Twenty Simple Strategies to Safer and More Effective Schools

Prepared by Safe Havens International for the Maine Department of Education

Introduction

As directed by the Maine Legislature, the Maine Department of Education conducted a statewide school security assessment in 2013 and 2014 (Resolve 2013, Chapter 76, H.P. 629 – L.D. 905, in support of M.R.S. 20-A, section 101, subsection 16). During the planning stage, the Department decided that it would be important look at school security to from an all-hazards perspective. With that understanding, the scope of the assessment covers the following areas:

- Safety
- Security
- School climate
- School culture
- Emergency preparedness
- Mental health services, including mass casualty event recovery

Violence has never been a leading cause of death in American K12 schools.

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), 1,351 people were killed in school transportation-related incidents from 2002 to 2011.[1] Meanwhile, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), there were a total of 334 school-associated homicides, including active shooters, during the same period of time.[2] While media accounts focus intensely on rare but catastrophic school homicides, particularly school shootings, educators and their public safety partners have an obligation to consider the more common causes of death rather than only those that receive widespread and intensive media coverage. While school shootings are a potential risk that must be taken seriously in all public and non-public K12 schools, they are not the leading cause of death for students and staff.

Working with Key Stakeholders

Knowing that violence is not the only issue at hand, the Department wanted to ensure that a pragmatic and holistic all-hazards approach to school risk assessment was utilized. The department sought the assistance of a variety of security and education stakeholders in this massive undertaking:

- Security Stakeholders
  - Maine Emergency Management Agency
  - Maine National Association of Social Workers
  - Maine Office of State Fire Marshall
  - Maine School Facilities Directors
  - Maine State Police
- Education Stakeholders
  - Maine Education Association
  - Maine Principals Association
  - Maine School Management Association
  - Maine School Superintendents Association
  - Maine School Boards Association

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[1] National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, 2013
[2] National Center for Education Statistics, 2013

The Department also sought guidance from an experienced non-profit school security assessment firm with significant experience working with Maine schools - Safe Havens International, Inc. Safe Havens is well respected in the field because their analysts rely on rational evidence-based and research-based approaches to school safety. The world's largest school safety center, Safe Havens has assisted with school security assessments for more than 6,000 K12 schools and support facilities in the United States and abroad. Safe Havens analysts have worked in more than twenty countries and have assisted with five previous state level school security assessment projects.

Safe Havens analysts have published more than 30 books on school safety and emergency management topics including *Weakfish – Bullying Through the Eyes of a Child, Innocent Targets – When Terrorism Comes to School, Jane's Safe School Planning Guide for All Hazards and Staying Alive – How to Act Fast and Survive Deadly Encounters* - one of the most heavily researched books on the topic of life and death decision-making published to date. Safe Havens analysts have served as subject matter experts for the United States Departments of Education, Justice and Homeland Security, as well as for the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms and Explosives, Israel National Police, Vietnam National University, and more than fifty state departments of education, law enforcement, emergency management, and homeland security. Safe Havens analysts also assisted the United States Department of Homeland Security in developing a training program for the 2013 White House School Safety Initiative.

Purpose of this Report

Every parent, educator, public safety official, and elected official in Maine desires that our schools be safe. However, it can be challenging to determine the most practical approaches to enhance school safety. Schools are being provided a considerable amount of conflicting information on school safety and may have difficulty deciding which approaches are the most effective for K12 schools. School officials are accustomed to operating their schools based on evidence-based practices. At the same time, schools are now often being urged by staff and parents to implement a variety of approaches that are emotionally driven and not backed by research, assessment, or evaluation. To further complicate matters, educators are often hampered by significant budget limitations as well as limited staffing resources.

The assessment team felt that it would be beneficial to provide school officials with practical and no-cost or low-cost strategies that correlate to the findings of the assessment project. While there can be numerous opportunities to improve school safety which require financial commitments, many of the most impactful improvements in school safety do not require significant expenditures of fiscal resources. As a non-profit center, Safe Havens offered to work with the department and its stakeholders to develop this free guide to provide a simple but impactful resource for Maine educators. This list of relatively easy to implement success strategies is not intended to be an all-inclusive list nor is it meant to imply that other measures are not also very important. Instead, we have focused on strategies that school and public safety officials across the nation have consistently told the authors they have found to be extremely beneficial while being achievable for most school systems. Many of these strategies are evidence-based practices. Some examples are included to provide context to the reader.

The members of the authoring team feel privileged and honored to be able to provide this information as a pro-bono service in keeping with our non-profit mission to help make students safer anywhere in the world they happen to have been born and attend school.

Twenty Strategies for Safer and More Effective Schools

The following opportunities for improvement have been noted by Safe Havens analysts in their school security assessments across the nation as well as in many schools in Maine. These steps for school safety and security improvement can often be addressed with increased awareness, policy development, and achievable changes in school culture. The following concepts all have some basis in research and/or assessment. This document will focus on strategies that are evidence-based in order to demonstrate effectiveness, rather than what we just hope, or think subjectively, might work to make schools safer. It is important to focus on what we know works before considering strategies that may work but are not validated as effective.

1. Create an enhanced and intensive focus on improved student supervision.

One of the most prevalent themes in successful school safety litigation involves safety and security incidents that take place because students are not being properly supervised. Improving student supervision can often be easily accomplished and does not involve significant fiscal expenditures. One Safe Havens client school district achieved a more than a 50% reduction in expulsions and suspensions by using Geographic Information System (GIS) student surveys to make modifications in student supervision practices. By moving personnel to "hot spots" identified by students in the site-based surveys, a dramatic reduction in illicit student behaviors was achieved.

Because one of the most common types of school weapons assaults occur in relation to triggering behaviors such as fights, basic student supervision is important. Enhanced student supervision can reduce the number of these types of incidents while also reducing the chances that serious injury or death will occur due to accidents and medical emergencies. Improved student supervision also magnifies the ability of school staff to implement life-saving protective actions like lockdowns and reverse evacuations.

2. Improve the ability of staff to address common medical emergencies.

While media reports focus intently on school shootings, deaths from school shootings are actually extremely rare in the United States. In fact, violence has never been a leading cause of death in American K12 schools. Research shows that school-related murders typically make up less than 2% of all homicides among young people.[3] In reality, medical emergencies and accidents are statistically far more common causes of death. While every school has the potential for mass casualty violence which must be taken seriously, the ability of school employees to quickly and effectively respond to situations relating to more common emergencies such as sudden heart stoppage or anaphylactic shock due to an allergic reaction to an insect sting or food allergy is also critical to life safety.

While medical emergencies do not involve the public outcry and media attention that is garnered by rare but catastrophic school shootings, in reality these types of situations claim more lives each year. While most schoolteachers will never have a shooting in their school during their career, they will almost certainly encounter medical emergencies.

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[3] Cornell, 2013.

Improving student supervision increases the chances that a child experiencing a life-threatening medical emergency will be detected and acted upon more rapidly. Training on common life-threatening medical emergencies will improve the chances that a staff member who encounters a medical emergency will know what to do. Of extreme importance in these situations are realistic training and drills which help staff learn and practice making life-saving decisions and effective rapid communications that can increase the survivability rate because critical emergency medical care will be provided in time.

3. Develop positive connections between staff and students.

While often thought of as beneficial in other ways, positive connections between staff and students have been demonstrated to improve school safety. There are a number of proven strategies to help improve connectivity.[4] These include research-based approaches to student behavior management and physical adjustments like Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED). CPTED uses simple approaches to building planning, design, and use to make people safer from victimization and injury while also making people actually *feel* safer and more comfortable. The best results in an educational facility can be achieved by combining these design concepts with appropriate staff interaction with students and interaction with the building by all occupants.[5]

4. Create a greater sense of employee empowerment.

There are numerous instances of deaths from school crisis events that have been successfully averted because a school custodian, teacher, food service worker, secretary, or administrator did not hesitate to act and felt empowered to take immediate action. Having emergency plans with specific components for each job role is one way of specifically empowering each employee to act during a crisis.

While media reports naturally tend to focus intently on tragedies, there are numerous safety incidents that are prevented each school day. For example, one school district in Georgia has successfully averted seven planned school shooting incidents involving gang members, as well as one planned bombing of a middle school and a double-suicide plot involving two high school students. This district has also successfully stopped five different men and women who came to elementary schools with loaded guns intending to kill someone, or abduct a student by force. Though it is a large school district in a high crime community this district is the only school system of its size in the state that has never had a student shot on school property.[6]

While it is very important to learn from each tragedy, it is at least as important to learn from the many "near misses" where a tragedy almost occurs. Perhaps most importantly, school officials should carefully consider successes. Every incident that was successfully prevented in the aforementioned Georgia district was averted because one or more employees had a strong sense of empowerment and did not fail to act in time. At the same time, each incident that is prevented must serve as a reminder of the real level of risk and the potential for a successful attack at any given time.

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[4] Sparks, 2011.
[5] Atlas, 2013, p. 69.
[6] Dorn, *et al*, 2014.

5. Improve natural access control.

Designs that control access through a building by channeling visitors through areas where they can be observed by staff are part of what is referred to as *natural access control*. School office designs that channel visitors through the main office are a common example. Natural access control can reduce the chances that someone who plans to commit a crime or policy violation will attempt or be able to breach the security of an area. For example, a non-custodial parent who plans to abduct a child from school may be deterred because they are unable to sneak past the office into the school to find the child. Natural access control measures also increase the ease of detecting illicit behaviors and effectively responding to them.[7]

6. Improve natural surveillance.

Increasing the ability for people to see and be seen by others is called *natural surveillance*. Most people who are covertly violating laws and rules seek privacy and attempt to blend in as they engage in, or prepare for, their activities. Efforts to open up lines of sight in and around schools can make it easier for staff and students to spot someone who is about to commit a crime or policy violation. For example, by simply tipping the window shades in a classroom window so students and staff can see a suspicious person who is outside the school, the opportunity to identify a dangerous person in time to take action is increased. It is also very important for school employees to understand that offenders are often deterred by good natural surveillance.

It is important to note that offenders tend to act with increased nervousness in these types of environments where they may be detected, all while helping students and staff to feel more comfortable in them, even though they may not know why they feel more at ease.

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[7] Atlas, 2013, p. 70.

7. Improve territoriality in the school environment.

Creating a sense of ownership among students, staff, and the community is a CPTED concept known as *territoriality*. Improved territoriality in schools can be achieved on the campus through the use of signage, landscaping, and fencing to indicate what is school property and what is not. Territoriality also sets the tone for what is acceptable behavior.[8]

On the inside of the school building, territoriality is commonly achieved through measures that tie legitimate building occupants to the school through murals, artwork, color schemes, and a variety of building design features. While it is very rare to see a school that does not have some good examples of positive territoriality in the form of student artwork, most schools have opportunities to improve in this area. Positive territoriality in stairwells and student restrooms, as well as in hallways, cafeterias, and classrooms, is desirable. In the example on the left, students designed and painted a mural highlighting the unique learning programs at the school.

A valid concern of many students, staff, and parents is the fear of creating a prison-like environment in the school and making it less inviting through enhanced security measures. Improvements in positive territoriality not only make students, staff, and parents more comfortable and connected, but can also help to reduce the negative perceptions sometimes associated with school security technologies such as security cameras and buzzer access systems. Many schools with intensive security approaches feel welcome and warm because of significant efforts to treat people politely, combined with excellent territoriality. In school safety, sometimes the *culture* of how things are done can be as important as *what* is done to make people safer. Positive territoriality combined with respectful staff interaction can help to prevent what would otherwise seem to be a prison-like environment.

8. Reduce the presence of targeting indicators.

The average school employee or parent is not aware that aggressors sometimes attempt to locate and kill or abduct victims in the school setting using what we refer to as target identifiers. Target identifiers take a variety of forms and can help a dangerous person quickly determine the location of an intended victim. The most common examples seen in schools include teacher's names on their classroom door, student names and/or photographs posted outside the classroom, and parking signs that clearly indicate the title of the person who parks in this location.

While positive territoriality is desirable, staff and students have been victimized in schools because aggressors have been able to locate them when target identifiers are in place. It is important to find a balance that showcases students safely.

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[8] Ibid, 73.

For students, this could mean posting these items in common areas like the front lobby, the media center, cafeteria, etc., and posting student names and information on the inside of the classroom door rather than the outside. For staff, simply using "Reserved" instead of "Reserved for Principal" on parking spaces (as shown in the photo to the right) can make it harder for an aggressor to target a specific staff member.

Venues for this type of aggression have taken place in areas one would not suspect, such as low crime communities and at one of the nation's finest independent K12 schools with an annual tuition higher than that of many universities. Though our suggested practices are a significant cultural shift for most educators, a few simple adjustments can significantly reduce risk without a major impact on school climate. Schools around the country have been implementing each of these measures successfully for over a decade or more.

9. Prevent gravity hazards.
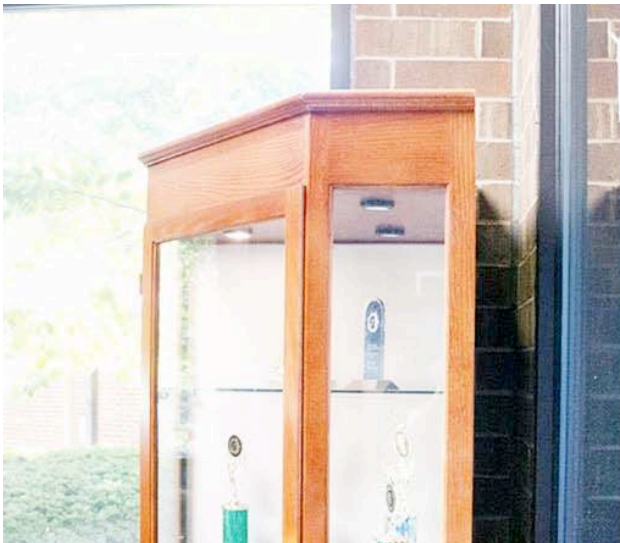
While serious injuries and deaths from gravity hazards in schools rarely garner significant media coverage, they do result in tremendous suffering. For example, in 2013, a six-year-old child was killed when she climbed on an unsecured bookshelf in her Virginia classroom. The bookshelf fell over killing the child in front of her classmates. Like the majority of these types of incidents, the event was not reported in the national news because only one child died. These types of easily preventable school safety incidents often result in successful litigation against school employees and their organizations.

Gravity hazards take a variety of common forms including heavy items that are unsafely stored in overhead areas where they can easily fall on staff and students, bookshelves or trophy cases that are not properly anchored, as well as heavy equipment or objects that are unsafely stacked on stages and in other locations.

Gravity hazards can be easily found and corrected with a little effort. This proper focus on the full circle of safety can ingrain a positive culture so that employees do not inadvertently create these deadly hazards.

10.   Add important life-saving emergency protocols to crisis plans.

While many schools have focused on fire evacuation and lockdown protocols, there are other life-saving emergency protocols that should be developed, trained, drilled, and evaluated. Three particularly important functional protocols that many schools lack are *reverse evacuation, sheltering in place* for hazardous materials incidents, and the *room clear* procedure. These simple yet important functional protocols should be considered for a well-rounded approach to school crisis preparedness.

Reverse evacuation protocols are procedures used to rapidly move students and staff inside to the safety of the building when dangerous situations or conditions exist outside. While many school employees assume they can quickly move groups of students indoors, experience has shown that this can be difficult to achieve fast enough to protect students without practice. Initiated with a simple phrase, reverse evacuations can help protect students and staff from dangerous people, aggressive animals, hazardous materials incidents, severe weather, and a variety of other external threats. Without an effective approach to reverse evacuation, students and staff are not properly prepared for other emergency protocols such as lockdowns or severe weather sheltering.

The *shelter in place* protocol is designed to protect students and staff from external hazardous materials incidents that can occur from utility failures, farming accidents, rail disasters, transportation accidents, shipping incidents, clandestine narcotics production and other situations where dangerous contaminants are released into the environment near the school. Fire service and emergency management personnel can often assist school officials in developing shelter in place protocols and should be included in this planning, training and drill process, and subsequent evaluations of drills. As shown in the example to the left, shelter in place procedures in some buildings might require using plastic and tape to cover air vents with outside air intake.

The *room clear* protocol is another simple concept that can be initiated with a simple phrase to protect students and staff. A room clear can be used to clear students and staff from an enclosed space when it would be dangerous for them to remain, or when staff need to clear the area to provide emergency assistance, but a building-wide evacuation is not needed. For example, a room clear can be used to move students out of a space where an aggressor is present, or to clear a classroom so a staff member can provide emergency assistance to a student or staff member that may be experiencing a medical emergency.

11.   Increase the focus on the first 30 seconds of a school crisis event.

Upon review of seven active shooter incidents in U.S. and Canadian K12 schools and hundreds of other school crisis events, combined with more than five thousand one-on-one controlled crisis simulations by Safe Havens analysts, we have noted the critical importance of seeing that all school employees are trained, drilled, and empowered to take immediate life-saving action in the first critical seconds of an emergency. More than 100 students and staff have died in situations where school personnel did not take immediate actions in life and death situations because no supervisor was present to give a "go ahead" and direct their actions.

Though many people assume school employees will know what to do, or that an administrator will be able to direct staff to perform life-saving actions, actual incidents have proven these to be deadly assumptions. In many situations, the untrained actions, or inaction by the first staff member to become aware of a life-threatening emergency have resulted in loss of lives or in the prevention of death. Plans, training, and drills that are structured to prepare all employees to take immediate action to protect themselves and others, as well as to communicate the presence of danger to others, are of vital importance. Approaches should be designed to afford school leaders a reasonable level of confidence that employees have been properly prepared to make good decisions. Consequently, staff will have the opportunity to gain confidence in their ability to make effective decisions when required to prevent avoidable injuries and death. The "Window of Life" graphic on the next page explains the prioritization that you should consider when responding to any immediate crisis where injury or death are possible.
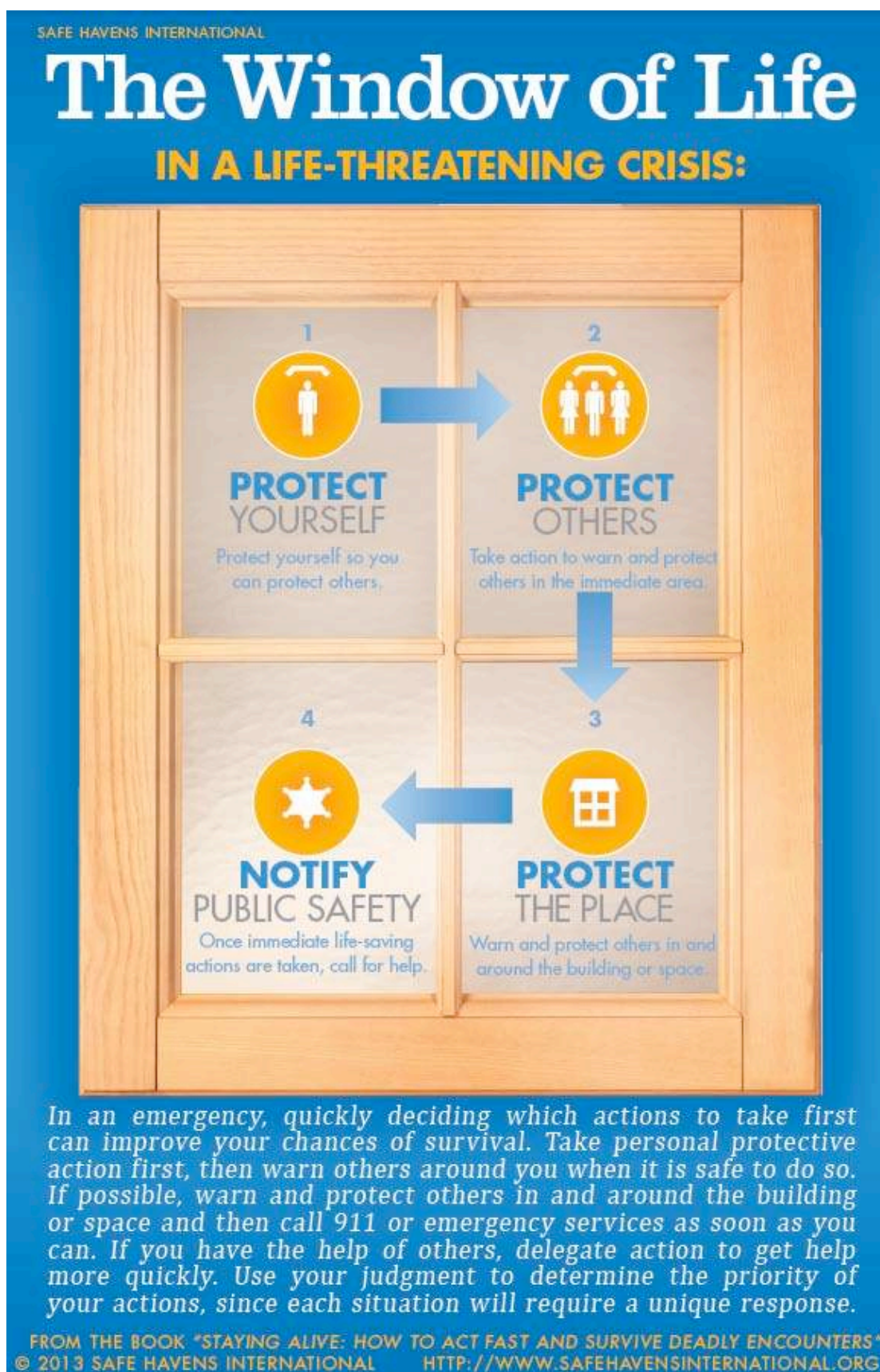
Reproduced with permission from *Staying Alive – How to Act Fast and Survive Deadly Encounters*, Barron's Education Series.

12.   Use a wider array of emergency drills and request that fire service, law enforcement as well as emergency management personnel observe drills.

Many schools focus primarily on fire drills and lockdown drills, but there is considerable research to indicate that conducting a wider array of different types of emergency drills will better prepare students and staff to survive actual crisis situations of any type they might encounter. The human brain has an amazing ability to function rapidly when people are properly prepared. Extensive research performed by Dr. Gary Klein shows that people who have a wide base of knowledge can rapidly adapt to high stakes situations through proper experience and training with a clear understanding of how the mind works under stress.[9] Conducting a variety of types of drills can increase the ability of students and staff to react to any given situation rather than relying on them to instantly know what to do in situations they have not practiced.

During post-incident forensic evaluations and controlled simulations, we have noticed indications that schools that focus intently on preparing for active shooter incidents may actually be less prepared for active shooter incidents as well as being poorly prepared for far more common school crisis events such as medical emergencies. School officials should consult with area public safety officials to evaluate whether their current drill approaches are broad enough and not too limited in scope of scenarios.

13.   Carefully evaluate how well staff are able to communicate during an emergency situation.

Effective emergency communications involves appropriate technologies, such as internal and external public address systems, duress buttons, and portable radios. However, it is just as important to prepare all school employees to utilize these communications tools properly and rapidly while under the extreme stress and time pressure of an actual event. Conducting surveys of staff to identify gaps in communications and addressing these gaps by providing staff development on effective emergency communications can truly make the difference between life and death. Local public safety personnel can often help school officials learn how to communicate on school radios more effectively.

In one New Mexico school district Safe Havens International evaluated, school staff not only receive advanced training on radio communications and etiquette, but dispatchers from the local 911 center also attend a sampling of school drills to observe school operations during a crisis event, and school administrators are invited to visit the 911 center to understand how first responders receive and respond to emergency notifications from the school. Effective communications within a school or district can help to identify and correct common gaps that can result in deadly delays during an emergency. Delays caused by communications issues on radios or 911 calls can cause critical delays of several minutes or longer during a critical event.

As with other suggestions in this guide, effective collaboration and teamwork can yield substantial improvements. Improvements in communications capabilities will provide benefits, regardless of the type of situation that might arise. Many schools use handheld radios on a daily basis, making these types of improvements among the most logical for many schools to improve crisis response but also day-to-day operations.

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[9] Klein, 1999.

14.   Resist the urge to focus intensively on active shooter incidents.

Research shows that a total of 50 students and 12 school employees were murdered in active shooter events on K12 school campuses between 1998 and 2012[10]. For contrast, a careful comparison reveals that a single attack using fire as a weapon in 1958 killed 95 people – more than all of the active shooter incidents in the past fifteen years combined. The 1958 arson fire attack at the Our Lady of Angels Sacred Hearts School killed 92 students and 3 staff members[11]. We can gain additional perspective by considering that the National School Safety Center reports 232 violent school deaths on U.S. K12 school campuses from the years of 1998 to 2010, indicating that active shooter events are not the leading cause of violent school death in America.

Focusing intently on active shooter incidents can result in a reduced level of preparedness for more common acts of violence as well as other types of situations that result in more deaths than active shooter incidents. We must be deeply concerned about the 50 students who have been murdered by active shooters during the last 15 years. At the same time, we should also be greatly concerned about the fact that an average of 17 school-age children die in school transportation-related crashes each year.[12] In fact, violence has never been the leading cause of death in American schools. The research of Dr. Dewey Cornell at the University of Virginia has shown that typically less than 2% of all juvenile homicides take place on a school campus.[13]

While media accounts can, and often do, make it seem that active shooter incidents are common occurrences in American schools, the research and data indicate otherwise. While mass casualty incidents may garner widespread emotion and intensive media coverage, far larger numbers of student deaths result from other causes such as medical emergencies, lightning strikes, and accidents that are rarely reported in the national media because the deaths typically involve only single victims.

While we must consider not only the number of victims killed and injured in mass casualty school shootings but also the increased fear generated by these events, it is not prudent to ignore other types of school safety events that claim far more lives than active shooter incidents. Focusing intently on active shooter events can be compared to a person who likes to sail in the ocean focusing on how they would survive a shark attack while not taking the time to learn how to swim.

We also urge caution for school officials who have adopted or are considering the implementation of training programs and videos focused on training school staff and, in some cases, students to attack an active shooter as a last resort. To date, none of these training programs have been proven to work through evaluation. In addition, six school employees have been shot and killed attempting to disarm people in America to date.[14]

Though more research is needed, there are significant indications that the types of active shooter training programs currently being offered can accidentally condition people to attack when it is not appropriate. During school security assessments, Safe Havens analysts use a research-based approach to measure how well school employees have been prepared for emergencies. Test subjects are shown a three-minute control video before being asked to respond to a variety of video and audio school crisis simulations. The responses of test subjects are scored against a list of appropriate action steps for each scenario to see how well they have been prepared to make life and death decisions without direction from a supervisor. During the more than 5,000 controlled school crisis simulations conducted by Safe

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[10] Satterly, 2014.
[11] McBride, 2004, pp. iii-vii.
[12] NHTSA, 2013.
[13] Cornell, 2013.
[14] Dorn & Satterly, 2012.

Havens, their analysts have had many experiences where school employees who have watched active shooter response training videos and/or attended live training programs on the topic have opted to attack people when it would increase danger to do so. For example, staff who have completed this type of training have often decided to attack a student who is depicted holding a gun to his head with his finger on the trigger and who has stated that he is considering killing himself. This type of reaction where school employees trained in this manner misapply the training concepts has been observed numerous times. During one assessment process, our analysts found that school employees who had completed an active shooter training program consistently had lower scores than school employees who had no formal training. Concerns have also been raised due to numerous reports of school employees being seriously injured while participating in these types of training programs.

While mass casualty weapons assaults in American K12 schools have been documented as far back as 1764, starting with a deadly massacre at a one-room schoolhouse in Pennsylvania, the public perception is often that these types of attacks are a relatively new phenomenon. Deadly incidents have occurred in some our nation's most peaceful and affluent communities, such as: the horrific 1999 attack at Columbine High School in Jefferson County Colorado; the brutal attack at an Amish School in Nichol Mines, Pennsylvania; the 1989 attack at an Elementary school in Stockton, California where five students where shot and killed and another twenty-nine students were wounded; and the more recent attack at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut. These incidents and many others all stand to demonstrate that deadly mass casualty attacks can occur even in the most peaceful communities at excellent schools.[15]

Mass casualty attacks have always been a concern and unfortunately, the potential that such attacks will periodically occur is very real as long as students attend schools in large numbers. Because five of the most deadly attacks involve a span of 248 years, there is a well-established historical pattern of rare but periodic and deadly acts of violence. These attacks also demonstrate that a variety of attack methodologies have been employed and specific types of attacks are difficult to predict:

   • In 1764 headmaster Enoch Brown and all but one of his students were beaten to death in a brutal attack.

   • In 1927 the bombing of the Bath School in Bath, Michigan left forty-three students and staff dead and fifty-eight victims injured.

   • In 1958 an arson attack at the Our Lady of Angels Sacred Hearts School in Chicago killed 95 students and staff.

   • A 1999 attack using explosives and firearms left 15 dead and 24 wounded at Columbine High School in Jefferson County, Colorado.

   • The 2012 attack using firearms at Sandy Hook Elementary School left 26 students and staff dead.

Though far more students and staff have died from accidents, medical emergencies, and causes other than violence, these mass-casualty attacks result in far more fear, apprehension, and anxiety for many students, school employees, and parents. For this reason, they can and should be addressed in appropriate ways. At the same time, focusing intently on these rare but catastrophic incidents can increase the risk of death in schools by other risks that are a regular occurrence rather than a remote but very real possibility. Especially as schools are required to work with extremely limited staff time and resources compared to the level provided at private industry or military facilities, it is critical to avoid strategies that address only a single threat instead of using an all-hazards approach.

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[15] Dorn, *et al*, 2014.

15.   Carefully consider ways to improve preparedness for medical emergencies.

Common medical emergencies such as heart stoppages, choking, allergic reactions, and asthma attacks are among the most common causes of death for students and staff at American K12 schools. This means that school officials should thoughtfully consider how staff are prepared for these life and death situations through training and equipment. Items such as Epipens, clotting bandages, and a functioning AED (Automated Electronic Defibrillator) are much more logical to have on-site and accessible in the event of an emergency than plans or equipment that are designed specifically and solely for active shooter events.

16.   Conduct an annual school safety, security, climate, culture, and emergency preparedness assessment in cooperation with local law enforcement, fire service, and emergency management personnel.

One valuable tool that can help school officials identify and more effectively address risk is to conduct an annual school safety, security, climate, culture, and emergency preparedness assessment with the assistance of area public safety officials. While school safety consultants can be of assistance when school officials have adequate funding, many school systems and non-public schools lack funding to pay for these types of assessments on an annual basis. A number of school districts in Maine and around the nation have had good success in conducting their own school safety assessments by partnering with local public safety officials. These types of assessments will be more effective when representatives from law enforcement, fire service, and emergency management are on hand to assist. Practitioners from each of these disciplines look at schools in different ways.

Past events demonstrate that reliance solely upon officials from one discipline is less effective than a multi-disciplinary approach. For example, when considering that the most lethal attack ever recorded at a U.S. school involved fire as a weapon, it becomes clear that fire officials can provide valuable input to this process. At the same time, fire officials typically focus on emergency egress issues and are not as cognizant to security related issues as law enforcement personnel are.

When school safety consultants are utilized to assist in facilitation of these assessments, local public safety officials should still be invited to assist as they have knowledge of the local risks, resources, and response capabilities that external consultants will often lack. One approach that has been widely and successfully utilized across the nation is for outside consultants to provide school safety assessment training to a local team that will conduct assessments internally. This can enhance the level of expertise at the local level, while dramatically reducing the cost of performing school safety assessments. In addition, this approach can create the sustainable local capacity and knowledge base required in order to perform quality in-house school safety assessments.

17.   Take advantage of free school safety resources.

While properly screened and qualified school safety consultants can provide superb value, there are numerous free resources that can make schools safer. For example, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) offers high quality free online training as well as free live training at the Emergency Management Institute at Emmitsburg, Maryland. FEMA not only provides live training at no cost, but will also cover airfare, meals, and lodging for teams from local communities. FEMA offers a multi-day live training program on all-hazards school crisis planning. School officials can contact local public safety agencies, the Maine Department of Education, and the Maine Emergency Management Agency to learn about other free government resources relating to school safety. The authors of this report were also asked to author a FEMA Independent Study course as part of the White House 2013 School Safety Initiative. The course, titled *IS-360: Preparing for Mass Casualty Incidents: A Guide for Schools, Higher Education and Houses of Worship* is available along with more than 180 other free courses at http://training.fema.gov/IS/.

18.   Request that law enforcement, fire service, emergency medical services, and emergency management personnel assist you in developing and improving your school safety plans.

Another way local public safety personnel can provide invaluable free assistance to school officials is by working with school officials to update school crisis plans. As with other efforts, superior plans can be developed when local fire service and emergency management personnel are involved along with area law enforcement officials. Full scale exercises coordinated with these agencies are the culmination of this long term process of needs assessment, plan development, training, and practice. The time to meet your responding police, fire, medical, and emergency management personnel is before rather than during a crisis.

19.   Share safety success stories within and between school districts.

It is very common for staff at one school in a public school district to develop excellent strategies to improve school safety. At the same time, it is important that these strategies be shared with other schools in the same organization. One simple way to share these and other successes is for school officials to "shadow" their counterparts at other schools in the same district or in other school districts in the region during drills and exercises. The same holds true for student supervision techniques, physical security improvements, and many other risk reduction techniques. We have seen this type of opportunity for improvement frequently in Maine schools as well in school districts across the nation.

For example, the authors of this document recently conducted a school safety assessment project for hundreds of schools in a large school district. The analysts noticed that there were severe traffic hazards at several schools in the district with similar school designs. They also noticed that the staff at one particular school had developed a variety of simple but highly effective strategies to dramatically reduce risk while also significantly reducing the amount of time parents had to wait to pick up their children each school day. By simply having staff observe how one school was handling traffic challenges, every school in the district can be made safer while making the process faster for parents and more efficient for the school.

20.   Focus on the school safety efforts that have been demonstrated to work.

The intensive fear resulting from mass casualty attacks in K12 schools has resulted in numerous calls for action. Most people feel that something must be done to address school safety concerns. However well-intentioned and understandable, visceral and solely emotional calls to "do something" without deep thought on the substance of our response can result in a reduction of logical approaches and even lessen the actual level of safety and security in the school. More startling is the fact that ineffective or misguided measures can even increase the probability of violence and preventable deaths. In recent years, hundreds of new concepts to improve school safety have been developed. While some of these concepts will prove to be effective, others will likely be found to be ineffective as time passes. Real lives of students and staff are sometimes endangered because of these untested approaches.

Though it is helpful to always search for new and more effective ways to make schools safer, there are a number of approaches to school safety that have been consistently proven to work that are, unfortunately, still not in use in many schools. One of the most prominent examples of this on the prevention side is the concept of multi-disciplinary threat assessment. Using structured approaches to evaluate situations where students communicate threats to harm others, numerous planned school shootings and bombings have been successfully averted. One model, the Virginia Student Threat Assessment Guidelines, has been rigorously evaluated over the course of two field trials and four controlled studies involving more than a thousand schools. One study showed a 65% reduction in long-term suspensions, an 87% reduction in alternative school placements, nearly a 400% increase in the use of counseling, and a 250% increase in parental involvement in school using the program.[16] This program is the only threat assessment model listed in the National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices.

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[16] Cornell, 2013.

Conclusion

Before implementing new strategies that might work, school officials should consider whether they have implemented the logical school safety strategies that have time and again been proven to work. In many cases, these strategies require little or no cost to utilize and can be implemented immediately. In the case of student threat assessment, the dividends are unparalleled by any sort of response measures because the damage from an incident that is prevented is non-existent compared to even the most minor act of school violence. The same is true for many of the other steps discussed in this document. At first glance many of these measures might seem too subtle or even too basic to have an effect on the serious problem of school violence; however, these concepts have shown positive results over time. Schools that are already experiencing violence might ask how their school could possibly benefit from improving climate and culture or focusing on hazards other than weapons. The co-authors' experience in working in and helping to assess more than 6,000 K12 schools around the country has shown that the schools that do focus on these basics are often the best prepared and have often achieved excellence in academic performance as well.

About the Authoring Team

The following personnel gladly assisted in the development of this guide without fiscal compensation. This authoring team feels honored to be able to be able to participate in this effort to help make the schools of Maine even safer. Safe Havens Analysts:

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All photography by Rachel Wilson on assignment for Safe Havens International.

To the best of our knowledge this report is based on current research and the authors have made a reasonable effort to verify the authenticity and currency of the information provided in this report. The internet references cited in this report were valid as of the date of publication.

The information presented in this report is designed to provide general information on school safety practices and procedures. Readers should be aware that to use the skills and concepts in this report, they should also seek out information from other sources and in some cases expert advice, including legal counsel, public safety agencies, risk management, emergency management personnel, supervisors, co-workers, family members, etc. as applicable to the situation at hand. Methods of implementing procedures, programs and strategies outlined in this book are obviously beyond the control of the authors. Therefore Safe Havens International Inc. and the Maine Department of Education assume no liability for the application of any concepts described in this report or any accident, injury, loss or damage arising from the use of this information.

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