

Developing Your School Crisis Plan

Who must have a school crisis plan? The answer is simple really...all schools and it should include all employees. If a violent incident were to occur at your school district today, every school employee would play a role in evacuation, lockdown, working with emergency personnel, etc.. Too often, the development and review of the school crisis plan is limited to administrators, principals, and select teachers. Forgotten are key school employees such as custodians, food service, bus drivers, substitute teachers, and part-time employees.

Don't let this happen at your school. Ensure that every school employee receives a copy of your district's crisis plan, receives hands-on training, and is ready to **'act not react'** if a violent incident were to occur.

Where to Start

The development and implementation of an effective crisis prevention plan begins with your school district's administration. Your administrators, school board members, business manager and principals must ensure that crisis training is at the top of their agenda each and every school year. Administration must also demonstrate their commitment to crisis planning by participating in the crisis prevention training – they can't watch from the bench.

Train **All** of Your School Employees

Think for just a moment...if a violent act were to occur right now, this minute in one of your schools, who would probably be the first person notified within that school? The district administrator? The building principal? The answer is no and no. In the vast majority of schools that have had to implement their school crisis plan, it all began with a school secretary – the first person contacted. If a bomb threat was to be called in to your school, who would probably answer the phone? An office secretary. If a classroom teacher were to contact the office to report a violent incident, who would probably take the call? Again, an office secretary. Have all of your school office personnel received up-to-date crisis training?

All school employees must develop a good working knowledge and understanding of your district's crisis plan.

- Start by reviewing and practicing the implementation of the crisis plan – time and time again, until the various responses to various scenarios becomes routine.
- Review your crisis plan throughout the school year; it's simply not enough to review it when school employees return from summer vacation.
- Don't forget your custodians, bus drivers, and food service personnel in your crisis plan training.

If a crisis situation were to occur and your plan was implemented, who would lock down the school, provide building information to law enforcement and/or transport students away from the school? Your custodial and bus service staffs – never forget them when training.

Update Your Crisis Manual

Your school district's crisis plans must be reviewed and updated on a regular ongoing basis. Changes occur everyday – to your staff, facilities, and operations – your crisis plan must change accordingly. Good times to review and update your crisis plan are when:

- school employees are returning from summer and Christmas vacation
- new employees are added to staff
- substitute teachers are present
- new building construction or modification takes place
- new roadways or changes in traffic patterns occur near or on school grounds
- there is new emergency response (police/fire/EMS) management

Law Enforcement Involvement

Not too long ago, I was assisting a small school district in the development of their crisis plan. One of the first questions I asked was "Have you involved your police and sheriffs departments in the development of your crisis plan?" The response from the district

administrator was quick and rather surprising, “No, and we don’t intend to...we have our plan and they have theirs!”

The only way to have a complete, thorough, and well thought out crisis plan that will work is if you develop it as a team. Your school district and law enforcement agencies must be working on a two way street – and that street is called communication. Your local law enforcement agencies can assist you by:

- Identifying the level of response needed for the situation – armed intruder, gun in locker, hostage situation, assault, etc.
- Identifying key individual responsibilities for staff
- Practicing ‘what if’ scenarios
- Developing response plans for after school hour events
- Conducting table top exercises to practice roles

In summary, it is important to remember that your school crisis plan is an ever-evolving program that requires the involvement of all school employees as well as law enforcement personnel.

Ted Hayes has over twenty years of experience consulting with school districts and municipalities. His book “Not in MY School! A Pro-Active Guide to School Violence Prevention” can be obtained free of charge by sending \$7.00 (check or money order) for shipping/handling to: Ted Hayes, 2793 East Bittersweet Court, Wausau, WI 54401