



## A New School Year is Well Underway

[The Minnesota School Safety Center \(MnSSC\)](#) cares about the safety of MN schools. The SSC provides training and resources to schools to help them prepare, respond, mitigate and recover from all hazard emergencies.

### Contact the MnSSC team for more information:

- [Randy Johnson](#), Director, 651-201-7094
- [Jennifer Larrive](#), School Resource Officer Coordinator, 651-201-7092
- [Connie Forster](#), Safe School Assessment Coordinator, 651-201-7093

If you have ideas or topics for the Minnesota School Safety Center Newsletter, [please contact Connie Forster](#).

### Threat Assessment Training

MnSSC Team presented Threat Assessment training at the Minnesota Department of Education/ Minnesota Association of School Administrator's annual conference on August 7 in Brooklyn Park. One topic covered "Enhancing School Safety Using a Threat Assessment Model", and was attended by nearly 100 public school superintendents from throughout the state. Recent school and legislative initiatives have identified threat assessments as a best practice to encourage a safe and healthy learning environment for students, staff, and the community.

The presentation sessions provided senior school administrators current best practices in developing a strategy to respond to and evaluate threats that may be targeted towards the school, students or staff members. The incorporation of a consistent and thorough threat assessment into school policy is endorsed by the MnSSC and school safety professionals. The presentation also focused on the development of a 360 degree threat assessment, done by a team of educators and partner professionals from public safety, mental health, and juvenile justice officials.



School superintendents were presented simulated threat assessment incidents. Groups worked through the threat assessment process of gathering all pertinent information surrounding the threat, and determining a course of action to respond to the situation. Attendees were provided models of threat assessment policies and threat assessment evaluation instruments.

### School Resource Officer Training

On August 15-17, a total of 25 School Resource Officers received training through the MnSSC in Elk River. Training topics included were data privacy, legal issues, autism awareness, school threat assessments, lockdown procedures, and bullying and social media investigations.



## Be prepared! As staff and students settle into their school routines, these ideas can help you be better prepared for an emergency.

- 1. Do a scavenger hunt with staff to identify items and areas in the building that may be needed in an emergency.**

Does everyone know where the AED, first aid kit, utility shut offs, fire extinguishers, shelter areas etc. are located? Are staff able to shut off the utilities if needed? Do they know how to access the PA system?



- 2. Create a checklist for substitutes and traveling staff to give them an overview of emergency procedures and expectations.**

- 3. Do a communication check.**

Can everyone hear the announcements over the PA? Do radios and cell phones work throughout the building and if not, what alternative communications are in place?

- 4. Everyone does a door lock check.**

Report locks that are not working.

- 5. Update emergency numbers for staff, utility companies, non-emergency public safety partners, relocation sights, crisis and threat assessment teams, etc.**

- 6. If you have a relocation sight that is not a school district owned building, reconnect with the sight contact to ensure the sight is still an option and you still have access to the building.**

- 7. Give parents information at back to school nights or first parent teacher conference about your emergency communication plan.**

Where should they go for information if there is a snow storm (bus crash, etc.)? What expectations are there of them in an emergency?

- 8. Discover which students do not have a connection with an adult in your building.**

List names of students. Ask staff to put a check mark next to all students whom they feel they know or have a connection with. If there are students that do not have check marks by their names, ask staff to commit to making a connection with at least one of the students identified. Studies have shown that student success and school safety is linked to school climate.





## School Resources

Concerned about threats in your schools?

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security and the U.S. Secret Service has created a resource to help schools establish a threat assessment process.

[Review the document by clicking on this link.](#)

The first couple of months of the new school year include severe weather and the transition to winter.

The National Weather Service has resources to help schools monitor weather that can put a damper on special events such as homecoming football games.

[Use think link to customize your search for weather information.](#)

October is Fire Safety Month.

This year's theme is "*Look. Listen. Learn. Be aware. Fire can happen anywhere.*"

[The Minnesota State Fire Marshal](#) Division provides school fire inspections as well as fire prevention resources.

[The National Fire Protection Association](#) also has teacher resources available based on Fire Prevention Week activities.

The Minnesota Department of Public Safety division of Homeland Security and Emergency Management has received a grant to help 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade students prepare for emergencies.

The STEP (Student Tools for Emergency Planning) program can be taught in as little as one hour of classroom time. Materials are provided at no cost to schools.

Interested? [Contact Amber Schindeldecker.](#)



## Communication is Key in Any Emergency!

Giving people accurate information in a timely manner will help those involved make good decisions, create calm in a chaotic situation, speed recovery, and help slow the rumor mill and misinformation.

**Inform parents at the beginning and periodically throughout the school year to let them know where they can go for information both in emergency and non-emergency situations.** Consider language and reading limitations as well as the use of multiple mediums such as the school website, social media, as well as the more traditional methods (radio, TV, email, phone and text messages). This creates redundancy and options for parents to receive the information in their preferred method.

- Control the student flow of social media as much as possible.
- Students and staff will get messages from parents and loved ones in an emergency. If the message is controlled by the school, loved ones will have accurate information.
- Let students and teachers know what message to send out.
- Misinformation occurs when people don't have details. They start to speculate.



**It is a good practice to build redundancy in your communication plan.** There are several ways this can be accomplished. Most schools are using some type of public announcement (PA) system, either over a speaker system that can be accessed through the office or via a phone system. If the PA system can only be accessed in one or two areas, consider using an additional format to give staff information such as sending messages over email or mobile app. There may be no way to inform staff and students located outside on the playground or athletic fields using the PA system.



### Schools are countering these issue in several ways:

- 1) Installing a colored light on the exterior of the building in key locations. This will inform those outside that something is occurring in the building and they should initiate the evacuation process and not enter the building.
- 2) Using two way radios or a mobile application which can be updated as the situation evolves can also address this.

**Communication dead zones tend to be an issue especially in older buildings.** Conduct an annual communication drill. At a certain time of the day, assign different areas of the building to staff members. Make an announcement. Ask people to check in if they did not hear the message. Determine other communication techniques as a work around to those dead zones. Work with public safety partners to determine if emergency radios work in all areas of the building. Determine if "boosters" need to be installed in dead zones.

**Emergencies are dynamic and often fast paced events requiring information to go out quickly.** To make the event less stressful, create pre-scripted messages that can be quickly distributed by filling in a couple blanks.

**Remember, the sooner people have information, the more prepared they will be!**

