

May 8, 2018

TO THE ADMINISTRATOR ADDRESSED

SUBJECT: Adequate and Appropriate School Safety Measures

In recent weeks, there have been media reports from different parts of our state regarding potential threats in various school districts that were fortunately headed off thanks to the collaborative efforts of school administrators, local law enforcement and state-level support from the Texas Department of Safety.

One such incident occurred in Uvalde where Texas Rangers, working with local law enforcement, investigated and uncovered a plot by two students who were allegedly planning a mass casualty event against a school. Thankfully, this plot never came to fruition. However, this incident underscores the importance of school systems to always be vigilant and prepared.

Our schools face emergency situations that vary in severity and duration. With that in mind, it is important not only for school personnel, but also for students to remain vigilant and aware of their surroundings, both on and off campus.

Schools must take preventive safety actions to successfully fulfill their primary mission, which is educating students. These preventative measures include planning, drilling and training for a variety of emergencies. Last month, I was pleased to advise Governor Abbott that all Texas school districts were in compliance with recent state required safety and security audits. However, emergency preparedness does not end there.

School districts should continually self-assess their emergency management processes. School safety plans should be coordinated with local emergency management agencies, law enforcement, health departments and fire departments. This coordination can help ensure safety plans will not conflict with existing local emergency services protocols. It is the responsibility of district administrators to ensure staff is trained and adequately prepared to respond to and recover from these incidents.

Access control continues to be one of the top safety and security challenges faced by schools. Allowing unauthorized individuals access to a school or facility can compromise student and staff safety. Consider tools, such as your local Crime Stoppers program, which is available at no cost to monitor suspicious activity through a reporting mechanism that allows students to report tips or concerns.

Please remember that the Texas School Safety Center provides a variety of resources to assist schools with implementing a comprehensive safety program. One of these resources is the High-Quality Emergency Operations Planning tool (<https://rmt.txssc.txstate.edu/tools/hq-eop>), which provides guidance on the state mandated planning process to prevent, prepare for, respond to, and recover from any type of emergency. As part of an effective safety plan, districts are also encouraged to incorporate the K-12 Standard Response Protocol

(<https://txssc.txstate.edu/tools/srp-toolkit/>), which is a multi-hazard based response protocol for a variety of threats that could impact a school. These response protocols should be drilled and exercised regularly with local first responders. Further, districts can access guidance and resources for conducting state mandated ongoing self-assessments (<https://txssc.txstate.edu/tools/k-12-toolkit/>), which serve to identify hazards, threats, and vulnerabilities that might pose a danger to life or property or interfere with a safe and healthy learning environment.

Evacuation, fire and lockdown drills should be conducted throughout the school year. Several of these emergency drills should include first responders so they can become familiar with the campuses.

Thank you for your unwavering commitment to the safety of students on all our campuses.

Mike Morath
Commissioner