

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!
See us at:

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: Summer Safety

As schools across the state begin to prepare for the end of the 2013-2014 academic year with state exams, end-of-year activities, including ceremonies, proms, graduations, and more, we want to remind school administrators to also prepare for *Summer Safety*. Many of our school districts use the summer as a time to make building repairs, address maintenance issues, update protocols, and get ready for August in-service training for incoming staff. Others juggle these demands along with

summer programs, including in-district or community-run programs.

School Security is a year-round effort; *emergencies happen everywhere, and at any time*. As you ready your school buildings to welcome summer programs, think about how to communicate to summer staff and students the following:

All about my building.

Do summer staff (teachers, maintenance, vendors leasing the building, etc.) know the physical address of the building? Where

emergency tools such as fire extinguishers, AEDs, shut-off valves, and other tools are located? Who has keys to open/lock doors during "off" hours?

Who's in charge? Do they know whom to call in case of an emergency? Do they call the district superintendent, building principal or the program's lead person? Who has the authority to make decisions?

...cont'd p.2

Hot Topics: NJ Best Practice School Security Task Force

On March 19, 2014, Governor Christie appointed 6 individuals to the School Security Task Force led by the NJ Department of Education. Five more appointees or designees will be made in May for a total of 11 members on the task force. In accordance with a recommendation in Legislative Bill A3583/S1613, these appointees or designees hold an expertise in the development or implementation of school security standards or technology. Their diverse

expertise will aid New Jersey in creating benchmarks and standards that will help protect our school communities from senseless acts of violence, man-made and natural disasters, and other emergencies. According to the bill, appointees are to "identify physical and cyber vulnerabilities and potential breaches of security in public schools and make recommendations to improve school safety and

security". Moving forward, this task force has the very important duty to offer possible solutions based on research and expertise, on the following: building construction that balances security with our schools' open environment culture; products that aid responder communication; technology that advances our ability to mitigate and prevent emergencies; and training that better prepares our school community to handle and recover from emergencies.

Alone we can do so little;
together we can do so
much.

—Helen Keller



NJ In The News (...cont'd)

My program is... Where is information regarding the program, staff, and students occupying the building provided? Describe the size of classes, culture and climate, any off-site activities, days/hours of operation, etc.

Who's in the building? Where is the following information available? How many people (staff, program participants, parents, other) are in the building during program hours? Does staff have special training (e.g. CPR, sign language, EMT)? Does anyone require or have special needs (e.g. temporary disability, language barrier, hearing/sight impairment, other)? Is there a visitor's log? Do people sign in and out? These practices are less typical in summer programs.

In case of an emergency... We are Ready! Include emergency procedures on evacuation routes, drill practice, chain of command, site emergency toolkit, etc.

While this information may be second-nature for regular employees, do not assume summer staff are in the know. Prepare summer personnel with the information and tools to be ready *when an emergency happens*. Continuity of safety during summer months is important.

Hot Topics (...cont'd)

In the area of school safety and preparedness for the K-12 community, New Jersey continues to pave the way across the nation. For more information on the bill, [click here](#).

Promising Practices: County-Wide Protocols

Around the state, leaders are harnessing the power of collaboration to successfully coordinate strategies and protocols around school safety. One such example is Camden County in southern New Jersey. Camden County has been a leader in county-wide protocols since 2007, when key stakeholders, including Camden County's Police Chief Association, Department of Public Safety, Superintendent of Schools, Prosecutor's Office, and Fire Chiefs and Fire Officers Association recognized the importance of having a common language and procedures to respond to critical incidents at schools throughout the County.

Since then, county leaders have continued to seek ways to improve response procedures for law enforcement and the school community. More recently, the county has moved to a "plain language" vernacular that will better prepare staff and students to understand *what* they need to do during an emergency. This, in turn, will help first responders know exactly what to expect from staff and students when they respond to an incident in a school, regardless of jurisdiction.

These changes are extremely valuable, particularly during larger emergencies that require

mutual aid. In addition, consistent protocols throughout the county create alignment from kindergarten to high school, whereby students will learn procedures early on and have an opportunity to practice them throughout the subsequent academic years. Similarly, families that may move from one district to another do not have to relearn *core* emergency procedures.

In the 2013-2014 school year, all schools in Camden County were required to implement these new guidelines to prepare schools in an emergency situation.

For more information [click here](#)

A Special Message from Acting Essex County Prosecutor, Carolyn Murray ... Speaking in One Voice

For law enforcement and educators, few things are more important than the safety of school children. When parents send their children off to school, at the very least, they expect that they will be able to learn in a safe and secure environment.

Increasingly, that assumption has been upended; we have seen a rise in school violence and threats of school violence. As recent as April 9 of this year, a 16-year-old stabbed a teacher and 21 students in Murrysville, PA., leaving some critically wounded. Closer to home, on the same day as the Murrysville attack, Essex Valley School in West Caldwell imposed a three-hour lockdown when one student reported seeing another student with a gun. In the end, thankfully, no weapon was found and no one was injured.

Still, these incidents remind us we cannot become complacent. It was with that in mind that we held an Essex County Safety Preparedness Summit in March. More than 100 educators and law enforcement officials gathered to discuss the state's strategy and best practices for dealing with school safety.

Essex County poses some unique challenges. Within the 130 square miles of this county, we have hundreds of schools. Some are located in large urban areas such as Newark and others in tiny suburban communities like Essex Fells. Because each school community is different, as a Prosecutor's Office, we have not sought to dictate the language that law enforcement uses with districts and schools in their safety plans. Rather, we are trying to make sure that we are speaking in one voice. In the midst of a crisis, poor communication adds to confusion and puts lives at risk. Clear communication is crucial to assessing the situation, neutralizing the threat(s) and rescuing victims who may be injured.

What we discovered is that many districts and schools have sound, effective plans, including response for active shooter incidents that are fully in compliance with state regulations but the language used from one district and/or school to the next may vary greatly. That can pose a problem when outside law enforcement or other first responders are needed.

To that end, we have established a committee that will help us develop standardized language county-wide to use when responding to critical emergency situations, such as bomb threats and an active shooter. For example, some school communities use the term "code orange" to signal certain kinds of emergencies, while others use the term "code red" for the same event. The committee, which began meeting in April, will come up with cohesive language that can be adopted by all school districts, charter schools, and nonpublic schools in collaboration with local law enforcement.



Acting Essex County Prosecutor Carolyn Murray addresses educators and law enforcement at the March 9 Essex County Safety Preparedness Summit in Newark, NJ.



Acting Attorney General John Hoffman gives remarks at the Essex County Safety Preparedness Summit in Newark, New Jersey, on the value and purpose of working together for the safety of all of our school children.

As the Murrysville tragedy demonstrated, no one can plan for every possible scenario. In that case, the attacker was armed with knives, not guns, something we have not seen recently. But our goal is to put together the most comprehensive responses possible, taking into consideration the diverse needs of individual schools and districts. To meet that goal, we have engaged a broad cross-section of educators and law enforcement personnel to work together and speak in one voice across Essex County.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Carolyn A. Murray".

Significant Incidents that Make an Impact on NJ School Policies

April 2007

Virginia Tech Shooting

32 people were killed and 17 wounded in the deadliest school shooting in the U.S. by a single gunman. The shooter, a senior attending the polytechnic institute, committed suicide.

Lessons learned from this incident include identifying and providing support to persons with mental health issues is critical.



April 2012

State K-12 School Preparedness Initiative Launched

Two years after the initiative entitled, *Safer Schools for a Better Tomorrow*, launched on April 20, 2012, key leaders in education, law enforcement, and local government continue to work diligently in the spirit of the initiative to foster coordinated communication and purposeful collaboration. To date, several [SSBT programs](#) have spawned interagency communication, including the *Making Our Schools Safe Project*, *Unannounced Drills*, and *Securing Our Schools*.

AT-A-GLANCE: What does “Coordination” really mean?

According to FEMA’s Principles of Emergency Management, coordination means to “*synchronize the activities of all relevant stakeholders to achieve a common purpose*”. The principle outlines key elements of coordination, including:

- Coordination can only take place within the context of collaborative relationships;
- Coordination takes the relationships developed by collaboration and the mutually supporting systems of successful integration and focuses them to achieve specific goals; and
- Coordination translates context into action.

Did You Know? NJ Facts

4 – New Jersey is the 4th smallest state in the United States and covers 8,722 square miles. However, NJ has the **highest population density** in the U.S., 13 times the national average.

21 – The number of counties in New Jersey. These include clearly defined territories; 250 boroughs, 52 cities, 15 towns, 244 townships, and 4 villages.

565 – The number of municipalities or administrative entities in the state.

10 – The number of unexpected disasters that can impact New Jersey; a list compiled by [NJ Spotlight](#) from New Jersey Office of Emergency Management’s 2014 Hazard Mitigation Plan.

450+ – The number of full-time municipal police departments in New Jersey (*last updated March 6, 2014*).

1 – New Jersey is the only state in the U.S. that classifies all of its counties as metropolitan areas.



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 in 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.

Ayuda Mutúa

--Mutual Aid

Conferencia

--Conference

Grupo (Cuerpo) Especial

--Task Force

Proteja

--Protect

Colaboración

--Collaboration

Cumbre

--Summit

Para Los Niños

--For the Children

Rapido/Aprisa

--Fast/Quick

Condado

--County

Escuchar

--Listen

Práctica

--Practice

Revisión

--Revise

Your District in the Spotlight: **Glen Ridge Public Schools**

New Jersey schools are taking drilling seriously. Our schools are elevating their drills from simply a response stance (e.g. lockdown, evacuate) to drilling with local law enforcement to test the school's protocols and alignment with emergency responders' procedures. Recently, during an unannounced drill observation at Glen Ridge High School, local police also had to respond as if it were an actual incident occurring at the school. Observers from the state's K-12 School Security Task Force were joined by Essex County Prosecutor, Carolyn Murray, and her team to assess what happens *inside the building* and provide guidance on staff and student actions and protocols. Glenn Ridge local police led by Chief Sheila Byron-Lagatutta tested their own procedures; including how long it would take to reach the high school from their location at the time of the call and how to get into the building.

Typical to Glen Ridge schools at the start of a drill, an administrator phones local police. Available patrol officers respond to the indicated school assessing their own response time. The Chief commented several lessons have emerged during these exercises. For instance, as usual, local police tried to access the key to the building from a lock box. This time the lock box was frozen due to the persistent inclement weather the state experienced this winter. An after-action debriefing helped the district and local police brainstorm alternatives to this problem and come up with a solution.

Some will be of the opinion that the size and lower crime index in Glen Ridge creates an environment that allows opportunities to work on other constructive approaches. However, it was clear that the coordination and collaboration exhibited by the school district and local police was by design – deliberate, strategic, and a priority for the leadership of the community in this northern enclave. The team observing the unannounced drill all walked away feeling as if Glen Ridge “*gets it*”.

Glen Ridge Public Schools

A Tradition of Excellence



NEXT ISSUE

Highlights

- ✓ **New Jersey Drill Law Update**
- ✓ **Cyber Safety & 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.

