

SCHOOL SHOOTINGS – SCHOOL VIOLENCE PREVENTION-PREPARATION-RESPONSE

INTRODUCTION

A grand jury acts as a watchdog over governmental behavior. Sources may be citizen complaints, whistle-blowers, previous grand jury reports, looking at what other counties are investigating, or plain old brainstorming and yes, it can decide to look at something even when there's no apparent problem. However, this report differs from typical grand jury reports. Potential school violence is a case where the 2014-15 San Luis Obispo County Grand Jury (Grand Jury) looked at school and other stakeholders' preparation and potential responses. The Grand Jury initiated this report on behalf of the community and especially parents or grandparents of schoolchildren in local schools, or relatives or friends of teachers, staff or administrators. The Grand Jury undertook a dispassionate examination of the topic.

AUTHORITY

California Penal Code section 925 authorizes the Grand Jury to investigate and report on the operations, accounts and records of functions within the county.

METHOD

The Grand Jury visited 11 schools throughout the county: 9 public schools and colleges covering all age groups, and 2 private schools. It received information from school administrators. The Grand Jury interviewed the school principal, an experienced teacher and a newer teacher at each school. The Grand Jury attended school drills and off-site training exercises co-sponsored by the Sheriff's Department and other agencies to aid in police and fire department preparation for school emergencies. The Grand Jury questioned personnel of the Sheriff's Department, all 7 police departments and several fire departments.

BACKGROUND

SCHOOLS, THE FIRST LINE OF DEFENSE

All California schools have shooting preparation as a mandate and as part of the administrators' and teachers' manuals. This concern was heightened by the Columbine High School shootings on April 20, 1999, in Colorado, which resulted in the deaths of 12 students and 1 teacher, injuries to 21 additional people, and the suicides of the 2 perpetrators.

As a result of additional incidents, schools have enhanced violence preparation in their manuals and have included additional training and school drills. In training that represents best practices schools have included police, fire and emergency medical services (EMS) personnel in those drills to make the preparation more meaningful, practical and realistic. Many other school-related incidents have occurred, such as Sandy Hook Elementary School in Connecticut and another at the UC Santa Barbara campus community of Isla Vista, California, that demonstrated school violence is geographically spread and covers all age groups.

Schools have mandated drills (the highest frequency was monthly) each year to prepare. The frequency and timing depends on the school district, which typically divide potential situations into three categories: fire, earthquake and lockdown. Some schools' policy/drills distinguish between "shelter-in-place" (possibly an off-campus situation that is near the school) and lockdown (including cases where an assailant may be on school grounds). See Appendix A for definitions of shelter-in-place and lockdown. Additionally, schools are concerned with potential wildfire, nuclear disaster, train derailment, earthquakes, and other natural and manmade disasters so there's a lot for which they have to be prepared.

POLICE, FIRE AND EMS, THE SECOND LINE OF DEFENSE

High schools may have dedicated school resource officers¹, but lower grade levels generally do not. Schools will call 911 which then dispatches emergency services, such as police, fire and EMS who are trained to handle violent or active shooter incidents.

All police departments in the county and the Sheriff's Department are continuously trained and have a section in their manuals outlining procedures in the event of school incidents, including active shooters. The police and fire departments have been participating in many school drills.

NARRATIVE

The Grand Jury observed that school districts, schools, police, fire and EMS agencies in San Luis Obispo County are aware of and prepare for the possibility of school incidents of violence, including school shootings.

Law enforcement preparedness

The Grand Jury visited all seven of the county's municipal police departments as well as the Sheriff's Department. The Grand Jury met with the chiefs of police and their assistants and with the sheriff and undersheriff. The purpose was to determine their preparedness to deal with an active shooter at any school campus within their jurisdiction. As a part of their preparation all departments start with a service called Lexipol as a basis for their training and procedures for dealing with potentially violent incidents at local schools. A complete description of Lexipol is contained in Appendix B.

In all departments visited the Grand Jury observed innovations that went beyond what Lexipol material offers. In one department all officers are periodically given a skeletal

¹ School resource officers are sworn law enforcement officers who are responsible for providing security and crime prevention services in schools.

map of a specific school and officers are required to identify which unnamed box represents the school's library, gym or other locations. Another department obtained the school's master keys and mapped, by color-coding, those keys to a laminated map of the school campus. They then placed the packet in all their police vehicles. Another department periodically sends their officers to local schools to familiarize them with their campuses. Additionally, the Sheriff is leading an effort to electronically provide a three-dimensional map of every school campus in the county to all local police agencies.

SCHOOLS' PREPAREDNESS

Best Practices

The Grand Jury observed or was provided with many practices currently in use by local schools and emergency response agencies. The Grand Jury selected 45 that it deemed "best" in the sense of inherently good to do, not prohibitively expensive or impossibly difficult to implement. This section summarizes and categorizes most, but not all of them. See the full list in Appendix C.

The practices fall into two major divisions: education and training; implementation and action. In addition, each can be further broken down into pre-incident, mid-incident and post-incident activities.

Education and training

During the pre-incident time period, input for procedures should be gathered from teachers, administrators, emergency response personnel (law enforcement, fire and EMS), parents, students and others with special skills and knowledge. Meetings, seminars and assemblies can be useful tools for obtaining pertinent information.

Communication is vital: knowledge must be shared with all involved in the preparedness process. Rapport should be established between school personnel, students, emergency responders and parents. The lines of communication should flow freely with personal relationships formed as necessary, such as with a law enforcement officer who may be

assigned to a particular school, or a parent who volunteers to patrol school grounds. Invite emergency personnel to visit the school, introduce themselves and explain what they do during and after an incident - get to know them.

Once information is gathered and communicated, best practices suggest training must ensue. Training is a very important component of preparedness. Training should include all stages of an incident: as it begins and unfolds; the confrontation of a possible perpetrator; lockdown, lockout and victim release procedures. In addition, all the other procedures under the implementation and action section that follow require repetitive training to be successful.

Everyone needs to be trained including administrators, teachers (whether long-term, newly hired, or substitutes), students and parents. Training can be accomplished by meetings, drills and written materials developed for this purpose. It must be an ongoing process with frequent iterations.

Drills should not only be performed regularly, but occasionally unannounced. Debriefing after a drill is a valuable learning experience for the participants to see what worked and what needs work.

Implementation and action

Early implementations and actions that are easy include developing teams of students and teachers each with a specific emergency responsibility based on their training. Develop school safety procedures including lockdown and lockout rules, create a plan to disburse school employees to pre-arranged emergency stations and assign authority. Other tasks include establishing notification procedures for students, teachers, parents and others.

Additional actions are creating and printing maps, diagrams, sign-in/sign-out logs and visitor badges and the creation of a Classroom Emergency Response Guide available throughout the campus. Escape route maps for people on campus should be posted in each room. More sophisticated color-coded three dimensional diagrams are very helpful

to emergency responders, particularly if coupled with color-coded school keys.

Students and others need to be alert to unfamiliar faces on or near campus and for unusual or hostile behavior. These should be reported to a teacher, administrator or a school resource officer. This requires minimal training and can be implemented immediately. Examples of red-flag situations: someone seated in a car in the parking lot for an unusually long time, lingering in front of the school or a stranger attempting to enter the grounds or on campus without a visitor or vendor badge.

Nuts and bolts actions and implementations are more problematical in that they may require money for buying parts and hiring skilled labor, which in turn can enhance security in major ways in schools. A good practice is installing inside-securing door locks. This seemingly simple idea is easy, inexpensive and effective. Another such action is to have easily set up window covers located near the windows. More complicated, if somewhat more expensive, is to install a closed circuit television monitoring system which would require someone to monitor it during school hours. Alternatively, a few inexpensive wireless cameras at carefully chosen locations can show remote or hidden areas of the campus.

Having color-coded keys that coordinate with emergency responders' color-coded maps can help them navigate through a campus, saving time when it is needed most. Another approach is the KNOX-BOX® Rapid Entry System² similar to a realtor's doorknob key box but for emergency responders.

CONCLUSION

The Grand Jury shares the public view that no school violence should ever take place. At the same time it is aware that such events occur and it supports the combined efforts of school officials and other stakeholders to prepare for possible incidents. The Grand Jury commends school efforts, both public and private, to provide a safe place for students to

² KNOX-BOX Rapid Entry System is a secure emergency access box developed for first responders for storage of access cards, entry keys and floor plans; preventing costly entry damage.

learn. The Grand Jury's conclusion is that schools and police/fire/EMS personnel have prepared very well for worst-case scenarios.

REQUIRED RESPONSES

This is an informational report. No responses are required.

APPENDIX A

Shelter-in-place is a short-term measure implemented when there is a need to isolate students and staff from the outdoor environment for any reason. This allows for the free movement of staff and students within a classroom or building, although one should not leave the room/building until further instructions are received. Those in classrooms and buildings with exterior passageways must remain in the classroom while shelter-in-place is instituted. Many schools report that they continue with classroom studies during a shelter-in-place. It is appropriate for, but not limited to, gas leaks, external chemical release, dangerous situations outside of the school, or as a precautionary measure. School administration is responsible for termination of a shelter-in-place action.

Lockdown is initiated to isolate students and school staff from danger when there is a crisis within the school campus and movement within the school might put students and staff in jeopardy. Lockdown could also be initiated due to an off-campus incident by request from law enforcement. Lockdown is used to prevent intruders from entering occupied areas of the building. The concept of lockdown is no one in, no one out. After hallways are swept, all exterior doors are locked, and students and staff must remain in the classrooms or designated locations at all times. Teachers and other school staff are responsible for accounting for students and ensuring that no one leaves the safe area. Lockdown announcements may be by distinctive alarm, electronic notification to all staff on campus, or verbal. This action is considered appropriate for, but is not limited to emergencies such as gunfire, multiple students fighting on campus, or a campus intruder. Schools reported that law enforcement is responsible for termination of a lockdown action.

APPENDIX B

Lexipol is a company that offers a subscription service that is used by 95% of all California police agencies which can be adapted to the specific needs of each department. Lexipol provides the template for all law enforcement policies and procedures. It is court-tested, updated regularly, reviewed annually incorporating any changes in laws and court decisions, and contains federal and state laws involving best practice policies.

Lexipol provides an on-demand on-line training program to all police agencies which can be used as a part of daily roll call training. The use of Lexipol standardizes responses by police agencies operating under mutual aid agreements, saves time and money by continually researching laws and best practices, and is now expanding to police and fire agencies throughout the United States.

APPENDIX C – Best Practices for Schools

The Grand Jury encourages each school to consider the following best practices in securing their schools.

Organization

- Include input from teachers, school administrators and others in the development of written plans or procedures.
- Ensure that knowledge of the content and expected implementation of the plans and procedures is shared among administrators, teachers, staff, volunteers, students, vendors and visitors to campus.
- Have an active parent-teacher association with knowledge of and support for the emergency plans.
- Create teams that include teachers, support staff and students with each having specific emergency assignments.
- Develop and ensure each classroom has a Classroom Emergency Response Guide - a multi-page, multi-colored brochure that includes a map of the campus as well as what to do in the event of each type of emergency with simple steps condensed onto one page.
- Ensure students are briefed and trained on detailed shelter-in-place and lockdown procedures to be followed during a potential incident.
- Ensure both teachers and students understand that lockdown means all classroom doors are immediately locked; hence anyone in hallways or other school areas cannot enter any classroom.
- Develop and have teachers discuss with students specific instructions on what students who are locked out should do.
- Ensure all classroom doors can be locked from inside the classroom.
- Ensure all classrooms have easily deployed window coverings for all internal and external windows and glass partitions.
- Develop a plan for administrators to go to assigned areas throughout the campus during an incident.

- Have written procedures designating who is authorized to notify teachers, students, staff, etc. when the situation is over.

Training

- Ensure training for new teachers and staff is given a high priority.
- Brief substitute teachers and outside vendors with specific lockdown instructions upon arrival on campus.
- Train all teachers and support staff in what to do/not do if directly confronted with a potential school shooter.
- Conduct discretionary and unannounced drills in addition to the repetitive drills mandated by state law or school district policy.
- Provide ongoing education to students, teachers and support staff on the importance of reporting unusual or hostile behavior.
- Have quarterly meetings of school administrative teams that handle fire, earthquake or intruder incidents to stay current with practices and procedures.
- Offer annual crisis intervention training for all school teachers and support staff.

Debriefing

- Have performance critiques (debriefing) for all teams immediately following a drill.

Liaison with other stakeholders

- Develop procedures for action by school resource officers, when appropriate.
- Establish and work to maintain rapport and good communication between all stakeholders, especially police/fire/EMS.
- Provide school keys to police, sheriff and fire departments. Best solution has keys available to police departments that are color-coded to the campus maps so that responders know which areas or buildings need to be reached.
- Work with law enforcement to ensure there is at least one specifically identified sworn officer familiar with each school.
- Develop a protocol for notifying parents, media and others.

- Designate an assembly area away from the school where parents can wait until they can unite with their children.
- Develop and communicate a method of reporting an "all clear" to everyone.

Technology

- Establish drill-specific audible warnings.
- Develop a notification system (reverse telephone/cell/social media/e-mail procedure) for parents, public and media to keep them informed.
- Develop and ensure police/fire/EMS have a current detailed map of the school before there is any incident. Some of the best maps the Grand Jury examined were color-coded three-dimensional realistic views of school campuses.
- Have on campus a KNOX-BOX[®] Rapid Entry System for use by emergency personnel and first responders on the campus.
- Ensure 2-way radios are programmed to support use between schools and police/fire/EMS.
- Adopt current electronic technology such as electronic key access for police/fire/EMS and a wireless emergency notification and evacuation alert system for mass notification and instructions.
- Consider installing inexpensive wireless cameras in remote access areas of the campus that can be deployed as extra eyes during an emergency.
- Have school administrators in charge of managing the school's emergency wear distinctive identifying clothing (hat, vest, etc.).

Other best practices

- Ensure the only entrance to a school is through a single designated entry or that all are actively monitored.
- Have a procedure for sign-in and sign-out with current date name badges for approved visitors and enforce this procedure with no exceptions.
- Question any unfamiliar face on campus.