.nj.us/education/schools/security/task/audits/>

Significant Incidents that Make an Impact on NJ School Policies

October 2013

School Shootings in the Nation

Only two days apart students, staff, and community members on opposite ends of the nation experience the grief from the loss of two beloved teachers killed by their students. The tragedies happened in Sparks, NV and Danvers, MA on October 21 and 23, respectively.



One Year After the Sandy Hook Elementary Shooting

The tragedy in Newtown, CT on December 14, 2012 that took the lives of 20 children, and 6 adults placed school safety & security front and center on the nation's hot topics. In New Jersey, schools continue to find the right balance between an open environment and security improvements.

AT-A-GLANCE: Zero Tolerance in Schools

Last issue, we noted one of the significant incidents that make an impact on NJ school policies are the number of reported false bomb threats that disrupt education and cost the state millions. As a result, former Attorney General Jeff Chiesa and Director of NJ Office of Homeland Security & Preparedness [enlisted support](#) from law enforcement and school administrators to promote a *zero tolerance* message.

Typically, a **zero-tolerance policy in schools** is a policy of punishing any infraction of a rule, regardless of accidental mistakes, ignorance, or extenuating circumstances. These policies are promoted as preventive measures; the aim is to discourage students, staff, and other individuals from carelessly acting under false pretenses and refocusing emergency resources to address actual critical needs.

As a note, Zero-tolerance policies in the United States became widespread in 1994, after federal legislation required states to expel any student who brought a firearm to school for one year, or lose all federal funding.

Did You Know? NJ Facts

110 – The number of unannounced drill (UADs) observations conducted in New Jersey since April 2013. This number includes public, charter, and non-public schools. *UADs have been conducted in 19 counties.

2 – The number of Regional Planners in New Jersey charged with providing districts with guidance & technical assistance related to school security planning and drilling.

15 – The number of state & local agencies represented on the Governor's K-12 School Security Task Force.

2492 – The number of public and charter schools in New Jersey according to the department's 2012-2013 Fact Sheet.



Academic success cannot be achieved if students do not have a safe learning environment. Research has proven students who are fearful do not learn well.

For this reason, New Jersey is one of the most aggressive states when it comes to protecting our nation's most vulnerable population – **OUR CHILDREN**. New Jersey is serious about providing a top-notch education for all children, all communities *regardless of zip code*.

Prepárate Ahora: ¿Como Se Dice?

During summer 2011, NJ DOE hosted an 8-week course for state stakeholders on **Spanish as a Second Language** as part of the Planning for the Next Pandemic grant received to look at ways continuity of education could occur during emergencies. New Jersey recognizes the importance of linguistic and cultural competence in planning and implementing resources, as well as communicating and delivering messages across various mediums. In response to this growing need to better communicate across diverse populations, NJ is targeting key stakeholders that are integral during emergency planning, including state officials, law enforcement, administrators, and education personnel to enhance our state's linguistic competency. In this spirit, this newsletter will feature a Spanish Language Vocabulary Section.

Amenaza de Bomba

--Bomb Threat

Bombero

--Fireman

Cuidado

--Careful

Recuperación

--Recovery

Apúrese

--Hurry

Camine Lentamente

--Walk Slowly

Incendio

--Fire

Salud Mental

--Mental Health

Ayuda Médica

--Medical Assistance

Cero Tolerancia

--Zero Tolerance

Intruso

--Intruder

Sin Previo Aviso

--Unannounced

Your District in the Spotlight: Mount Laurel Schools

New Jersey schools are taking drilling seriously. Our schools are elevating their drills from simply a response stance (e.g. lockdown, evacuate) to scenario-based drills that ultimately test the districts' plans, procedures, and trainings. Mount Laurel Schools use a district tool to set up each drill.

Here's what the tool achieves:

- Identifies **objectives** for the drill
- **Develops a scenario** to test the objectives
- Sets a **goal** for the school
- **Assesses** a school's ability to coordinate with external support systems
- **Evaluates** the response simulated for a specific scenario
- **Pinpoints** areas in need of improvement

Here's what the tool looks like:

[XYZ Township School Security Drill Set Up Sheet](#)

Date/Time: 4/19/13 - 9:08 a.m.
 School: ABC Elementary School
 Drill Type: Lockdown
 Administrator: Principal J. Lopez

Objective(s):

- I to evaluate the effectiveness of the execution of Lockdown procedures of the students and staff of Hartford School.
- I to determine if students are aware of what they should do if they find themselves in the bathroom at the time of a Lockdown.

Scenario: Someone followed another visitor into the building and did not wait to be screened at the door. The person pushed past the first visitor and walked down the living hallway.

Goals: Immediate and effective Lockdown of Hartford School

School Actions: After receiving information from main office staff, school administration initiates an immediate Lockdown.

I to test our objective, administration positioned themselves in the hallways and waited for students to enter the bathrooms. Once there were a number of students in the bathrooms, a signal was given and a Lockdown was initiated.

The following was simulated:

- Immediate notification to 911 emergency services of the situation.

District Actions: N/A

Evaluation:
 How well did the staff and students respond to the scenario?
 The staff and students responded quickly to the initiation of Lockdown procedures. Teachers quickly

We applaud Mount Laurel Schools for their commitment to school safety and preparedness through elevated drill practices.



NEXT ISSUE

Highlights

- ✓ Moving the NJ DOE forward: Special Highlight
- ✓ What is “The Cloud”?: Sharing Information
- ✓ Next Steps of *Safer Schools for a Better Tomorrow* Initiative



Want to be featured in our next issue? Have a topic you want us to address?

Send us comments, promising practices, featured school districts, or an incident you have dealt with to:

ssbt@doe.state.nj.us



About ... The K-12 School Security Task Force

Established in 2006, the mission of The Governor’s K-12 School Security Task Force is to further enhance the safety and security of New Jersey’s public and nonpublic school students and, to the extent possible, develop standard benchmarks for education and law enforcement officials to help maintain consistency in school security protocols across a wide variety of safety and security challenges.

