School Safety Features

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Secondary Education and Student Support
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Executive Summary

Emergencies – whether man-made or caused naturally – occur every day. While there is no way to stop an emergency, there are ways to respond so that damage to people and property is minimized.

Understanding this reality, in 2001 the state Legislature created the School Safety Advisory Committee (SSAC). The School Safety Center functions within the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction to provide for consistent, statewide guidance and assistance on school safety and related issues to school districts, educational service districts, and community stakeholders.

State law passed in 2013 tasked the SSAC with creating model policies and strategies that school districts can use to design emergency-response systems. The systems, in turn, will be designed so that they can be updated as new technologies become available.

Second, the SSAC is responsible for developing recommendations to insure that public access to grounds and buildings is done in a safe manner. Third, the SSAC will develop plans to address public access to classrooms, and apply best practices to protecting students and staff.

The law establishing the SSAC’s responsibilities also requires the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) to award competitive grants. The grants will use “evolving technology” to expedite the response to and arrival of law enforcement at school emergencies.
Introduction

Revised Code of Washington 28A.320.126 calls for the School Safety Advisory Committee (SSAC) to develop model policies and strategies for districts and law enforcement to design emergency response systems using evolving technologies. A related state law, RCW 28A.300.565, requires the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) to award grants to school districts that use “evolving technology” in their implementation of emergency response systems.

Between Aug. 1, 2013, and Nov 7, 2013, seven meetings were held. During the first meeting, the SSAC created a Safety Advisory Subcommittee of Advisory Committee with members who were more specifically involved in those aspects of school safety that are addressed in legislation.

The other six meetings focused on creating a common understanding of the SSAC’s responsibilities, gathering the necessary partners and reviewing grant requirements, among other tasks. Organizations involved in policy planning and grant development included:

1. School Safety Advisory Committee (SSAC)
2. OSPI School Facilities and Organization
3. Washington State School Directors’ Association (WSSDA)
4. Criminal Justice training Commission (CJCT)/Educational Service District 105 (ESD 105)
5. Educational Service District (ESD) 112
6. Washington Association of Sheriffs and Police Chiefs (WASP)
8. Fire Commissioners Association (WFCA)
9. Pierce County Emergency Management Division
10. Pacific County Emergency Management Division
11. Thurston County 911

The SSAC has generated a preliminary school district draft policy document as a starting reference point. The wording of the draft will evolve as issues, which are noted below, are addressed. The draft policy states:

*It is the policy of the ___ School District to ensure and maintain the critical and necessary environment in which effective teaching and learning can take place. School safety supports student learning by creating and promoting a physically, emotionally, socially, and academically secure climate for students, staff, and visitors.*

*To help ensure a climate of safety, district and school personnel will, through collaboration with local law enforcement agencies and first responders, develop an individualized emergency response agreement which defines a system to expedite communication, response and arrival in the event of a threat or emergency at a school. The district will implement the use of best practices, and the most current and evolving technologies to facilitate such communication, response and arrival.*

The SSAC has identified several issues for policy and planning:

- A working definition of “evolving technologies” – one that may vary, based on location;
- Existing school safety plans and resources;
• Components of the agreement referred to in the draft model policy: a model Memorandum of Agreement/Understanding (MOA/MOU) between the Local Education Agency (LEA) and local law enforcement jurisdiction(s);
• Clarification of legislative vocabulary (for example, “expedited” to mean “effective & timely”);
• Inclusion and coordination with 911 call centers;
• Integration with current technologies (for example, existing Rapid Responder technology); and
• Integration with a district’s current plans, procedures and resources.

These issues overlap and help inform OSPI’s School Facilities and Organization section, which is overseeing the grant application process. Some considerations for policy, planning and grant development include a review of existing district emergency response systems; plans for implementation and improvement, specifically in law enforcement response-time; the type of information to be provided by law enforcement; and integration of evolving technologies into existing district systems.

Planning specific to the grants includes, but is not limited to:

1. A budget with specific costs for each item and identification of all project costs (e.g. planning, labor, materials, etc.);
2. Identification of, if any, costs that are local contributions;
3. A project schedule with major milestones, including expected completion date;
4. A scoring guide which will consider the improvement of the dispatch time for the school and information provided to law enforcement;
5. Schools with the greatest improvement of arrival time relative to other schools will receive the most points;
6. Cost reasonableness, including purchase, installation, support, upgrades and staff training; and
7. Completion date of the grant project.

Conclusion and Next Steps
Several issues require further discussion and consideration for policy and safety planning. The SSAC recognizes that it must finalize model safety policy wording, and that it must work with the Washington State School Directors’ Association to publicize the model.

In addition, the SSAC will:

1. Clarify terms used in safety policy development and planning, particularly as they impact coordination with local law enforcement;
2. Suggest model procedures to accompany the model policies;
3. Generate list of “evolving technologies” and best practices;
4. Create a handbook/primer for schools and districts;
5. Develop safety planning models and best practice guidance;
6. Update the current School Safety Planning Manual to incorporate safety planning models and guidance; and
7. Develop OSPI safety planning reporting process by December 1, 2014.
The OSPI School Facilities and Organization section must also:

1. Publicize the grant Request for Proposals (RFP) through iGrants by December 2, 2014;
2. Create a review process and team;
3. Receive, score and fund projects in March 2014;
4. Award grants in April 2014; and
5. Track successful implementation of funded projects.

Current information on the grant program can be accessed on the School Facilities and Organization website.

Acknowledgments

We would like to acknowledge the work of the SSAC members for their ongoing efforts to ensure a safe, secure, healthy and positive learning environment for all students in Washington State. We would also like to especially acknowledge the members of the SSAC Subcommittee for their work in developing model policies and plans in response to this legislation.

References

1. School Facilities and Organization
2. The School Safety Advisory Committee
3. The School Safety Center