

# The Safety Net

The Electronic Journal of Safe Havens International

*The world's leading authority on school safety, security & emergency preparedness*

Spring 2012 • Volume 2 • Issue 2

Working with Modern  
Safety Technology

Safety Success  
Stories

Planning for  
Special Events

International School  
Safety News

New Training Resource:  
Assess and Train Using  
Video Scenarios



An electronic publication of Safe Havens International



Photo: Safe Havens Video

## Message from the Executive Director

### *The Safety Net for Spring 2012*

Welcome back to the spring 2012 edition of The Safety Net. In this issue we're going to address a variety of aspects of a single topic: getting ready for crisis events with modern forms of training and planning, along with a constant search for ways to improve current procedures.

I'd like to take a moment to invite you to our new and improved website. The new site is much easier to navigate - both for you and for our staff. That means we'll be updating new content much more regularly, along with videos and photo galleries.

We have also added a new blog feature that I will be using, with guest posts from other Safe Havens authors from time to time. I will be making regular blog posts with general info as well as my thoughts on late breaking events as they happen.

We are also creating a much more robust resource library, adding new resources from Safe Havens team members as well as additional resources from leading organizations in campus safety. So please take a moment to visit our updated site and take a look around.

In this issue, Charles Fleming of Safe Havens Video discusses the evidence behind video-based scenario training and shares excerpts of an interview with Lt. Col. Dave Grossman. My son Chris and I will share stories of lessons learned and how districts across the country are dealing with safety in the face of budget cuts.

Dr. Sonayia Shepherd focuses on what happens to responders during a crisis, and how we can prepare and respond to this phenomenon.

CFO and Senior Analyst Russell Bentley will revisit the topic of planning for school athletics events, this time focusing on how to tie it all together with a pre-game and pre-season checklist.

In addition, each issue has a variety of columns and resources, including:

- The Safety Riddle: school hazard assessments
- Welcome Home: positive school body language
- The News Digest
- Hidden in Plain Sight: disguised & improvised weapons
- High as a Kite: drug and drug paraphernalia awareness

- Before the Smoke Clears: tabletop scenarios

- The Library: learning resource review

The Safety Net is just one way that Safe Havens International provides free assistance to those who desire to make schools safer. Our mission is to make children and youth safer anywhere in the world they happen to go to school.

We welcome divergent viewpoints, suggestions, ideas for topics or general comments about The Safety Net. We also welcome readers forwarding The Safety Net to colleagues who may benefit from reading it. We hope you will join us and watch us grow as we continually update and improve this newsletter and it's offerings into a robust resource that will benefit educators and parents around the world.

We look forward to visiting with you each issue and thank you for your efforts to make schools safe and effective places of learning where dignity, honor and respect are the norm.

*Michael Dorn is the Executive Director of Safe Havens International. Over the past thirty years, his school safety work has taken him to Central America, Mexico, Canada, Europe, South Africa, Asia and the Middle East. A powerful keynote speaker, Michael has presented from Virginia to Vietnam. Michael can be reached at [mike@weakfish.org](mailto:mike@weakfish.org).*



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The Safety Net is the electronic journal of Safe Havens International. Each issue contains feature articles written by Safe Havens analysts as well as guest authors from the fields of school safety, mental health recovery, emergency management, anti-terrorism and related fields. Monthly features include columns and visual exercises to enhance the general knowledge base in the field of school safety and emergency preparedness for the learning environment.

Safe Havens International, Inc. is the world's leading non-profit campus safety organization. Safe Havens works with K-12 schools, institutions of higher learning and faith-based organizations worldwide to improve campus climate, safety and emergency preparedness. As a non-profit center, our mission is to do what we can to make school a safe and enjoyable place for students to learn and teachers to teach, no matter where they happen to live. The Safe Havens team is comprised of international authorities and school safety, security and preparedness specialists. Our goal is to help schools improve safety while raising test scores using proven concepts tailored to fit local risks, realities and resources.

#### Do you want to write for The Safety Net?

If you would like to be a guest author or if you have information you'd like to see featured in an upcoming issue of The Safety Net, please contact us at [newsletter@weakfish.org](mailto:newsletter@weakfish.org).

About the cover: In this still photo from the production of our new training resource *The First 30 Seconds*, Executive Director Michael Dorn demonstrates how to use video scenarios for staff development training. Photo by Rachel Wilson.

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# The Safety Riddle

What is the unique safety innovation in this photo?  
Answer on page 23



Photo: Michael S. Dorn

## Before the Smoke Clears:

Text-based Tabletop Scenario



Photo: Chris Dorn

Early in the school day, the front office receives a frantic call from a classroom. The distraught teacher rapidly explains: "We need help now! I am absolutely certain that a snake is in my room - I saw it crawl under the door and come into the classroom! And I'm willing to bet one of my students had something to do with it. I have no idea where it is now - I immediately evacuated all the students and we are in the media center now. Two other students want to call their parents and leave but everyone else is fine." As the teacher finishes talking, another staff member in the media center can be heard in the background over the phone line saying "I hate snakes - I want to leave until they find it! I refuse to work with that snake in the building!"

*Each issue features a new scenario that you can use in planning and training for emergency situations. These may be reprinted or used without limitation if the scenario is reproduced in it's entirety and the following credit is given:*

"Source:  
[www.safehavensinternational.org](http://www.safehavensinternational.org)."

## Hidden in Plain Sight

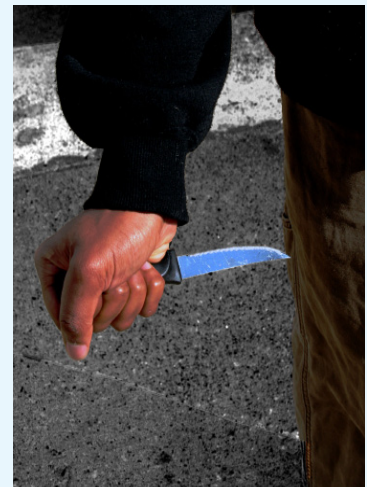
Disguised Weapons

Take a look at the top photo on the right - notice anything funny about the shape of this person's hand as it rests by their side?

The second photo reveals what was hidden in the first photo. This demonstration illustrates how easy it is to conceal a fairly large item in plain sight. Think about how easy it would be to hide drugs, tobacco, knives, or even firearms like this.

Keep an eye out for this behavior both with suspicious individuals and in day-to-day supervision.

Photos by Chris Dorn



# Welcome Home

## Examples of Positive School Body Language



Photo: Russell E. Bentley

This beautiful mural is one of many superb examples of the positive use of murals in the School District of Philadelphia. The use of murals can be an especially powerful tool to improve school climate and culture in older buildings, as this district has done in many of its facilities. This particular mural reflects the history, mission and the diversity of William Penn High School. These projects give students the opportunity to decorate their building and participate in a supervised activity, and builds a sense of ownership of the building for the occupants.

# High As a Kite

## Drugs & Paraphernalia Identification

Notice anything suspicious about these items? Answer on page 23.



Photo: Chris Dorn

*Do you have a photo to share? The Safety Net welcomes photo submissions showing examples of positive school climate, safety hazards, drug paraphernalia or disguised weapons. To submit your photos, e-mail us at: [newsletter@weakfish.org](mailto:newsletter@weakfish.org). Due to space limitations, it may not be possible to publish all submissions.*



## News Digest

### Current Events In School Safety Around the World

by Charles Fleming

#### *Estranged parent shoots wife, step-daughter – Conyers, Georgia*

A man was charged with two counts of aggravated assault for shooting his wife and step-daughter at a day care in September. The shooter waited for his wife and stepdaughter outside the Little Mountain Christian Academy during morning drop off, and began shooting when he saw them. He then shot his wife, a kindergarten teacher, and his 10-year old stepdaughter several times. The shooter was already on probation for domestic abuse towards his wife, who had just filed for divorce after a long separation. Counselors were called to help at both the school and the elementary school attended by the daughter. The shooter surrendered to Sheriff's deputies later that day, telling them his life was "falling apart." The mother and daughter survived with injuries.

#### *Student's face cut on school bus – Orlando, Florida*

A 9th grade student was stabbed on her face, arm, back and chest during a bus ride home in October. Witnesses reported that a 9th grader, who the victim regarded as a "friend," teased the victim and called her names, before starting a fight because the victim was walking too slowly departing the bus, telling the victim to "hurry and walk." Bystanders attempted to help and pull the girls apart without success. Another student captured the fight on a cell phone camera. A judge ordered the 14-year-old attacker, who is charged with aggravated battery, to remain in juvenile detention.

#### *Recent study says Soda May Cause Teen Violence – US*

In a study conducted by the Harvard School of Public Health's Injury

Control Research Center and published in Injury Prevention, researchers found that there was a strong relationship between the number of soft drinks students drank and the number of fights they participated in. This corresponds to findings from a study done in Norway in 2006. The survey questioned 1800 students in Boston Public Schools about behaviors such as how many sodas they drink per week, how often they participate in violence and how often they carry a weapon. Only 23% of subjects that drink less than one soda a week said they carry a weapon.

#### *Gang-related school shooting – Fayetteville, North Carolina*

An 18-year-old and a 15-year-old were taken to the Cumberland County Sheriff's Office after shooting another 15-year old in the cafeteria of Cape Fear High School in October. The shooting left the victim in critical condition, and the school population nervous about gang violence at their school. Reports say parents and students had been complaining about possible gang activity for weeks before the shooting, with some parents afraid to allow their children to attend school and school events. Student witnesses commented that there had been gang-related fights and Facebook posts shortly before the shooting. Police found a weapon and a shell casing on school campus.

#### *Ohio gym teacher convicted of inappropriate activity with 5 students - Springboro, Ohio*

Stacy Schuler, a high school gym teacher at Mason High School in Springboro, Ohio, was convicted in October of having sex with five high school students, including some football players. Schuler was sentenced to four years in prison. Victims testified that Schuler initiated much of the contact, drinking and providing alcohol to them. Although some students testified for Schuler, victims and their families commented on the negative emotional impact of

these events, and how this has affected nationwide perceptions of teachers. The trial shut the school down for a week.

#### *Former teacher gets 30 years in prison for child pornography – Alexandria, Virginia*

After being jailed in April without bond, Justin Coleman, a former 4th grade teacher at John Adams Elementary School, was sentenced to 30 years in prison for two counts of producing child pornography. He led a secret life that included secretly filming students and altering child pornography with images of his students. Coleman told officials that he liked girls between the ages of 7 and 11. An Assistant U.S. Attorney said Coleman also engaged in child pornography while teaching at a U.S. military school in Japan, and during a school trip to Italy. Coleman had more than 2,500 images of altered child pornography and at least 74 videos he recorded in classrooms.

#### *Teacher makes false school bomb threat - Denver, Colorado*

A Denver elementary school teacher was charged with one count of false reporting of explosives at Escuela de Guadalupe, a Catholic elementary school in northwest Denver. The teacher put a note saying "there is a bomb inside" outside the school's main entrance. Though released on bond, she faces a felony charge in Denver County Court.

#### *Students redecorate rundown shop with mural – Lincoln, UK*

After being asked about improving their neighborhood, local students decided to paint a mural over a vacant shop window they highlighted as one area in need of improvement. The mural features various fruit and different juice varieties. The City Council says the mural can stay up as long as the community wants it. The mural was created for a City of Lincoln Council project to create murals in the community during half-term break.

Get more news stories, plus links to the full story on these articles, at [safehavensinternational.org/newsdigest](http://safehavensinternational.org/newsdigest)

# Safe Havens Releases Video Scenario Assessment and Training Tool

Safe Havens International recently released a new training and assessment tool: "Safe Topics: The First 30 Seconds." This is an advanced training and evaluation system to prepare all school employees to make life-and-death decisions in the first moments of any school crisis.

Complete with trainer guides, evaluation tools, video scenarios and workbooks covering over 30 crisis scenarios, this 4 DVD set was developed by world-renowned school safety expert Michael Dorn and the Safe Havens team. "Safe Topics: The First 30 Seconds" is built on effective concepts that have been used in training law enforcement, fire service, emergency medical personnel, pilots and military personnel for many years. For the first time, these training concepts have been adapted for handling school crises, during which a delay of even five or ten seconds can result in mass casualties.

Simulations conducted by Safe Havens at schools around the nation have revealed that most school employees unfamiliar with this specialized training miss at least one critical action step per scenario, such as initiating an evacuation, calling the main office, or dialing 911. More than 70% of school employees participating in simulations fail to implement a lockdown for an aggressor with a weapon such as a knife, crow bar or hammer. Attacks with weapons other than firearms are far more common and can also be deadly, and schools cannot afford to overlook any gap in preparedness.

The Safe Havens video scenarios allow school employees to practice making life-and-death decisions in ways not possible with other types of drills and exercises. Using The First 30 Seconds, schools can practice for a wider array of situations in a shorter period of time, and quickly build a decision-making knowledge base to draw from during a crisis. The series is designed to provide enough resources to evaluate your organizational preparedness and train staff for a full academic year. For more information, including an informational video, visit the following link, or contact us for quantity discounts or purchase orders.



Photo: Rachel Wilson

[www.safehavensinternational.org/thefirst30seconds](http://www.safehavensinternational.org/thefirst30seconds)

## The Library: Learning Resource Review

by Michael Dorn

### Audio course: The Art of Critical Decision Making

Author: Professor Michael A. Roberto, Bryant University  
ISBN 159803538

I have purchased more than a dozen courses from The Teaching Company and have found all of them to be beneficial, since my hectic work schedule makes it difficult to attend live college and university programs.

Professor Roberto draws upon the works of a number of top researchers and authors as well as his own experiences in consulting. He is also the author of *Know What you Don't Know – How Great Leaders Prevent Problems Before they Happen*.

This course includes a number of thoughtfully analyzed case studies, including space shuttle crashes, wildfires, combat and other situations requiring fast and effective decision making. The course also explores situations when critical decisions must be made at a slower pace but with the same life and death consequences.

As a whole, this resource provides a solid background on critical decision-making, from an academic perspective, made relevant with real-life examples.

Publisher:  
The Teaching Company  
1-800-TEACH-12  
[www.TEACH12.com](http://www.TEACH12.com)

## Indiana School District Exceeds REMS Project Goals

by Michael S. Dorn

The Evansville-Vanderburgh School Corporation (EVSC) in Evansville, Indiana received a Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools (REMS) grant award for \$249,236.00 in 2009. Now nearing completion of the project, the corporation has far exceeded what it promised to accomplish in its grant application.

According to the Annual Performance Report submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on July 30, 2010, the EVSC has made the following improvements:

- At the start of this grant only 5 key personnel had completed a total of eight NIMS courses. To date more than 100 EVSC employees have completed NIMS courses including ICS-100, 200, 300, 400, 700, and 800. Four employees have completed all six of these courses.
- The district has developed a heavily improved all-hazards crisis plan with inter-agency teams including written plans for all four of the phases of crisis planning and a new biological incident plan. The new plans address students with special needs with customized individual plans for each special needs student and a custom training video.
- The EVSC worked with Safe Havens Video to produce a series of training videos for staff and students, including crisis training for staff, transportation safety training, special needs planning and instructional videos on the district's functional protocols
- The updated written plan includes infectious disease and food defense plans. An internationally recognized expert provided training on these plans and the district planning team has trained employees on the plan. The local health department is one of many community partners involved in this process. This effort also includes area private, parochial, and charter schools.
- In the months of February, April, and October, 2010, fifty-four staff members and community partner agency personnel were trained on Threat Assessment and Hazard Assessment. The grant called for a 25% increase in the number of hazards addressed by improved emergency response plans.



*Members of the EVSC School Safety Team inventory new flashlights, which are being placed in an emergency kit for every classroom in the district through a grant from the United States Department of Education Office of Safe and Drug Free Schools. Photo courtesy of the EVSC.*

- The district held a town hall meeting and training session in April 2010, which included a powerful bullying presentation by Safe Havens Executive Director Michael Dorn. More than 150 people attended the evening event and it was decided to add a second presentation in January of 2011. This second event was attended by 180 parents, students, and community partners from as far away as Kentucky. This was part of the effort to make parents aware of crisis planning efforts and to explain the corporation's family reunification plans.



Photo: Adam Parker

*The EVSC worked with Safe Havens Video to produce a series of custom school safety training videos to educate staff, students and community partners on crisis preparedness.*





*EVSC Crisis team personnel prepare "to go bags" for issue to every teacher in the district. Photo courtesy of the EVSC.*

- The district increased the number of classrooms with emergency management supplies by 25%, and today every classroom in the district has received a new emergency "To Go Bag" with a flashlight and other emergency supplies in each bag. This includes participating private, parochial, and charter schools.
- The district updated emergency fast reference guides to comply with FEMA guidelines. The new EVSC Emergency Manuals are being delivered to each classroom in the district – there are 2,000 total - and every department head will receive a role specific emergency chart with the updated EVSC emergency procedures for their department.
- There has been a 50% increase in the number of EVSC staff members trained in emergency management procedures.

- In February and April 2010 a total of 285 staff members attended training. Since April 2010 more than 500 building staff members have received training on emergency management procedures. Training sessions included a custom training program for district secretaries, receptionists and administrative assistants as well as an advanced training session and meeting facilitated by Safe Havens International Executive Director Michael Dorn for the superintendent and cabinet officials.

- The EVSC has moved from a single emergency chart that attempted to direct all employees in the district with a single document to a series of role specific, integrated emergency reference charts for different groups of key personnel.

Through the REMS grant, the EVSC has dramatically increased the number of personnel who will be issued integrated role specific emergency fast reference charts. Role specific emergency charts have been developed for cabinet officials, building administrators, front office personnel, custodians, school bus drivers, food service personnel and an after-hours event emergency chart is being developed from planning templates. A custom school safety training program was developed and instructors have been trained to deliver live awareness level training in combination with the custom video series that was created using on-site footage and input from the district.

SHI Senior Analyst Russell Bentley trained EVSC personnel on how to facilitate video tabletop exercises using custom videos to allow more frequent practice for staff members. This effort, combined with other tabletop, functional and full-scale exercises in the future, will allow EVSC personnel to practice implementing the district's new emergency procedures.

The EVSC now utilizes a series of video tabletop scenarios to allow staff members a more realistic way to practice life and death decision-making.

The district's efforts far exceeded the goals of its REMS grant and was able to add a number of additional accomplishments through creativity, careful fiscal management and hard work. Hundreds of employees in the district and from area community response agencies worked to help make the district's grant project a major success. The efforts of the EVSC have allowed the district to achieve far more from the grant than is typical of a REMS project of this scale.

The tremendous support from district leadership, employees, the security director, students and parents have created a highly sustainable and comprehensive approach to school emergency preparedness. What has taken place in Evansville is what is supposed to happen when a REMS grant is awarded. Good stewardship has produced results that will enhance the level of safety in the EVSC for years to come.

## Scenario training: A key tool to prepare for a crisis

by Charles Fleming, Director  
of Photography and Editing,  
Safe Havens Video

Video crisis scenarios are quickly becoming a leading way to train and exercise school staff on their procedures and ability to respond in a crisis. Video scenario training is much less expensive than conducting drills and full scale exercises. Videos can be paused and reused, in contrast to school and district-wide drills and exercises which, though highly effective, require extensive planning and resources. To plan a full-scale exercise, FEMA recommends at least 12 to 18 months of planning. Training with video scenarios can be completed in a much shorter time frame and be used in tandem with these more time intensive forms of training.

Scenario-based training can often help open up dialog between staff, administrators, and district level planning personnel about hypothetical problems that may be encountered in a real crisis. This type of training can also help reveal gaps in planning or the execution of protocols before unnecessary money is spent, or lives are lost. It is also a good way to simulate both ambiguous, non-threatening situations, and critical decision making for life-threatening circumstances.



Photo: Rachel Wilson

We recently interviewed Lt. Col. Dave Grossman (retired), a former West Point professor and author of *On Killing*, and *On Combat*, and a leading researcher in the field of crisis response among law enforcement and military personnel. This interview focused on how training affects decision making among school staff.

Although Grossman's ideas are used heavily and praised in the law enforcement and military communities, they also apply to school staff in crisis situations. We can use the same techniques of visualization and mental preparation to help educators work through actual crisis situations and successfully resolve them under stress. Grossman teaches that police and military personnel need to be conditioned to perform correctly under stress by training and mental simulation. School staff can also be conditioned in a similar way.

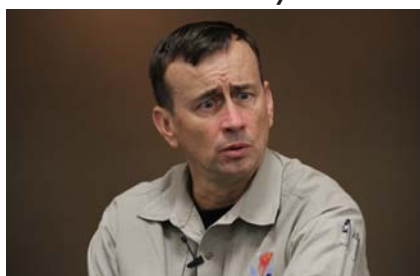


Photo: Rachel Wilson

**Safe Havens Video:** "Why are mental simulation and visualization important as training tools?"

**Lt. Col. Dave Grossman:** "If you've previously experienced it in a training event, and the more realistic the better, when the real thing happens, you won't panic. If the educator panics, the children will panic."

When we talk about responding to emergencies, we want to empower the individuals, and the only way to do that is through training and simulators. So they can deviate from the plan when necessary, they can use their common sense. Our goal is to let people know what needs to be done, and still let them have the authority to deviate as the situation calls for. You do not do that by slapping down rules, you do that by doing scenarios, and giving them opportunities to have that experience in training."

**SHV:** "That's very interesting. And using this type of training also prepares staff for the stress of a crisis, right?"

**DG:** "Decisions, and actions, performed under stress, will be much more powerfully carved into our neurons. You've got a simulation of the event, and you perform a



Photo: Rachel Wilson

certain way under the simulation, then the learning lesson is carved in much more deeply. That's why it's so essential in training that we do what we ought to do, and do it the right way. We are bringing educators up to the level of professionalism and competence that we would do with firefighters, or police, or military, or pilots, and it is absolutely essential to do it in this day and age. You do not 'rise to the occasion' - you sink to the level of your training."

#### *A Consensus in the Field*

This correlates with information gathered from past clients, independent research and research from others in the field of crisis decision making and psychology, such as Dr. Gary Klein. Dr. Klein has done extensive research on the way people make decisions, and the factors that determine the decisions they make.

The Recognition-Primed decision making model says that when someone is faced with a situation where a decision has to be made, people usually choose an option that they believe will work under the circumstances presented to them. They then

rationalize the outcome of the decision they have chosen, to evaluate whether they are making the correct decision, before finally acting on it. Under stress, when the heart-rate is high and mental judgment is poor, this decision making process suffers.

Video training, and other types of training, are useful to help staff visualize and prepare for different types crises and situations. Research has proven that people who have been exposed to crisis situations, whether through experience or through training, are better able to handle the stress of life-or-death decision making, and are more likely to end up with a better outcome. Furthermore, people who have visualized themselves experiencing a variety of crisis situations, mentally surveyed available options, and taken appropriate steps to end up with successful outcomes are more likely to perform well under the stress of a real emergency.

Video-based scenario training allows staff to better visualize and mentally prepare for situations, leaving them better prepared with a sense of self-empowerment and the ability to deviate from plans and pro-

cedures when needed. Under stress, untrained people do not make clear decisions, and rely on prior training and physical memory to perform. A person under stress may not be able to clearly recognize dangerous new developments in the specific situation they are involved in, or think of options outside of the rules and guidelines they have learned through training. How many times have we seen school employees on the news after a crisis, where they did not follow their training, stating "I just did what I was trained to do?"

Mental simulation allows teachers and staff to make the right critical decisions, regardless of the circumstances of the situation they are faced with, even in fast changing and challenging situations. A good example would be a teacher who needs to evacuate his or her class through a window during a lockdown because of immediate danger in the hallway. A teacher who has not been trained in this way might panic and feel compelled to stay in the classroom even though logic would dictate otherwise.

Along with tabletop drills, functional, and full scale exercises, video training can help school staff become familiar with crisis decision-making and help them to respond calmly, rationally, and correctly during any crisis event. Safe Havens International is a leader in this type of training, and provides many options for school systems to incorporate video into their training program.

*This article is based on an interview that took place in Atlanta, GA between Safe Havens Video and Lt. Col. Dave Grossman in the Fall of 2011.*



# Sony Says

## *Crisis Stress for Responders*

We often forget about ourselves during a crisis. We become selfless. One of the most common responses is that you have a lot of people that want to do well, and want to respond. But the challenge is knowing what to do, and knowing how to do it adequately. Most people want to do the right thing, but the issue is, how do we do that, and how do we do that effectively? And if staff aren't properly prepared, it can really have an adverse effect on a crisis. If we don't respond adequately, it can reduce confidence held in us by our peers, by the parents and by students. I find that most people can really perform in a crisis, but they have to be adequately prepared. With training, you can really overcome that sense of "I don't know what to do."

First, staff can improve their ability to perform under stress through training. That's one great way to really get out there and improve your response. Other ways are practicing with drills, and exercises, and really participating in them. I know that drills and exercises can be very daunting, but when you actively participate in them, you learn a lot, and you get to rehearse your response and improve your ability to perform under stress, improve your ability to protect the kids, and you feel a little more comfortable in performing your duties in a crisis.

Focus on improving skill sets that you can use during a crisis but also in your daily work – for example de-escalation training can help you calm people down when they're really upset, deal with somebody who is emotionally or mentally distraught, respond to someone on drugs or intoxicated or even prevent a weapons incident. These are skills you can use in your everyday job.

### *Preparing for Our Own Mental Health Responses*

Most people assume they won't need mental health services after a major crisis. A traditional, office-based approach to providing services has proven to be ineffective in disasters because many people think 'that won't happen to me'. But school recovery personnel should actively seek out those impacted by the disaster. And the emotional impact often goes beyond the school grounds. The entire school district may be impacted, and depending on the size of the incident, the entire community or even the entire country might be emotionally affected.

But in all this chaos, the people actually responding are often victims of the same crisis. So remember to allow time for YOU to take a break from the crisis. Meeting the emotional needs of others is psychologically taxing, and skipping this part of recovery can lead to compassion fatigue or other serious side-effects. I myself was diagnosed with compassion fatigue because, as a mental health professional, I never thought I needed to decompress. So take the time, and plan for others to need this time as well. We recommend being ready for this possibility to reduce the chances that members of your recovery team will have this experience. Remember, helping others recover from a crisis may be difficult, but it is a much needed service.

As a mother of two, I am wholeheartedly committed to making sure that our nation's schools, and our schools everywhere, are safe. But I also have to remember that there are times when I need to protect myself and look out for my own well being, so that I can continue to serve others. Keep this in mind as you serve and protect our children and you will be doing yourself and others a service.

*A popular & animated keynote speaker, Dr. Sonayia N. Shepherd (Sony) has authored and co-authored sixteen books on school safety and emergency management.*

*A co-founder of Safe Havens International, her work has taken her to five continents, responding to events ranging from the Indonesian Tsunami and Hurricane Katrina crises to the G-8 summit. Sony has assisted large organizations, like FEMA and the WHO, as well as smaller organizations - including over 2,000 public and private schools and campuses. She can be reached at [sony@weakfish.org](mailto:sony@weakfish.org)*



Photo: Safe Havens Video

# Role Specific Integrated Planning Can Dramatically Improve Emergency Preparedness

by Michael S. Dorn

The first employee to encounter a major crisis on campus must be prepared to act immediately to prevent the loss of human life. In some instances, serious injuries and even fatalities can occur if functional protocols and critical communications are not initiated in the first ten to thirty seconds of an event. While many campus organizations rely on a single ready reference chart, or simply a plan for administrators, this approach has failed on a number of occasions, sometimes with a terrible price in human lives.

One reason the singular planning component approach has failed so often is that different categories of employees do not perform the same action steps during a crisis event. Consider the different actions that would be implemented during an emergency lockdown by the following employees:

- ° The school principal
- ° A food service worker
- ° The lead custodian
- ° A classroom teacher
- ° The receptionist
- ° The superintendent

One approach to help train and empower various campus employees for a broad range of crisis events involves role-specific plan components that are designed to work together. By developing specific versions for each key category of employee as part of a single planning system, each employee is better prepared to carry out their role-specific responsibilities during a crisis.

A number of experts recognize that a solid base of experience is needed to make appropriate decisions under fast-developing life and death situations. It is extremely difficult to provide school employees with a solid base of experience without first providing them with the action steps they would need to perform in an appropriate array of crisis situations. Interactive staff development sessions using scripted and video crisis scenarios can be extremely helpful in helping train and empower staff to initiate life saving action in the first critical seconds of a crisis.

Role specific plan components are also invaluable tools for use during training sessions, drills, exercises or scenario-based training. Having something to refer to during these activities is key to building a base of knowledge for staff to use during a crisis.

Many districts have found that plan development templates can dramatically reduce the staff time needed to develop these types of plan components. This approach has been adopted on a state-wide basis in Indiana and Wisconsin. Other districts, such as the Hillsborough County, Florida Public School System, have committed personnel to complete plan development from scratch, and with great success.

The method you choose will depend on staff and budget availability as well as a variety of other concerns. With either approach, role specific integrated plan components are one of the most effective ways for school officials to prepare the individual employee for a crisis, so they are ready to react when lives are on the line.

*Many districts, including the Evansville-Vanderburgh School Corporation (IN), the Rockdale County Public Schools (GA) and Chesterfield County Public Schools (VA) use role-specific fast reference emergency plan components to better prepare various types of staff members for a wide range of crisis situations.*



Photo: Rachel Wilson

## Advocate for the Children: Rod Ellis

by Michael S. Dorn & Chris Dorn

### *Professionalism, Pragmatism and Purpose*

Appointed Chief of Police in August, 2010, Rod Ellis found ways to continue to implement improvements in his agency and his district despite massive budget cuts. A veteran officer with experience in both local and state law enforcement agencies, Chief Ellis threw himself into his new position, and with his 16 sworn officers, he has reached out to school system employees and area public safety officials to seek partnerships and solutions to protect the district's 13,000 students, more than 2,000 employees and their facilities. Despite personnel cuts above 30%, the department has been able to provide coverage and police services with creative new schedules and multi-tasking to improve efficiency.

In addition to their main duties, officers must also cover traffic points, random patrols of elementary schools and a variety of other law enforcement functions. Although the department is not a twenty four hour patrol agency, an evening shift was set up to patrol after-hours and during periods of increased activity, like athletic events. Coordinated schedules on game days cut overtime expenditures from approximately \$80,000 to \$8,000 in one year. Though these cuts were difficult and painful, they were necessary to keep the department functioning and providing service.

#### *Financial Innovation*

Structural changes are important when attempting to improve services with significantly fewer personnel. Chief Ellis and his staff are developing a revised policy manual,



Photo: Rachel Wilson

Rod Ellis is the Chief of Police for the Glynn County School System in Brunswick, Georgia.

tailored to reflect the duties performed by school district police officers. Chief Ellis has also designated a patrol officer to serve as the agency investigator. With this focused effort, the department has already cleared a number of challenging cases.

There is now a central phone extension with a simple number that can be dialed from any school phone to immediately ring to a sworn officer who is on duty at a central location. On-call access is provided 24/7 by forwarding this extension to a cell phone after hours. The officer staffing this line also:

- Monitors local police, emergency medical services and weather radios to alert officers of critical activity that could impact area schools.
- Serves as the agency custodian of records and area court liaison
- Manages report quality control
- Submits required Uniform Crime Reporting
- Dispatches units as needed
- Monitors cameras
- Monitors an e-mail instant alert system that notifies school police whenever 911 is called from any school phone.

#### *Maintaining Morale & Community Image*

Having moved up through the department, Chief Ellis understands that his officers needed additional recognition for their hard work and selfless dedication. He worked with the local Longhorn Steakhouse to have them sponsor an officer of the month program, which provides a \$25.00 gift card for exceptional service each month.

Chief Ellis also feels that it is important to recognize the work of officers from other agencies, presenting a "Chief's Award" for high performing officers, as well as an "Officer of the Year" award. The "Officer of the Year" award is presented by the local Exchange Club, and the recipient of this award is selected by popular vote.

To address concerns about the department's image within the community, Chief Ellis headed a redesign of the agency patch and uniform to create a look more indicative of a police agency. The new uniforms express the professionalism and standards of the department while still serving officer's needs for comfort and day-to-day use. The department also has new standard guidelines for duty firearms and equipment.

To match this new appearance, the department also



emphasizes a customer service attitude and Chief Ellis tries to demonstrate this as a guiding principal through his own actions. Officers have been receptive of this approach, resulting in a noticeable reduction of complaints filed against officers. The department now has a new agency mission statement to reflect the focus on professionalism.

Chief Ellis also works with the school system's public information officer to highlight the department's efforts, and created an agency webpage to better communicate with the public. Regular school board meeting attendance also helps bridge the gap with district leadership. These measures have helped gain support and given the department the positive public image that it needs to effectively serve the community.

#### *Meeting the Professional Needs of a Police Department*

The department's vehicle fleet was also in need of improvement. With limited funding, five used patrol cars were purchased from the local police department. These patrol cars were in excellent condition, complete with emergency warning equipment. These patrol units are now marked with the agency colors and insignia, and serve as a valuable addition to an aging fleet.

To improve multi-agency response, Chief Ellis scheduled active shooter training - giving his officers a chance to train with outside agencies while preparing for those rare but horrible active shooter situations. At the firearms range, his officers fire approximately 800 practice rounds to improve individual performance - and far exceeding the norm for Georgia's municipal and county police agencies. Chief Ellis feels that this is an area of considerable importance.



Photo: Rachel Wilson

School district police officers must be prepared to function in a school environment where large groups of people are the norm.

He also assisted with the narration and production of a series of custom staff training videos on emergency preparedness that are now shown to all school staff members. This effort was funded as part of a Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools Project (REMS) grant from the federal government. Members of the department were also provided advanced training in several key areas under this grant. Chief Ellis helps to sustain this level of advanced preparedness by regularly reading a variety of relevant publications and passing relevant information on to his staff and others in the district.

#### *A Team Approach*

Chief Ellis believes in hands on management, spending as much time in the field with his officers as possible. He also makes it a point to network throughout the district - getting feedback and earning buy-in by attending principal's meetings and talking to people in all facilities and job roles.

In addition to listening to those within his agency, Chief Ellis sought the counsel of other successful law enforcement leaders from around the state - from agencies small and large.

Agencies at all levels have provided generous amounts of time and feedback to help create a solid background of knowledge to work from.

To tie all this together, Chief Ellis was recently awarded a fellowship through Georgia State University in Atlanta, GA. Only 12 police executives are given this honor each year, and the focus of the fellowship is a two week training exchange with the State of Israel. Police executives from Georgia visit Israel to participate in advanced antiterrorism, counter terrorism, and community police training. In turn, high ranking members of the Israel National Police visit the United States to learn from stateside agencies.

With this huge variety of feedback from throughout the district and "best practices" information collected from around the nation and around the world, the department has taken great strides to provide a safe and effective learning environment while working under unprecedented financial constraints.

It is the work of Chief Rod Ellis - and other Advocates for the Children like him - that help keep our schools something we can be proud of.

*Each edition of "Advocate for the Children" will focus on a leader in the field of school safety - from teachers and administrators who have made safety in their school a priority, to district-level personnel who put the issue of safety on the front burner and individuals from outside organizations that have really stepped up to the plate to help their local schools.*

## Would Your Plan Withstand? We Need More Than Just a “Plan in a Can”

by Russell E. Bentley

### *The Million Dollar Question*

Each fall, as I contemplate the start of a new basketball season, I ask myself the same question I’ve asked myself countless times sitting on the bench looking into a crowded gymnasium. This question applies to all school-related sports events. And it’s the same question I often thought about as the chief of an urban school district police unit. The million-dollar question is “What if a large fight breaks out in the stands, or near the concession area or – worse yet – what if shots are fired during the game?”

As a law enforcement executive and a basketball coach, I have been in my share of sporting venues. The question of crowd control is continually in the back of my mind. In 2004 I was officiating a basketball game in a small Georgia town when it happened – a large fight broke out. The fight started in the men’s restroom while I was in the area. The incident caused a delay in the start of the third quarter, and many of the spectators in attendance were frightened and uncertain of their safety.

The school staff and the law enforcement officers were able to stop the fight, but I was still not convinced that all the appropriate emergency response

measures had been taken. For many school employees, the crisis plan is just a large three ring binder sitting in the Principal’s office. What about when that plan must be put into action?

### *What if?*

What if this situation had erupted to the point where a parent or friend of one of the combatants pulled a small handgun and started shooting? What if people in the hallway near the concessions panicked and began to run from the gym? What if several people were trampled during the chaos, or an elderly spectator breaks his hip in the panic? Would the emergency response plan for the school withstand the chaos of the situation, or would the school staff quickly find themselves in over their head?

Many districts find themselves staring crisis in the face and trying to work through the situation flying by the seat of their pants. They quickly learn the true meaning of the phrase “The night of the prom is too late to learn how to dance”. Often, our best efforts to prevent or mitigate an incident of this sort falls short. Simply having uniformed law enforcement officers and school-based staff on-site with a 3-ring binder does not constitute a solid sporting event emergency plan.

I can’t solve this hypothetical crisis in the confines of this short article, but I want to offer a few tips on pre-season and pre-game emergency preparedness. These tips might help you respond if this type of incident was to occur during one of your games this upcoming season or next year. These tips can also be a part of your emergency preparedness for other activities such as school dances, concerts, etc.

### *Planning for Basic Event Security*

Sporting events present unique considerations for emergency management planning. Similar to emergency management planning for schools, these plans should be developed based on site-specific issues. Collaborative exercises, site assessments, and other emergency exercises (including drills and tabletops) can assist you in better preparation for emergency situations.

First, each school (or school district, as appropriate) should have a four-phase all-hazards emergency response plan. The district should also provide preparedness training for all event support staff, such as ticket sellers, ticket takers, timers, custodians, announcers, scorers, security and other school officials.

Secondly, each game site should have a designated event administrator. In Georgia, the Georgia High School Association (GHSA) uses the term “game manager.”



Photo: Rachel Wilson

The GHSA white book states "it shall be the responsibility of the home of the host school to take the following precautions at all interscholastic athletic events to prepare for crowd and spectator control including having and administrator (or designee) from the host school to function as a "game manager" at all GHSA sanctioned events (with the exceptions of golf and tennis)."

This game manager is the school's liaison with the assigned game officials, and is responsible for activities related to maintaining an orderly sporting venue. The game manager can simplify their job by developing a pre-season and pre-game emergency preparedness checklist (See the accompanying sidebar for more information about what to put on this checklist).

In Georgia, game managers are required to introduce themselves to the lead official before the start of each contest. It is equally important that the spectators know how to identify law enforcement personnel in the event of emergencies or to find basic information, such as the whereabouts of emergency exits and restrooms. All emergency exits should be clearly marked and other emergency equipment such as fire extinguishers, AEDs and emergency phones should also be checked and accessible.

The host facility should post visible signage that articulates their ability to grant or deny admittance to the sporting event, including removal of individuals from the contest, and defines a clear policy on the possession of weapons, alcohol, tobacco and other drugs.

Before and after the event, you should also consider the need to provide a security escort for game officials, including escorting officials to their vehicles (this is required in Georgia).

We were also required to develop a plan to handle situations that might occur during an athletic contest, like fights.

It is important each year to remind law enforcement officers of their specific responsibilities regarding game security. Officers employed to work sporting events generally do a better job when they are reminded of the specific demands of sporting event security and the need for them to be alert and not distracted by the event itself.

As I watch students participate in what I consider to be one of the greatest and most rewarding athletic events - high school basketball of course - the thought stays in the back of my mind: "Does this school have a plan for what could happen before our team leaves for home?"

I am reminded of my efforts to meet the mandates of the GHSA as a district police chief. I have many war stories about all the incidents we experienced. To say the least, we dodged a few nightmares.

Make your sporting events emergency response plan a living and functional process. Develop a pre-season and pre-game emergency response check list and gain a better understanding of your emergency response plan. Taking these steps will help you focus on what really matters - helping students compete in a great sporting event.

#### References:

- "Guidelines for Security, Safety, and Crisis Management", Colorado High School Activity Association Constitution and By Laws
- Georgia High School Association
- Fort Wayne Community Schools Athletic Events Security (Memo 2009)

#### *Some of the items you should consider adding to your checklist:*

Some of these items are simple resources that you should acquire; others are more complex and will require additional development efforts.



Photo: Rachel Wilson

#### Do you have:

- A list of crisis management team members in attendance for each game?
- A staffing plan for adequate law enforcement/security and other staff?
- The location of the crisis incident command center?
- A photo tour of the venue (in color, with both electronic and hard copies)?
- A venue floor plan for emergencies?
- A copy of the emergency response plan and/or a ready reference chart for after-hours activities?
- Emergency announcements, to be located at the scorer's table? Including those for evacuation, lockdown and shelter-in-place procedures?

#### Have you completed:

- A pre-season review of the emergency response plan?
- Appropriate training for event support staff?
- An event communications plan?
- A pre-game safety meeting?



# Safe Havens Video wins W3 Award for Web Excellence

The Safe Havens Video team was awarded a silver trophy from the 2011 W3 Awards for their work on the REMS-funded project "Lincoln County School District Emergency Procedures."

With over 3,000 entries, the W3 honors creative excellence on the Web, and recognizes the creative professionals behind award winning Websites, Web Video and Online Marketing programs.

The W3 Awards are sanctioned and judged by the International Academy of the Visual Arts, an invitation-only body consisting of top-tier professionals from acclaimed media, advertising, and marketing firms. In determining winners, entries are judged based on a standard of excellence as determined by the IAVA, according to the category entered.

The award recognizes our work to provide a web version of the video project, which includes streaming view options for all of the videos in the series and a quiz function to assist in information retention and keep a record of employee training.

For more information, visit [www.w3award.com](http://www.w3award.com).



Photo: Rachel Wilson

## Photo from the Archives



Photo: Charles Fleming

Each issue will feature a photo from our archives that has never been used. This issue's pick is from our video production shoot in the Evansville-Vanderburgh School Corporation. In this creative multiple exposure, Charles Fleming used the "HDR" setting in the Nikon D300 to capture a total of 5 frames on a single image. This technique is usually used for other purposes but in this instance it created a dynamic image conveying the motion and excitement of a school police officer's job.

# Bullying Abatement – Reducing the Frequency & Severity of Bullying in Schools

by Michael S. Dorn

A number of years ago, a group of parents who had lost children to suicide banded together to form a support group called Bullycide. The fact that enough students had committed suicide after being bullied so severely at school should be a compelling example of the problem of bullying. While we have volumes of meticulous and quite credible research that offer proof that bullying is having a corrosive effect on our youth, our schools and our very culture, the very notion that some children have decided to end their precious lives because of the transgressions they suffer at the hands of other precious children should shock and disturb us.

No child should ever consider death as a possible alternative to school. Having personally considered this choice on many occasions while I was being bullied in school, I can attest to the fact that most problems of school bullying are not new. I feel compelled to point out to readers that during my 20 year career as a police officer I never once felt the fear that I felt walking the halls of Central High School in Macon, Georgia in 1979 as a student. Even the time a suspect fired six shots at me and my partner one night while we were on patrol.

Thankfully, I also experienced first-hand an even more pervasive amount of grace in my K-12 years. Outstanding literature and social studies teachers, a model ROTC instructor, an exemplary school bus driver, caring and dedicated volunteers who led

my Boy Scout troop and served at area Boy's and Girl's Clubs I frequented, and the superhero law enforcement officers who I encountered as part of a juvenile court diversion program all took the time and served as powerful role models.

When I speak to groups about bullying abatement, consult with school officials to help them create schools of dignity, honor and respect, or provide opinions as an expert witness, I carefully consider a variety of factors:

- The findings of a massive body of exhaustive and high quality research of others in the field, including the work of Olweus
- The findings of our analysts resulting from the thousands of schools where they have helped to conduct school safety, security, climate, culture and emergency preparedness assessments
- The victims and aggressors of bullying my officers interacted with while I served as a school district police chief
- The feedback shared with me by thousands of educators, school security and law enforcement officers, mental health professionals, students and parents over the years.
- What it was like to be humiliated in an elementary school bathroom, savagely assaulted in an elementary classroom and to attend dysfunctional middle & high schools where apathy were the norm.

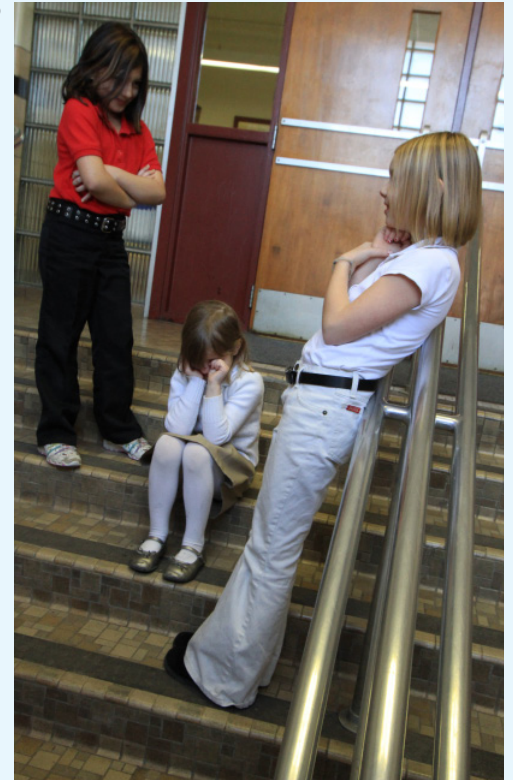


Photo: Rachel Wilson

- The blessings I have had to encounter along my journey through school, with an array of amazing teachers, scout leaders, priests, volunteers at local Boy's and Girl's Clubs, students, police officers serving groups for at risk youth, an unforgettable bus driver and an incredibly insightful and caring friend of my family we reached out and lifted me out of deep depression and thoughts of suicide

Each of these sources has and will continue to influence my ever-evolving thoughts on bullying. Perhaps they can influence yours with some positive effect as you attempt to grapple with the significant challenges and immense opportunities that you encounter to profoundly affect the lives of children and youth. I am going to boil down some of



the most critical concepts used by our analysts to help create schools of dignity, honor and respect around the globe. We will draw on our experience working with school officials in some of the most remote corners of the world, because even the largest school districts have gained benefit from schools only accessible by donkey drawn cart and dugout canoe. While technology can provide invaluable service to us in confronting the challenges of bullying, no security camera or software system can approach the power of a caring, highly motivated and properly trained school employee or volunteer in their ability to detect and address school bullying.

#### *Important things we will not discuss in this article*

We would be remiss if we did not acknowledge that there are other core aspects that are not only effective, but necessary, for effective bullying prevention. We feel that there are others who are more qualified, capable and skilled at addressing them. The most prominent of these is the need for schools to implement and to maintain evidence-based bullying prevention programs. While there are a seemingly limitless array of bullying prevention programs, some have been found to be ineffective and others actually counterproductive. Sticking with programs that have been validated by proper research methodologies is critical.

#### *Bullying abatement as a powerful tool to improve school culture and achievement*

Most educators we interact with indicate that they had not previously realized how strong the connection is between bullying and school climate, cul-

ture and most noticeably to them, student achievement. Hawaii is the first state in the nation to launch a statewide initiative to improve school culture and climate in hopes of impacting student achievement. The Hawaii Department of Education directly operates all public schools in the state and is thus in a better position to affect a state-wide effort of this type.

#### *Creating schools of dignity, honor and respect*

Without a concerted and thoughtful effort to address bullying, these guiding principles are only token words to those students who regularly experience victimization. Schools where dignity, honor and respect exist both in word and in deed are more effective places of learning where bullying is less frequent and less severe.

#### *Improving student supervision*

While not a stand-alone solution, effective efforts to improve student supervision can significantly decrease the risk of bullying and other safety concerns. Improved student supervision has been found to be one of the most effective tools to reduce inappropriate student conduct, and it reduces the opportunity for students to carry out many types of bullying behaviors while increasing the likelihood that they will be caught. Though proven techniques to improve students supervision are typically easy to implement, they have been found to be quite powerful.

#### *Utilization of space management*

This aspect of improved student supervision involves a concept based around the denial of opportunity for inappropriate behaviors.

Think about what each of the following criminal acts and prohibited activities has in common:

- Sexual assault
- Theft
- Vandalism
- Consensual sex between students or adults on campus
- Bullying
- Use of alcohol, tobacco and other substances

Each of these activities requires some level of privacy to take place. Locking areas that are not occupied by adults is one of the simplest and most important ways to prevent these types of incidents. For example, numerous sexual assaults have occurred in unlocked custodial closets, auditoriums, gymnasiums, classrooms and other areas in schools.

#### *Pattern recognition and matching*

Pattern recognition and matching was first validated by research as an effective safety strategy in cardiac care units in hospitals in the United Kingdom. After seeing mortality reductions of up to 50%, the use of pattern recognition and matching has spread to hospitals across the globe as well as to the military, law enforcement and a host of other sectors. Safe Havens analysts began incorporating these concepts into their training programs in 2009. The process involves empowering and training employees to learn to spot situations where the patterns of behavior they observe do not seem "normal" based on their work and life experience. In effect, being observant – but in a focused manner – can help school employees detect bullying, identify bullies and victims of bullies as well as other situations of concern,



ranging from persons who are carrying concealed weapons, students and staff who are at risk for suicide, persons suffering from mental illness, intoxication or other risk factors.

### *Improving natural surveillance*

Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) is another research-based body of knowledge that is used by architects while designing buildings. Schools can use some of these concepts during renovations but also during day to day operations. A key concept of CPTED is allowing natural surveillance through the application of building design features or simple adjustments in the physical environment. The resulting features create a greater ability for staff and students to see and hear one another – resulting in a greater sense of security for normal users of the space and vulnerability for those who are there to do harm.

Natural surveillance has been found to be effective because people who are doing things they are not supposed to do typically prefer privacy from others. For example, a group of children who want to bully student may be deterred from doing so because they realize that a school employee is in a position to see or what is happening.

A few common examples of natural surveillance include:

- Placement of windows in key areas when designing or renovating a school
- Doorless bathroom designs
- Building entry designs that make it easier for office staff to see people who enter the facility



Photo: Rachel Wilson

- Moving vending machines to improve line of sight in a hallway
- Keeping window shades open to improve the ability of people to see others throughout the building and create a greater ability for staff and students to see and hear one another – this helps prevent actual incidents, as well as false accusations of employee misconduct when staff and students are in secluded areas.

### *Creating positive territoriality*

Another of these concepts focuses on efforts to connect students, staff, parents and the community to the school through design features. Murals, displays of student artwork and brightly colored resilient flooring are a few common examples of concepts that have been found to enhance positive territoriality. A clean, warm and welcoming school setting not only looks good and supports a positive school climate, culture and tone - it also has been found to reduce crime and the fear of crime.

### *Removal of the fear barrier*

Each of the concepts I've mentioned in this article helps to reduce the frequency and severity of bullying in schools, and in doing so, they also help remove what I call the fear barrier. When I was a child, my fear of victimization at school was a far more powerful impediment to my ability to learn than my severe learning disability. When I was diagnosed with Dyslexia in the third grade, they told my parents I would likely never graduate from high school nor learn to read a book on an adult level. Neither they nor my parents understood that the hostile and unwelcoming school was far more of a barrier to my education than Dyslexia.

Thankfully, there were a number of educators and other adults in my life who helped me overcome at least some of the challenges of Dyslexia and my immense fear. It is only due to their efforts that I can read and write books today. Without their assistance, I would not have written this article. I think that is a fitting example of the incredible power that each and every school employee has to help to address bullying, to help students succeed and to create schools of dignity, honor and respect.

*Michael Dorn experienced severe instances of bullying in several of the schools he attended. Dedicating his life to making students safe at school, he became a campus police officer at the age of 18 and now serves as the Executive Director of Safe Havens International, the world's largest non-profit school safety center.*

Contact him at [mike@weakfish.org](mailto:mike@weakfish.org)

## Bringing our People up to the speed of our safety and security technology

by Michael S. Dorn

Never before have we had such effective technology to address safety, security and emergency situations for our schools. The quality and capability of today's security cameras, access control systems, fire detection equipment, emergency communications systems and other technologies too numerous to detail here is simply astounding. As with all computing products, the costs of previously cost prohibitive security and emergency preparedness technologies has dropped while the quality has improved.

Incredibly clear and compact camera technology, visitor management systems and robust emergency communications technologies have been designed for schools. Techniques have also been developed that can help school employees spot the subtle signs that a person is dangerous, and researchers have identified how human beings can be prepared to think faster and more reliably than some of our most advanced computer systems.

The key to a truly outstanding approach to school safety, security and emergency preparedness is to work diligently to implement suitable technology solutions while also working just as hard to train and empower school employees to use their incredible ability to protect others. School officials should seek an appropriate balance between their technology and the efforts to train and empower their people to function more effectively in the safety arena.

For example, we now have reasonably priced technology solutions to enable a front office employee to clearly see and hear a visitor before they are buzzed into a school. But this technology will be even more

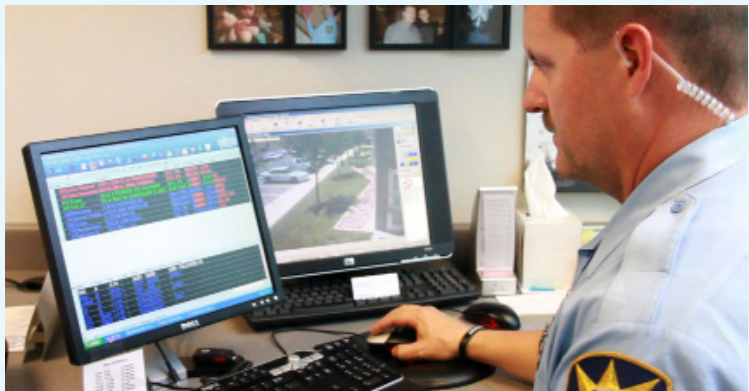


Photo: Rachel Wilson

effective if the employees who operate it are trained and empowered to use the simple yet powerful concept of pattern matching and recognition. This evidence-based technique builds on the human brain's ability to notice and match patterns of human behavior to experiences stored in their work and life experience.

These powerful concepts have been used to reduce mortality in cardiac care units by as much as 50%. Now, school bus drivers, teachers, custodians and other school employees are being trained and empowered to use this proven approach to detect sexual predators, bullies, non-custodial parents, terrorists and a number of other types of aggressors who seek to harm students and staff.

An increasing number of school districts and non-public schools are training and empowering their employees to prevent, prepare for and respond to school crisis situations through human factors approaches. Tried and true assessment-based approaches - like pattern matching and recognition, mental simulation and controlled breathing - that have been successfully applied in other fields are finally making their way into K-12 schools.

Even the highest quality metal detectors and access control systems have been easily defeated in controlled tests as well as in actual incidents. At the same time, assessments have also

demonstrated that it is very difficult to defeat excellent technology when it is combined with properly trained and empowered employees.

Fortunately, the range of options available to schools is increasing at a steady pace. As changes in technology make staff development efforts more accessible, realistic and effective, more and more schools are seeing the benefits of complementary approaches to school safety, security and emergency preparedness technology. Decades of research and assessment in other fields are now making our schools safer.

Taking care to implement solid school safety, security, and emergency preparedness technology while training and empowering school employees are both effective and necessary components of a truly top flight school safety strategy. Be sure to recognize and utilize one of the most powerful assets any school has - it's people.

*Michael Dorn has coordinated school safety assessment projects for more than 2,000 public, private, charter, parochial and independent K-12 schools, and pioneered a variety of cutting edge concepts for safety, security, emergency preparedness, climate and culture assessments for schools.*



*"The Safety Riddle" Answer: This "safety line" at an elementary school in Henderson, NC is an inexpensive, yet invaluable strategy implemented by the school's principal many years ago. When the principal was assigned to the school, she observed afternoon dismissal and was concerned that students could be easily hit by cars because of the parking lot layout. After observing the traffic flow with law enforcement and facilities personnel, a variety of prevention measures were implemented, including the use of this safety line. Students must wait behind this line while being closely supervised by staff, who walk each student to their car when a parent or guardian arrives.*

High as a Kite answer (from page 5):

*These are rings with hidden compartments to store drugs. In ancient times these may have been used to carry poison, but in the past several decades they have been a "convenient" way to carry drugs in pill or powder form. The pill on the left is Xanax, a prescription anti-anxiety pill that is commonly abused in either whole form or even crushed and snorted. The substance on the left could be cocaine, methamphetamine MDMA or even heroin. These rings would be convenient for a drug user because a small amount of the powdered drug could be snorted directly from the ring while it is being worn. These rings can be easily identified on a careful visual inspection by looking for the hinge and clasp that are visible even when the rings are closed (See the photo on page 5).*



Photo: Chris Dorn

## Resources on the Web: TSA "Good Catch!" announcement and Press release page

This web page is dedicated to showcasing notable finds at Transportation Security Administration checkpoints. These are informative to read, since they demonstrate how people try to conceal weapons and other contraband in one of the world's most secure environments (in a relative manner of speaking). Some of the press releases are also just fun to read – like finding out about the weird items that people try to smuggle onboard – including a spear gun, grenades, snakes and marijuana hidden in a peanut butter container.

<http://www.tsa.gov/press/goodcatch/index.shtm>

## Check out our new website!

Completely redesigned,  
with more resources and  
information to help you  
make your school a  
safer place!



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