



Vermont School Safety Center

Recommended School Safety Best Practices

In an effort to enhance the level of school emergency preparedness, the Vermont School Safety Center in collaboration with the Vermont School Crisis Planning Team is recommending the following school safety “best and promising practices”. Recognizing that each school has its own unique educational and school safety landscape, we recommend that schools evaluate these “best and promising practices” and consider their implementation into existing or future school emergency preparedness initiatives. These practices are not listed in any prioritized order.

Planning

1. School Emergency Operations Plan – Every school is required to have an Emergency Operations Plan (<http://education.vermont.gov/sites/aoe/files/documents/edu-state-board-rules-series-4000.pdf>). Working with internal and external school safety partners (school administrators, school counselors, facility managers, school nurses, guidance counselors, emergency first responders, mental health professionals), schools should develop a comprehensive “all hazards focused” Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) . In the absence of a fully developed EOP, schools are encouraged to use the Vermont School Crisis Planning Guide found at: <http://schoolsafety.vermont.gov/planning> The plan should be reviewed/ revised by the school crisis planning team after a critical incident or at a minimum, on an annual basis.
2. Visitor management – Developing a policy and practice of requiring all visitors to sign in at a centralized location allows for school administrative staff to properly identify all those wishing to gain access to a school. A “host meets guest” policy should be established to ensure visitors are met by a designated staff member prior to gaining full access to the school.
3. Post-Tragedy Response - Students, staff, families and the community need varying degrees of support after a small scale incident or a large scale tragedy to promote recovery. Efforts can be made to identify directly impacted students,



families or staff who need targeted support and activities can be planned to foster resilience and recovery. Collaboration with mental health partners and other community resources is key. A Post-Tragedy Response Plan following best practice guidelines should be established and reviewed annually.

<http://schoolsafety.vermont.gov/sites/ssc/files/documents/SchoolSafetyPlanning/VTSchoolCrisisGuide/Recovery/School%20Recovery%20after%20a%20Critical%20Incident%20or%20Tragedy.pdf>

4. Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design – School should develop safety and security strategies that adhere to the practices of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design, (CPTED) - These concepts may include:
Natural Access Control - Design features that clearly indicate public routes and discourage access to private structural elements. Such design features include placement of entrances and exits, fencing, and landscaping to control traffic flow,
Natural Surveillance - Design features that increase the visibility of a property. These features maximize the ability of persons in the area to see persons in the vicinity and avoid trouble and allow external activities to be seen from adjacent building structures by persons who could call for help. Such design features include landscaping, lighting, window and stairway placement, and building entrance and garage layouts,
Territorial Reinforcement - Design features that clearly indicate public and private structural elements of a property. An individual will develop a sense of territoriality for a space with frequent activities in an area, a sense of ownership,
Target Hardening - The use of mechanical devices (locks, security systems, alarms, and monitoring equipment) and organized crime prevention strategies (security patrols, law enforcement) make an area harder to access but may have a tendency to make the inhabitants "feel" unsafe.

Equipment

1. Access Control – During normal business hours, schools should limit access to their buildings by utilizing a combination of access control technology such as (access cards, fobs or keys). Once the school day begins, exterior doors should be locked and visitors, guests and contracting staff should be required to gain access



to the building via a main entry point where access is controlled through an audio/video and an access control device. Once entering the building, guests should be guided by way finding signage that directs them to the main administrative office of the school.

2. Interior door locking mechanisms – All classroom doors and office spaces should have the ability to be locked, preferably from the inside, to ensure individuals do not need to exit the room in order to lock the door. All locking mechanisms shall be in compliance with National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) standards.
3. Public Address/Emergency Notification Systems – Schools should utilize a public address/emergency notification system that allows those inside and outside the school to be notified when an emergency is taking place. School staff must be trained and educated in how to utilize these systems and these systems should be incorporated into the schools safety drills and exercises. During these exercises, schools should ensure these systems can be heard in all common areas, bathrooms, library's, outdoor activity areas and surrounding athletic fields.
4. Window shading – all first floor exterior windows should have appropriate window shading that limits the visibility into the school from the outside, and all interior windows in classrooms and office spaces should have appropriate window shading that limits visibility into the classroom from the hallway. This shading should be easy to use and shall be in compliance with NFPA standards.

Organization

1. School Crisis Planning Team – Every school should have a school crisis planning team comprised of school safety stakeholders that may include but is not limited to: school administrators, faculty, staff, school nurse, school counselor, facility managers, local emergency first responders and designated mental health agency representatives. This team should meet regularly (preferably once a month) to develop/review/revise school emergency plans, policies and procedures. See Vermont's School Crisis Planning Guide for more information.



2. Supervisory Union/School District Public Safety Team – Each Supervisory Union/School District should have a public safety team comprised of members that include but are not limited to: superintendent, school executive leaders from each of the schools in the SU/District, local emergency first responders, transportation coordinators, members from the designated mental health agency for that area and local emergency management directors. This team should meet regularly (preferably on a quarterly basis) to develop/review/revise regional school emergency plans, policies and procedures. See Vermont’s School Crisis Planning Guide for more information.

3. Behavioral Threat Assessment Team – Every school, supervisory union or school district should have access to a behavioral threat assessment team. This team should be comprised of school safety stakeholders that include but are not limited to: school administrators, mental health professionals, school counselor, school nurse, local law enforcement and other school safety partners as needed. By design, this team is charged with evaluating concerning behaviors, social media posts, verbal or written threats or other actions displayed by students, faculty, staff or others that may have a negative impact on the school. Members should be trained in how to conduct these assessments and schools should have the appropriate policies and procedures in place to support the team.
<http://schoolsafety.vermont.gov/sites/ssc/files/documents/SchoolSafetyPlanning/VTSchoolCrisisGuide/PreventionMitigation/Threat%20Assessment.xlsx>

Training/Exercising

1. See Something, Say Something – Every student, faculty or staff member, parent, school bus driver and school safety stakeholder should be familiar with the formal and informal policies and practices currently in place to report activities (ie. behaviors, social media posts, text messages, conversations etc.) that may have a negative impact on the school. We know that in some cases, perpetrators involved in an active shooter incident or other violent crimes have often discussed their intent with friends, displayed some type of concerning behavior or posted their violent thoughts on social media. <https://www.dhs.gov/see-something-say-something>



2. School safety drills and exercises – All schools are required to follow the school safety drill schedule as directed by the Agency of Education and Division of Fire Safety Memo at:

http://schoolsafety.vermont.gov/sites/ssc/files/documents/LatestNews/Egress%20and%20Lockdown%20Drills_2016_0809.pdf

Conducting school safety drills and exercises can increase a schools ability to respond to an emergency by testing and evaluating existing emergency response policies and procedures. An after action review should be conducted following each school safety drill or exercise to identify strengths, opportunities for improvement and to guide future school crisis planning, training and exercise initiatives.

3. Options Based Response Protocols when responding to a violent intruder – In light of the ever changing school threat environment, schools should begin to transition away from a standard lockdown response to a violent intruder and implement a response methodology that provides a variety of response “options” that increase survivability in these types of incidents. Run, Hide, Fight, is an example of an options-based approach that your school may choose to utilize. Additional information about this program is available at:

<https://rems.ed.gov/IHERespondToActiveShooter.aspx>

4. Parent/Guardian Communication – Prior to the start of every school year, school administrators should share information with parents and guardians about how they will be informed of a school emergency, and what actions they should and should NOT take. Well informed parents are more likely to follow designated emergency procedures, keeping them from potentially interfering with the response to a school emergency. If schools do not have access to an emergency notification system, they may consider utilizing VTAlert:

<http://vem.vermont.gov/vtalert>