NASB News Update--February 2018
News from the Association, Nevada, and Across the Nation

NASB

Supporting Success for All Students through Local School Board Leadership

A Message from NASB's President

As school trustees, all of us are concerned with school safety in all of its forms. To build on the training that NASB has provided on this issue in the past, the Association and POOL/PACT will offer a workshop on April 20-21, focusing on school safety and school climate. Sometimes we think about these as two separate aspects to the school environment. It seems to me that they actually work together to increase the likelihood that our students will succeed academically at the same time that we protect them and enable them to thrive in a safe environment.

The February and March editions of *NASB News Update* will focus on aspects of school safety from a range of directions. This President Message will address the issues of school climate. In a positive school climate, our students are encouraged to engage in behaviors that have clear consequences as well as rewards. School climate extends beyond the borders of our schools and involves interactions among and between staff, students, families, and the community throughout the entire school community. In a positive school climate, we can clearly see the caring attitude of the school because this climate is reflected in the widespread participation in all areas of the school.

I recently read a report from the National School Safety Center (1990) that still applies to today's student experiences at school. According to the study, a student's perspective of the school climate is affected by the following:

- Student involvement: The degree to which students are involved in and enjoy classes and extracurricular activities at school;
- Student relationships: The level of comfort students feel in relating to one another and the ease with which they make new friends;
- Teacher support: The amount of help and care that teachers direct toward students;
- Physical environment: The extent to which the school building reflects the caring attitude of the school, the school buildings are clean, well-cared for, supervised, and safe;
- Conflict resolution: Whether students are clear about the rules and feel that conflicts are resolved fairly and rules are consistently enforced;
- Participation in decision-making: The extent to which students, administrators, and teachers share in making decisions about school improvement;
- Curriculum: The extent to which students feel that what is taught in classes meets their needs;
- Counseling services: Whether students feel counselors are accessible and able to help with personal problems, job, and career information, and concerns about drugs, alcohol, and sex;
- Recreation alternatives: Whether students are satisfied with existing recreational activities and teachers' support of these activities; and
- Personal stress: The amount of pressure students feel they are under and the resources they have to cope with it. A safe school is also prepared for emergencies, provides opportunities for students in before- and after-school activities, and has effective school–community partnerships.

There's a lot on this list, some of which we can address as school trustees through our policies and direction for the superintendent. It is likely that we can do more than we are doing now. It is achieving that precarious balance between what we can do and what we should do that motivates each of us each day to strive toward safer Nevada schools with positive, warm, and welcoming climates.

We also have to be prepared for emergencies. Through the supportive work of POOL/PACT, fifteen of Nevada's school districts have been given guidance and assistance in preparing for a variety school emergencies. Clark and Washoe school districts have also made strides forward to ensure that emergency

preparation is in place at each school across their districts. The Nevada Legislature has also given us requirements regarding school/district safety plans and training for educational staff. Developing strategies and implementing violence intervention programs are part of that crisis plan about which we all need to know. We cannot afford to wait until the moment of an incident to brainstorm ideas for what should be done.

I encourage you to plan ahead to attend the workshop on April 20-21 jointly organized by NASB and POOL/PACT. Our students depend on us to keep them safe at school and to balance their physical security with a nurturing school climate. Achieving that balance is an important goal for each of our school boards.

Sincerely,

Stacie Wilke-McCulloch

NASB President

In a crisis, parents want to know: 'Is my child OK?'

Erik Endress

It's Monday morning at your high school. The school day has just started and the cafeteria kitchen staff is hard at work beginning to prepare lunch for 1,200 students. The loading dock bell rings, signaling the first delivery of the day, one of many that happen like clockwork every Monday.

Mary, who is prepping the ingredients for the salad bar, hears the bell and heads down the long hallway leading to the back door. Milk is the first delivery every Monday, and Harry has been delivering milk to the district on Monday for years. He is always on time. The bell rings a second time.

Mary pops the loading dock door open and is surprised to find her ex-husband standing there. With a single gunshot, he kills Mary, then nonchalantly walks back to his car and drives away.

In the second-floor media center above the cafeteria, a staff member pauses after hearing the gunshot. She looks out the window and sees Mary lying bleeding on

the loading dock. She calls 911 from her cell phone, reporting that a person has been shot at the school. Over the next few minutes, the police, fire/rescue, and EMS units will scream through town and towards the school. The school is placed in lockdown, as it is unclear if the shooter is in the building. Students, hearing the sirens and seeing heavily armed tactical entry teams moving through the building, realize this is not a drill and start texting their parents.

Parents immediately panic. Many will get in their cars and start racing to the school. The 911 lines light up as parents call to confirm the news and ask what they should do. In the district office and the high school office, parents' calls are going unanswered. The district and high school websites are unchanged; there are no new Facebook posts, no tweets.

What began as a normal school day just 60 minutes ago is now one of an entire community in crisis, even though there is just a single victim.

Back at the school, law enforcement officers begin to methodically evacuate employees and students from the school, which has become a crime scene.

A thousand students must be moved to a secure, offsite reunification zone. This requires immense coordination, collaboration, and communication among school officials, emergency management, and parents.

COMMUNICATIONS PLAN
Does your district have a family reunification plan? Do you have a team identified who will manage the process? Have they practiced it? Do your families know what they should do or expect in the wake of a serious incident? Are you prepared to communicate with family members via text message and social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter?

While many districts conduct monthly emergency drills, it's very uncommon for them to practice the post-incident communication and reunification process. As a result, they are ill-prepared to communicate with the hundreds or thousands of family members who simply want to know if their children are safe.

Likewise, families have no idea what they should do or where they should go to be reunited with their children. Most will assume it is the same school where the emergency is happening, unless you can quickly direct them to where they should go.

At New Jersey's Ramapo-Indian Hills High School District, School Safety Director Charles Wolff believes that advance communication is the key to improving the outcome of these incidents.

"We distribute as much information about potential emergencies as we can to our families, making that information available on our website. We send it via email at the start of the year and include it in the student handbook," says Wolff. "It is also mentioned at freshman orientation each August and at PTSO meetings."

'IS MY CHILD OK?'

In the chaos and confusion in the moments after the December 2012 shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut, parents descended on the school building itself while desperately trying to find out if their children were safe or not. It would take hours for 26 families to learn that they had suffered an unspeakable loss.

When any emergency is happening at your school, family members only want one question answered: "Is my child OK?" Once they know that answer, they will likely be more willing to wait calmly for reunification to happen.

Family members also want to feel that the district or school leadership knows what it is doing during this time of crisis. If it appears like nobody has a clue about what should be happening and can't answer any questions, family members will not have confidence in the process they are enduring.

"We have been planning and exercising for several years on the topic of school emergencies and, more specifically lately, on reunification" says Chief Christopher Wagner of the Denville, New Jersey, Police Department. "One of the things to first consider is preplanning your emergency communications and making the school population (students, teachers, parents, and relatives) aware of what tools you are going to use in advance. By preplanning, you guarantee the greatest amount of effective notification in a very short amount of time. We are going to do our best to try and minimize the response of parents to the actual emergency location."

Denville recently took the unusual step to move its reunification site to a location outside of its borders, selecting a county college in a neighboring township.

CUTTING CHAOS AND CONFUSION

Most school administrators are cautious about communicating with parents in the immediate aftermath of the incident, citing a desire to provide only highly accurate information.

In today's technology-rich environment, districts should accept the fact that family members will become aware of an incident almost immediately from other sources such as their children or other parents texting them, as well as from Facebook posts and tweets about it. Unfortunately, much of the information being shared can be erroneous, which only adds to the chaos and confusion on site.

The faster your team can communicate information to families about what has and is happening, the better the outcome of your incident will be. That communication should not supersede managing the incident, but it needs to be part of your process and be someone's responsibility, especially if you will be going to a reunification location.

"One way we have taken the lessons learned from emergency incidents across the country is to prioritize our response and make choices that put the safety of the students and staff as the number one priority," says Joseph Pangaro of Pangaro Training & Management.

"To that end, we have decided to set the process in motion before we make notification to anyone; meaning, we choose our evacuation/reunification location and get the kids moving first. This gives our staff and the police a chance to secure the location we are going to and set up the appropriate crowd control measures to ensure that when people show up they are managed safely and efficiently, allowing the school to control the process and maintain security." Pangaro states that this concept of moving the kids first, before

any notifications are made, has been met with some initial reluctance. However, it is based on the belief that, as the people responsible for the safety of the students, staff must act on their behalf first and make sure they are secure before they do anything else.

"Once we have them in a safe environment, we can then make the notifications to parents and guardians so they can make their way to the evacuation/reunification site. This process considers the historical response we can expect when notifications are made, that being a rush to the location, and the disorganization that can result," says Pangaro.

Scott Rocco, superintendent of New Jersey's Hamilton Township Schools, shares Pangaro's "safety and security first" philosophy while encouraging district leaders to be in constant contact with their public safety incident commanders and counterparts.

"It's critical that everyone in the command post is comfortable with the information you are preparing for release," he says. "Coordinating your message with that of your public safety partners signals to your community that there is a collaborative effort in dealing with the emergency."

Rocco reminds district leaders that they should provide students, staff, parents, and community members with information that informs them of the situation but does not compromise emergency practices, evacuation locations, or investigations.

TOOLS FOR IMPROVEMENT

What's clear from speaking with district and school administrators nationwide is that there is room for improvement in post-incident communication as it relates to the reunification of students with their parents.

"After experiencing a critical incident requiring the mandatory evacuation at one of our elementary schools, and conducting a follow-up debrief on how it went, we determined that our reunification procedures could be improved," says Paula Valenti, superintendent of schools in New Jersey's Glen Rock. "We set out to find a single tool that would serve the district well to provide timely communication to our staff, board of education, and parents during incidents. For Glen Rock, Share911.com was that tool we were looking for, and we have implemented it throughout our school district."

I've been a school board member for six years and have served my community as a volunteer fire/rescue responder since I was in high school. Much of my career has been spent solving problems with

technology and helping school districts leverage technology for both learning and communication.

This combined experience led me to create Share911.com in 2013 because I saw, firsthand, the inefficiency of communication and information sharing during and in the wake of incidents in our schools. Share911.com provides district administrators and their public safety counterparts with a single source of truth for managing an emergency collaboratively from start to finish.

Districts should have a districtwide communication and reunification team that goes into action the moment you know you have a major incident happening. Every member should know what his/her responsibility is and be ready to respond. You cannot expect that the superintendent or building principal will be able to do everything that needs to be done, especially when a major incident has occurred.

The reunification is a process that can take hours under perfect conditions. Emotions will be running high and families just want to know their children are safe. In most instances, your staff and students will be OK, so being able to communicate that information quickly will help. As family members arrive at the reunification location, your team can confirm the status of their student.

School board members and administrators need to recognize that the same methods for communicating normal school business or information may not be very effective during a crisis.

If your district is going to use Facebook and Twitter to communicate post-incident and during reunification, be sure you have a social media manager role on your team—someone who will be responsible for sharing information and monitoring and replying to comments. These are the platforms upon which people get their information and interact with each other. If you plan to use them, expect to engage with your constituents.

Any school can have a serious emergency that will require reunification. It doesn't have to be an active shooter.

It can be a chemical spill, gas leak, power outage, or another situation in which nobody has been injured.

Being prepared to communicate and reunify your students with their families is key to the successful outcome of these incidents.

If you aren't prepared, if families are left in the dark and they sense that you have no idea what you are doing, you should expect them to ask questions and demand answers of your leadership team.

*[This article originally appeared in the **American School Board Journal (ASBJ)**, August 2017. Erik Endress (**erikendress@gmail.com (link sends e-mail)**) is the CEO and co-founder of Share911.com. He has been a volunteer fire/rescue responder and incident commander since 1985 and spent six years serving as trustee on his local board of education, where he advocated for school safety initiatives.]*
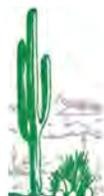
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The Top Five Cybersecurity Threats for Schools

You'd be hard-pressed today to find a school that doesn't consider safety a high priority. We go to great lengths to keep those inside school walls safe, running drills and spreading awareness in case of threat.

There's one kind of threat schools often overlook when it comes to safety, however, and that's cyber attack.

Cybersecurity isn't a new concern by any means—it's just that it has taken many schools quite a long time to develop a safety plan. With recent ransomware attacks like WannaCry and Petya, the potential theft and leakage of data, particularly confidential information, should be on the minds of all school leaders.

If your school hasn't thought about cybersecurity as a growing concern, it's time to learn what the threats are and what you should be doing to keep your school, and its data, protected.

To start, here are the top five cybersecurity threats schools face and how you should prepare:

1. Link Security
From ransomware to phishing and other types of security breaches, direct contact is the number one way that you can create vulnerability in your system. Those who commit these online crimes are finding smarter and sneakier ways to infiltrate your data every day. Sometimes the attack can even come as an email from a legitimate sender, or appear to be a perfectly normal message on social media. The goal is usually to get you to click on a link.

Solution: Make sure the security preferences for your email account(s) are set up to filter spamming, phishing and executable files that aren't recognized. There are also many email scanners on the market that can restrict macro script files and authenticate inbound mail.

2. Unknown Devices
It's not just the devices themselves you have to worry about–you also need to protect your network as a whole. While precautions must be taken with the devices your school owns, you also need to consider the devices students and staff bring with them that access your network.

Solution: Your IT system should include a solution that tracks all devices, including those not owned by your school, that enter the network.

3. Out-of-Date Technology
Contrary to popular misconception, user interaction isn't always required for a cyber attack to be launched. The WannaCry attack targeted hundreds of computers all with the same security vulnerability on their Windows operating systems. While newer versions of Windows now come with that weakness patched, the victims were all users who hadn't updated to the latest OS or downloaded the necessary patch.

Solution: Again, an IT solution that tracks all devices is important, but one that can also check on software upgrades and block access to certain apps is ideal.

4. User Error
A data breach in Florida is just one example of the chaos user error can provoke. This issue didn't begin with hackers at all. It began with carelessness that caused sensitive information to become public, leading two students to sue the Miami-Dade school district after a simple Google search revealed that their test scores and social security numbers were published on the district website for all to see.
User error occurs regularly, and a common root of this is failing to restrict access to files or certain sites that may be compromised.

Solution: Restrict user access to sensitive documents only to those who absolutely need them, and make sure that your site architecture is set up to require a secure login for access. You may also want to create a white list of safe sites and applications and block the rest.

5. No Backup

As disheartening as it sounds, even when you take all the necessary precautions to protect your vital information, data breaches can still occur. When an attack happens, it's often a major blow to productivity to try and get all the information back into a secure place. Worse, vital work can be lost for good.

Solution: Install a backup system on each school device that sends data to a remote server throughout the day (not just at night) to help make sure nothing is lost.

Arming Your Team with Tools

If you're already using a help desk solution to automate your cybersecurity program, you may want to consider adding two additional tools for your IT team: agentless asset inventory and mobile management.

An agentless tool tracks all IP-addressable devices on your network, meaning any device that enters your network (school property or not) is discoverable. You'll not only be able to know a device's users and location, you can also see if their software is up to date and see what applications they have downloaded. Best of all, you don't have to manually download an agent on each device.

When it comes to mobile asset management tools, like Mobile Device Management, you not only can track who is on your network, but remotely access each device.

You can push out updates remotely, restrict access while these devices are on your network and enforce any of your other security protocols.

While those who commit online crimes can sometimes seem unstoppable, making sure those in your school are educated about cybersecurity goes a long way. Action, however, is required to prevent infiltration, so begin creating your cyber safety program with these five solutions *now* to make your school that much safer.

*[This article has been re-printed from eSchool News: **https://www.eschoolnews.com/2017/11/29/cybersecurity-threats-schools/**.]*

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