

School Safety Study

Terrence Thornberry, Ph.D.
University of Maryland

Sabrina Arredondo Mattson, Ph.D.
University of Colorado, Boulder
Center for the Study & Prevention of Violence

This research was supported by the United States Department of Homeland Security through the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START), grant number N00140510629. However, any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect views of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

Presentation Overview

- School safety efforts have improved substantially over the last 15 years, however, research shows that more work is needed.
- Review of School Related Events: How federal, state and local institutions have responded to school emergencies/crisis of the past to help reduce or prevent disruption in schools.
- School Safety Study (funded by DHS): Describe the level of preparedness of schools for an emergency/crisis.

A Review of School Related Events

EVENTS

- Prior to 1986-random incidents of violence; drug use reaches epidemic proportions toward the end of the period
- 1987 to 1996-continued use of drugs and increasing interest in crime/violence in schools
- 1997 to 2000-high visibility targeted school shootings
- 2001 to Present-9/11, Beslan, Virginia Tech, NIU, Rita, Katrina, H1N1

RESPONSE

- Limited government involvement; Safe School Study Report to Congress 1977; acknowledgement of some violence and drug use toward the end of the period
- School district's implemented programs/practices to prevent drug use & began focusing on crime/violence; Drug Free Schools and Communities Act; National Drug Strategy
- Recognized the need for violence prevention programming; Safe School Initiative; Safe Schools/Healthy Students; Threat Assessments; SCSS
- Emergency Management for Schools; Study on Terrorism in Schools; More partners (FEMA, DHS, CDC)

Minimize School Disruption

- ◉ All hazards approach
- ◉ Four Phases of Emergency Management and Crisis Response promoted by OSDFS
US Department of Education
 - Prevention/Mitigation
 - Preparedness
 - Response
 - Recovery

School Safety Study

○ Research Question

- What do U.S. school principals and district administrators think about their school's/district's level of preparedness and vulnerabilities for an emergency/crisis?

Method

- Web-based Survey of elementary & middle school principals and superintendents in the U.S.
- Stratified random sample of 2,800 school district superintendents and a randomly selected principal of one of the schools
 - Received funding to improve preparedness
 - Region
 - Geographic location
 - Size of the school district

Method

● Fall 2007

- Researchers sent letters explaining the confidential study
- Incentives: \$5 gift card to Starbucks for superintendent & \$5 gift card to principal
- Emailed the link to the online survey to the superintendent in the district with their id & password along with instructions to forward the email to the principal of the selected school for completion of the survey.

● Completed Surveys:

- 813 superintendents or emergency managers
- 656 principals
- Response rate 34% and 27%, respectively

Survey Content

- ◉ Measures aspects of the four phases of emergency management and crisis response
 - Prevention/Mitigation
 - Preparedness
 - Response
 - Recovery

Primary Findings

◎ *Response & Recovery Plans and Teams*

- More than 90% of school and district administrators reported having a crisis response plan and crisis response team compared to less than 40% that had a recover plan and recovery team.

◎ *All hazards approach*

- Almost 65% of school and district administrators reported that it was “very true” that their emergency response plan followed an all hazards approach.

Primary Findings

● *Plans for a Pandemic:*

- About half of school (50%) and district (30%) administrators reported that their plans did not include provisions for dealing with a pandemic.

● *Plans for Terrorist Attack:*

- About one fourth of school (26%) and district (21%) administrators reported that their plans did not include planning for terrorist threats (such as chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear and explosive incidents).

Primary Findings

◎ *Planning for Special Needs of Students:*

- Only 57% of principals and 50% of district superintendents reported that their emergency plans included provisions for students with special needs had been “completely implemented.” And, only 52% of principals and 46% of superintendents reported that their emergency plans included provisions for students with medical needs had been “completely implemented.”

Primary Findings: Strengths

- On average, *school district administrators* reported scores in the highest response category on a 4 point scale where they report having “completely implemented”:
 - *comprehensive emergency plan procedures, and*
 - *crisis response team roles and responsibilities established.*

Primary Findings: Strengths

- On average, *school principals* reported scores in the highest response category on a 4 point scale (“very true”, “completely implemented”, or “always”) for having:
 - *positive student teacher rapport;*
 - *clearly defined policies regarding student behavior/code of conduct;*
 - *supervision of students in important school settings;*
 - *comprehensive emergency plan procedures; and*
 - *crisis response team roles and responsibilities established.*

Qualitative Analysis

- Obstacles to school safety
 - Financial resources
 - Training
 - Time
 - Isolated rural location

Summary

- School safety efforts have improved, more work is still needed
- Most prepared when it comes to having an emergency crisis plan
- Areas needing improvement: recovery teams and plans, all hazards approach (pandemic and terrorists), planning for special needs
- Areas of strength: positive student teacher rapport; clearly defined policies regarding behavior; supervision of students, plan procedures, established crisis response roles and responsibilities

Contact Information

Sabrina Arredondo Mattson, Ph.D.
Director, Safe Communities~Safe Schools
Center for the Study & Prevention of Violence
Institute of Behavioral Science
University of Colorado at Boulder
<http://www.colorado.edu/cspv>
sabrina.mattson@colorado.edu
303.735.1633