

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 email ssbt@doe.state.nj.us.

NJ In the News: Drill Visits Are A Success!

On [February 26, 2013](#), the department announced “surprise” school security drills coming to schools. At the time, some schools expressed hesitancy as the media reported the visits as a “gotcha” strategy toward schools. Over two years later, the department’s Unannounced Drill (UAD) visits have been a great success. [Local news reports](#) now highlight the value in these visits. In fact, the UAD visits have achieved its intended goal to provide technical assistance and to support school preparedness

efforts. Dr. Edward Keegan, Superintendent, Bethlehem School District shared, “*Your visit was extremely valuable and we have already instituted some of the changes that we discussed in the debriefing sessions. We all feel much more confident in our security protocols now that we have heard from the experts.*”

The visits are led by the Office of School Preparedness and Emergency Planning (OSPEP) Regional Planners in a collaborative

process with the NJ Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness, State Police’s Traffic and Safety Unit, representatives from the Office of the County Prosecutor, local emergency responders, and the district. Overall, the feedback from school administrators has been praiseworthy of the approach and the feedback shared throughout the visit. Scott Feder, Superintendent of Millstone Township School District said, “*I have to say how impressed I was with this process; outstanding in every way.*”

(cont’d p.2)

Hot Topics: Using Data to Foster a Culture of Prevention

More and more educators, law enforcement personnel, and administrators understand a single incident is typically the culmination of a multitude of underlying issues and events that may have gone unnoticed or underreported. Everyone has a role in reporting potential threats to schools. The [See Something Say Something](#) Campaign urges New Jersey residents to report suspicious activity. Many school districts have a tip line to encourage students

to share information and concerns. Students are volunteering social media comments that make them uneasy. Identifying potential concerns helps to foster a culture of prevention. In a May 2013 bulletin, the United States Secret Service shared components of a [comprehensive prevention plan](#). Aptly stated in the bulletin, one of the biggest challenges NJ schools face is managing data from school safety reports. Here in NJ, schools report incidents via the School Security Incident Report

(SSIR) and the Electronic Violence and Vandalism Reporting System (EVVRS), to inform trends and prevention and intervention programs.

The department will continue to refine and update reporting systems and share with districts from a bird’s eye view the “big picture” of their data reporting. In the next year, districts will receive updated guidance from the department to help facilitate the reporting process and how it can inform safety and security planning.

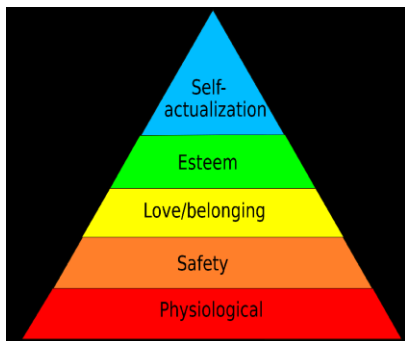
NJ In The News (...cont'd)



As of April 30, 2015, Regional Planners have conducted visits throughout all 21 counties across the state, including:

- **Districts** **136**
- **Schools** **357**
- **Public** **272**
- **Charter** **16**
- **Non-Public** **69**

Invariably, the visits are a part of a proactive conversation on how to make school preparedness a part of their every day school life and not just a reaction to when an incident occurs. School Administrator Donald Costantino of Our Lady of Sorrows (Trenton Diocese) summed it up, noting, “*Your visit has made active conversation a vital part of our day.*”



Promising Practices: Behavioral Threat Assessments

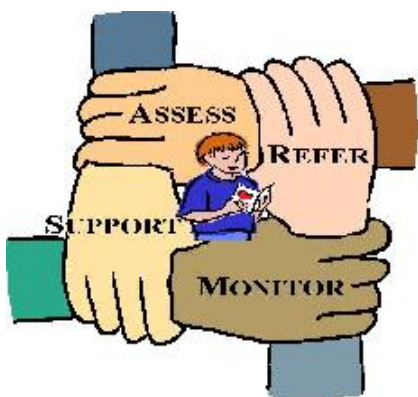
The research has mounted over the years regarding the value of threat assessments as an approach to prevent targeted violence. Incidents of targeted violence at school rarely were sudden, impulsive acts. According to the DOE’s [Safe Schools Initiative](#), in over 80% of the incidents, at least one person had information that the attacker was thinking about or planning in the school attack. Similarly, a [2013 Student Safety Report](#) revealed “37% of students are aware of an individual that poses a risk to their school.” This data suggests that warning signs are present and that threats are preventable. Harnessing information ahead of time will increase the likelihood of mitigating a potentially dangerous incident. According to the U.S.

Secret Service National Threat Assessment Center ([NTAC](#)), behavioral threat assessments help to: (1) Identify students of concern; (2) Gather information; (3) Identify intervention and management strategies; (4) Connect students (and families) with resources. In this manner the behavioral threat assessment is a comprehensive and collaborative process for mitigating the risk of violence. It is not only important to establish a multi-disciplinary team which may include school staff, guidance counselors, local law enforcement or school resource officers, and others, but also to identify an investigative procedure and reporting mechanism for the information

collected. Noteworthy are privacy laws and parental consent regulations, which may impact how schools, mental health providers, and local law enforcement personnel interface with a student and share information across agencies. To help a district or school understand the threat assessment process, our department is working in collaboration with the REMS Center to provide technical assistance training. If you are interested in a **free** Threat Assessment in Schools Training for staff, [click here](#).

“When our children walk into the school, the most fundamental thing they want is to have a relationship with a caring adult, who will listen to them. They need those relationships; that’s the gateway to all of our learning”

-Maurice J. Elias, Ph.D.



A Special Message from New Jersey State Police Superintendent Rick Fuentes

My name is Rick Fuentes. I am the superintendent of the New Jersey State Police, but I wear a second hat as the director of the State Office of Emergency Management (OEM). Our state is one of only a couple of states that run the OEM under the state police, and having been in these dual positions since 2003, I have seen firsthand the reason for that integration. I have been through too many states of emergency to count, and I have always been proud of the response by our troopers as they perform search and rescue, as well as security missions. Prior to becoming superintendent, I spent time as a supervisor with the FBI/NJSP Joint Terrorism Task Force where we investigated criminal threats against our state and country. My entire career has helped me understand the importance of being prepared for critical incidents, and nowhere is this preparation more urgent than in our school systems where the lives of our children are at stake.

Whether it is the threat of an active shooter scenario that strikes terror in the minds of our citizens, or the impact of a hurricane disaster on the school community, today's educators must consider a multitude of hazards that can affect students' learning and school safety. In order to properly plan for such incidents, it is paramount that school districts maintain a well-defined emergency response plan that is detail-oriented and coordinated with local law enforcement, school administrators, and local first responders.

To address this issue, the New Jersey State Police School and Traffic Safety Unit and the Emergency Response Bureau offers two blocks of instruction on responding to violent incidents, active shooter incidents, and other hazardous scenarios that today's school districts face. Troopers from these units are certified instructors of FEMA's Multi-Hazards Emergency Planning for Schools Course (MHPS), which teaches participants to plan and respond using the all-hazards approach. The program includes two table-top exercises; as well as several smaller exercise scenarios. Scenarios range from an active shooter exercise to a scenario depicting an accidental gas leak with multiple casualties.



The true value in this course is that school districts and first responders work through scenarios together with members of the State Police, Department of Education, County Prosecutor's Office, and County Emergency Management. This course is offered to districts at no cost, and plans can be tailored to suit individual communities. I strongly encourage districts to take advantage of the summer months to host a MHPS Course to improve their emergency operations plans. Districts interested in hosting a course should contact the New Jersey State Police School and Traffic Safety Unit at (609) 882-2000 ext. 2287 or the Emergency Response Bureau at (609) 882-2000 ext. 6236.

When a hazardous situation arises, split-second decisions need to be made. A sound, comprehensive emergency response plan is the best way to ensure the safety of your students, faculty and staff. We all share a common goal: *Safer Schools for a Better Tomorrow.*

Significant Incidents that Make an Impact on NJ School Policies

March 2015

Cybersecurity

The Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) testing was disrupted for two days in the Swedesboro-Woolwich School District after its computer network was held hostage by a ransomware program. This program demanded a ransom of 500 bitcoins. Digital currency is difficult to trace. Districts will have to review school security plans and assess what procedures are in place to safeguard disruptions to learning.



April 2015

Kenya School Attack

Islamist gunmen shot and killed 147 people and wounded numerous others at Garissa University in Kenya. According to reports, four gunmen initiated an early morning attack during morning prayer services that lasted for several hours, taking hostages and killing mostly non-Muslim students. Reports state that an additional 79 people were injured and 587 students had to be evacuated before the gunmen were killed by police. Schools should exercise security plans during non-traditional times and events to increase preparedness to possible threats.

AT-A-GLANCE: Crisis Intervention Team Model (CIT)?

The CIT Model is designed as a local initiative to improve the way law enforcement and the community responds to people experiencing mental health crises. They are built on strong partnerships between law enforcement personnel, mental health provider agencies and individuals and families affected by mental illness. CIT provides law enforcement with in-depth mental health knowledge and crisis resolution skills, all while bridging the gap between police and psychiatric care.

For more information visit the [National Alliance on Mental Illness](#) (NAMI).

Did You Know? NJ Facts

8 – The number of [counties in N.J. that offer Crisis Intervention Training](#) (CIT); these include: Union, Essex, Passaic, Burlington, Camden, Warren, Ocean, and Hudson.

21 – The number of county-based collaborative networks of Traumatic Loss Coalitions supporting professionals working with school-age children around suicide prevention and trauma response.

7 – The number of State Climate and Culture Specialists that provide training and ongoing support to school leaders.

105 – The number of schools whereby New Jersey State Police are the primary responders.

120+ – The number of community mental health providers [DMHAS](#) contracts to provide an array of services.

3461 – The endorsement code which states the eligibility requirements for a [Student Assistance Coordinator](#) (SAC) certificate.



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?

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.

Clima de la Escuela

--School Climate

Estrategías

--Strategies

Mitigación

--Mitigation

Salud Mental

--Mental Health

Comunidad

--Community

Evaluación

--Evaluation

Policía Estatal

--State Police

Si Ve Algo, Di Algo

--See Something, Say Something

Cultura

--Culture

Intervención

--Intervention

Prevención

--Prevention

Trauma

--Trauma

In the Spotlight: School & Traffic Safety Unit



**NOTE: Typically, a district is highlighted in this section. We are taking the opportunity to highlight an agency unit that is working energetically with 105 schools throughout the state to share best practices in school safety, security, and preparedness.*

Since October 2014, the Department of Education has strengthened its partnership with the New Jersey State Police (NJSP) to support schools that rely on State Police as first responders during an emergency. The Office of School Preparedness and Emergency Planning (OSPEP) teamed up with NJSP's [School and Traffic Safety Unit](#) to provide resources, training, and direction to public, charter, and non-public schools in their patrol area. The mission of the School and Traffic Safety Unit is to "foster ongoing communication and cooperation between State Police and school districts served by State Police".

Currently, the School and Traffic Safety Unit visit schools throughout the state conducting Unannounced Drill Observations with the OSPEP Team. So far, the unit has visited 20% of the schools in State Police-patrolled areas. Although troopers assigned to local substations regularly rotate to other duties, the centralized unit serves as a point of contact for these schools. The goal is to develop and sustain a relationship with these schools and maintain a repository where information is housed for schools to access. The partnership among the two agencies, districts and the State Police local stations has been invaluable to schools.

The unit also offers a Multi-Hazard Planning for Schools course to help schools develop comprehensive plans consistent with NJ LEA Minimum Requirements for School Safety and Security Planning. This is a free two-day, FEMA course and engages community participation to ensure everyone is on the same page. If you are interested in such training for the school district, please contact Adam Drew, NJSP, at 609-882-2000 ext 2859 or via email at lpp6263@gw.njsp.org.

NEXT ISSUE

Highlights



- ✓ **Task Force Report Findings**
- ✓ **Violence Awareness Week**

New Jersey encourages partnerships between education and law enforcement to build relationships, identify community-centered approaches and create innovative programs that promote safe school environments. A funding opportunity is available through the U.S. Department of Justice. Schools should partner with local police to identify gaps that this funding opportunity may address.

For more information on the Community Policing Development (CPD) Grant [click here](#).



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