

New York State School Safety Group 491

Safe Schools Agenda

Route to:

___ Superintendent
___ School Business Off.
___ Athletic Director
___ Supt. Bldgs/Grounds
___ Site Administrators
___ Transportation Dir.
___ Lunch Director
___ Classroom Teachers

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A monthly service provided to help you with your efforts to make your school safe for students, staff and the public

We are saddened by the death and injuries visited upon students and faculty at Virginia Tech. We send our condolences and prayers to the victims, their family members and all who are suffering as a result of the tragedy.

Reflections...

Two things strike us about the Virginia Tech Shootings: the shooter's fellow students knew that he was troubled, and some were afraid of him; and some faculty members were also concerned, tried to help him, and reported their concerns to counseling and to the police. The failure of the "system" to act on those concerns appear to be tied to the laws of Virginia and the U. S. privacy laws - factors that shouldn't affect K-12 schools in New York State.

"The shooter's fellow students knew that he was troubled." After hearing one of his sinister poems in class, many students skipped the next class. They moved away from him, socially and literally, as all peer groups will when they feel threatened by a person. The point is that we must make sure that students feel comfortable in confiding with some adult in the school when they feel concerned or threatened by a fellow student.

Students and staff should feel free to report bullying, threatening statements or writings, weapon-seeking and weapon-using behavior, suicidal behaviors, stalking, and behaviors suggesting that an individual is contemplating or planning an attack.

Identifying behaviors of individuals who may pose threats of violence is the best tool for preventing violence in our schools according to the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Secret Service. Their threat assessment process, the *Safe School Initiative*, lists 10 key pieces of advice worth reviewing, and discussing with staff members.

10 Key Findings of the Safe School Initiative

1. Incidents of targeted violence at schools are rarely sudden, impulsive acts.
2. Prior to most incidents, other people knew about the attacker's idea and/or plan to attack.
3. Most attackers did not threaten their targets directly prior to advancing the attack.
4. There is no accurate or useful "profile" of students who engage in targeted school violence.
5. Most attackers engaged in some behavior prior to the incident that caused concern or indicated a need for help.
6. Most attackers were known to have difficulty coping with significant losses or personal failures. Many had considered or attempted suicide.
7. Many attackers felt bullied, persecuted, or injured by others prior to the attack. (Mr. Cho's high school classmates recalled that he had been bullied)
8. Most attackers had access to and had used weapons prior to the attack.
9. In many cases, other students were involved in some capacity.
10. Despite prompt law enforcement responses, most shooting incidents were stopped by means other than law enforcement intervention.

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Practical Steps...

It is perfectly natural to want to block out the idea that another school shooting could happen at our school. We want to get back to the day-to-day business of helping children learn. And we are reluctant to spend staff time and budget dollars on equipment and training that we are unlikely to use - we hope. In addition to opening up lines of communication and ensuring that we have a safe and nurturing environment, we have to prepare for the possibility of an attack. Now is the time to review your emergency plans in view of our continued development of knowledge and strategies in crisis management:

- Every school building should have a crisis response plan, and the key players should be well versed with their responsibilities in the Incident Command System. This won't really happen unless training includes mock emergency drills.
- The plan should advise staff when to lockdown their areas, and when and how to evacuate.
- Every plan should provide for two-way communication with staff members. Public address systems may be adequate for initial announcements of lockdowns, etc., but the plan should also provide for continued two-way contact with staff members via internal computer systems or cell phones (text messages).
- Written emergency directions should include understandable symbols and provide for foreign-language speakers.
- Your command center should have a number that every staff member is asked to call in the event of an emergency, and a staff member should be assigned solely to that telephone. Command needs to know if the staff member and students are safe.
- Your site surveys of all buildings and campuses should be on file with rescue and law-enforcement officials so that they can plan their strategies for a crisis.
- Site surveys should include blueprints of all buildings and infrastructure, videotapes of interior spaces, lock information, charts of surveillance coverage, notes on access to tunnels and electrical panels.
- Rescue and law-enforcement officials should be encouraged to conduct on-site emergency drills at all school locations.

Advice from CDC

- School-related homicides make up one percent of the total number of child and youth homicides in the U.S.
- Most violent deaths occurred during transition times such as the start or end of the school day, or during the lunch period.
- They are also more likely to occur at the start of the semester.
- Nearly 50% of the homicide perpetrators gave some type of warning prior to the event.
- Twenty percent of the student perpetrators were known to have been victims of bullying and 12% had expressed suicidal thoughts or engaged in suicidal behavior.
- Make efforts to reduce crowding, increase supervision, and handling of disputes during transition times.
- Take threats seriously.
- Take talk of suicide seriously.
- Promote prevention programs that are designed to help teachers and other school staff recognize and respond to bullying incidents.
- Ensure at the start of each semester that school security plans are being enforced and that staff are trained and prepared to use the plans.

See

<http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/dvp/bestpractices.htm> for Best Practices of Youth Violence Prevention.