

School Committee Security and Safety Update 2018

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During this past fiscal year, a continued and ongoing comprehensive top down review and analysis was conducted of the School Department's safety and security procedures with an overall goal of enhancing and strengthening the district's overall security posture.

Our goal each and every year is to continue improving and refining our security procedures to meet the challenges of ever evolving threats. The actions taken in the initial minutes of an emergency are critical to saving lives. Details are as follows.

Standard Response Protocols (SRP): SRPs have been fully integrated and deployed throughout the school district at each and every school site location with continuous and varied training involving emergency response base scenarios. The training and associated drills have continued to evolve in complexity and scope (i.e. unannounced drills to both staff and students, Lock Down drills while students are outside the building or classrooms, blocked pathways in order to alter routes and stimulate critical thinking during a fire drill, and incorporating severe weather scenarios in addition to continuous ongoing active shooter and fire drills). Site surveys to identify "safe zones" and subsequent shelter drills were conducted at Parker Road, Floral, Paton, Sherwood, and Oak schools, with the assistance of school administrators.

Emergency Radio Communications: Emergency hand held radio and base stations with their own dedicated frequency have been installed and in use at each school site location. These radios are monitored by police dispatch at all times. This allows the schools direct contact with the Police Department in case of an emergency. It also allows for redundancy for emergency contact by schools in case the telephones were disabled. Training for utilization has been provided to school staff

and routine testing is conducted to ensure operability.

Two-way radios: Standardized two-way radios have been deployed to all school site locations throughout the district. Staff have been full trained on their use and are proficient in utilizing them. These VHF model radio options allow for the police department personnel the option to “dial” in to the school’s respective radio frequency and effectively communicate directly with staff members during an emergency situation. Standardization of radio and communication equipment is an essential element of an effective communication plan.

Emergency Management Table Top Exercises (TTXs): Tabletop Exercises (TTXs) generally involve key personnel discussing simulated scenarios in an informal setting. This type of exercise can be used to assess plans, policies, and procedures or to assess the protocols and systems needed to guide the prevention of, response to, and recovery from a defined incident. Participants are encouraged to discuss issues in depth and to develop decisions through slow-paced problem solving, rather than the rapid, spontaneous decision making that occurs under actual or simulated emergency conditions. The effectiveness of a TTX is derived from the energetic involvement of participants and their assessment of recommended revisions to current policies, procedures, and plans.

During the past year, the School Department in conjunction Shrewsbury Police Department conducted twelve (12) separate TTXs. Of the twelve TTX’s, the first two involved large-scale emergency management scenarios centered around discussing and developing Parent-Student Reunification protocols with senior staff and representatives of each school’s Crisis Management Team. The third large scale TTX was an Active Shooter scenario at the High School focused on implementing developed Parent-Student Reunification protocols and procedures.

Subsequently, a total of nine (9) additional Parent-Student TTX’s were conducted with SPD at each school site with Staff and Crisis Management Team members. Protocols and Procedures were established to address certain nuisances specific to a certain school site.

Evacuation sites were reviewed and updated which gives the school department greater access and control.

Building Assessment Team (BAT) Security Survey: A major goal of the BAT is to provide enhanced protection for students and staff by pinpointing high-risk areas in school buildings where potential problems or emergency situations might occur. The BAT is conducted on a yearly basis and is comprised of members from the School Department, Shrewsbury Police Department, Shrewsbury Fire Department, and Town Buildings Department. This may also be known as Target hardening. Target hardening refers to strengthening the security of a building and in this case the various schools, so that it is difficult for an individual(s) to attack. The goal is to increase the time and effort (creating a “Time Barrier”) needed to compromise a school facility to the point where a perpetrator will move on to a softer target. The BAT accomplishes this through a “Physical Security Survey” and walk through of each school site location. The survey is an annual comprehensive, detailed, technical on-site inspection and analysis of the current security and physical protection conditions. As a result, numerous improvements were implemented to include the following sampling:

- Installed new and improved Public-Address Systems located at Paton, Parker Road, and Coolidge schools.

- Identified and conducted drilling sessions for students and staff relocating into “Safe Zones” for severe weather/tornado sheltering within the following schools sites: Floral, Parker Road, Coolidge, Paton, Spring, and Sherwood.

- Provided Magnet Door Locks to numerous school locations in order to expedite the securing of classrooms during an emergency situation.

- Identified and anticipate the installation of new and improved Public Address System for Spring St School. Existing system is old and failing.

Training: The School Department in conjunction with the Shrewsbury Police Department during December and April 2017-18 conducted Active Shooter Training and classroom instruction at the Sherwood and Oak Middle Schools during winter and spring school breaks. Because there is no way of knowing which police department employees might be the first to arrive at the scene of an active shooter event, the thought process behind the training was to train all officers in the skills that would be needed to perform critical tasks. These skills and tasks include immediate assessment of an active shooter scene, room entry techniques, building clearing, building formularization and victim rescue. Active shooter incidents are fundamentally different from hostage situations and other critical incidents, because of the extreme pressure on police to respond as quickly as possible to stop the killing and wounding of victims. Active shooter training is built around the reality that even a one-minute delay in responding may result in multiple additional fatalities.

Additional training and drills pertaining to other emergency type scenarios were conducted to include Lockout, Shelter, Evacuation, and Fire.

The Future of Security and Safety in the School Department: Again, with our eyes focused forward the School Department through the year will continue to build upon, improve and refine our security and safety procedures to meet the challenges of ever evolving threats. Standardization and institutionalizing our emergency response protocols, communications and equipment, along with training will remain the cornerstones of this program. The School Department will maintain our vigilance and evolve our procedures to counter the ever-increasing bomb threats, which continue to plague numerous school districts. Enhancement and leveraging technology surrounding the existing school video surveillance systems and capabilities is critical for several reasons. School security cameras help maintain safety around our campus, they also discourage misbehavior, and act as a deterrent. Conspicuously placed school surveillance cameras have been shown to reduce threats of violence and vandalism drastically. Additionally, school security cameras at entrance doors can assist administrative staff in the monitoring of visitors and ensure they are properly signed in,

while still allowing students and staff to move freely around the campus.

Lastly and most importantly, continue to work with school administrators in support of a robust High School Student Support Team (SST), which consists of school administrators, guidance counselors, psychologists, and students to help proactively prevent violence and or inappropriate behavior in the schools. The efforts of the SST, which meets on a weekly basis, can go a long way toward mitigating the threat of such occurrences. Although not an exact science for predicting school setting violence or adverse behavior, students and staff can take certain actions to reduce these incidents. First, it is critical to understand that these types of behavior do not just happen at random or “out of the blue.” Rather, perpetrators usually display some behaviors of concern. Thus, awareness of these indicators and the subsequent implementation of an action plan to de-escalate potentially violent situations and/or unwanted behavioral issues form essential components of school violence prevention program. As a side note, this program through its proactive efforts was credited with identifying and successfully resolving a recent potential threat posed to the High School.