

# **DISTRICTWIDE SCHOOL SAFETY PLAN**

**September 1, 2025- September 1, 2026**



## **VALLEY CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT**

**944 State Route 17K**

**Montgomery, New York 12549**

**Telephone Number: (845) 457-2400 Ext. 18122**

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**Approved by  
Board of Education**

**Evette Avila  
Superintendent of Schools**

**Submitted by:  
Janet B. Werner  
Coordinator of Health and Safety**

**BEDS Code: 44 13 01 06 0000**

## SECTION I: GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS AND PLANNING GUIDELINES

The District-wide School Safety Plan was developed pursuant to Commissioner's Regulation 155.17. At the direction of the Cooperative Board, the Executive Officer appointed a District-wide School Safety.

### Identification of School Teams

The School District has created a District-wide School Safety Team consisting of, but not limited to, representatives of the school board, students, teachers, administrators, parent organizations, school safety personnel and other school personnel. The members of the team and their positions or affiliations are as follows:

<b>School Board Representative</b>	<b>Robert Oakes, Angela Terralavoro</b>
<b>School Superintendent</b>	<b>Evette Avila</b>
<b>Administrator Representatives</b>	<b>Ivelisse Mojica, Central Office Ivan Tolentino, Central Office Brad Conklin, Central Office</b>
<b>Director of Security and Emergency Preparedness</b>	<b>Stephen Ragni</b>
<b>Social Emotional Support Specialist</b>	<b>Nancy Fitzsimmons</b>
<b>Health and Safety Coordinator</b>	<b>Janet Werner</b>
<b>Teacher Representatives</b>	<b>Debra Peet, Katrina Smallwood</b>
<b>School Facilities Personnel</b>	<b>Ryan Schmidt, Buildings &amp; Grounds</b>
<b>Director of Technology</b>	<b>Vincent Brancato</b>
<b>Athletic Director</b>	<b>Theresa Uhelsky</b>
<b>VCTA Representative</b>	<b>Pasquale Leo</b>
<b>VC Transportation</b>	<b>Renee Marchant</b>
<b>School Nurse Coordinator</b>	<b>TBD</b>
<b>Nutritional Unit Representative</b>	<b>Vienna Baselice</b>
<b>Paraprofessional Unit Representative</b>	<b>Diane Savage</b>
<b>Custodial Unit Representative</b>	<b>Christopher Bartko</b>
<b>First Student Bus Company</b>	<b>Becky Finch, Paul Adams</b>
<b>PTA Council Representative</b>	<b>Sarah Begley, Tara Lapierre</b>
<b>Student Representative</b>	<b>TBD</b>

## **Identification of Chief Emergency Officer**

The Chief Emergency Officer Evette Avila, Superintendent, will be responsible for coordinating communication between staff, law enforcement, first responders and for ensuring staff understanding of the district-level emergency response plans. The Chief Emergency Officer will also be responsible for ensuring completion and yearly update of buildings level emergency response plans

## **Concept of Operations**

The District-wide School Safety Plan is directly linked to the individual Building-level Emergency Response Plans for each school building. Protocols reflected in the District-wide School Safety Plan will guide the development and implementation of individual Building-level Emergency Response Plans.

In the event of an emergency or violent incident, the initial response to all emergencies at an individual school will be by the School Emergency Response Team and driven by Building Emergency Response Planning Teams.

It is important to prepare a threat assessment strategy so that when a threat occurs, everyone will know there is a policy and understand what actions to take. Threats are alarming statements or behaviors that give rise to concern about subsequent violence.

To address this issue, the Valley Central School District has established a Threat Assessment Team that is called in to assess the credibility of, and needed response for, serious threats. The team should include school and school district administrators, representatives from law enforcement and legal counsel as appropriate. It might also include security personnel, mental health professionals, threat assessment experts, and any other person who could contribute in a meaningful way. Typically, the permanent members of the Threat Assessment Team would also serve on the School Site Safety and Violence Prevention Committee, Crisis Planning Team, and/or Crisis Management Team.

Upon the activation of the School Emergency Response Team, in the event of a serious threat, the Superintendent of Schools or his/her designee will be notified and, where appropriate, local emergency officials will also be notified. Efforts may be supplemented by county and state resources through existing protocols, including Critical Incident Response strategies. Valley Central School District participates in the county-wide Crisis Response Team through the Orange-Ulster BOCES. Information about the district and its facilities is shared regularly with the BOCES superintendent or a designee.

Efforts may be supplemented by county and state resources through existing protocols.

## **Secret Service Threat Assessment Suggestions**

School and law enforcement officials are frequently placed in the difficult position of having to assess specific people (e.g., students, staff, teachers, and others) who may be likely to engage in targeted violence in which there is a known or knowable target or potential assailant. The following suggestions for threat assessment investigations are based on guidelines developed by the Secret Service's National Threat Assessment Center (NTAC). They were developed primarily for preventing the assassination of public officials so they may not be applicable to all school situations.

To identify threats, school officials are advised to:

- Focus on individuals' thinking and behavior as indicators of their progress on a pathway to violent actions. Avoid "profiling" or basing assumptions on socio-psychological characteristics. In reality, accurate "profiles" for those likely to commit acts of targeted violence do not exist. School shootings are infrequent and the great majority of individuals who happen to match a particular profile do not commit violent acts. In addition, many individuals who commit violent acts do not match pre-established profiles.
- Focus on individuals who pose a threat, not only on those who explicitly communicate a threat. Many individuals who make direct threats do not pose an actual risk, while many people who ultimately commit acts of targeted violence never communicate threats to their targets. Prior to making an attack, potential aggressors may provide evidence they have engaged in thinking, planning, and logistical preparations. They may communicate their intentions to family, friends, or colleagues, or write about their plans in a diary or journal. They may have engaged in "attack-related" behaviors: deciding on a victim or set of victims, determining a time and approach to attack, and/or selecting a means of attack. They may have collected information about their intended target(s) and the setting of the attack, as well as information about similar attacks that have previously occurred.

Once individuals who may pose a threat have been identified, ten key questions should guide the assessment of the threat:

- What motivated the individual to make the statement or take the action that caused him/her to come to attention?
- What has the individual communicated to anyone concerning his/her intentions?
- Has the individual shown an interest in targeted violence, perpetrators of targeted violence, weapons, extremist groups, or murder?
- Has the individual engaged in attack-related behavior, including any menacing, harassing, and/or stalking-type behavior?
- Does the individual have a history of mental illness involving command hallucinations, delusional ideas, feelings of persecution, etc., with indications that the individual has acted-on those beliefs?
- How organized is the individual? Is he/she capable of developing and carrying out a plan?
- Has the individual experienced a recent loss and/or loss of status, and has this led to feelings of desperation and despair?
- Corroboration: What is the individual saying, and is it consistent with his/her actions?
- Is there concern among those that know the individual that he/she might take action based on inappropriate ideas?
- What factors in the individual's life and/or environment might increase/decrease the likelihood of the individual attempting to attack a target?

## **Prevention - The Role of School Administrators, Teachers, and Staff**

To be effective, violence prevention programs require community-wide collaborative efforts that include students, families, teachers, administrators, staff, social and mental health professionals, law enforcement, emergency response personnel, security professionals, school board members, parents, the business community, etc. School administrators should bring together all of the above constituencies to develop strategies appropriate for their own particular school and community environments. These strategies will be shared with all staff so they will be prepared for the emergency.

While school boards and administrators set the climate of safety within schools, teachers, especially, must be directly involved and supported in all stages of developing and implementing programs to achieve safer schools. Teachers establish the first line of school safety, because they have the most direct contact with students. Often, they also have great insight into the potential problems and realistic solutions applicable to their school.

## **School Security**

The level of physical security may need to be modified in order to lower schools' vulnerability to violent behaviors. Different strategies will be required to address needs specific to individual elementary, middle, and high schools.

Administrators should initiate a comprehensive security assessment survey of their school's physical design, safety policies, and emergency procedures. The assessment should be conducted in cooperation with law enforcement, school security staff, physical facilities personnel, fire and other emergency service personnel, teachers, staff, students, and other school community members. Using the conclusions of that survey, administrators should assign a safety and violence prevention committee composed of all of the above representatives to develop a comprehensive security plan (School Site Safety Plan). Based on each school's needs, school safety plans may include some or all of the following suggestions:

- a. Utilize School Resource Officers, who may be provided by local law enforcement. SROs often provide law enforcement, law-related counseling, and law-related education to students, faculty, and staff. Continuity of officers within individual schools should be encouraged, so that students and SROs develop rapport.
- b. Consider seeking one or more probation officers for use on campus to help supervise and counsel students. This would be especially appropriate for high schools with a significant caseload of juveniles on probation.
- c. Utilize paid, trained personnel hired specifically to assist teachers and administrators in monitoring student behavior and activities. Continuity of monitors within schools should be encouraged to facilitate good rapport with students. The number of monitors used should be based on the number of students, the extent of problems at the school, and the space and layout of school grounds.
- d. Encourage screened and trained parents/guardians and other volunteers to provide monitoring of students. Ensure volunteers have adequate training and guidelines outlining their duties.
- e. Develop and enforce restrictions about student loitering in parking lots, hallways, bathrooms, and other areas. Publish restrictions in the student handbook/code of conduct.

- f. Consider the use of metal detectors only in special circumstances to deter weapons on campus.
- g. Adopt policies for conducting searches for weapons and drugs. Publish policies in the student handbook/code of conduct.
- h. Require visitors to sign in and sign out at the school office and to wear visible visitors' passes. Post prominent signs at all school entrances instructing visitors where to sign in and out. Publish the policy in the student handbook/code of conduct.
- i. Encourage school personnel to greet strangers on campus and direct them to sign in if they have not. Also instruct school personnel to report visitors who have not signed in.
- j. All students and staff are required to carry and/or wear their official school-issued photo identification (ID) at all times while on school grounds and during any school-related activities.  
  
Staff must visibly wear their school-issued photo ID on the upper portion of the body (e.g., chest or collar area) during school hours and at all school-related events to ensure clear identification.
- k. Establish a closed campus policy that prohibits students from leaving campus during lunch.
- l. Establish a cooperative relationship with law enforcement and owners of adjacent properties to the school that allow for joint monitoring of student conduct during school hours.
- m. Encourage neighboring residents and businesses to report all criminal activity and unusual incidents. Establish a protocol within the school to handle calls from the neighborhood.
- n. Consider providing and making use of alarm, intercom, cell phone, building paging, two-way radio, and mounted and hand-held camera monitoring systems on buses and school campuses.
- o. Develop a school bus rider attendance checklist for each bus and use it daily.
- p. Consider the need for employing outside security personnel during school functions.
- q. Patrol school grounds, especially in areas where students tend to congregate such as parking lots, hallways, stairs, bathrooms, cafeterias, and schoolyards.
- r. Allow local law enforcement access to school security cameras for safety and emergency purposes only.

## **Reporting**

Establish a climate that encourages and enables students, teachers, and parents/guardians to report threats and acts of violence. For an example, use a case involving violence that may have been averted with more adequate reporting and assessment.

- a. Within the limits of legal guidelines and statutes, maintain confidentiality.

b. Develop and adequately communicate reporting procedures with input from district school officials and local public safety agencies. Standard procedures should include definitions of pertinent information and how and where information should be distributed.

c. Consider establishing a properly staffed, confidential hotline for reporting issues of harassment, safety, vandalism etc. If answering machines are used, calls need to be retrieved in time to effectively address threats of violence. Aggressively advertise the hotline number to students and parents /guardians in student handbooks, on posters throughout the school, on pencils, student IDs, lockers, etc. Parents and students should also be advised when to use 9-1-1 rather than the hotline.

d. Obtain training to recognize whether reports of threats or acts of violence are false and/or malicious.

### **Student Rules (See Code of Conduct)**

Student rules must be communicated, understood, and consistently enforced. They also must comply with constitutionally guaranteed due process procedures.

a. Establish rules of conduct pertaining to improper student behavior using input from students, parents/guardians, staff, public safety officials, mental health agencies, and legal counsel.

b. Annually review, and if needed, revise rules of student conduct.

c. Ensure that all rules have a purpose that is clearly understood. They should be clear and communicated to all students in both written and verbal formats.

d. Post summaries of rules of student conduct in classrooms and throughout the school.

e. Send rules home to be read by students and parents/guardians. Include an acknowledgment form for students and parents/guardians to sign and return to the school. Hold meetings to communicate rules to parents/guardians, and to the extent practicable, make sure they understand them. Invite parents/guardians to call if they have questions about the rules.

f. Communicate rules in as many languages as needed and possible for each school's population.

g. Apply rules in a consistent manner. Have pre-established consequences for rule violations with the flexibility to respond to individual needs and circumstances.

h. Develop a consistent, timely, and effective means to notify parents/ guardians of rule violations and consequences.

i. Establish clearly defined rules and appropriate consequences for all types of harassment, intimidation, and disrespect. Rules should cover adult and student behavior at all school events. Parents/Guardians and teachers need to act as positive role models for students.

j. Suspend and consider expulsion of students and dismiss or discipline of staff for serious rule violations. Serious Code of Conduct for serious rule violation and consequences.

## Anti-Bullying Programs

Bullying is a range of behaviors, both verbal and physical, that intimidate others and often lead to antisocial and unlawful acts. As defined in the Code of Conduct and Plain Language Summary, the definition of bullying is as follows: *“Bullying is generally the creation of a hostile environment by conduct or by threats, intimidation or abuse, including cyber bullying, as defined by the Dignity for All Students Act”*. This definition will be used to identify harassment in schools so that the bullying behavior can be stopped and will allow us to implement consequences for this type of behavior. Our Dignity Act Coordinators will oversee bullying prevention measures and address issues surrounding bullying in their buildings. They have been named, trained, and approved by our Board of Education and are listed as follows:

Berea Elementary - Katherine Gusmano, Student Assistance Counselor, 845-457-2400, ext. 11647  
 East Coldenham Elementary – Alexandra Riker, Student Assistance Counselor, 845-457-2400, ext. 12006  
 Montgomery Elementary - Sarah Barringer, Student Assistance Counselor, 845-457-2400, ext. 14645  
 Walden Elementary -Lydia Pabon-Genovez, Student Assistance Counselor, 845-457-2400, ext. 15645  
 Middle School - Catherine Heil, Student Assistance Counselor, 845-457-2400, ext. 16241  
 High School - Lacey Benjamin, Student Assistance Counselor, 845-457-2400, ext. 17647

Staff, students, and parents/guardians need to understand that bullying is a pervasive problem that leads to violence. Bullying should neither be thought of as a "kids will be kids" occurrence, nor accepted as a way of life. Schools should implement anti-bullying programs that include the following school-wide, classroom, and individual tactics:

- a. Training on the Dignity for all Students Act (DASA) and anti-bullying strategies will be provided annually.
- b. Based upon the above, establish specific rules prohibiting, and consequences for, bullying activity as part of a comprehensive school code of conduct.
- c. Seek information about the motivations behind specific incidents of bullying.
- d. Establish a reporting mechanism by which incidents of bullying can be reported and recorded immediately after they occur.
- e. Ensure reporting procedures address with whom and under which circumstances information will and will not be shared. Care should be taken to:
  - Protect witnesses and victims from retaliation.
  - Meet applicable standards for confidentiality.
  - Ensure that personnel involved with victims and bullies have the information they need to effectively work with them.
  - Protect the accused from false allegations.
- f. Notify parents/guardians of both victims and perpetrators whenever a report of bullying is formally filed. Establish a policy regarding the circumstances under which parents/ guardians of bullies and/or their victims should be called in for an on-site conference.
- g. Consider creating building level committees to discuss the nature of the problem of bullying and ways to solve it.

- h. Identify community resources that can be utilized to intervene immediately, as well as those that can be used to develop additional intervention and/or prevention programs.
- i. Ensure adequate social service and mental health resources are both available and being utilized.
- j. Provide district wide training for parents.

### **Bullying Resources:**

<http://www.stopbullying.gov/>  
[http://kidshealth.org/teen/your\\_mind/problems/bullies.html](http://kidshealth.org/teen/your_mind/problems/bullies.html)  
<http://www.education.com/topic/school-bullying-teasing/>  
<http://pbskids.org/itsmylife/friends/bullies/>  
<http://facs.pppst.com/bullying.html>  
<http://www.pacerkidsagainstbullying.org/>  
[http://www.educationworld.com/a\\_special/bully.shtml](http://www.educationworld.com/a_special/bully.shtml)  
<http://www.p12.nysed.gov/dignityact/>

### **Anti-Gang Programs**

Gang membership is destructive to a healthy school environment. Members of gangs are more likely than other students to carry weapons and engage in acts of violence.

- a. Establish partnerships with law enforcement in order to exchange information and educate teachers and staff about the presence of gangs and their activities.
- b. Become aware of gang-related clothing, paraphernalia, and behavior. Establish a school dress code that would exclude outward manifestations of gang membership.
- c. Inform parents/guardians if their children are suspected of involvement in gangs and give them relevant information, counseling, and access to available pertinent resources.

### **Suicide Prevention**

Suicide is a far more common form of violence involving students than school homicide. In some cases, perpetrators of school shootings felt their actions would lead to their being killed by police, which also could be considered a form of suicide. It is hoped that effective suicide prevention will decrease the occurrence of both self-inflicted suicide and violence by students who believe their acts will result in their being killed by others.

- a. Develop a plan that specifies how to identify students at risk, how to handle threats, and what actions to take in the event of a suicide.
- b. Ensure that students have, and are aware of, easy ways to get help, such as access to suicide hotlines, counselors, and written/visual materials.

c. Educate students, parents/guardians, teachers, and other school personnel on how to identify and get help for troubled students before they become victims of suicide. Include how to get immediate help to prevent or respond to suicide attempts.

### **Programs to Reduce Isolation and Alienation and to Promote Respect**

School administrators and teachers should identify and implement programs that increase positive self-respect and respect for others. In general, these programs should:

- a. Establish standards for how people should treat each other.
- b. Promote and ensure that classroom standards are consistent with school and district policies.
- c. Ensure classroom standards are reviewed in class and that a copy of them is sent to the parents/guardians.
- d. Coordinate a cooperative effort to create and disseminate statements of values that all affiliates of the school will be expected to follow. All members should be able to state their school's values.
- e. Establish better lines of communication with students who may feel alienated or isolated and/or have low self-esteem.
- f. Increase the number and diversity of positive extracurricular activities available to students.
- g. Help students become more successful in achieving desirable short- and long-term goals and increase the likelihood that their progress is recognized and rewarded.
- h. Teach students how to resist others' efforts to intimidate or isolate them.
- i. Initiate a community service requirement for middle and high school graduation.
- j. Model and reinforce values such as learning, respect, character, and cooperation.
- k. Encourage students to work together through the use of cooperative learning techniques such as team projects.
- l. Encourage the contemplation of core values (respect, responsibility, trust, sharing, etc.) through the use of age- and curriculum-appropriate writing assignments and class discussions.
- m. Encourage students to become actively involved in the school community.
- n. Recognize and reward students who exhibit positive and responsible behavior.
- o. Offer troubled and withdrawn students, including victims, help outside of class with schoolwork and personal problems.

p. Develop a climate that encourages open communication between students and adults. It should maximize the options by which students can transmit their concerns about violence to school personnel, foster an environment of trust, and be sensitive to their fears of retaliation.

## Plan Review and Public Comment

This plan will be reviewed periodically during the year and will be maintained by the District-wide School Safety Team with technical assistance from the Orange Ulster BOCES Risk Management Department. The required annual review will be completed each year after its adoption by the Board of Education. Pursuant to Commissioner's Regulation 155.17 (e) (3), this plan will be made available for public comment 30 days prior to its adoption. The school board may adopt the district-wide and building-level plans only after at least one public hearing that provides for the participation of school personnel, parents, students and any other interested parties. The plan must be formally adopted by the Board of Education.

While linked to the District-wide School Safety Plan, Building-level Emergency Response Plans shall be confidential and shall not be subject to disclosure under Article 6 of the Public Officers Law or any other provision of law, in accordance with Education Law Section 2801-a.

Full copies of the District-wide School Safety Plan and any amendments will be submitted to the New York State Education Department within 30 days of adoption. Building-level Emergency Response Plans will be supplied to both local and State Police within 30 days of adoption.

## SECTION II: RISK REDUCTION

Risk Reduction/Prevention and Intervention are activities that are taken prior to an emergency or disaster to eliminate the possibility of the occurrence, or reduce the impact of such an emergency if it does occur.

### Prevention/Intervention Strategies - 2025-2026

#### PROGRAM INITIATIVES

Listed below are programs and activities the district may utilize for improving communication among students and between students and staff and reporting of potentially violent incidents, such as the establishment of:

#### VIOLENCE PREVENTION PROGRAMS

Name of Program	Elementary Schools Grades K-5	Middle School Grades 6- 8	High School Grades 9- 12
School Resource Officer	Y	Y	Y
Director of Security and Emergency Preparedness	Y	Y	Y

Social Emotional Support Specialist	Y	Y	Y
School Greeters	Y	Y	Y
School Monitors		Y	Y
Anti-Bullying - Building Level Teams	Y	Y	Y
Peer Mediation	Y	Y	Y
Student Assistance Counselors- Group & Individual Counseling	Y	Y	Y
School Psychologists- Group & Individual Counseling	Y	Y	Y
Character Education Programs	Y	Y	Y
Drug / Alcohol Programs	Y	Y	Y
Gradus Honoris / National Junior Honor Society		Y	Y
Red Ribbon Week Activities	Y	Y	Y
Celebration of Capabilities	Y	Y	Y
Co-Curricular Activities		Y	Y
Extracurricular Activities/ Clubs	Y	Y	Y
Awards: Recognition for Academic Achievement, Character & Citizenship	Y	Y	Y
Equity & Equality Programs	Y	Y	Y

### TRAINING, DRILLS AND EXERCISES

- All Valley Central School District personnel (faculty, custodial staff, office staff and administrators) will receive an orientation to the district's multi-hazards emergency plan on an annual basis. The orientation will focus on the district policies and procedures for fire evacuations and emergency response codes procedures, emergency communications and the district's incident command system. (Substitute Teachers will receive training and a fact sheet on the district's policies and procedures upon initial assignment).
  - ❖ Each emergency response code procedure will be practiced on a semi-annual basis as part of a regularly scheduled staff meeting to test the district's communication system.
  - ❖ Building evacuation procedures will be practiced a minimum of 8 times per school year. Lock down drills will be held 4 times a year. 8 of the required drills will be completed in the first half of the year with the completion day of December 31.
  - ❖ The district will conduct one early go-home drill to test its alerting and warning procedures, communications procedures, resources, staff procedures, transportation procedures, public information procedures, and evacuation procedures on an annual basis.
  - ❖ The emergency plan for sheltering in the event of severe weather threat such as a tornado or thunderstorm will be practiced on an annual basis to test alerting and warning procedures.

- Communications procedures, staff procedures and the movement of students to designated areas within the school building.
- ❖ The district will conduct four drills and/or exercises with local law enforcement agencies and other emergency response agencies to practice and review its emergency procedures for a “violent incident” on an annual basis.
- Following a program orientation, drill and/or exercise, participants will forward their observations to their “Building Safety Committee” representative for further review and/or discussion. If immediate action is needed, the Building’s Principal will be notified in order to take corrective action. The “Building Safety Committee” will review after action reports and forward their recommendations and suggestions to the “District Wide Safety Committee” as appropriate.
  - Hall monitors are hired to ensure that students are following the school rules. These positions are posted. Interested candidates will provide three letters of reference, an application, resume and cover letter. The administrator will screen and interview the candidates that they feel have experience and who would do a good job. A second interview with the Assistant Superintendent will be held. Once selected as the candidate, three reference calls are made. The candidate is sent to be fingerprinted and is provided with required training including DASA, and other mandated safety materials.
    - ❖ Annual training of hall monitors and other school safety personnel acting in a school security capacity will be provided, including training to de-escalate potentially violent situations.
    - ❖ Training of student assistance counselors, school psychologists, school nurses and other pupil personnel and staff in Basic Critical Incident Response Strategies will take place across the district.
    - ❖ Annual training on Risk Reduction/Prevention and Intervention will be incorporated into annual staff development plans.

#### IMPLEMENTATION OF SCHOOL SECURITY

- All exterior school doors remain locked during school hours to ensure the safety of students and staff. Staff members access the building using a secure swipe card system. Visitors must press the door buzzer and present a valid photo ID. They are required to state the purpose of their visit. Once vetted visitors receive a temporary ID badge, which must be worn at all times and returned upon departure. All visitors must be escorted to and from their destination.

#### Vital Educational Agency Information

- Each school’s specific safety plan provides the school population, number of staff, transportation needs, and the business and home telephone numbers of key officials of each such educational agency. Local law enforcement, school administrators and BOCES have access to this information.

#### Hazard Identification

Faculty and/or staff will conduct a daily inspection of their classrooms, specialty rooms, playground, athletic fields and/or office area to identify, evaluate and if needed to control any potential hazards associated within their work area. All concerns should forward to a member of the facility's safety committee for further review. If immediate action is needed, the Building's Principal should be contacted directly.

Valley Central will continue to work with outside emergency response agencies and Orange-Ulster BOCES Risk Management Department to evaluate potential hazards associated in transporting and/or educating the children within our district. See "Building Level Response Plans" for a list of Specific hazards associated with each building.

### **Notification and Activation (Internal and External Communications)**

In the event of a violent incident, a safety code is announced to the students and staff and the procedures for that code are followed. Each building has a designated person who will contact the Superintendent's office and local law enforcement. This person is identified in their building safety plan.

### **Rapid Response Crisis Kit**

Each school building will organize a Rapid Response Crisis Kit containing:

- Master Key(s) - lock boxes with additional keys are located at the main entrance of each building. 911 has the code to the boxes
- Blank name tags or identification vests
- Classroom telephone directory
- Building floor plans (supplied by BOCES Risk Management)
- Utility Shut-off master diagram (supplied by BOCES Risk Management)
- Notebooks, pens, markers
- Complete student roster
- Bell and Bus schedules
- Current yearbook or class photos
- Daily attendance list
- Each principal should have a Rapid Response Crisis Kit in the main office & in a secure room or location on the other side of the building.
- Others items, as appropriate
- The incident may specify that in the event of an emergency, or impending emergency, the district will notify all principals/designees of facilities within the district to take the appropriate action.

## **SECTION III: RESPONSE**

### **Notification and Activation (Internal and External Communications)**

- Upon being notified of an emergency, the Building Principal or designee will contact law enforcement or emergency personnel in accordance with stated response protocol and request the closest response agency to ensure that the response to the incident is as rapid as possible.
- In the event of an emergency the Building Principal or Designee will notify all building occupants to take the appropriate protective action. Follow established procedures as listed in the Building-Level Emergency Management Operations Plan.
- The following systems may be utilized as forms of communication:

Telephone	Intercom/PA
Fax/Email	Local Media
District Radio System	NOAA Weather Radio
Others, as appropriate	Parent Square
Alert button on every District phone	Lockdown Button within buildings

The system may specify that in the event of an emergency, or impending emergency, the district will notify all principals/designees of facilities within the district to take the appropriate action.

- Should parental and/or media notification be required, the school district will contact appropriate parents, guardians or persons in parental relation to the students/staff via media release, telephone contact, or other appropriate means in the event of a violent incident or early dismissal following the protocol listed in the Building Level Emergency Management Operations Plan.

### **Notification for contacting parents/guardians or other persons in a parental relationship in the event of an implied or direct threat of Violence (EdLaw 2801-a: School Safety Plans)**

- In the event of a threat of violence and school safety, student's families will be notified via Parent Square. Information will be posted on our web page.
- If a threat to a specific student is made, that parent will be contacted by school staff.
- When a student makes a threat of suicide, parents and/or mobile mental health is notified by school staff immediately.

### **CHAIN OF COMMAND**

#### **Superintendent or Designee will contact:**

1. **Director of Security and Emergency Preparedness, Social Emotional Support Specialist, Board of Education and the Coordinator of Health and Safety**

#### **Coordinator of Health and Safety will contact:**

1. **All School District Administrators**

## DISTRICT EMERGENCY TELEPHONE NUMBERS

Confidential

All District Administrators have the District Emergency Telephone Numbers

### ***ALL EMERGENCIES FOR FIRE, POLICE & AMBULANCE DIAL 911***

#### **ASSISTANCE FROM LOCAL GOVERNMENTAL OFFICIALS**

#### **COORDINATION WITH LOCAL AND COUNTY AGENCIES**

The School District has developed an emergency management plan along with specific procedures to follow should an emergency occur. A copy of this plan is located in each of the building offices.

<b>Agency</b>	<b>Contact</b>	<b>Phone</b>
Town of Montgomery Police	Dispatcher	845-457-9211
New York State Police	Dispatcher	845-778-7111
Walden Police	Dispatcher	845-778-5595
Maybrook Police	Dispatcher	845-427-2226
Village of Montgomery Police	Dispatcher	845-457-3666
Town of Montgomery Fire Department	Chief	845-457-3205
Walden Fire Department	Chief	845-778-7171
Maybrook Fire Department	Chief	845-457-2220
Orange/Ulster BOCES	District Superintendent	845-291-0100 ext: 10110
Risk Management	Risk Manager	845-615-3600

Other:

Poison Control	1-800-222-1222
Gas Leak	1-800-533-5325
FBI - Hudson Valley Field Office	845-220-4200
FBI – Regional Office (White Plains)	914-989-6000
Orange & Rockland Utilities	877-434-4100
Life Threatening Emergencies	911

Should an actual emergency occur the District Emergency Officer or Incident Commander will contact the appropriate agency with the specific nature of the emergency and request assistance.

### **Situational Responses Multi-Hazard Response**

The district's multi-hazard response plans for taking actions in the following emergencies are included in the Building Level Emergency Management Operations. They are as follows:

#### **Criminal Offenses:**

- Bomb Threat
- Written Threats
- Telephone/Verbal Threats
- Suspicious Packages
- Outside Facility
- Evacuation for Bomb Threat
- Shelter in Place for Bomb Threat
- Bomb Threat Response Form
- Civil Disturbance/Prison Break
- Hostage Taking/Kidnapping
- Intrusion
- Suspected Student with a Weapon on Campus
- School Shooting
- Suicide Threat

#### **Natural Hazards:**

- Severe Thunderstorm/Tornado

- Winter Storm/Ice Storm
- Hurricane/Tropical Storm
- Flood
- Reservoir/Canal/Dam Failure
- Earthquake

### **Technological Hazards:**

- Mail Handling Protocol
- Anthrax/Biological Threat On-site
- Biological Threat Off-Site
- Air Pollution
- Aircraft Crash
- Gas Leak
- Hazardous Material Incident-On Site
- Hazardous Material Incident-Off Site
- Radiological Incident
- Water Emergency

### **Explosion and Fire:**

- Explosion/Fire Emergency

### **System Failures:**

- Building Structure Failure
- Cyber Failure/Computer Loss
- Electrical System Failure
- Energy Supply Loss-Utility Restrictions
- Heating System Failure
- Sewage System Failure
- Transportation Fleet Loss

### **Medical Emergencies:**

- School Bus Accident
- Epidemic/Human Disease

## **RESPONSE TO ACTS OF VIOLENCE/IMPLIED OR DIRECT THREATS**

The Valley Central School District recognizes that appropriate response to acts of violence by students, teachers, other school personnel and visitors varies greatly depending upon the actual threat or act as well as the magnitude of such an emergency. The building level plan and Code of Conduct detail the appropriate responses to such emergencies utilizing the following procedures:

- Use of staff trained in de-escalation or other strategies to diffuse the situation
- Inform building principal of implied or direct threat
- Determine level of threat with District Superintendent / Designee
- Contact appropriate law enforcement agency if necessary
- Monitor situation, adjust response as appropriate, include the possible use of the Emergency Response Team

## **Responses to Acts of Violence**

The Valley Central School District recognizes that appropriate response to acts of violence by students, teachers, other school personnel and visitors varies greatly depending upon the actual threat or act as well as the magnitude of such an emergency. The Building-Level Emergency Management Operations Plan and Code of Conduct details the appropriate response to such emergencies utilizing the following procedure:

- The threat level will be determined
- If the situation warrants, the immediate area will be isolated and evacuated.
- Administration will be notified

If necessary, lockdown procedures will be initiated and appropriate law enforcement officials will be notified. The situation will be monitored and the appropriate response will be adjusted accordingly. If necessary, early dismissal, sheltering or evacuation procedures may be initiated.

## **Imminent Warning Signs for the Potential of Violent Behavior**

- Talks about violence and has a specific plan.
- Talks about violence and/or expresses violence in writings and drawings.
- Severe expressions of rage often for minor reasons (i.e., banging head against the wall, unstoppable screaming).
- Severe destruction of property.
- Tortures animals.
- Frequently fights with peers and/or family members.
- Access to family or own firearms and capable of competent use.
- History of suicidal or other self-destructive behavior.

## **Early Warning Signs for the Potential of Violent Behavior**

- Social withdrawal/lacks commitment or connection to a group or persons
- Excessive feelings of isolation and being alone.
- Excessive feelings of rejection
- Often the victim of aggression, bullying, or other violent acts.
- Feelings of being picked on/persecuted.
- Low school interest/poor academic performance.
- Patterns of impulsive, chronic hitting, intimidation, and/or bullying behavior.
- Regularly involved in behavioral/discipline problems.
- Behavioral difficulties at an early age - the earlier the problems, the higher the likelihood of serious problems in adolescence.

- Past history of violent and aggressive behaviors.

### **After the Crisis**

- Assess the degree of support needed.
- Notify BOCES in order to activate the County Crisis Plan (if necessary).
- Designate a person to handle crowd control.
- Gather staff together before dismissal for the day in order to provide an update.
- Plan for deployment of support staff for the next day.
- Meet with Central Office (& Board members, if appropriate) to review incident and plan for the next day.
- Assign a district spokesperson to deal with the media.
- Assess the needs of the community. e.g. community meetings to disseminate Information, contacting PTA's/PTO's to provide food and babysitting services for affected families.
- Provide an early morning debriefing meeting for the next day for all the support service providers and appropriate internal staff.
- Assign counselors to buildings.
- Assign staff members to visit hospitals; e.g. nurses.
- Provide a press release (if appropriate).
- Monitor needs as the day progresses and modify accordingly (e.g. If a student is critical and should die during the school day).
- Assess the need to bring in additional experts Determine need for ecumenical services.
- Determine need to designate individuals to attend funerals
- Continually appraise key people of the status of the situation as it changes.
- Hold an end of day session with counselors and staff to assess needs for the the next day.
- Repeat this process of holding meetings in the morning and at the end of the day.
- Hold meetings until it is determined that the crisis stage is over. Anticipate long-term effects on children, staff and community. The initial crises may give you an inaccurate read of the needs of your district since people are in shock.

### **Procedures for Obtaining Advice and Assistance from Local Gov't Officials**

The district will utilize procedures outlined in the Building Level Emergency Response Plans for obtaining advice and assistance from Local government officials including the county or city officials responsible for implementation of Article 2-B of the Executive law. The types of procedures for obtaining advice and assistance from local governments during countywide emergencies could include the following:

Superintendent/Designee in an emergency will contact emergency management coordinator and/or the highest-ranking local government official for obtaining advice and assistance.

## **District Resources Available for Use in an Emergency**

The District has committed to full inventory of its resources to be available for use during an emergency. These resources will be utilized in line with the Building level emergency management operations plan as deemed appropriate by the Incident Commander. Specific resources are identified in the Building Level Plans.

## **Procedures to Coordinate the Use of School District Resources and Manpower during Emergencies**

Each building level plan provides a description of the district's procedures to coordinate the use of resources and manpower during emergencies. These sections include the identification of the officials authorized to make decisions and the staff members assigned to provide assistance during emergencies.

## **Protective Action Options**

Depending on the emergency, response actions may include:

- a. School cancellation
- b. Early dismissal
- c. Evacuation (before, during and after school hours, including security during evacuation and evacuation routes)
- d. Sheltering sites (internal and external)

## **SECTION IV: RECOVERY**

### **District Support for Buildings**

After a critical incident has occurred, the District is committed to a thorough and comprehensive recovery for students, staff and families. To achieve this goal, the Post Incident Response Team should consider the following steps:

1. Consult with administrators and other to:
  - Determine advisability of team involvement
  - Determine nature of team involvement
  - If team is needed, acquire release from currently assigned responsibility
  - Inform Superintendent of nature of incident
2. Acquire facts and circumstances as to the nature of the trauma or loss.
3. Determine those groups and/or individuals most affected by the trauma/loss

4. Assist building administrators in the following:
  - Arrange for staff meeting
  - Formulate staff meeting agenda
  - Dissemination of information to staff, parents, students, media, etc.
5. Assignment of team members and other staff to individual tasks.
6. Provide Crisis Team Services
  - Conduct faculty meeting with all building staff
  - Provide educational information to teachers to be used in classes
  - Assess needs and arrange for follow-up meetings with individuals and small groups.
  - End of day staff meeting to update staff and administrator and plan for next day
  - Crisis Team debriefing at the end of the day
  - Provide substitutes and aides as back-up staff for teachers
  - Offer a separate room for parent contact, if necessary.
  - Crisis workers in offices to aid office staff to deal with parents' telephone calls and questions.
7. Assist in creating a committee that can coordinate and plan for memorial contributions, expressions of sympathy, scholarship funds, etc, should be composed of staff students and parents.
8. Follow up plans for Crisis Team involvement
  - Staff meeting
  - Alert staff to individual staff questions and needs
  - Respond to individual staff questions and needs
  - Provide feedback to teachers regarding individual student needs: referral of literature
  - Refer students and others to appropriate building personnel or other helping resources in the community,
  - Arrange for a meeting with the Crisis Response Team to determine effectiveness of the Crisis Response Plan in addressing the needs in this particular incident.

## **Disaster Mental Health Services**

The District will work closely with local mental health services to:

- Provide services to children and families that are appropriate for the type emergency/disaster
- Assess condition and immediate needs of children and family including food, shelter, clothing, medical treatment
  - Follow-up on referrals
  - Decrease the internal and external stressors which affect the children and family
- Provide opportunities for children and families to verbalize their feelings and provide emotional support to aid recovery
- Guide the family through the emergency/disaster and provide tools and techniques for the family to help themselves to recover

## PLANNING FOR THE PSYCHOLOGICAL AFTERMATH OF SCHOOL TRAGEDY

Thomas T. Frantz  
Associate Professor of Counseling and Educational Psychology  
State University of New York at Buffalo

Our purpose is to discuss a basic postvention plan that can be adopted for use in any school following a death or tragedy. The plan is designed to go into effect the first school day after the trauma has occurred.

To initiate thinking about postvention, consider the following specific questions that will usually arise:

1. How and when should students and faculty be informed of the pertinent details surrounding it?
2. How, when, and where should students be allowed to express their reactions?
3. What should be done for victims' close friends?
4. What should be done for "high risk" students?
5. Should the school hold a special assembly or memorial service?
6. Should there be a symbolic expression of grief, such as lowering the flag to half-mast?
7. Should the school close for the funeral?
8. Who should go to the funeral?
9. What kinds of commemorative activities or symbols—plaques, memorial funds, etc.—are appropriate?
10. Should the victims' parents be contacted and what help can be offered to them?
11. What should be done about the concerns of other parents?
12. How should the school deal with the media?
13. Should the school turn to outside consultation for help? To whom?
14. What reactions from students should be expected?
15. Should a regular school schedule be followed the day after?
16. How long should the school be concerned about student reactions?
17. How much grieving or "acting out" should be allowed?
18. Should students be involved in planning the school's response?
19. Who should organize and coordinate the school's response?
20. What about siblings or affected students in other schools?
21. What should teachers say to students in their classes?

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## PRINCIPLES OF POSTVENTION

Before presenting a plan to respond to the issues raised by these questions, interrelated principles of postvention are outlined. The postvention plan is on the principles of reducing fear, facilitating grieving, and promoting education.

### REDUCE FEAR

Fear is the most overpowering and debilitating human emotion. Fear can cause us to flee in panic, act irrationally, become immobilized, say things we regret, and act in other ways that later are embarrassing to us. To deal with fear, we first recognize that fear breeds in the unknown. People are most afraid of what they don't understand, of mysterious, dark, different, unknown situations. The neighbors' German Shepherd running at you, riding the subway, or driving to Toronto may each be scary the first time, but once you get to know the dog, have taken the subway a few times, or made the trip to Toronto often, you are much less afraid. Experience reduces the unknown and thereby reduces fear. An earthquake, especially one resulting in death, produces so many unanswered questions, leaves so much unknown, and thus creates fear. What made it happen? Will it happen again? Is the school really safe? Am I safe at home?

Will the next one get me? Why didn't God do something! Is there any place that's really safe?

As a result of so many unanswerable questions, the atmosphere in a school following an earthquake may be tinged with fear. Students and staff may feel unsure of themselves, confused, afraid of what else might happen, and not know how to behave or what to say.

Most of us grow up not thinking much about earthquakes. They only happen to other people, people we heard of or read about. It's hard to imagine that a major earthquake, especially one that kills people, would ever happen to our friends, family, or community, and when it does, many people feel insecure and afraid. Something that wasn't supposed to be part of the plan, something that wasn't supposed to happen has happened, and if that can happen, then anything can happen.

An earthquake can pull the rug out from under basic beliefs about how the world is and leave us feeling unsure, unsafe, and wondering what we can count on with certainty. It's in this sense that an atmosphere of fear may prevail in a school the days following an earthquake. Of course, those friends and staff closest to those who may have died will be most affected; but the tragedy will affect everyone in the school to some extent.

It is very difficult for any constructive activity to take place when people are afraid. It's hard to concentrate, hard to take tests, write essays, or listen to lectures. It's even hard to feel sadness, remorse, or other normal grief feelings. Hence the reduction of fear is the first major goal for the school following a tragedy. We can't expect to eliminate it, but we can reduce it by reducing the unknowns.

While exercising sensitivity, we reduce fear by providing students and staff factual information about what happened, the deaths, and the grieving process to be expected in the days ahead by organizing the school day with as few changes as possible and by providing an open, accepting atmosphere allowing the "secret" fears, questions, and feelings of students and staff to come out.

## FACILITATE GRIEVING

Grief is the normal, healthy, appropriate response to death or loss. Anyone who knew those that were killed is going to experience grief, from the parents whose bereavement will normally last 2 to 3 years to tangential acquaintances whose grief will be measured in days. Students and staff don't get a choice of whether to feel grief, but they do get to choose how they'll respond to it.

People who deny their grief, pretend it's not a big deal, or insist they're not going to let it bother them, or try to cover it up with bravado, laughter, or stoicism usually have a much harder time resolving their grief than do people who are able to grieve more expressively.

Each person grieves in his or her own way, a way that has been learned by experience with loss over the years. A student or staff member's way of grieving or coping with loss can be predicted (based on past experience with loss) and is not likely to change in the midst of a crisis like the aftermath of an earthquake.

Accordingly, a wide range of grieving behavior needs to be tolerated, e.g., screaming in anguish, pounding the lockers in anger, sobbing in the hallway, stunned silence, inability to answer even simple questions, seeming totally unaffected as if nothing happened, or saying as one boy did upon being told of his friend's death, "Good, now I don't have to pay him the ten bucks I owe him." (This last remark was made in shock and he spent the next month being attacked for it and apologizing over and over for it.)

The initial response of most people to learning that someone they know has died is shock. Shock is usually a numbness, feeling like in a fog or spacey during which the full impact of what's happened may not have sunk in. People in shock usually don't talk a lot and mostly need friends to be patient and not assume that they're unaffected just because they're not emotional.

Other reactions to be expected for some people following death are anxiety over what else might happen; anger at the person that died (e.g., for not heeding warnings); blame at someone for not doing something to save her; and perhaps guilt for surviving when he didn't. Naturally sadness and feeling the loss will usually replace shock, anxiety and anger and remain as the major result of the death for a long time.

While each person's way of grieving needs to be accepted, people who can get their grief out by talking, crying, expressing anger or guilt, writing, reading, exercise, painting, music, etc. are usually better able to resolve their grief and in less time than those who can't or are not allowed to grieve. Thus, the school's postvention program needs to allow and encourage the natural expression of grief, especially immediately after the tragedy, but also, for some students, in the weeks and months ahead.

In this vein, one of the most predictable and significant consequences of a tragedy is that it will unlock and trigger unresolved grief in many students and staff. That is, there will be sadness in the school not only because a student has died, but because grief over people's previous losses will be activated. For

example, the girl whose father drowned last year, the teacher whose miscarriage at 6 months no one would talk about, the boy whose mother has breast cancer, the custodian whose dad is deteriorating with Alzheimer's disease at a nursing home, the freshman whose parents are fighting out a bitter divorce all will be feeling both the effects of the tragedy and, now even more intensely, the pain of their own life.

The school's postvention program must take into consideration both grief over previously unresolved losses and give high priority to facilitating the grieving process of students and staff.

#### PROMOTE EDUCATION

The purpose of a school is to educate its students and (if Anna who says in The King and I, "by our students we'll be taught" is right) staff. Since we learn more from problems, crisis, and tragedies than on average days, an earthquake will be an intense time of learning—not reading and arithmetic, but of things perhaps more important.

The postvention program must be developed to promote constructive and useful learning in the aftermath of tragedy. Students and staff can be helped to learn how they react in a crisis, what people do that help most, how to help other people, what they really believe about death, that people can cry and still be strong, and, measured against the criterion of death, what's really important in life.

Obviously no one wants a student to die; however, given that the death has happened, inevitably learning is going to take place. The only question is, is the school going to allow it to occur haphazardly or will a postvention program be developed to promote constructive grieving, ways of helping others, and understanding of death and people in crisis.

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#### POSTVENTION PLAN

What follows is intended to be a practical step-by-step outline of the tasks to be accomplished in planning a school's response to tragedy. The planning process should begin, of course, long before the event occurs. It may be initiated by anyone recognizing the need for a postvention plan; however, the cooperation, support, and, hopefully, leadership of key school personnel must be obtained before meaningful planning can take place. That is, the principal, superintendent, and guidance staff clearly needs to be involved and preferably also key teachers, coaches, school psychologists and social workers, nurses, and administrative assistants. Some involvement of an outside expert or consultant may be helpful at varying stages of the planning process. At times in the process it is extremely important to consider the roles that custodians, secretaries, cafeteria workers, substitute teachers, bus drivers and student leaders may play in the planning and/or implementation of the postvention program.

Each school needs to plan how it will carry out the 19 tasks outlined below. A report containing plans for how each task will be accomplished constitutes the postvention plan and should be available to all school personnel. It should be periodically reviewed, especially by the administrative and guidance staff,

to update it (key resource people and phone numbers may change) and to keep copies of it at home as that's where the initial call about the tragedy may come from.

To provide a context for the specific aspects of the postvention plan, we'll assume that the school day after the earthquake would begin with an emergency staff meeting before school followed by each faculty member facilitating a short discussion of what has happened in the homeroom or first period class. Discussion of feelings about what's happened should be allowed to take as much class time as seems appropriate. A regular school schedule should be followed, but with great flexibility in allowing students to talk in the hallways, go to various individual and group counseling rooms provided, sit quietly in pairs on the stairway, be excused from tests and homework, etc. The structure of a regular school day provides some security and routine in a suddenly topsy-turvy world while the wide latitude given students allows grief to be expressed.

A variety of school and community personnel will be available to help students during the day. After school a second general staff meeting is held to review the day and prepare for tomorrow.

1. Selection of the Crisis Response Team. A crisis response team of perhaps three to five members with authority to make decisions in the time of crisis needs to be chosen. The team is responsible for both planning and implementation of postvention. Among its members should be staff who have some respect in the school, are sensitive to student and faculty needs, are committed to personal involvement in a crisis response, are able to be decisive, and who are relatively calm under fire. The crisis response team would conduct planning for the remaining tasks and, along with the building principal if he or she is not on the team, be responsible for carrying out the school's response to a suicidal death on the days succeeding it.
2. Identification of Media Liaison Person. One person within the school district should be designated to handle all contact with newspaper, television, radio, and magazine reporters and shield school personnel from media intrusion. Media personnel should not be allowed in school. All school students and staff should be firmly instructed to refer any phone or personal contact, whether in school or at home, to the media liaison person whose phone number should be readily available and who should receive instructions on what information to release from the crisis response team. A press release should be prepared to serve as a basis for talking with the media. In general, the less publicity death receives the better.
3. Identification of Family Liaison Person. The crisis response team should designate a representative of the school to initiate immediate and appropriate contact with the family of the dead student, to express the empathy and concern of the school, to answer parents' questions regarding school plans; to ascertain family wishes and plans regarding funeral, wake and memorials; to discreetly obtain the information about the death and the circumstances surrounding it; and to offer to help the family with support, contact with community resources, or perhaps tangible help like driving, food, babysitting, or talking with siblings. The family liaison person should be educated about helpful and unhelpful responses to grieving people, be sensitive to family privacy, and use intuition about maintaining some contact with the family during the weeks ahead. The crisis response team may choose one family liaison person for all situations or a different one may be designated for each crisis based on the person's relationship to the deceased student or his/her family.
4. Organization of Staff/Telephone Network. A telephone network or tree should be developed wherein each school staff member is called as soon as possible after the incident has occurred, given the brief basic facts, and notified of the time and place of the emergency staff meeting to be held usually before the next school day. Care should be taken to reach not only faculty, but all auxiliary and related personnel as well. Furthermore, selected staff members in schools throughout the district should be notified, particularly in schools attended by siblings or schools from which support staff may be borrowed to help during the crisis.

## COUNTY-WIDE RESPONSE PLAN TO SUDDEN CHILD/ADOLESCENT DEATH

### I. INTRODUCTION

The tragic phenomenon of sudden child/adolescent death has, in recent years, represented a significant social problem for many school communities throughout the county. Unfortunately, several regional and county area school districts have also experienced child/adolescent suicides and deaths from other causes. Recently, educational leaders throughout the Orange-Ulster BOCES area have recognized the need for an organized approach on a county-wide basis to deal with this potential crisis situation. In deference to such concern, the Orange-Ulster BOCES has organized an alliance of local educational and public mental health professionals for the purpose of developing a County-wide Response Plan to Sudden Child/Adolescent Death. The result of this "Response Plan" is to offer local school districts the opportunity to receive supplemental support personnel for one or two days and to provide procedural guidelines should the an unfortunate case of sudden child/adolescent death occurs.

The County-wide Response Plan to Sudden Child/Adolescent Death contains the following two provisions:

A. The "Response Plan" establishes a County-wide Crisis Team consisting of professionals from local school districts and from the Orange County Department of Mental Health. These dedicated individuals are offering their experience and expertise with the support of their respective superintendents of schools on a request basis to local school districts during a time of crisis. School districts without sufficient experience in dealing with the delicate issue of child/adolescent death, or in need of additional staffing, required to implement a response plan, may contact the Orange-Ulster BOCES to request expertise and assistance. Support may be in the form of consultant services or direct intervention as determined by a requesting district.

B. The "Response Plan" presents specific Preparatory and Procedural Response guidelines which school districts may follow in the constructive treatment of a sudden death crisis within their districts.

### II. SPECIFIC RESPONSE TO SUDDEN CHILD/ADOLESCENT DEATH

#### A. Preparatory (before sudden/adolescent death)

1. School districts designate which in-district clinical support staff (psychologist, social workers, guidance counselors, etc.) will be assigned, as Crisis Team Members, to each building in the district should a crisis occur.
2. School Principals designate the potential locations of crisis centers.
3. School districts should project the extent of their need for support from the County-wide crisis team prior to a crisis situation.
4. School districts designate a primary spokesperson to deal with the media.
5. School principals designate, in advance, which building staff member will serve as an assistant organizer/decision maker during the time of crisis.

B. Procedural (after sudden child/adolescent death)

### **Alert Day**

1. Student found dead of an apparent suicide. This usually occurs after school hours or on weekends.
2. District representative (school principal, central office administrator, psychologist) contacts Crisis Team members (in-district) as soon as possible.
3. District representatives contact the District Superintendent or Assistant Superintendent, Superintendent of Orange-Ulster BOCES, requesting assistance from the County WIDE Crisis Team.
4. Local superintendent contacts and confirms the district professional who is the designated primary spokesperson to deal with the media.
5. Building principal contacts and confirms as assistant organizer/decision maker to facilitate response plans in the school building which has been affected.
6. Building principal or crisis team member in a building where sudden death has occurred contacts crisis team members in other district schools. This is important to provide support for siblings, relatives and close friends in other schools.
7. Building principal designates an individual who will have primary responsibility for answering parent questions.
8. Building principal activates a telephone chain to announce a faculty meeting prior to the opening of school on the next day.

### **Day One (In School)**

1. Early morning faculty meeting is held with several purposes:
  - a. Principal reviews the known facts of the case, in order to establish a common reference base and to dispel rumors.
  - b. Principal introduces crisis team members, reviews special schedules for the day and communicates the location of the "crisis centers."
  - c. Crisis team members describe the feelings which students may be experiencing and suggest how the teachers might handle them. Time is allowed for questions and dealing with the feelings of the staff. Some staff may be particularly upset and require additional support.
  - d. Guidelines are provided for helping any students who are upset and for having them escorted to one of the "crisis centers" set up in the building (guidance office, etc.). Faculty should identify close friends of the deceased and other high need students for potential follow-up.
  - e. Teachers are encouraged to allow students in their classes free expression of grief. The guiding principle is to return to normal routine as soon as possible within each class and within the school. School-wide assemblies or memorial activities are discouraged. Students (individually) should be allowed time needed to express grief. Not all students will recover at the same rate, even those who have no close relationship to the individual.
  - f. The teachers are asked to dispel rumors wherever possible, and to discourage any "glorification" of the event. For example, if a student is heard to say, "I wouldn't have the guts to kill myself," the teacher can respond, "We all care for the individual and his/her family, but suicide is not really a brave act! It is far more courageous to go on living and to face your problems each day as you and I do."

- g. The principal and/or guidance counselors and clinical staff may meet with each grade, either by individual homerooms or by total grade (if possible) in order to:
- Review the known facts and to dispel rumors.
  - De-mythologize the act. (This is not heroism or a media event. It is a real concern for the family).
  - Inform students and staff of the location and role of the crisis center.
  - Encourage students to express their reactions in whatever way is appropriate for them. (All responses are acceptable, from severe upset to no reaction whatsoever).
  - Discuss possible feelings of guilt or feelings of responsibility.
  - Discuss possible fears for their own safety and that of their siblings and peers.
  - Ask students to be supportive of one another and to escort any friend who is upset to a teacher or the crisis center.
  - Reassure students that any adult in the building is available to help.
- h. Telephone calls are made to parents of individual students who are particularly upset during the day. The crisis team will collaborate to determine which parents are called. The telephone contact is ideally handled by clinical staff who can explain the student's reactions to the parents, and give appropriate advice as to how parents should handle their son/daughter. Some parents may be asked to pick up the student at the school.
- i. All building staff are assembled after school to:
- Allow for the expression of feeling and mutual support. (After a full day of dealing with their own emotional responses and that of their students, the teachers are generally quite drained).
  - Review the events of the day.
  - Review the characteristics of high-need students (those who seem especially upset or depressed or show other signs of not dealing well) and compile a list, based on staff observations, of individual student reactions during the day.
  - Announce funeral arrangements and encourage staff to attend, in order to provide support to students and their families.

## **FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES**

The Crisis Team shall suggest follow-up activities to the building principal and superintendent of schools who shall determine the most appropriate course of action. It is further suggested that staff be reminded that there is one media contact person.

- A. Outside consultants may be called upon. At this point, it may be helpful to have "outside" professionals because they are not emotionally involved and can, therefore, provide objective support and direction. Some of the services they can provide are:
- Recommend to parents private evaluations for "high-risk" students.
  - Speak at a general faculty meeting on the issue of adolescent suicide; identification, prevention, response.
  - Conduct evening informational meetings for all concerned community members.

- B. Guidance and clinical staff continue meeting with individual students and small groups to provide support, and to further identify “high risk” students and faculty.
- C. Contact all parents of students identified as “high risk” to express concern and to suggest possible follow-up evaluation by informing parents of community and Orange and Ulster County resources available.
- D. Outside consultants and school staff may conduct an evening meeting of all concerned parents to answer questions and allay concerns.
- E. Guidance and clinical staff continue crisis intervention, answer phone calls of anxious parents, and meet with concerned staff.
- F. The principal and superintendent of schools will determine whether letters should be sent to parents of “high risk” students reminding them to seek a private or community professional evaluation, in order to insure the health and safety of the child. (Return receipt mail is suggested).
- G. “School/Community Steering Committee” can be formed and can plan a meeting of the teenagers of the town.
- H “Front-line” staff who have been dealing directly with the crisis should meet with a consultant for expression of feelings and mutual support. (This is a very necessary ingredient).

### **Closing Comment:**

An outside support consultant can help the superintendent, principal and other key coordinators to examine their own view of the situation and, at the same time, validate key responsibilities toward children, teachers, parents and/or the community as a whole.

## **EVENT WITH MULTIPLE CASUALTIES**

### **I. Introduction**

The County-wide Response Plan was developed to provide guidelines for school administrators and clinical personnel in preparing for and reacting to the sudden death of a student, faculty member or staff member. This plan provides strength and guidance during events on a large scale; specifically, the tornado at East Coldenham Elementary School, Valley Central School District, and the Monroe-Woodbury bus accident. Following these events, it was felt that an addendum should be added which would incorporate the knowledge gained by the individuals who dealt with the aftermath of these tragedies. The process of identifying the “what to do” has taken many individuals back to a circumstance they would do anything to prevent. They have given of themselves to develop this addendum in the hope that no one will ever need to use it. However, should a disaster occur again, they hope their experience will serve to guide staff, students and families through the crisis.

Large scale disasters take many forms and each presents unique situations and needs. At the time of the event, immediate emergency procedures must be given priority in order to cover medical and safety concerns. The provision of mental health support personnel to respond to and care for traumatized individuals within the school community are the focus of the Crisis Response Plan. This addendum identifies procedures for obtaining crisis support personnel by temporarily reassigning local school, county and state employees to the site during the crisis period. The goal is to assess needs, provide services and resume normal operation as quickly as possible. It should be noted, however, that major disasters may require two to five years before school functioning returns to normal.

## **Specific Response to an Event with Multiple Casualties**

### **A. Pre-crisis Planning**

Schools need to be prepared to respond effectively in the event of a major school disaster. To this end, the following recommendations are offered:

- Each school district should develop, review and annually revise a district-wide Emergency Management Plan and a Crisis Response Plan. Building administrators should annually review with staff the main components of these plans, including personnel assignments.
- Key district and building personnel should receive professional in-service training, as identified below:
- Key administrators and crisis coordinators should be trained in how to prepare for disasters and in procedures for responding to disasters;
- Key administrators, pupil personnel service staff and other designated responders should be trained in crisis intervention techniques; and
- Key administrators, pupil personnel service staff and other designated responders should be trained to provide grief counseling and long-term clinical services for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder.
- District administrators should plan a communication mechanism to maintain control of the communication process. Methods and time frames should be established to convey information to various audiences: staff, students, parents, BOCES, other districts, board members, State Education Department, physicians, clergy, general public and media.
- District administrators should develop lists of resources which may be called upon in the event of a crisis, e.g., volunteer service agencies, physicians, clergy, private security companies, State and County resources, insurance contacts, press contacts.
- District administrators and/or pupil service personnel should develop a library of crisis-related materials for parents, teachers, counselors, clinical personnel and community members.

### **B. The Day of the Disaster**

The Superintendent of Schools, District Emergency Coordinator/Social Emotional Support Specialist and/or designee(s) will need to:

1. Notify emergency services, e.g., police department, fire department, mutual aid, ambulance.
2. Assess the damage and the amount of support needed.
3. Notify the District Superintendent to activate the County-wide Response Plan.
4. The District Superintendent will need to know:
  - the nature and extent of the disaster (numbers of students involved);
  - the approximate number of Crisis Team members needed (assess high); and
  - the type of Crisis Team members needed, e.g., school psychologists, social workers, nurses.
5. Organize school personnel to quickly respond to the disaster by assigning staff to committees to provide the services listed below. These committees should meet daily throughout the crisis phase in order to
  - **Coordination**

Assign personnel to coordinate the intervention effort, establish working committees and advise district administration about needs and status of services.

- **Notification of Parents**

Assign personnel to a calling committee to inform parent(s) or Guardians about the disaster and related procedures. e.g., bussing, pick up of children, school closing and support services which will be provided.

- **Reunification of students and families**

Assign personnel to set up a temporary shelter area, identify procedures for release of students to parents and monitor release of students to parents.

- **Counseling and Direct Intervention**

Assign staff and temporary personnel, assigned through the County-wide Response Plan to provide direct intervention to affected individuals. A team leader from the district should coordinate assignments, brief staff and temporary personnel and provide information to the coordinating committee.

- **Media Control**

Assign a person(s) to prepare sample press releases, identify a media center, direct media away from the crisis area until the situation is stabilized, help to conduct briefing sessions, act as a liaison between the crisis area and the press room and establish procedures for photography and/or videotaping.

Note: The area may need to be secured for police or insurance purposes.

- **Coordinate Volunteers**

Assign personnel to coordinate volunteer services such as food, shelter, transportation, babysitting and donations and to maintain lists of volunteers and services provided.

- **Notification of Other Individuals**

Assign personnel to coordinate a telephone committee to identify siblings, neighbors and other related individuals (e.g., club members or non-public students) who may need to be informed of available support services.

6. Designate an Official spokesperson (usually the Superintendent of Schools) to deal with the press.

7. Obtain additional crisis intervention support personnel from sources such as County, State and State Police, if needed.

8. If students or staff are hospitalized, assign Crisis Team members to the hospital(s) to work with families, students, faculty and staff, as needed.

9. Close school in the affected building or district-wide, if needed. Notify media of closing, following established district procedures .Note: The integrity of the building may need to be determined by a structural engineer prior to occupying the building again.

10. Identify counseling support areas. Large areas should be provided for food and general talk; small, more intimate areas should be provided for private discussions. Note: Traumatic experiences cause people to forget information, retain only pieces of information or confuse facts-, therefore, important information will need to be repeated frequently.

11. To promote continuity and structure, develop and distribute the following

materials:

- Crisis Team assignment rosters which lists name, organization, home phone, work phone, length of time available and assignment should be distributed to the Crisis Team and Building Administrators;
- A Crisis Plan overview which describes the response plan and the role of the support services should be distributed to the Crisis Team;
- Building floor plans should be distributed to the volunteer workers and the Crisis Team;
- Lists of community resources and phone numbers should be distributed to the Crisis Team and volunteer workers;
- Copies of materials describing reactions and how to cope with crisis should be available for faculty members and parents;
- Copies of clinical materials about crisis, expected reactions, Post-traumatic Stress Reaction, etc. should be made available to counselors and the Crisis Team; and
- Copies of forms to be used to identify “high risk” individuals who appear to be suffering traumatic reactions should be distributed to the Crisis Team.

### **C. The Day(s) After the Disaster**

The Superintendent, Director of Security and Emergency Preparedness, Social Emotional Support Specialist, Building Administrator and/or other individuals designated by the Superintendent may need to coordinate long-term response efforts and identify and respond to long-term crisis needs. Following are suggested activities which will provide this support:

1. Cancel regular classes on the day(s) following a disaster, if needed. The Crisis Team should be available to meet with parents, students and staff at the affected site or another designated site. Provide child care services. Teachers should be available (in their classrooms, if possible) to provide a sense of “normalcy” and support.
2. Develop press releases, as needed.
3. Maintain complete rosters of:
  - Crisis Team members—name, district or agency affiliation, address, home and work phone numbers and the length of time available; and
  - Volunteer Workers—name, home and work phone numbers, service provided and date. These rosters can be used later to generate thank you letters.
4. Determine the need for attendance at funerals, arrangement of memorial or ecumenical services and provision of counseling services.
5. If students or staff are hospitalized, daily hospital visits by teachers and administrators are advised.
6. Determine the need, nature, content, timing and location of public meeting(s) to review the disaster; describe crisis intervention, insurance and other responses; and allow structured community comment. Obtaining an outside expert on disaster or trauma may be advisable; a “neutral” expert may help to diffuse some of the emotion surrounding the incident.
7. Arrange for direct billing to the insurance company or school to avoid billing the families of injured students.
8. Conduct regular briefing meetings with all administrators, Crisis Coordinating Committee, Crisis Team leaders, Crisis Team members, teachers and staff (this should be continued daily throughout the crisis phase). The focus of these meetings should be to:

- provide current information regarding the event such as medical conditions of the injured, funeral arrangements for the deceased, role of the Crisis Team members, role of district staff, daily response plan and overall Crisis Response Plan;
- distribute materials (items b, e, f and g, above), as needed;
- announce daily Crisis Team assignments;
- review organization and communication chain;
- provide daily contact with coordinating agencies to define needs and roles of support personnel;
- determine a need for teacher substitutes.
- share information about perceived student, staff and community needs; and
- provide a mechanism for interaction among teachers, support personnel and clinical staff.

Note: It is important that the Principal retain control and authority in the building; students, faculty, parents and the community will look to the Principal for leadership and stability. Other Administrators and the Crisis Coordinating Committee should support the Principal's role, providing direction and advice to him/her, as appropriate. If possible, the Principal should make personal daily contact with injured students and families.

Also Note: Personnel who have been directly involved in the disaster may be traumatized; additional support and/or temporary relief from decision making processes may be needed.

9. Provide follow-up counseling sessions for staff, faculty and transportation personnel, emergency workers (e.g., police, rescue squads or hospital staff) and Crisis Team members, as needed.
10. Obtain a trained trauma counselor to debrief traumatized teachers, students, support personnel and community members.

## **D. Long-term Response**

By the second or third day of the crisis, district personnel should be assigned by the Superintendent and Building Administrator to:

- meet with the Crisis Coordinating Committee to determine long-term needs;
- arrange for replacement counselors, if needed;
- arrange for long-term clinical personnel (District, County, State, Private) to be available for intervention or referrals;
- identify high-risk individuals and arrange for continued support services;
- designate an individual to document and summarize the Crisis Response efforts in a written report;
- review staffing patterns in anticipation of increased mental health needs in the school(s) and community;
- meet with representatives of mental health intervention resources to ensure that the "hand-off from the crisis phase to the long-term phase is organized, defined and efficient; and
- formally acknowledge, in writing, the voluntary contributions of all personnel engaged in the crisis response effort.