



## MEMORANDUM

To: Governor Philip Scott  
From: Thomas D. Anderson, Commissioner  
Vermont Department of Public Safety

Heather Bouchey, Interim Secretary  
Vermont Department of Education

Date: April 13, 2018

Re: March 2018 School Security Assessments

### Introduction

On February 22, 2018, following the tragic school shooting incident in Parkland, Florida and a potential school shooting that was averted at Fair Haven Union High School, the Governor issued a plan outlining short and long-term actions to maintain the safe, healthy and strong communities and schools.<sup>1</sup> As part of his plan, Governor Scott directed the Vermont State Police and Vermont Emergency Management, in coordination with the Vermont School Safety Center, the Agency of Education, and local, county and state law enforcement officers, to conduct security assessments of all public, independent and tutorial schools. The intent of these security assessments was to identify school emergency preparedness strengths, areas for improvement, and future school safety planning, training, exercise and resource needs. These assessments were conducted throughout the month of March with 98% of Public Schools and 88% of Independent/Tutorial Schools<sup>2</sup> participating in these assessments.

The survey was developed by the Vermont School Safety Center and provided to law enforcement agencies throughout Vermont, who then conducted the surveys by visiting each school and meeting with appropriate school safety personnel. Each survey took approximately 30 minutes to complete. As a result of the data collected school safety strengths, areas for improvement, and recommendations to enhance school safety were identified.

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<sup>1</sup>The memorandum outlining the Governor's plan of action can be found here:

[http://governor.vermont.gov/sites/scott/files/documents/Gov.%20Scott%20Memo%20to%20General%20Assembly 02-22-18.pdf](http://governor.vermont.gov/sites/scott/files/documents/Gov.%20Scott%20Memo%20to%20General%20Assembly%2002-22-18.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Though not the focus of this survey, law enforcement agencies also visited 9 community-based child programs that were not affiliated with a school. All of these facilities have developed an Emergency Operations Plan, and the majority educate faculty, staff, and students on the school's emergency response protocols before the start of the year and have participated in school emergency preparedness initiatives with local emergency responders over the last year. Unfortunately, only half have a system to identify, report, and evaluate school threats or concerning behaviors and less than half of them are utilizing an options-based response protocol for a violent intruder. The main security technology/systems that were identified as a need were cameras, buzzer system for front door, and door locks.



In addition to and in conjunction with the school security assessments, the Governor’s plan also calls for grant funding in the amount of \$5M be made available to schools to be used for security infrastructure upgrades and school safety planning designed to enhance the capacity of school districts to maintain safe schools.<sup>3</sup> It is anticipated that these funds will be made available to schools through grants to address any gaps and needed improvements to school safety identified in the safety assessments, which are outlined below.

## Strengths

- **96% of schools always/most of the time comply with the Agency of Education and Division of Fire Safety’s School Emergency Drill Schedule.** In 2016, the Vermont School Safety Center partnered with the Agency of Education and Division of Fire Safety to update this Emergency Drill Schedule. This schedule was publicized through the School Safety Center’s website and is highlighted through the School Safety Training and Awareness Calendar.
- **96% of schools during the last year have participated in school emergency preparedness initiatives with local emergency responders.** Since 2016, the Vermont School Safety Center has focused on enhancing this collaboration between first responders and schools by meeting with every Local Emergency Planning Committee to educate them on school emergency preparedness initiatives. In addition, the Vermont School Safety Center has highlighted this collaboration by identifying the month of September as “School Safety Month” culminating in the Governor’s September 2017 School Safety Month proclamation.
- **92% of schools educate faculty, staff, and students on Emergency Response Protocols prior to the beginning of the school year.** In 2016, the Vermont School Safety Center recommended that all schools adopt the Standard Response Protocols of Lockdown, Lockout, Evacuate, and Shelter. This recommended practice ensures all students, faculty and staff are using consistent emergency response terminology when responding to a school emergency. These protocols have been the focus of the bi-monthly “What if Wednesday” school safety exercises that have been offered to all schools through the Agency of Education’s Weekly Field Memo and the Vermont School Safety Center website.
- **86% of schools have the ability to make an internal public address announcement.** This capability ensures that schools can alert everyone inside the building when an emergency is occurring.
- **86% of schools have developed or are in the process of developing a Family Reunification Plan.** In 2017, the Vermont School Safety Center recommended that schools utilize the Standard Reunification Method for family reunification planning and has created a training video and three discussion based exercises to assist schools in this implementation.
- **85% of schools have a system to identify, report, and evaluate school threats or concerning behaviors<sup>4</sup>.** In 2015 and 2016, the focus of the Governor’s School Safety Conference was to build a Behavioral Threat Assessment capacity in schools across Vermont. Thereafter, 315 school safety partners

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<sup>3</sup> Governor Scott requested and the House of Representatives has appropriated up to \$4M for school safety enhancements. In addition, the Department of Public Safety has reallocated approximately \$1M in Homeland Security Grant funding for school planning, training and exercise.

<sup>4</sup> According to a 2002 joint report from the United States Secret Service and United States Department of Education, “Officials may benefit from focusing their efforts on formulating strategies for preventing these attacks in two principal areas: Developing the capacity to pick up on and evaluate available or knowable information that might indicate that there is a risk of targeted school attack; and employing the results of these risk evaluations or ‘threat assessments’ in developing strategies to prevent potential school attacks from occurring.”

[https://www.secretservice.gov/data/protection/ntac/ssi\\_final\\_report.pdf](https://www.secretservice.gov/data/protection/ntac/ssi_final_report.pdf)



were trained in the Threat Assessment methodology that is recommended by the United States Secret Service and United States Department of Education.

- **83% of schools lock exterior doors during business hours.** The Vermont School Safety Center has reinforced this best practice of locking exterior doors during business hours through school safety site visits, training videos, and discussion-based exercises.
- **76% of schools reported the use of portable radios to communicate with faculty, staff, and/or first responders during an emergency.** The use of portable radios ensures effective communication among all key stakeholders when responding to a school emergency.
- **71% of schools are utilizing the Vermont School Crisis Guide for their School Emergency Operations Plan.** This guide, which is developed and maintained by the Vermont School Crisis Planning Team, provides schools with an operational framework that assists them with preventing against, preparing for, responding to, and recovering from a school emergency.

## Areas for Improvement/Gaps<sup>5</sup>

### Plans/Procedures

- **51% do not require faculty/staff to wear identification tags/credentials during normal business operations.** If adults do not wear identification tags/credentials, it makes it difficult to determine who should/should not be in the building.
- **44% have not communicated with parents/guardians about what to do and what not to do during an emergency.** If parents/guardians are unaware of how they can support an emergency at the school, they may take actions that hinder response.
- **19% are not utilizing an options-based response protocol for responding to an active shooter event.** By reviewing past active shooter incidents, we know that individuals must be provided with a variety of response options and that no one-size fits all methodology can be used when responding to an active shooter incident. These emergency procedures allow individuals to make life saving decisions based what threats or hazards they are being exposed to at a specific time and location.
- **17% do not lock exterior doors during normal business hours.** In reviewing past active shooter or school violence incidents, we know that controlling access to our schools reduces the risk of violence our schools may be exposed to.
- **11% requested planning assistance under the additional comments section of the survey.** Since there was no question specifically asking schools if this type of assistance is needed, we anticipate that the number of schools needing planning assistance is much higher.

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<sup>5</sup> The survey did not include questions relating directly on 9-1-1 compliance. Rather, the Vermont School Safety Center contacted the Vermont Enhanced 9-1-1 Board Executive Director for an update on this issue. As of March 29, 2018, 103 schools, or nearly 34% of Vermont public schools, have demonstrated the ability to send all required information to the 9-1-1 system. Based on the Enhanced 911 Compliance Grants awarded to date, the Board can report that another 31 schools are expected to complete upgrade projects by the end of 2018. Successful completion of these projects will move the number of compliant schools to 134, or approximately 44%. Additional funding of \$225,000.00 for the Enhanced 911 Compliance Grant program is included in the Governor's recommendation for this year's Capitol Bill Adjustment.



## Training

Schools identified the following emergency preparedness training gaps:

- 74% of schools requested Active Shooter Response training
- 58% of schools requested Behavioral Threat Assessment training
- 55% of schools requested Incident Command System training
- 51% of schools requested Emergency Exercise/Drill Development training
- 49% of schools requested Security Technologies – Emergency Trends and Contemporary Standards training
- 42% of schools requested Developing a School Emergency Operations Plan training

## Equipment/Technology

- **70% do not have the ability to lock all interior doors to classrooms and office spaces from the inside.** Classrooms and office spaces that do not have the ability to lock from the inside require that an individual exit the room to lock the door, potentially exposing these individuals to harm.
- **51% do not have the ability to make an external public address announcement that makes those outside the building aware of an emergency.** Schools must have the ability to notify those inside and outside of their buildings when a school emergency is taking place. School leadership teams must be able to rapidly communicate emergency response actions to all individuals.
- **50% do not label exterior doors on the outside (e.g. Gym, Auditorium, Main Entrance).** Labeling all exterior doors from the outside ensures that first responders are able to identify specific locations of concern when responding to a school emergency.
- **36% do not have reliable cell phone coverage on school grounds.** At times cell phones can be the primary method of communication between those managing a critical incident and first responders.
- **24% do not utilize portable radios.** School leadership teams must have the ability to communicate with each other to assist in managing a critical incident at their school. The use of portable radios can also assist school officials in communicating with first responders who may be arriving at the scene.

Schools were asked to identify security technology/systems which could be used to improve the level of security at their school.

- 65% thought the use of cameras could enhance the level of security at their school
- 43% thought the use of a variety of door locking systems could enhance the level of security at their school
- 23% thought the use of a public address system could enhance the level of security at their school
- 13% thought the use of window improvements (bullet resistant, window tinting, shatter resistant film, shading) could enhance the level of security at their school
- 11% thought the use of a communication/notification system could enhance the level of security at their school



Some schools have identified and are considering investing in School Resource Officers. A 2013 Congressional Research Service Study of School Resource Officers<sup>6</sup> found that there was limited research available on the effectiveness of School Resource Officer Programs and that “the research that is available draws conflicting conclusions about whether SRO programs are effective at reducing school violence”. Before deploying additional School Resource Officer programs, schools should review all available data to ensure the appropriate implementation and usage of these programs.

### Enhancement Recommendations

- **School Safety Best Practices** - The Vermont School Safety Center in collaboration with the Vermont School Crisis Planning Team will develop and distribute an updated comprehensive list of school safety best practices that will include but will not be limited to: access control, visitor management, exterior door labeling, interior door locking mechanisms, public address systems, and internal communication systems, mass notification systems and parent/guardian communication. These updated best practices will be distributed to schools by the Vermont School Safety Center prior to the start of 2018/2019 academic year and training materials will be developed and distributed to assist schools with implementing these best practices.
- **Planning** – The survey results showed further development of school crisis plans is needed to ensure schools are prepared to respond to the wide range of hazards and threats they may be exposed to. Department of Public Safety will allocate \$1 million of Homeland Security Grant funding to significantly enhance planning efforts and support provided to schools to update and/or create school crisis plans that are comprehensive in nature and reflect the updated School Safety Best Practices outlined above.
- **Training** –Based on the results of the assessment, schools identified additional training needed including active shooter response, behavioral threat assessment, incident command and many other school safety training courses. Utilizing Homeland Security funding DPS will significantly enhance the Vermont School Safety Center training program to ensure schools receive the volume of training they need. The training will align with the School Safety Best Practices outlined above.
- **Technology/Equipment** – The survey results validated that schools have varying needs for capital eligible improvements to enhance the physical security of their campuses. With the anticipation of capital funding for school emergency preparedness, the Agency of Education, Department of Public Safety, the Vermont School Safety Center, and school safety partners will develop a recommended equipment/technology list that schools should consider when applying for these potential school safety grants. When properly utilized, security technology and equipment such as door prop alarms, public address systems, lights, locks, cameras, panic/duress alarms, window shading are an integral part of a comprehensive school safety plan. Recognizing that each school is a unique educational environment, schools will be encouraged to review the list mentioned prior to submitting their grant requests but should work to develop their own school safety equipment and technology approaches that will enhance the level of safety and security at their school.

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<sup>6</sup> United States. Congressional Research Service. School Resource Officers: Law Enforcement Officers in Schools. June 26, 2013. March 4, 2018 <<https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R43126.pdf>>



## **Conclusion**

All schools and local, county, and state law enforcement officers who participated in these school safety site assessments are to be commended. The overwhelming response to this initiative demonstrates the commitment by Vermont educators and our first response community to this important work. The Vermont School Safety Center, in collaboration with the Vermont School Crisis Planning Team and additional school safety partners, will utilize the data from this assessment to reinforce our existing strengths and develop strategies to address the identified school safety gaps.

*Attachment: 2018 Vermont School Safety Assessments Report.* This report includes percentages for survey data and will be made available to the Violence Prevention Taskforce when it is formed.

cc: Colonel Matthew Birmingham (Vermont State Police), Major John Merrigan (Vermont State Police), Director Erica Bornemann (Vermont Emergency Management), Emily Harris (Vermont Emergency Management), Robert Evans (Vermont School Safety Center), Deputy Commissioner Christopher Herrick (Vermont School Safety Center), Chief Jennifer Morrison (Vermont Chiefs Association), Sheriff Bill Bohnyak (Vermont Sheriff's Association)