

## **Creating a Safe Haven Proven Techniques to Prevent School Weapons Assaults**

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**Disclaimer** – The materials contained in this presentation are for instructional purposes. Consult with an attorney well versed in this specialized field of law before implementing any new strategies which could have legal implications.

**Applicability** – This presentation covers a wide array of general concepts as well as very specific strategies to help reduce the risk of weapons assaults on campuses, near campuses, on school buses and at special events. We would like to emphasize that attendees should evaluate the specific risks, resources and needs for their situation and develop a tailored approach using those concepts that are most appropriate for their specific situation. Every approach described is not appropriate for every situation. **For additional supplemental information, visit the free resources section at [www.safehavensinternational.org](http://www.safehavensinternational.org) to download a variety of topical papers on related topics such as school access control, lockdown drills and procedures and the prevention of campus weapons assaults. Safe Havens also offers a free e-newsletter and most issues contain a link to a new in – depth topical paper. Michael Dorn's latest book *Let None Learn in Fear – Michael Dorn on School Safety* is available as a free 200 page downloadable e-book on the site as well.**

The concepts covered in this session are not theoretical. These concepts have proven to be effective in a wide range of public, private and independent schools across the United States in urban, suburban and rural communities. Most of the concepts covered here were developed in the Bibb County, Georgia Public School System and helped the district reduce student weapons violations by more than 90% over a ten year period of time. During that time, the district successfully averted six imminent planned school shootings. Each of these events were gang related and at least one loaded functional firearm was seized in each case. Thirteen individuals were convicted in superior or federal courts of law in these situations. The district also used the techniques covered in this session to avert one planned bombing of a middle school and a planned double suicide by two high school students.

The first step in determining appropriate prevention measures is to evaluate the specific risk indicators that often precede weapons assaults on school property. A tactical site survey coordinated by a properly trained tactical site survey team should be conducted each year to augment the basic evaluation below.

**It is generally ineffective, fiscally irresponsible and can even be counter productive to implement prevention measures without first conducting a hazard and vulnerability assessment.**

### **Weapons assault risk self assessment**

Answer these questions based on the predominant conditions at your school or school district. **Please complete this activity and the school safety test prior to reading the rest of the handout and the start of the session.**

Yes \_\_\_ No\_\_\_ Serious disciplinary infractions (those that can result in a suspension or expulsion) **are a daily occurrence**

Yes \_\_\_ No\_\_\_ Fights occur **more than once per month**

Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_ Verbal assaults on staff involving yelling, cursing and other disorderly behaviors **occur with regularity (at least once a week per school).**

Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_ Most weapons recovered from students are recovered **due to a tip**

Yes \_\_\_ No\_\_\_ Gang activity can be **observed on a daily basis** (graffiti, gang clothing identifiers, throwing of gang hand signs, disrespectful verbal exchanges)

Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_ The school does **not have good access control** (perimeter doors secured during the day, visitors required to show photo identification and to wear a time sensitive visitor badge etc.)

Yes \_\_\_ No\_\_\_ Student, staff and parent safety surveys have **not been conducted in more than two years**

Yes \_\_\_ No\_\_\_ There is not a **research based** bullying program in place

Yes \_\_\_ No\_\_\_ Students are allowed to congregate in areas **without a staff member present to supervise** in the mornings, lunch time and afternoons on a daily basis

Yes \_\_\_ No\_\_\_ Teachers and support staff **have not been trained** in early and imminent warning signs of destructive youth behavior

Yes \_\_\_ No\_\_\_ There is **not a dress code** requiring students to tuck in their shirts or if there is a dress code it is not enforced

Yes \_\_\_ No\_\_\_ The school/district **does not have** a multidisciplinary threat assessment team

Yes \_\_\_ No\_\_\_ There is **no policy prohibiting** unarmed staff from searching students for weapons

### **School safety test**

Violence is the leading cause of death among students on school property in the United States. True \_\_\_\_\_ False \_\_\_\_\_

According to every major research study, over the past three decades, school homicides in the United States are: Up \_\_\_\_\_ Down \_\_\_\_\_

The most people killed in a school violence incident in the United States occurred at \_\_\_\_\_

The most reliable means to catch students with weapons on campus is a tip from a student. True \_\_\_\_\_ False \_\_\_\_\_

Which of the following countries are experiencing issues with weapons assaults in schools in recent years?

USA \_\_\_ Canada \_\_\_ England \_\_\_ Japan \_\_\_ China \_\_\_

A police officer can only search students for weapons with probable cause while a school official can conduct most searches of students based on the lesser standard of reasonable suspicion True \_\_\_ False \_\_\_\_\_

### **United States Department of Education School Safety Planning Model**

This is a four phase plan model that recommends that every private, independent and public school system in our country have written, all hazards school safety plans which address each of the four plan phases in distinct written fashion.

- Prevention and mitigation – The written plan section that outlines what your organization is doing to keep crisis situations from taking place and to minimize the negative impact of those events that cannot be prevented or that occur in spite of prevention efforts.
- Preparedness – The plan components and preparedness efforts performed prior to a crisis which prepare the staff and people to know what to do in the event of a crisis.
- Response – The plan section that helps people implement the preparedness plan under extreme stress should a crisis occur.
- Recovery – The mental health recovery plan and the business continuity plan that enable the organization to help people get

back into the process of teaching and learning after people are traumatized and/or facilities or systems are damaged or destroyed.

It is important to note that people can die because any of these plan sections are ignored. In some instances, more people have died from suicides relating to an incident than the actual casualty rate for the incident itself. All four plan sections must be developed for an effective school safety and emergency preparedness strategy.

Prevention

Mitigation

### **Two obligations to maintain a safe school**

Legal

Moral

Safety is any and every educator's first job responsibility

### **Civil liability**

Students in most states have some legal rights to be safe at school

Education and law enforcement agencies and their employees can be held liable for a failure to provide a reasonably safe environment at school and have sometimes been successfully sued for safety incidents taking place off campus but in proximity to schools.

The most effective way to prevent being successfully targeted by safety litigation is to prevent safety incidents. In many cases the potential liability is greater for inaction than for taking appropriate action. Those who are afraid to act because they might get sued are often more likely to be face litigation and to lose.

## **Assessment based approaches to the prevention of campus weapons assaults**

With risk, we assess, not guess

Tactical site surveys – An annual hazard and vulnerability assessment of each facility owned and leased by the organization. This assessment should involve significant participation from building level administrators who have the authority to act when dangerous conditions are found. No school administrator has the time **not to** conduct a tactical site survey each year. Consultants should only be used to train an internal team to coordinate tactical site surveys. We have found that schools and districts that rely on private consultants to perform safety assessments rarely improve to the level of those who become invested in the process. It is wasteful and inefficient to purchase security cameras and other security equipment until the need for and locations for such equipment has been determined by a tactical site survey.

Surveys – Staff, students and parents should be surveyed about safety, bullying, weapons, gangs, drugs and other dangerous situations annually. As the majority of these behaviors taking place on school campuses are not discovered or reported by victims and witnesses, relying only upon reported incidents often results in undetected danger and a false sense of security among staff and students.

Reported incident data – Schools and their law enforcement partners should track and analyze reported incidents data from a type of occurrence, time of occurrence, frequency of occurrence and location of occurrence standpoint.

### **Prevention Strategy**

The most effective prevention strategy will:

Be based on a formal risk and vulnerability approach

Focus on the creation of a stable, warm and structured environment where people expect safety and appropriate behavior.

Provide assistance to those with mental health problems

Emphasize the importance of effective supervision and discipline

Create a close connection between the school and the students they serve

Ensure that a sense of justice prevails in the school and for students

Ease the pain of individual students

Supplements each of these strategies through thoughtful building design, policies and procedures and supporting security technology

### **Community based school safety committee approach**

While there are numerous proven concepts we will discuss, there is no canned program that will work well for every school and school system. Regardless of your communities' needs, the community based approach will usually yield the best results.

The prevention and mitigation plan should be updated annually.

### **Environmental factors**

A child who is not dangerous in one setting may become dangerous in another. For example, a child who was happy and enjoyed school in one state committed a multiple victim shooting within a few months after moving to a new school in another state. He was badly bullied in this school and responded with violence. Similarly, some students who have had extensive discipline problems, joined gangs or otherwise exhibited high risk behaviors have prospered in a new school environment. The environment of a school can help to reduce risk of individual children, groups of students and visitors to the school.

Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED – commonly pronounced sep-ted). This is a research based approach where the built environment and the manner of its use are designed and adjusted to improve security, to make the legitimate user feel more comfortable and the unauthorized user to feel uncomfortable.

Target hardening. An approach to security that is typically more suited to high risk situations. This approach emphasizes physical barriers such as metal screens, steel bars and other means to prevent access. While this approach affords protection from vandals, thieves and burglars, it can also create a prison like environment, particularly if applied without careful thought and creativity.

Codes of conduct. Written policies governing behavior. Without an intelligent, clear and defensible set of guidelines, schools often become a hostile environment for employees, students and visitors.

Consistent enforcement. Without a sense of consistency and stability, even good codes of conduct can become ineffective. Generally, the less

consistency present, the more disorderly, unsafe and unpleasant a school environment will be.

Dress code. Dress code can clearly help to reduce gun violations in K-12 schools (Bibb County, Georgia Public Schools dropped from a high of 6 elementary school student gun violations in one year to no more than one per year over the past decade through implementation of a student dress code) A well thought out dress code improves school climate, fosters confidence in students, helps to reduce bullying and creates a more professional climate for students.

### **Critical Policies, customs and practices to reduce the chances of a campus weapons assault**

Mandated timely reporting of all weapons incidents

User friendly reporting mechanisms for students

Prohibition of unarmed employees searching students for weapons

Mandating annual tactical site surveys at each school and facility

Mandating annual student, staff and parent safety surveys

Mandating the implementation of a research based bullying program in every school

Mandating a character education program in each school

Policies designed to reduce triggering behaviors

Policies that clearly define weapons

Positive dress code policies

Policies requiring students and staff to wear photo identification cards can reduce violence in some settings

Access control policies can reduce the danger from trespassers

Visitor screening and sign in procedures are needed in every school. Dangerous individuals have come to public schools, private schools, independent schools to harm staff and children. Attacks have occurred in rural areas, suburban areas, high income neighborhoods and in every state.

Notification of search policies relating to students, student lockers, vehicles on campus and school grounds and facilities

## **Following policies, customs practices and procedures**

One of the most effective ways to be sued and lose is to deviate from a safety policy, custom, practice or procedure without a logical and demonstrable reason.

## **Supervision of students**

Any improvements in supervision that are implemented will reduce the risks of a shooting or stabbing on school property.

Safety is any school or school system employee's first legal and moral obligation to students and every school employee has a moral and legal obligation to supervise students in some way. Many educational employees who did not believe this have learned in a court of law, at a funeral or in other of life's harsh learning experiences that this concept is indeed true.

## **Have your staff been trained and motivated to supervise students properly?**

For good supervision, staff must believe they should supervise students and know the techniques to help them do so effectively.

Do most staff in your organization feel it is their job to help supervise students?

Most school employees have never received any formal instruction on how to supervise students. Have your staff ever received any formal instruction or written guidance on how to supervise students?

Here are a few concepts that have helped educators improve the level of supervision in schools:

Creating safety zones for students to use in the morning, during lunch and in the afternoon. These areas are designated, properly staffed and students are not allowed to be anywhere else without a pass.

Compartmentalization of the campus. Ordinarily, any lockable room or space should be locked unless an adult is in the room. Students are not left in rooms alone. Unsecured space is space that ties up staff for supervision. Safety incidents ranging from theft, vandalism to bullying and sexual assault happen in unlocked spaces. Visual depictions can help to inform students, staff and parents clearly what areas can be used by students during these periods.

Positive positioning of staff. Are staff supervision assignments left up to individual employees or made by administrators without comparison to incident data, survey results and other tangible indicators of need?

Security camera coverage. Cameras can be beneficial when they are placed in locations based on assessment rather than assumption of need and they are not seen as a replacement for human supervision.

Random surprise supervision. Optical distance supervision (staff using binoculars from hidden locations) and law enforcement officers, security officers, hall monitors and school administrators can use bicycles to create unexpected random supervision. Bicycles are a fun, inexpensive, healthy, student friendly way to dramatically improve supervision on campus. Students also often find bicycle mounted officers and staff to be more approachable.

Training staff how to move students through the building while supervising them.

Conditioning staff to supervise students even more closely during emergency evacuations

School administrators should work with teachers to develop guidelines for issuance of student passes and procedures to be followed when students are issued passes.

### **Support for staff who supervise well**

Administrators must support staff who provide good supervision. Many students report that teachers and adults in their schools do not supervise effectively. Many teachers and support staff indicate they decrease or discontinue their efforts to closely supervise students when they are not supported by administrators. Many building administrators report that their central administration does not support them in maintaining a disciplined environment. Some superintendents say their boards do not support them on disciplinary actions and school board members sometimes say parents complain when schools hold students accountable. What is most important is that each person “hold the line” at their level, within their authority to affect good supervision. The bottom line is that when schools and school systems submit to these very real pressures, schools become dysfunctional, school climate and the very process of education suffers, students get hurt and children sometimes even die.

Does your school culture support or degrade supervision by staff?

The parent that complains about their child being properly disciplined may very well also be the first one to file a civil action when their child is

injured in a safety incident when safety, order and discipline are not maintained due to parental pressure.

### **Code of conduct**

Should define prohibited items and behaviors

Should outline accountability for students parents, visitors and school system employees

Should be easy to understand, apply and defend

The code of conduct should help create a civil, warm, caring and stable school climate

The more consistency you have, the less likely your school will be to experience a weapons assault.

### **Triggering behaviors**

Of particular concern are those patterns of behavior that precede most school weapons assaults. Though multiple victim school shootings have received considerable media attention, they are extraordinarily rare events. The vast majority of school weapons assaults bear little resemblance to these high consequence yet rare incidents. One of the most effective means to reduce the chances of a weapons assault on campus is to reduce the frequency and severity of the precursors to campus weapons violence that we see most frequently:

Fights. Every fight on campus increases the chances that a shooting or more commonly, an edged weapons attack will take place.

Disrespectful gang behavior such as the throwing of gang hand signs, verbal gang slurs and other disrespectful and provocative gang behavior. In one case, a gang member shot at a passing school bus because a student on the bus threw a disrespectful gang hand sign.

Verbal and written threats to attack another. Students have preempted other students who had threatened to attack them. In one case, a middle school student smashed another student in the back of the skull from behind as he was getting off the school bus to avert what he felt was an imminent attack at the bus stop.

Trespassing or loitering. There have been numerous instances where trespassers have attacked students and staff.

Illicit drug activity. In a typical case, a drug dealer came to a high school at dismissal, shot and killed a student to settle a drug related dispute. It was later learned the student had been dealing drugs on the campus.

Bullying. While the connection between bullying and multiple victim school shootings is sometimes overstated, there is a clear connection between bullying and a number of catastrophic acts of school violence.

## **Consequences**

Consequences can help reduce the frequency and the severity of triggering behaviors.

Consistent sanctions

Firm yet reasonable

Enough to deter most potential violators without creating sympathy for those who are held accountable

Alternative prosecution programs often work very well if good judicial support exists. It is often better to write tickets to supplement disciplinary actions rather than to wait until behaviors escalate to the point students are expelled for more serious behavior. Keep in mind that behaviors that are common place can almost dissipate with an effective ticketing program.

The less consistency you have, the more violations you will encounter, the more liability you will face and the time spent on safety and disciplinary issues will be increased.

## **Crime prevention through environmental design**

Three major tenants of CPTED:

Territoriality

Natural surveillance

Access control

## **Visitor screening and identification procedures**

Can a bad man (or woman) leave your school with a child?

Are you protecting your communities' children from non custodial parents, gang members, dangerously mentally ill individuals and sexual predators with the honor system?

Good visitor screening and identification requires:

Minimizing unlocked doors

Requiring photo identification from all visitors staff cannot identify by name on sight

Checking student contact cards

Use of proximity cards, time sensitive visitor badges or other badges that prevent re-use of old badges.

Security of the sign in book and visitor badges (never leave them within easy reach of visitors)

Raising awareness of staff and students

Periodic testing of the system

### **Criminal trespass warning slips**

Use a written warning form to ban trespassers, suspended or expelled students, terminated employees as appropriate. Schools do not have to wait for an individual to commit a crime to ban them from the property. Generally, schools can ban any individual who poses a threat or who refuses to comply with safety policies and procedures. For example, schools can usually (and sometimes should) ban parents from their children's school when they yell, curse etc. on school property. While no educator likes to ban a parent or guardian from their children's school, it must be remembered that individuals who act in this manner can often become physically dangerous. In one case, a school employee was murdered by a parent the third time he cursed the employee out on school property.

Written warnings should be issued rather than verbal warnings whenever possible

Warnings have a better chance of working when the person being banned is provided a copy of the written warning

Be sure to cover special events, athletic events etc. as appropriate when warnings are issued

Having a law enforcement officer present when the warning is issued reduces danger, reduces the likelihood that the individual will return and may eliminate the need for the administrator to appear in court should an arrest become necessary.

Consistent prosecution of violators will also increase the effectiveness. Whenever an individual is arrested after being warned, they should be warned again, in writing every time they are arrested.

Schools can cross check the database that is created from banned individuals before allowing non students to attend school dances and other functions.

If you know an individual is a drug dealer, child molester, gang member or other potentially dangerous individual, ban them if they have no legitimate business on school property.

Make a notation on the warning slip that once a person is banned, they can never return without the express written permission of the organization. Be sure to state on the form who they can contact to request this permission.

### **Drive by shootings**

The most proven technique to prevent gang related drive by shootings in school parking lots and streets next to schools is the use of intensive traffic enforcement in close proximity to the school.

### **School/law enforcement partnerships**

Do you have a strong and effective school/law enforcement partnership?

Do you have armed officers? (There have been numerous on campus weapons assaults carried out in the presence of unarmed school police (California, Nevada, South Carolina and Texas among others). There have also been numerous close calls averted by armed school district police and school resource officers.

Campus officers should help reduce weapons violations in a variety of ways such as reducing triggering behaviors, educational programs, awareness efforts, random weapons screening, visual weapons screening and gang and drug reduction efforts.

Are armed officers properly trained and equipped?

-The better armed they are, the less likely it is that officers will have to use force

-Not arming campus officers is an approach that is three decades out of touch with the realities of school safety.

-A handgun is a weapon of convenience and political correctness. School based officers should have ready access to properly secured tactical carbines or rifles in their office or patrol vehicle. While this very concept is upsetting to many educators, properly equipped officers have stopped imminent gunfire by producing superior weaponry in a number of instances around the nation without a shot being fired. In many communities, American law enforcement agencies have been decades behind their counterparts in England, Germany, New Zealand, Israel and other countries where officers have had ready access to tactical rifles for many years. The better armed and trained officers are, the less likely they are in many situations to need to discharge a firearm.

-Officer selection, training and equipment selection are very important. Campus officers should have superior firearms training to officers in traditional patrol assignments. Movement with a loaded weapon, shooting techniques for crowded conditions, rapid response/deployment training with a shoulder weapon, spin shooting, independent judgment drills, position of disadvantage drills, school bus drills, paintball simulations, steel target duels and other advanced gunnery drills should be regularly utilized. While these are technical concepts for law enforcement officers, it is important that both school and law enforcement administrators understand the concept that use of force settings in the campus setting can be far more demanding than the vast majority of use of force situations in more traditional law enforcement roles. A number of instances where officers have been forced to engage an armed assailant on campus have been incredibly difficult situations for officers due to panicked students and staff combined with actions and armament of assailants (Red Lake Reservation school shooting, Columbine school shooting, Santee High School etc.)

While the Secret Service assessment correctly demonstrates that most multiple victim school shootings were over before law enforcement officers arrived, it is important to note that almost all of these incidents took place in schools without armed officers on campus. Armed officers have stopped a number of in progress campus shootings. In addition, one school administrator used his National Guard military service pistol to stop the Pearl Mississippi shooting rampage and a citizen used a shotgun to stop a shooting rampage at a school dance in Pennsylvania. Armed law enforcement intervention has reduced the death toll in a number of cases around the nation.

Use of force options

In the same manner, officers who have a variety of use of force options such as pepper spray, collapsible baton, Tasers® and other options combined with advanced use of force training are often able to minimize the amount of force needed to make a situation safe.

### **Education and information efforts**

The more you tell, the less you will expel

Efforts to inform students, staff, parents and the community at large of weapons abatement policies, procedures and laws should be proactive and clear.

Does your organization use:

Posters

Signs

Billboards

Cable television

Student behavior contracts

Rapid call notification systems

Take home DVD's

Presentations to community groups

Proactive work with area media

And most importantly, daily interaction with students

### **Treats, tips, hotlines and reporting mechanisms**

We know from interviews with hundreds of students who have been caught with weapons on campus that the tip is the least reliable means to find weapons on school property. Interviews with students caught by means other than student tips indicates that students who have a firearm on school property rarely tell anyone about the weapon or show the weapon to others. The same is less true but still often true for other types of weapons such as metal knuckles and edged weapons (Bibb County, Georgia 1989-1999 where school police interviewed weapons violators caught with weapons on school property).

If your organization has never done so before, it is valuable to review all student weapons violations for the past few years to see how weapons have been recovered. If most weapons recoveries were based on student tips, you are probably missing the vast majority of weapons coming to campus.

Tips do lead to many of our most important weapons recoveries, but reliance upon a hotline or other reporting mechanism as the primary means to recover weapons is dangerous.

-Does your organization have a good series of reporting mechanisms in place?

-Remember that if you know the name of a student who has come forward, you cannot absolutely guarantee confidentiality. Judges can order school officials and police in open court to identify students who have provided information. Though this is extremely rare, it can occur.

Be careful about using a student as an information source on an ongoing basis. You can create a legal responsibility for protecting student informants, particularly if you encourage continued reporting.

Take all reports relating to weapons and threats seriously

Be sure to comply with reporting laws. Attorneys can use an administrator's failure to follow state reporting laws to make a convincing argument that school officials act in an unlawful manner to cover up school crime. This can be very damaging evidence in a civil trial.

### **Acting on tips relating to weapons on campus/school search and seizure basics**

Always have at least one armed officer present when anyone is searched for a weapon – regardless of age. A first grader was shot and killed by another first grader when school staff failed to find a gun on a student who was caught with a knife. The United States Supreme Court case of *T.L.O. V New Jersey* held a principal's search based on reasonable suspicion was lawful even though a police officer was in the room when he searched her purse. The California appellate court case *In Re Fred C.* (1982) held that police officers can act under the expanded authority of school officials when four conditions are present:

-The officer is present upon the school's request

-The school has the legal authority to search

-The educator/school is in charge of the search

-The presence of the officer reduces danger

Though technically binding only in California, this case has now been successfully used as a legal precedent in all 50 states. It is important to note that case law and statutory laws in various regions changes from time to time. Make sure that your organization periodically researches the laws pertaining to school search and seizure.

Always investigate thoroughly, a number of school shootings and edged weapons assaults have taken place after school officials conducted ineffective searches missing weapons that were later used. Most properly conducted searches for contraband relating to tips yield contraband. In many cases, the contraband found is not the same contraband indicated by the tip. For example, it is rather common for a search for a pack of cigarettes my yield drugs or a knife.

### **Multi disciplinary threat assessment**

Some tips received involve information indicating that a student, employee or other person has expressed a threat to harm others. Managing these situations is also critical to the prevention of weapons violence. In the early 1990's the Bibb County, Georgia Public School System School District Police Department began systematically assessing potentially dangerous students jointly with school social workers and school administrators. The department demonstrated immediate success and began teaching the concept at professional conferences around the country. Soon other school districts such as the Los Angeles Unified School District began utilizing similar approaches. Several years later, the United States Department of Education and the United States Secret Service conducted an intensive study of individuals who had carried out planned school shootings. These shootings were defined as targeted acts of violence and detailed findings of the study were compiled over time into two publications, a superb training program and recently as a DVD. The work of the federal government and a number of experts in the field has improved the basic concept first utilized in Bibb County to a significantly higher level. Due to these efforts numerous planned school shootings and bombings have been averted through variations of this approach. We are to date not aware of any multiple victim campus shooting that has taken place after this type of intervention was utilized though there are numerous examples of single discipline assessments prior to campus shootings (Thurston High School Shooting, Virginia Tech among them).

### **Core concepts**

The primary strength in this approach involves the combined expertise of multiple relevant disciplines to more accurately assess and find a successful resolution to situations where a student, employee or other

individual has expressed some type of threat to commit an act of violence at a school, on a school bus or at a school event. There have been instances where a student has committed a targeted act of violence after being assessed by a mental health professional alone, a school administrator alone or a law enforcement officer acting alone. We know of no instance to date where a student has carried out such an attack after a multidisciplinary threat assessment approach has been carried out by a team involving an administrator, law enforcement officer and a mental health professional working in concert. While it would not at all be surprising to see the approach fail some day, the success stories are beyond tabulation with one school district (Clark County, Nevada) having performed thousands of threat assessments successfully.

Though it is not possible to thoroughly examine this topic in a few minutes during this presentation, we shall explore some of the key concepts of successful threat assessment:

-The most powerful advantage of the approach lies in the variety of skills knowledge and abilities brought to bear on the situation by the different disciplines working together. A law enforcement officer may key in on certain facts that might not be noted by a mental health professional while the mental health professional might be able to accurately gauge risk in ways not apparent to a law enforcement officer. A school administrator may have a better understanding of context of different facts that become available due to their knowledge of the school and they are in a leadership position to help affect change if it becomes apparent that there are pressures being created affecting some children that can be corrected through modification of the school environment.

-The focus is on a pragmatic and thoughtful evaluation of facts rather than a fast response that may not bring real resolution to a situation.

-The process emphasizes an open minded and listening approach where all relevant parties are interviewed to gain a clearer picture of what has and may transpire.

-The team should focus on long term resolutions rather than simply short term fixes. For example, if a student indeed made threats and was in the planning stages of an attack, arrest, expulsion and mental health treatment may be tools that are utilized. But if the actions of the student were driven by severe bullying behaviors, the team should also work to affect change before another student acts improperly due to the pressure exerted by such situations.

### **Disguised weapons**

Another reason that trained police and security officers should conduct all searches for weapons is the concern for disguised weapons. There are hundreds of readily available disguised weapons that can be purchased in retail stores and online. There are numerous lip stick knives,

hairbrushes containing daggers, pen knives, working pocket calculators containing knives, crucifix knives and other dangerous weapons that are manufactured to look like harmless objects. In addition, it is relatively common for students to create their own disguised weapons. Properly trained law enforcement and security personnel are usually able to spot these items which are frequently carried to school by students.

### **Possible preventive search strategies**

Contrary to popular perception, there are actually a number of proven techniques to deter school weapons violations and to dramatically improve the chances of detection when weapons are brought to campus. These strategies will not be as effective if the other types of prevention strategies covered are ignored. Search strategies emphasize deterrence of potential violators by making them feel they are likely to be caught and punished or the interruption of a planned attack through prompt detection.

It is just as important however, to try to minimize the desire for students and others to use a weapon as it is to deter them from bringing the weapon to school. For example, the penalty for possession of a firearm in the People's Republic of China is death. The punishment is swift and certain and the likelihood of detection for weapons violators is very high, yet China experienced one of the world's most horrific K12 school firearms attacks (16 reported fatalities and numerous injuries) when an intruder used a home made firearm. Other multiple victim attacks have occurred in Japan, Germany, Canada, England and other countries with strict weapons control laws. Attackers have used edged weapons, firearms, explosives, a flame thrower and in the most deadly school attack to date, fire to kill multiple victims. This highlights the importance of other prevention measures such as proper access control to prevent campus weapons assaults. Students are attacked with pencils, chairs and other improvised weapons far more often than with firearms. This is another reason that prevention efforts must not stop with strategies to keep guns and knives off of school property.

The following screening measures have proven to be extremely effective in dramatically reducing the presence of non improvised weapons on school property:

### **Entry point metal detection**

While this is typically the first weapons screening concept most people think of, it is the least often employed for K12 schools due to the expense and disruption of effective entry point metal detection. Originally used for airports, courthouses and special events like the Olympic Games, entry point metal detection is generally not well suited for K12 schools without substantial risk. While a number of large urban school districts have

demonstrated success with entry point metal detection most school systems and private schools will obtain more benefit by using the considerable resources required for effective entry point metal detection (often ranging from \$250,000 to \$500,000 per school per year for a mid sized secondary school) for other prevention means. Entry point detection tends to be more practical and cost effective for alternative schools and special events. Entry point metal detection depends on the elimination of exploitable gaps through a variety of countermeasures:

#### -Shoot through hazard

This technique was utilized successfully in the Red Lake Reservation School Shooting. The offender simply shot his way through the checkpoint which was staffed by unarmed personnel. The only reliable way to prevent this technique is for the check point to be staffed by or patrolled by armed security or law enforcement personnel.

#### -Perimeter entry

This technique has often been used by students to beat a metal detector checkpoint. Offenders simply place a weapon on a window ledge, pass it to another student via a pole through a second story window, or enter through an unsecured perimeter door. In one case, students noted that an officer assigned to protect a perimeter door took a break at the same time each day. At that time, a student opened the now unmanned side door and was given a handgun from someone outside the school. The student used the gun to shoot a rival gang member in the school.

#### Smuggling in weapons during after hours events

For this technique, students attend an after hours event such as a Parent Teacher meeting when metal detection is not performed. The student hides a weapon in the school and retrieves it later.

#### Misdirection

Metal detectors detect metal rather than weapons specifically. This means that every piece of metal capable of setting off the detector must be identified to rule out the possibility that an individual is carrying a weapon. For example, if a person at a screening station presumes that a student's metal belt buckle set off a detector, they could miss a handgun hidden under the student's clothing behind the buckle.

#### Pass around

Depicted in a popular movie, this simple technique involves one person going through the detector without a weapon and a second person tossing or sliding a weapon to them.

#### Disguised weapons

Thorough screening is required to detect the many readily available and popular disguised weapons. This is particularly true with disguised weapons with little or no metal components. If screening is conducted too swiftly, students will have little difficulty smuggling disguised weapons into a school.

Flow of people in balance with efficiency

Better quality metal detectors are adjustable for a wide range of sensitivity. The higher the sensitivity setting, the greater the number of alarms for metallic items that are not weapons. At the same time, when sensitivity settings are too low, smaller weapons can pass through the detector without triggering an alarm. Alerts from innocent items slow down the screening process dramatically because the cause of each alert has to be identified, most typically by screening with a hand held metal detector.

When entry point metal detection is deemed appropriate for the risk level careful consideration should be given to the logistics of the checkpoint, security of the checkpoint and how students will be prepared to quickly move through the checkpoint without triggering false alarms. If entry point metal detection is utilized, random metal detection should also be used to supplement it. Security should also be developed to protect students who are waiting to be screened or a weapons assault could occur among large numbers of students waiting to go through the checkpoint. Whenever walk through metal detectors are employed, it is a good idea to select multi zone detectors. These detectors help to pinpoint the region of the body where metal triggering and alarm is located i.e. the left foot. This dramatically reduces screening time because the cause of an alert can be determined without scanning the entire person with a handheld detector. In addition, this type of detector is safer for the operator because the operator will know where on the body the metal item is located. If a violator tries to beat the checkpoint and sets off the detector, the operator is in a much better position to quickly detect any attempt by the operator to retrieve a weapon to attack the operator.

Random/surprise metal detection

The majority of schools utilizing metal detectors have found random surprise screening to be far less expensive, less intrusive and less disruptive than entry point screening. The random metal detection concept was first suggested by a high school student in Bibb County, Georgia. The concept is now used by numerous public school systems and some private schools and has proven to be quite effective at reducing the number of student weapons violations. In this concept, a team draws classroom numbers or school bus numbers and checks each student in the selected areas with a metal detector. Students never know when they will be selected for screening and do not have the opportunity to dump weapons with any degree of certainty providing a significant deterrent with far less disruption than entry point detection.

The manner in which random detection is performed is crucial to the success of the program. As with entry point detection, at least one armed officer should be present when screening is conducted and personnel should be assigned to watch for students attempting to dump weapons. Buses can be checked upon their arrival in the morning and just prior to departure in the afternoon. One team member should quickly board the bus and move to the rear of the bus to keep students from hiding

weapons. The bus should be searched for weapons as soon as all students have disembarked to ensure that students are not able to beat the screening.

Some school systems have attempted to use random entry point screening by having all students walk through a metal detector on randomly selected days. This process has generally proven to be ineffective as students back up in large numbers affording them ample opportunity to discard weapons without detection. When students can simply discard their weapons without any consequences, the deterrent value is weakened. This approach is also far more disruptive for the school and intrusive for students than random surprise detection as described here.

For random surprise metal detection to be effective, there are several important considerations:

- To be lawful, the search must truly be focused on the recovery of weapons rather than for drugs or other contraband (but any drugs found within the scope of a weapons search can generally be used in court)

- The checks must be demonstrably random. Steering a search to particular classrooms, groups of students or individual students will almost assuredly be unlawful and will reduce the effectiveness of the strategy.

- Coordinating high frequency/low volume checks will prove far more effective and less disruptive than less frequent checks of larger numbers of students. A greater reduction will generally be seen checking one or two classrooms every two weeks than checking half the school three times a year. A well coordinated team can check a large classroom full of students in 15-20 minutes. Same sex operators should conduct all screenings.

- Screening team members should receive instruction on screening techniques and should pay particular attention to the potential for misdirection and disguised weapons.

### **Random locker inspections**

Manual inspections of randomly selected lockers (again, using a demonstrably random selection process to prevent any individual or group from being selected) has proven to be extremely effective at preventing students from hiding weapons in lockers. As with random surprise metal detection, high frequency, low volume checks will be more effective. There are legal limitations on searches of containers within student lockers. It is also important to secure all unused student lockers to minimize available alternate hiding places.

## **Random inspections with detection animals**

Contraband detection dogs and swine serve as a powerful deterrent to potential violators. Detection animals can be trained to detect drugs, beverage alcohol, tobacco, explosives, firearms and ammunition. Bomb detection dogs can usually detect firearms and provide an extra layer of protection, particularly if students and the general public know they are utilized periodically. The students, parents and the general public should never be told that a detection animal is capable of finding contraband if it is not trained to find. For example, falsely announcing that a drug dog can find guns could result in civil liability if a shooting takes place because a false promise of security has been made. As with the installation of fake security cameras, the deterrent value is not worth the incredible civil liability created by this type of practice. Another caution relating to detection animals involves demonstration in the presence of students. Though it is popular to have a police officer demonstrate the effectiveness of a detection dog in a student assembly, schools and law enforcement agencies have been successfully sued for this practice. Plaintiffs have successfully argued that their children were frightened by the animals to the point of being severely traumatized by the experience.

## **Visual Weapons Screening**

This simple yet incredibly effective technique has been used to avert a number of planned school shootings and is extremely effective for situations involving a rifle, carbine or shotgun. While there is no viable profile of a student or adult who will carry out a weapons assault at a school, people who carry concealed weapons perform specific physical behaviors relating to the presence of the weapon on their person. School staff, bus drivers and law enforcement officers and security personnel can be trained to spot the indicators that an individual may be carrying a weapon. At least one multimillion dollar settlement following a school shooting involved the failure of school bus drivers to be trained in the powerful concept of visual weapons screening. Visual weapons screening is inexpensive, easy to apply and is low impact in contrast to many other screening strategies.

## **Plain view vehicle check**

This simple and inexpensive technique is designed to help reduce the number of weapons stored in student and visitor vehicles on campus and at special events. Law enforcement or security personnel or school officials who have received proper training, conduct random sweeps of parking areas looking in the windows of parked vehicles to try to spot weapons that can be seen in plain view. Most weapons recovered will be

partially visible rather than simply lying on the seat of a car in full view. If this technique is employed with no prior notice, it is not uncommon for a dozen or more weapons to be found in one parking lot. If the vehicle is on school property and a weapon that is covered by school policy or legal statute or ordinance is seen, the car can be searched. When a weapon is found, be sure to search the driver and their locker for additional weapons if allowed under your organization's policies and legal rulings in your region. Since many weapons assaults on school property involve weapons retrieved from automobiles, this is an important screening tool.

### **Vehicle weapons checkpoints**

We have only seen this technique used twice, once in a Georgia school system and once in a Texas school district. This strategy involves the demonstrably random selection of vehicles entering campus to conduct a quick check of the vehicle interior and trunk for weapons. This type of screening is often used on military installations and high value targets of terrorism. This strategy requires ample prior notice that vehicles will be searched and that anyone entering the campus automatically consents to the search of their vehicle and its contents.

### **Home searches**

This simple technique has been used to avert considerable bloodshed. Developed by the Bibb County School District Police in the early 1990's this technique involves law enforcement officers searching a student's bedroom when they have an indication that a weapon or weapons may be hidden there. This type of search can be done through a "gun warrant" if the student is caught with a gun on school property or with parental consent if adequate cause to obtain a search warrant does not exist and the parent or guardian consents.

### **Intensive traffic enforcement**

In communities where gang related drive by shootings take place with any regularity, traffic enforcement efforts in close proximity to schools are an effective deterrent to shootings in school parking lots and on streets adjacent to campus. One district experienced a series of six gang related shootings on streets next to high and middle schools in 90 days. School police began an aggressive traffic enforcement campaign near public schools and no more shooting incidents took place for more than two years. When a new school superintendent stopped the practice, a gang shooting occurred within a few months. Traffic enforcement is a powerful deterrent to gang activity involving automobiles.

## **Many weapons violators have multiple weapons**

According to one Oklahoma school safety official, about 25% of the students caught with a weapon in his district were found to have at least one additional weapon. Students caught with a weapon should be searched by an armed officer for additional weapons. Book bags, purses, student lockers and on campus automobiles of students caught with a weapon should be searched as well. While the practice is offensive to educators, it is normally best to handcuff a student caught with a weapon on school property before they are searched for additional weapons. Experience has proven that it is far better to control the situation than to let it escalate because a suspect was not handcuffed prior to search for additional weapons.

## **Pre incident planning**

While this session is focused on proven techniques to prevent campus weapons assaults, no strategy can be 100% effective in preventing every incident. It is prudent to evaluate school mitigation and preparedness measures to ensure the impact of any event that could occur is minimized. The following are a few key points from the Safe Havens International Inc. advanced one day training program on school emergency preparedness:

### **Plans should cover all three types of campus weapons incidents**

Plans should cover the primary categories of weapons related emergencies that take place at schools, school buses and school special events:

- Report of a person with a concealed weapon
  
- Report of a person who is actually using a weapon to threaten or assault people
  
- Report of a hostage situation

The planning team should include school administrators, emergency management officials, pupil transportation officials and representatives from all law enforcement agencies that could be required to respond to any school or school bus operated by the school or district. Protocols for each of these three situations should be included in the role specific job aids for each category of employee covered by the plan.

### **Plans must be 3-D**

For all but the smallest schools and school districts, plans should include role specific emergency job aids that are specifically designed for major job categories. For example, a mid sized public school district might have a series of integrated emergency job aids for:

- Administrators and crisis team members
- Teachers
- School bus drivers
- Custodial staff
- School nutrition personnel
- After hours events

Trying to address this variety of job categories with one set of emergency guidelines will prove to be ineffective because each of these categories of employee perform different actions during a crisis.

### **Clear communications is crucial**

For plans to work, people must be able to implement them under extreme stress. All crisis team members, building administrators, department heads, the superintendent or head of school and their cabinet should be formally trained in the National Incident Management System and should practice using it during drills and exercises. Codes should not be used due to the opportunity for critical miscommunications. In one case, a gunman made it into an elementary school because several staff members did not understand the lockdown code. In this case, school officials used codes so they would not frighten children. The actual result was that numerous students saw a gunman in the school and were quite frightened. Plain speak phrases should be utilized for clear communications in potentially life or death situations.

### **All staff must be trained**

It should not be assumed that every staff member will know to act correctly in a crisis. In one case, a custodian in a rural school saw a student with a gun in the parking lot. Instead of alerting administrators and requesting a lockdown, he left the safety of the building and approached the student. The student killed an administrator in the school shortly after. The custodian later said that it never occurred to him the student could be dangerous and he had approached the student to tell him to take the gun home so he would not get into trouble. It is important to understand that this event took place in a community where almost any type of serious crime is an extraordinary event. Untrained school staff

have often done things that in retrospect do not seem appropriate because they were not properly trained. Training efforts should cover every employee and volunteer in the district.

### **Key staff must be empowered**

It is critical that employees who may be in a position to prevent a weapons assault from taking place or escalating be empowered to act to perform critical functions without being directed to do so. For example, there should always be at least one staff member in the office area who is trained and empowered to implement all of the functional protocols (lockdown, shelter in place, emergency evacuation etc.). The time it takes for a receptionist to call an administrator on a radio, describe a situation and receive instructions will often be too long for effective implementation of the life saving protocols. In one Georgia incident, the school secretary was able to avert a hostage situation by implementing a lock down at her elementary school without contacting the principal. With just seconds to spare, the building was secured before a gunman tried to enter the school.

### **Directed and self initiated actions**

All staff should know that functional protocols in their area of responsibility can be implemented by staff as a self directed activity. For example, a teacher who hears what sounds like gunshots in the hallway, should independently implement a lock down and notify the main office without waiting for direction.

### **Plans must be tested**

Appropriate drills and exercises should be utilized to test plans, procedures and equipment while allowing people to practice. Careful consideration should be given to the appropriateness of having students participate in drills and exercises. For example, there have been numerous problems encountered (Students severely injured and significantly emotionally traumatized) when students have participated as role players during full scale exercises involving school shootings. The need for realism should be carefully balanced with the risks involved. Similarly, there have been some severe problems with unannounced lockdown drills where blank rounds have been fired to create realism. Students should only be utilized when:

-It is safe to do so

- Having student participation will help prepare students for what they should do in an actual event.
- Students are not likely to be traumatized by the experience
- The level of realism needed cannot be achieved with adult role players taking the place of students

We hope you have found this session to be helpful and worth your valuable time. Please feel free to contact Safe Havens any time you think we may be of assistance. Our experienced analysts provide free telephone and e-mail consultations and are eager to assist you in creating a safer school environment. We also have a variety of free resources available on the Safe Havens web site at [www.safehavensinternational.org](http://www.safehavensinternational.org) including:

- Free topical papers on timely school safety topics**
- Free 205 page e-book on school safety**
- Free school safety survey instruments**
- Free school safety plan evaluation tools**
- Free school safety e-newsletter**
- Free school safety web tutorials on relevant topics**

Safe Havens analysts also regularly provide powerful conference keynotes, dynamic convocations and student assemblies, captivating school safety training for school staff and administrators and expert consulting services for schools, school systems, government agencies and professional organization. The experienced we have gained working in two dozen countries can help you're your schools safer, more productive learning environments. Please contact us at 404-557-2068 if we can be off assistance to your organization.