A Leadership Challenge

What Leaders Need to Know About School Safety

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About the Presenter

❖ Public Education: 28 years
  ○ Wisconsin, Colorado & Minnesota

❖ Emergency Management: 33 years
  ○ Broward County Public Schools (2018)
  ○ San Bernardino City Unified Schools (2017)
  ○ Sandy Hook Elementary School (2014)
  ○ FEMA Field Coordinator (Hurricane Katrina, 2005)
  ○ New York City Schools & NY Ed Commission (2001)
  ○ U.S. Bureau of Prisons (2001)
  ○ Active Shooter Drill in a School Setting (1993)
  ○ EMT (certified); Paramedic (student) assigned to WD Rescue/Ambulance Squad

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Why the need?

● Children spend more time at school than anywhere else other than home

● Since 1999: Nearly 300 people have been killed, 380 injured in 200-plus fatal school shootings

● Schools review safety, security measures in the wake of tragic incidents and threats

● School security remains a top-of-mind concern for parents, staff and community

● Staff, parents seek reassurances schools are safe
Today’s Reality

● A crisis is unpredictable, but not unexpected
● A crisis is complex with many facets
● Each crisis evolves over its duration, often spawning additional or secondary incidents; requires adaptability to approach and response

● Prompt action reduces collateral damage:
  ○ Length of incident
  ○ Moves situation to quicker resolution
We understand the importance of preparedness in emergencies. Crisis response and recovery plans should follow a model recommended by the U.S. Departments of Education and Homeland Security. We take every measure to ensure your child’s safety and well-being before, during and after a crisis situation.

**Prevention-Mitigation**
- Reduce, eliminate risk to life and property
- Steps to promote a positive climate and culture

**Recovery**
- Restoring teaching, learning environment and social support systems

**Preparedness**
- Planning for worst-case scenario; all-hazards plan
- Training, drills to rehearse for crisis

**Response**
- Critical, coordinated steps to take in a crisis
- Plan: action, communication, care for victims & families
Are you ready?

Important decisions must be made before the crisis

- Structure, process & leadership
  - Building capacity to take on crisis by equipping staff with protocols

- Those empowered to respond must be allowed to decide, act

- Focus on response, not sources of threat
  - Stop thinking like a mechanic; start acting like a gardener
  - Time consuming to predict potential scenarios; Prepare, then ACT
In a crisis, we react as we are organized and trained

- In high-stress, high-anxiety, high-fear events, cognitive function & manual dexterity are impacted in varying degrees
  - Fear & anxiety are hard-wired responses; designed to protect us
  - Acute Stress Response: Fight - Flight - Freeze
  - Normal coping mechanisms are overwhelmed
- People default to what they know and are taught
- The best safety practices are only as effective as the people who implement them
Training & preparation are mission CRITICAL

● Creates the cultural condition to know what to do in the event of a real-world crisis
  ○ **Mental Simulation**
    ■ Simulates crisis situations
    ■ Pre-loads the brain for when it needs to call on a “trigger” to respond
    ■ Training enhances mental simulation

● Demonstrates the teamwork needed when responding to and recovering from a school incident

**Are you ready?**
Are you ready?

- Situational awareness is critical: Ability to identify, process and comprehend critical elements that are impacting your organization or staff (simply, knowing what is going on around you)
- Knowing what to do can be the difference between chaos and calm, or even life and death
- “Cardiac Assessment” (intuition plays a key role)
- Be prepared ... bad stuff happens
Leadership is more about who you are than what you know.

An effective leader must act deliberately and quickly with honesty, high moral values and ethical standards.

Leaders guide their teams through difficult, psychologically stressful and emotional experiences.

Leaders set the tone by their example, conduct.

Positive words have enormous emotional power.

A crisis hits leaders hard too. Susceptible to trauma, psychological impacts.
Creating Safer Schools

- We cannot effectively predict where school violence may occur next. Being prepared now is proactive.

- There is no simple solution to school safety, and no single method, product or program in use today is fail-safe.

- New security-oriented design measures are often crisis driven. Focus on YOUR school vulnerabilities.
Creating Safer Schools

• Engage parents, students & stakeholders in a conversation about school safety. Understand what they value in terms of school safety, BEFORE spending resources.

• Training and preparation are the most critical components of a comprehensive safety and security initiative, when all else fails, these are the only measures that will increase chances of survival.
Creating Safer Schools

- Most important prevention steps:
  - Promoting positive school climate and culture
  - Teaching and modeling prosocial behaviors
  - Intervention when antisocial behaviors occur, including Threat Assessment
  - Physical environment improvements: Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED)

- Commit to improving & strengthening all aspects of school crisis prevention, preparedness, response and recovery.
Safety Measures: Best Practices

Access Management System
- Funnels visitors to a single control point
- Visitors pass through office for identification, sign-in

Visitor Management System
- Computerized system to screen, authenticate visitors before accessing school

Controlling access with greater certainty is proactive, the first line of defense to keep students & staff secure
Safety Measures: Best Practices

Emergency Preparedness

- Emergency alarm systems
  - Panic/duress buttons puts school in safe condition
  - Personal panic alarm devices
  - Triggers for propped or breached doors

- Positive Alarm Sequence (PAS)
  - Delayed and staged evacuations

- Classroom door locks district-wide

- Access doors: Keyless entries (e.g. fobs, proximity readers, cards)
Safety Measures: Best Practices

School Guard Glass

- Windows, doors in school entry areas; ground-floor windows

Video Surveillance

- Used to complement a comprehensive approach to school safety focusing on awareness, intervention and prevention, not just deterrence and detection

School or Fortress: How do we balance creating a safe school while maintaining a welcoming environment?
Emergency Management Manual

- Incident Command System
- School & District Emergency Response Teams
- Emergency Operations & Recovery Plan
- Training & Drills Plan
  - State-required 5-5-1 drills
  - Enhanced drills to replicate real-world
  - Table-top discussions
- Crisis Communications Plan
- Parent Reunification Plan
Incident Command System (ICS)

- Establishes common organizational structure, operating procedures
- One person in charge of decision-making; creates focused response and clear duties
- Provides for quick, effective performance
- Establishes a reasonable span of control
- Provides for effective coordination and transition of responsibility/authority with crisis responders
Incident Command System (ICS)

**Command Staff**
- Information
- Safety
- Liaison

**General Staff**
Functional authority for:
- Operations
- Logistics
- Planning
- Finance/Admin

**Incident Commander**
- Liaison Officer
- Safety Officer
- Public Info Officer

**Planning**
- Student Safety (school resource officer)
- First Aid/Health (nurse, health associate)
- Parent Liaison (teacher, para)
- Incident Recovery (psychologist, counselor)

**Operations**
- Facilities (custodian)
- Documents (school secretary)

**Logistics**
- Teachers w/ student supervisory duties
- Teachers w/out student supervisory duties

**Finance/Admin**
School Safe Procedures
(Standard Response Protocols)

Life Safety School Conditions
- Evacuation
- Lockdown
- Shelter-in-Place
- Severe Weather

Urgent Incident Condition
- Hold-in-Place
School Safe Procedures
Fall 2018: Version 3.0

- If in an unsecured location with no place to hide, evacuate the building immediately. Avoid going to the usual “assembly area” used for fire drills.

- If OUTSIDE when a lockdown is initiated, move immediately away from the area.

- Barricade door with heavy objects; stay out of door frame, stay low and quiet.

- If no other options when confronted in a life-and-death situation, FIGHT BACK with any object possible.
School Incident Flow Chart

School Site Incident
Incident Commander - Principal
Determines need to activate Command Post

Assess Situation
1. Place school in safe condition
2. Call 911
3. Assume command
4. Notify District Office

Engage BERT (if applicable)

BERT: Building Emergency Response Team

District Emergency Operations Director
Determines need to activate Emergency Operations Center (EOC)

Engage DERT (if applicable)

DERT: District Emergency Response Team
Staff Responsibilities

- Provide care & supervision of students; directing students in appropriate emergency procedures
- Follow crisis response procedures
- Follow the School Crisis Response Team lead
- Model behavior of calm & control
- Take attendance; report missing, injured students
“What happens when there’s a crisis on campus?”

- Immediately follow protocols, don’t delay
- Consider
  - Unknown creates a lot of anxiety, fear ... tell yourself, “Stay calm”
  - Lockdown may last a very long time
  - Law enforcement is in charge
  - Specific procedures to ensure situation is neutralized before beginning a methodical evacuation, taking care not to contaminate the area (investigation)
  - Bodily function; personal hygiene
  - Stay off cell phones
  - Follow police commands upon release/evacuation
Crisis is Over: **Now What?**

- **Post-event:** Critical Incident Stress Debriefing
  - Purpose: Restore equilibrium; reduces PTSD
  - Starting point of healing process (*psychological first aid)*
  - Provide incident updates
  - Assess emotional impacts on staff first (provide EAP or other counseling & recovery services); Staff lead, support student debriefing
  - Identify staff who went above-and-beyond in restoring systems
  - Debrief with leadership & Crisis Response Team
    - What worked?
    - What needs to be revised?
    - Have all employee needs been addressed?
    - What were our greatest challenges?
School Safe Conditions

“Okay, but what about arming staff or fighting back?

- **U.S. Dept. of Education**: Run, Hide, Fight
- **Others**: ALICE (Alert, Lockdown, Inform, Counter, Evacuate); Evacuate, Hide/Shelter, Take Action

**Consider**
- Benefits & concerns
- Research: Lockdown still most effective
- Sometimes independent decisions will need to be made, as a last resort, to save lives
- Children model adult behaviors; drill & practice
Communication is the foundation of any crisis planning, implementation, management and recovery effort.
• If the top priority in a crisis is public safety, then the top objective for crisis communication should be to prevent harm to stakeholders

• The best time to let employees know what to do in an emergency is before it happens

• Crisis creates an information void; stakeholders abhor a vacuum
Lack of information + Short decision time = UNCERTAINTY

- Stakeholders motivated to reduce uncertainty
- Uncertainty leads to increased information seeking
- Any information void is filled by someone (usually ill informed, misinformed or motivated to harm system)
Why is crisis communication so important?

- People remember how a crisis was handled longer than the details of the incident ... especially employees
- Long-term damage to an organization is done before and after a crisis more so than during it
- Trust and credibility may be quickly and permanently lost
- Proactive crisis communications helps minimize damage, improve morale and encourage healing
Why is crisis communication so important?

- News media helps set community, region, national and world agendas
- News media has significant long-term impact on public perception and organizational reputation
Critical Crisis Comm Elements

1. Speed of communication
   - First impressions = lasting impressions
   - This is your best opportunity to set the tone for your school or system
   - If you’re not first to frame the incident, others will tell your story
Critical Crisis Comm Elements

2. Factual content of the message
   - Get it right, repeat it, share w/ others
   - Inform employees first (the best defense against inaccurate comments)
Critical Crisis Comm Elements

3. Trust and credibility

- How you react publicly is likely to define organization’s success or failure in handling the incident
- Crucial to sustain support during & after the crisis
Thank You