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PRE-K THROUGH GRADE 12 SCHOOL SECURITY

SUMMARY

Florida public school systems have made great strides in planning and training to reduce vulnerability to terrorist attacks. Schools have done a good job in providing training opportunities for awareness training for school personnel and local first responders. School Resource Officer programs are providing visible policing at secondary schools across the state. Access control is still an area of concern due to differing views of how restrictive such control should be and the costs involved in retrofitting "open" campuses. Lack of funding has limited local school districts' ability to extend School Resource Officer programs in to elementary schools and has reduced DARE program officers on some campuses. Local response agencies and schools appear to be working well in coordinating emergency response plans and training with a focus on terrorist related events. The Florida Department of Education, Office of Attorney General and Florida Department of Law Enforcement have provided appropriate assistance and guidance to local school districts. Local school districts have taken the initiative to apply for available federal funding and to provide a terrorist response capability with whatever limited funds may be available. The level of commitment to protecting Florida's schools is very high across the state. More funding through federal, state and local sources would allow for specific identified program improvements, but Florida's Education community is moving ahead through innovative use of current funding and sharing of lessons learned across jurisdictions.

Over 2,500,000 children attend Florida's public schools in the K-12 education system.

Florida's sixty seven county school districts are responsible for the safety and security of their respective students, faculty, non-instructional personnel, structures, facilities and transportation systems. Individual counties have responded in different ways to these responsibilities. Some counties work through their local law enforcement, both city police and sheriffs departments, to provide school security. Some counties have very sophisticated planning tools and response plans in place through a coordinated program overseen by a school District Security Director. Some counties rely on School Resource Officers to assist with planning, and there may be some cases where schools have a security plan and law enforcement has a response plan and those plans have not been coordinated. Overall, local school districts appear to have moved forward in a positive manner to assure coordinated responses at the school and school district levels with community first responders; including law enforcement, fire/rescue, hospitals and health departments. While there are variances from district-to-district, Florida's school districts have worked for many years to achieve their current state of preparedness, with a renewed focus since 2001.

On the statewide level, school security issues are addressed by three lead agencies. The Department of Education, Office of Safe Schools, has taken a very strong leading role in the past year to assure that school districts are performing adequate assessments, planning and training across the state. Almost all counties have completed a district self-assessment survey on school security and have security plans in place according to those surveys. The Department of Education (DOE) has worked closely with the Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE) in developing a Statewide Strategic Plan for School Security. This new tool was electronically distributed to all public schools and

BACKGROUND

According to the Florida Department of Education "Snapshot of Florida Schools: 2001-2002;" there are 1654 Elementary Schools, 464 Middle/Junior High Schools, 400 Senior High Schools and 88 Combination Schools in the 67 Public School Districts in the state.

school systems on October 17, 2003 and represents the first statewide directive on domestic security from the Commissioner of Education. This strategic plan was designed by agency representatives from DOE and FDLE with assistance from the Regional Domestic Security Task Force Education Committees from around the state.

The Office of Attorney General, Florida Crime Prevention Training Institute (FCPTI) joined with DOE and FDLE to formulate a new terrorism training class for School Resource Officers (SRO) last year. This training, which was tuition-free due to DOE funding, was given to 1200 law enforcement officers, school personnel and fire/rescue personnel in nine locations throughout the state in Spring 2003. The Crime Prevention Training Institute has been training School Resource Officers since 1985 and has offered basic, advanced and/or specialized training to 8,437 FTE School Resource Officers from Florida and other states.

There have been 54 Basic Training Courses [40 hours] and 125 specialized SRO Courses offered. While the state did fund SRO training in 1994 and 1995, which allowed for 3200 officers to receive tuition-free training, and the DOE has provided some grant assistance, this valuable training component has been largely unfunded since its inception, and remains so today. Training costs are absorbed through fees paid by attendees.

All school districts have one person designated as responsible for security, whether they are titled or not. Some school districts have their own police force, but most rely on a combination of a district Security Director, School Resource Officers (and some DARE Officers in elementary schools) and local law enforcement, fire/rescue, hospitals and health departments as their first response teams.

All sixty-seven school districts have SRO programs in the upper level schools. Less than half have SRO programs in elementary schools, though some have DARE officers on campuses without SROs. In some counties, SROs have more than one school, while in others they have single school assignments. In some locales, such as Duval County, if there is a credible concern at an elementary school, an SRO may be temporarily assigned to that school. The SRO program originated in Miami in 1969. Orlando began the program in 1972. By 1997, 62 of 67 Florida School Districts had an SRO program. Today, 100% of the counties participate in some way even though there is no specific state agency assigned to oversee School Resource Officers and no specific funding for the

program. Most programs, either split funding between school districts and local law enforcement agencies or have a contractual arrangement between the school board and law enforcement. The cost splits are not uniform, but the largest number of counties have a 50/50 split in costs between schools and law enforcement. Others are 75/25, 80/20, 25/75 or use grant monies to offset some costs.¹ For example, Santa Rosa County Schools have worked out funding splits with the local sheriff's office and two local city governments to extend the SRO program. Santa Rosa has 18 SRO officers, with vehicles, and has SRO officers in all high schools and middle schools and five elementary schools with a goal of extending to eight elementary schools in the near future.

The School Resource Officer Program provides visible security in the form of a uniformed officer on a school campus. Awareness training for all school personnel is another important component of school security. Architectural and environmental design of the school and the campus play a role in the security plan, as does access control to the campus and identification of all visitors to the campus. This layered security model, practiced in urban communities for many years, is especially adaptable to external threats posed by terrorists.

In addition to having the School Resource Officer appear in different locations around a campus at different times on different days, which creates an uncertainty about when and where the law enforcement presence may appear for someone surveilling a site, school districts regularly train employees to confront unknown persons on their campuses to determine the person's reason for being there. In Hillsborough and Santa Rosa Counties, for instance, all school district employees must wear photo identification badges at all times on campus. Persons without this identification are subject to challenge. In Volusia County, tests are done to assure that persons claiming to be parents or guardians of students must prove their claim before students are released.

While each county's training methods may differ, it appears that the training and testing does occur. In Volusia County, each school must pass a Security Standards Certification once every three years, with annual spot checks and unannounced tests. Failure to

¹ Staff interview with Margaret Boeth, Coordinator of School Resource Officer Training, Office of Attorney General, October 9, 2003.

obtain and maintain this certification becomes a part of a principal's job evaluation.

Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) has been used in designing new schools in Florida school districts for some time. This concept adheres to principles for making a building more secure through hardscape, landscape and construction design. Some ideas to incorporate CPTED would be low plantings under windows and around doors to assure visibility and access, less doors into a facility, moving parking and drop-off areas away from structures; aesthetically pleasing berms, fencing and gating around school perimeters. While CPTED concepts are important prevention tools for new schools, trying to apply the concepts to retrofit existing facilities can be costly, if not impossible.

Access control is the most difficult, expensive and controversial issue facing school security planners. In this country, the concept of the schoolhouse as the center of a community dates back to the founding of the colonies. Schools have always been seen as neighborhood gathering spots and safe places for children and families to congregate. Unfortunately, international experience has taught us that we must consider the possibility of limiting some of that free flow to protect the lives of our children and their teachers.

Problems with open school design have been known to law enforcement for some time. Federal, state and local education departments began a renewed focus on this issue after a spate of "shooter" incidents in schools around the country, culminating in the Columbine High School shootings in April 1999. This incident raised many school security and law enforcement response issues, such as availability of school blue-prints and building lay-out drawings for law enforcement, and rules of engagement of on-site officers when a shooter is in the facility. Prior to this event, deputies on scene and arriving were not allowed to pursue the shooters until a command officer was present. This policy has been changed across the country to allow a responding officer to pursue, disarm or stop anyone threatening the life of another in a school environment. Today, as a result of the Columbine incident, for example, every law enforcement vehicle in Leon County is equipped with a CD containing blueprints and schematics of all Leon County Schools. This single tool can help responding officers locate intruders, identify entry and exit locations, and a myriad of other information which can be used in planning an incident response strategy on-scene.

Physical design changes such as added fencing, and gates, limiting the number of doors which are open for access, adding camera monitors at doors and gates and increasing lighting all add to the security of a facility. The issue for many school districts is how to balance these enhanced security features with the concept of an open school as the center of the community.

Another security issue facing school districts is school bus transportation. While there are many regulations regarding school bus safety, the concept of school bus security is somewhat new. Some districts have bus yards where school buses are housed when not in service. Some of these lots are lighted, locked and guarded. Some are not. Some districts allow drivers to take buses home overnight. School districts require drivers to perform a visual inspection of the inside and outside of the vehicle and a "pre-flight" test of the signals and systems on the bus. In districts where buses are not picked up from a central yard, this inspection process is on the honor system. Duval County contracts out for its school transportation system. Responsibility for security, therefore, becomes part of that contracted service. It is not known how many other counties may contract for that service.

According to an article entitled "Safety by Satellite" in the October 2003 edition of Government Technology magazine, the Indian River School District is testing a new Global Positioning System (GPS) and Student ID tracking system to provide a method of tracking what students are on what buses, and where those buses are located. This system evolved from a school bus wreck in 1999 that caused the death of two students and injury of a dozen others. The schools had no viable way of checking or confirming who was on that bus.

The Palm Beach County School District reports that GPS tracking is currently employed on all Special Education buses and will soon be expanded to all school buses. In addition, a new middle school opening in 2004 in Boca Raton will be a test site for new security technology. Details of this test project are still being developed.

It appears that school bus drivers get some basic training in hostage situations but most training is safety related, not security related.

The federal government has provided limited funding for school security since 2001. It has allowed a re-direction of some Safe and Drug-free Schools funds for school security issues. While the re-direction is

helpful, overall funding from the federal program for Florida decreased last year by 5% (\$1,109,106 decrease). This funding stream is projected to decrease by 35% nationally in federal fiscal year 2004. Such a decrease will certainly be reflected in less funds available for Florida schools. On October 1, 2003, the U.S. Department of Education awarded “Emergency Response and Crisis Management Discretionary Grant Program” grants to local school districts. Of the \$38 million national award, seven Florida School districts received a total of \$3,339,839. The districts receiving funds were Santa Rosa, Brevard, Hillsborough, Orange, Broward, Lake and Osceola. Hillsborough County received \$1,000,000., the largest grant in the country. While there are no public, compiled records of how many Florida districts applied for grants, staff has identified Palm Beach, Leon, Volusia and Duval as applicants who were non-recipients.

State funding for school security, through the Safe Schools program at DOE, has remained steady over the last three years at \$75,350,000.

METHODOLOGY

Staff held meetings and conducted interviews with the Director and staff of the Office of Safe Schools, Florida Department of Education; the Chief of Domestic Security Initiatives, Florida Department of Law Enforcement; and the Coordinator of School Resource Officer Training, Division of Victim Services and Criminal Justice Programs, Office of the Attorney General. Phone interviews were conducted with District School Security Directors in Duval, Hillsborough, Leon, Palm Beach, Santa Rosa and Volusia counties. School assessment, planning and training documents from various school districts around the state were reviewed. U.S. Department of Education, National Association of School Resource Officers (NASRO), Florida Department of Education and various other websites and documents were reviewed. Staff attended a CPTED training seminar at a national security conference (ASIS International, September 2003). Several schools security publications, including Jane’s School Safety Handbook, Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design, Campus Security and Crime Prevention, Campus Security: Situational Crime Prevention in High-Density Environments and the Campus Safety Journal magazine were reference materials for this report. The Palm Beach County School Security Director, Chief James Kelly, was a contributing writer to the Jane’s School Safety Handbook, authoring “Chapter III: Crisis Response.” The Jane’s series of

response manuals is one of the most highly recognized and well-used emergency response tools today.

FINDINGS

Florida’s public K-12 school systems have integrated school security into their planning and operations. 62 of 67 county school districts responded to the Safe Passage Act Safe Schools-2003 District Safety and Security Self-Assessment Reports survey, attesting to the fact that each school system had performed the assessment, had emergency/crisis response plans in place and had tested and/or exercised those plans with local first responders.²

The Commissioner of Education has issued a Florida Department of Education Statewide Policy For Strengthening Domestic Security In Florida Public Schools.³ This policy was developed by the DOE in consultation with the Florida Department of Law Enforcement and Education Committee Chairs from each of Florida’s seven Regional Domestic Security Task Forces in 2002-2003. The policy provides a framework for domestic security related planning, training and response capability to be integrated into all local school district plans. It encourages each district to “capitalize on current school protection measures; provide policy guidance... in terms of terrorism protection procedures and training focused on deterrence; and explore infrastructure enhancements and policy guidance for infrastructure.” The policy requires each district to:

- Control access to and enhance security of school campus and transportation
- Ensure availability and operability of emergency equipment and supplies
- Provide training to school personnel, students, state and local partners
- Ensure external communication and notification procedures are developed and implemented
- Ensure coordination with state and local partners
- Conduct Vulnerability Assessment and Establish Standards

Specific benchmarks for each of these requirements are included in the policy.

² According to the Florida Department of Education’s website, fldoe.org, all but Glades, Jefferson, Madison, Suwannee and Taylor counties self-reported.

³ Policy issued October 17, 2003.

In interviews with several District School Security Directors,⁴ staff found that local school districts are already complying with most of the new requirements, though some of the specific benchmarks, such as increasing visible policing or adding new perimeter fencing, may be more problematic due to budget constraints facing the school districts. Staff found that Security Directors were proud to report that almost all of the enhancements made over the last two years have been done within existing budgets. There are many projects which have had to be delayed due to lack of funding, but local school districts have found ways to incorporate new training specific to counterterrorism into their district plans. Additional funding would allow new and expanded security programs. For example, Hillsborough County has just been awarded a \$1,000,000 federal grant for school security from the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE). Those funds will be used, in part, to update communications equipment and interoperability for school personnel to be able to communicate internally and with local first responders, to improve gating systems and resolve access control issues, and to increase training opportunities for school personnel and School Resource Officers throughout the district.⁵ Santa Rosa County will use funds from the USDOE award to continue to address a list of 50 action items identified by the local Community Roundtable on School Violence, Safety and Security.⁶ Seven Florida school districts received grant awards from the USDOE grant: Santa Rosa (\$207,902), Brevard (\$500,000), Hillsborough, and Orange (451,7663), Broward (\$500,000), Lake (\$297,437), and Osceola (\$382,737). While it is unknown how many Florida counties actually applied for the grant, staff confirmed that Duval, Leon, Palm Beach and Volusia applied and were non-recipients. The total national grant award was \$38 million and every school system in the country was eligible to apply.

As reflected in the Florida Department of Education's Statewide Policy, school security in public schools requires a layered approach. These layers consist of

⁴ Staff interviewed School Security Directors from Duval, Hillsborough, Leon, Palm Beach and Volusia counties as a representative sample of local school districts.

⁵ Staff interview with Hillsborough County School Security Director.

⁶ The Santa Rosa County School System relies on a Community Roundtable advisory group consisting of community leaders and CEOs. The group was organized to address school violence issues after the Jonesboro, AR shootings in 1998 and has remained actively involved in school violence, safety and security issues.

access control, visible policing, architectural and environmental design, school personnel training and involvement and constant vigilance. All of these components in a school setting, along with clear and consistent response plans and coordinated communication, both internally and with first responders, make up a school's security response capability.

Access Control: The most difficult component of a school security plan is access control. Throughout the history of our nation, the schoolhouse has been a community gathering spot, a place where children came to learn, parents came to discuss important community issues and families gathered to celebrate and spend time together. Many community leaders, in Florida and across the nation, want to maintain that presence of the schoolhouse as the center of the neighborhood. All of the local School Security Directors interviewed by staff indicated that there were members of their community that felt very strongly about this issue. On the other hand, there were members of their communities that were concerned about the open access to school campuses in their districts.

Parents expect their children to be safe and protected while in the care of the local school system. From the time the child gets on the bus in the morning until he/she arrives home in the afternoon, the responsibility for protecting the child is given over to the school system. At the same time, parents want to participate in their child's education, be able to freely attend events on school campuses, and have quick and convenient delivery and pick up of their child from the school campus, if needed. While these two sets of expectations may appear to conflict, there are ways for each situation to be altered slightly to reach an acceptable level of access control without compromising the continued community involvement in school activities.

First, schools must devise a system whereby non-employees and non-students are immediately known to be on campus. In most cases, this step is achieved by having a single point of entry for visitors and some form of sign-in procedure. Hillsborough County Schools require all employees to wear photo identification badges at all times. An adult not wearing a badge is easily recognizable as a visitor. New school designs are using fewer doors and entry points, but older schools are designed with multiple access points to ease traffic flow and make the schools seem more "open." The major problem with these older designs is

that students and employees will be tempted to use the doors, even though such use may be prohibited by new policies. Doors are also a major component of school safety plans and may not be chained or barred shut because they are used for egress in an evacuation emergency. Schools must develop reasonable limits on access points and visitor identification and enforce the use of those access points by students, employees and visitors. School districts are working on ways to resolve this issue in each of the schools under their jurisdictions. Different solutions will be needed for some schools due to unique design configurations.

The second level of access control, perimeter protection, is difficult for two reasons. First, schools are not prisons. The perception of fencing around schools has been that this projects a negative message to the students and to the community. Several School Security Directors indicated that their hardest problem was to find ways of protecting the perimeter of school properties without projecting the image of a prison facility. Through established design principles, some fencing can be incorporated with less obtrusive physical barriers, such as earthen berms in landscape designs; large planters attached to the ground and reinforced below ground, or dense plantings of shrubs with sharp, pointed foliage to project a barrier without the prison effect.

The second difficulty with perimeter protection is cost. Large school facilities may require thousands of feet of fencing and/or incorporation of environmental design features which may be expensive to install.

An integral part of access control and perimeter protection is gating. Gating is problematic because schools must remain accessible to law enforcement and other first responders at all times. In addition, for evacuation purposes, gates must be able to be held in an open position to allow reverse traffic flow. Lock and key gates are not good solutions because of the number of keys that would need to be in inventory at any given time. Automatic pass-through gates are possible solutions but are somewhat expensive. Hydraulic bollard gates can cost several thousand dollars. Some automatic systems, such as tire-shredder devices, do not allow for reverse traffic flow, though the systems may provide some type of manual override. School systems are still working to find the right solutions for the gating component of the perimeter security issue. Hillsborough County will have funds available to test some gating options through the USDOE grant. Results of those experiences will be

helpful in other school districts' evaluation of available solutions.

Visible Policing: Law enforcement presence is a known deterrent not only to criminals, but to those who may be planning a terrorist attack. Organized terrorist groups spend large amounts of time planning for a successful mission. Al Qaeda members have indicated in multiple media stories that planning may go on for several years in advance of an attack. The time lapse between the first attack on the World Trade Center in 1993 and the latest attack in September 2001 is indicative of a lengthy planning period prior to the execution of the attack. Such planning may include extensive surveillance of the target and information gathering about activities that occur at the site. The presence of uniformed law enforcement, and law enforcement vehicles, on a campus will discourage planners if the law enforcement officer(s) follows an unpredictable schedule and roams through the entire campus area during a school day.

In Florida, School Resource Officers participate in school security in all sixty seven counties. Visible presence is an integral part of a school's security plan. The School Resource (SRO) program has been a part of the local school district in some parts of the state for 30 years or more. The first program was founded in Miami in 1969, followed by Orange County in 1972. By 1997, 66 Florida counties had SROs and today all 67 counties have an SRO program in place. In a majority of counties this program is geared towards Middle and High School facilities. In a 2000 survey conducted by the Office of the Attorney General, Crime Prevention Training Institute, less than half of the responding elementary schools had SRO programs. Many elementary schools do still have DARE program officers on-site, but according to School Security Directors some of those programs are experiencing cutbacks due to budget reductions in local school systems. Any uniformed law enforcement presence and law enforcement vehicle presence on a school campus provides an immediate deterrent effect against terrorist activity.

Environmental Design: Any site design, hardscape or landscape features or construction design that makes the school harder to reach helps to reduce the threat of terrorism. For example, moving parking areas, bus loading areas and student pick-up and delivery areas away from the structure and playground areas immediately reduces the risk of a vehicle carrying an explosive device getting close to the area where children are playing or studying. Placing physical

obstacles such as large trees, walls, large planters, “unfriendly” shrubbery, berms and fences around the school is another method of deterrence that would be factored in by anyone plotting to do harm to the school.

Training: Regular focused training is a critical component of school security. Training must include all school personnel, local first responders, and students. Plans must be tested regularly to assure that all issues are addressed, that everyone has a role, understands that role and can carry out their assigned duties.

School districts throughout the state have practiced many different emergency scenarios with their local response agencies. Because Florida is a state which has had plans in place for years for hurricane preparedness, students, faculty, administrators and staff are aware of many of the basic training components for evacuation and crisis response. Counterterrorism training differs only in that personnel will be required to discern the type and level of threat with little or no warning and determine the appropriate response. School districts are participating in local and regional multi-discipline training exercises in addition to normal in-school evacuation and lockdown drills. For example, Volusia County Schools were part of a county-wide emergency drill in which the scenario included the hijacking of a school bus full of students. The drill emphasized the importance of cross jurisdictional communication and cooperation.⁷

Communication practice is a very important exercise. Personnel must be able to communicate within the school, with district personnel and with local first responders. There must be an immediate method for communicating vital information to parents about students’ conditions and locations and a pre-planned “re-union” strategy for getting children to their parents as quickly as possible based on existing conditions. Several school systems employ “walkie-talkie” type radio communications on their campuses. Some district security plans call for cell phone/radio combination systems. Upgrades to these systems are in progress in some locations, but the cost of such upgrades is slowing the process. Public statements from school district personnel would be needed in a crisis, but would generally come through the unified incident command structure with the law enforcement or fire/rescue commander determining the content and scheduling of these statements.

⁷ Staff interview with Volusia County School Security Director

As expressed by the Duval County Security Chief interviewed by staff, the school system is responsible for assuring the safety of the students and employees, relocation, if needed, and reunification with parents and guardians. Criminal investigation, crisis response and law enforcement functions fall within the purview of the local first responders. Everyone working together doing their assigned task provides the full response capability. The best way to assure that everyone knows how to perform their assigned role is to train for the event.

Vigilance: School personnel across the state, including school transportation personnel, are being trained to increase their awareness of the area, pay attention to persons or things that seem to be out of place and to report anything that appears unusual. Personnel are now taught to stop and challenge unknown persons on their properties, asking who the person is and what business the person has on the campus. In Hillsborough County, district security personnel remove identifying badges and walk onto school property unannounced to test how long it takes to be challenged. In Volusia County, such tests are performed and failure to meet security standards at a particular school is included in the principal’s evaluation review.

School districts are working through lists of security related needs, such as the benchmarks laid out in the new Department of Education Statewide Strategic Plan. For example, Leon County has been able to provide “go kits” with all needed information and some supplies to each of its schools for use in an evacuation. Other districts have other needs and have not yet developed a funding source for “go kits.” These districts may have had more pressing needs for security enhancements already addressed by counties like Leon or Palm Beach that have taken very aggressive approaches to school security. Prioritization of training and equipment needs will allow for more focused attempts to locate and provide funding sources to meet those needs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Prepare legislation to allow for school drills specific to terrorism related events
- Encourage continued cooperation between local school districts and local first responder agencies in planning and training for emergency response

- Encourage a meeting of local school district administrators, local first responders, local school security directors and School Resource Officer supervisors to assure coordinated communication and response protocols.
- Pursue federal funding opportunities to increase School Resource Officer programs at elementary school level and to provide dedicated funding source to address access control concerns
- Encourage the Department of Education to re-implement regular conference calls with the Commissioner, local school district administrators and local school security directors to address new security issues and share information on lessons learned by districts around the state.