Volume XI - Issue 6 - February 2011

Sustaining a Culture of Caring in DoDEA

For many DoDEA students, school is more than a place to learn. It is also the place where they experience the additional care and support that their civilian counterparts might receive from extended family members. At Johnson Primary School (JPS) on Camp Lejeune, the entire student support team, led by counselor Hesta Roach, uses compassion and creativity, in addition to several well tested programs, to support some 720 students. Together, these efforts and programs create a culture of caring for some of DoDEA's youngest students.

While older students in grades 3 through 5 at Camp Lejeune use Trevor Romain's "Bullies are a Pain in the Brain" program, Ms. Roach developed "How to STOP a Bully," an early intervention program to teach younger students how to recognize signs of bullying behaviors. She teaches four lessons about bullying and then holds a bookmark design contest. Children share their understanding of kindness and inclusion and Ms. Roach displays their work on bulletin boards in the hallway. "Everyone comes out a winner," says Ms. Roach as participants receive certificates and pencils for taking part in the program.



Staff members at Johnson Primary School encourage students to send messages to their former classmates.

In 2010, JPS started a transition program that continuously earns praise from parents. New students take part in a "Welcome Walk" through the school,

are featured on a "Welcome" bulletin board, and receive a backpack filled with school supplies. Students leaving Camp Lejeune are supported in equally creative ways. "When kids are leaving they get a 'Good Bye Baggie,'" Ms. Roach explained. "This is a canvas bag which is decorated by the class and includes a teddy bear, an autograph book, and a self addressed envelope so that the child can write back to the class once they arrive in the new school." Ms. Roach also includes a personal note to each student.

The human connection affects the entire JPS family. The staff and teachers say their lives are enriched by the children. The efforts they make on behalf of students can pay unexpected dividends. "In my job, I get hugged around the knees first thing every day," reflects Ms. Roach. "Something about those smiles with missing teeth just makes me happy."

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Teacher's Decision Illustrates Need for Lockdown Practice

Lockdown procedures sound simple, but with all of the demands on educators' schedules it is often difficult to make time to practice. The experience of one school in a normally sleepy town in Maine, however, illustrates the benefit of regular practice.

During January 2011, teachers, a school secretary, a bus driver, and several students, took turns testifying about an October 2008 incident in which a fifth grade classroom was taken hostage by an armed gunman.

The lessons that emerged from the testimony of these school personnel sound familiar:

- Maintain access control -- the perpetrator walked into the school unimpeded.
- Use plain-English commands students were confused by the "code blue" signal used for lockdown, and did not move directly to the classroom.
- Practice lockdown the teacher failed to lock the door and later recited the procedures explaining that during lockdown they "Gather students together, move everyone into the corner, and lock the door;" rather than prioritizing locking the door.

This U.S. public school had established lockdown procedures and the police had been searching for the gunman in the area for a week. Unfortunately, access control was so porous that, despite heightened security, the perpetrator walked into the school as students were arriving. When confronted by a Physical Education teacher, the intruder produced a pistol.

But the most vexing detail that emerged concerns the dilemma of what to do with children trapped in the hall



Stockton Springs Elementary School teacher Carolyn Russell receives a hug from school secretary Tina Boyce.

during lockdown. Do you lock the door immediately or delay closing and locking the door to allow another child to enter? Teacher Carolyn Russell gambled that she could do both, and lost. Today, she lives with the regret of having had to surrender all of her class as hostages to a gunman. Fortunately, all of the students were eventually released without physical injury.

Here is what happened at the door: As Ms. Russell moved to lock her classroom, she looked down the hall toward the cafeteria and saw two of her students walking toward her door, followed by a man with a pistol. She told the students to hurry, let them into the classroom, and then slammed and locked the door – or so she thought. The perpetrator was still pulling on the door from the other side, preventing it from locking.

The teacher struggled to keep the door closed while the gunman forcefully pulled from the other side. Finally, she heard a gutural sound and the door was pulled from her grasp. Her hip was dislocated and her shoulder muscles torn from the strain, yet she failed.

Practicing lockdown procedures can interrupt learning for approximately eight minutes. Not practicing can produce a lifetime of painful regret. ■

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Safe Schools Planning

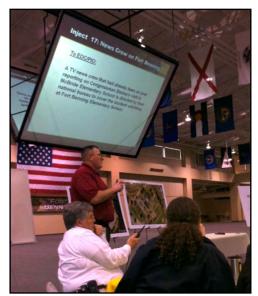
Table Top Exercise Helps School Officials Coordinate with Responders

On January 20, 2011, DoDEA educators from schools at Fort Benning met with installation security forces for a table top exercise. The event was designed to give school officials and emergency responders the opportunity to simulate coordinating their response to a crisis event. Ms. Lois Rapp, the new Georgia-Alabama District Superintendent, welcomed the 80 participants and thanked them for "Coming together to ensure the Fort Benning community could protect our children during any type of incident."

In addition to the usual table top role players, such as representatives from the Provost Marshall's Office (PMO) and the school crisis management team (i.e., principal, counselor, and teachers), the table top exercise included a range of participants representing the Emergency Operations Center (EOC). The EOC role players included rep-

resentatives from the various training sites on the installation such as Sand Hill and Kelly Hill, as well as the basic training units who were on standby to provide uniformed manpower to the school if necessary. They incorporated the exercise with Fort Benning schools into their preparation for an upcoming installation-wide full-scale exercise. Dr. Matthew Kralevich, principal of Dexter Elementary School, remarked with a smile as he surveyed the room full of faces, many of whom were uniformed, "I didn't know some of you even existed." The room erupted into gentle laughter and applause.

The scenario was designed to help all participants see the response actions that school, PMO, and EOC officials would implement during each phase of a crisis incident from initial response through recovery. In addition, the realism of the scenario gave leaders an opportunity to experience the challenge of making crisis management decisions under pressure. During the exercise, officials discussed who would be in charge at each stage of a crisis as the incident escalated. The police explained the Incident Command System is used to maintain "unity of command," or ensure that only one person is in charge. In turn, school representatives explained their internal procedures, some of which are unique to an educational setting due to the needs of children.



Dr. Fordyce Stone, Educational Operations Manager, Georgia-Alabama District, demonstrates a school radio as Installation Antiterrorism Officer Tim Price reinforces a teaching point during the Fort Benning Table Top Exercise.

The exercise revealed some strengths in planning, such as the use of an integrated Incident Command System. Department of the Army Police Captain Joseph LaBranche, who helped coordinate the exercise, explained that the PMO realized they need someone from the school at the command post who understands how the school operates. He offered an example of the difference between managing adults and students during an evacuation: "With adults you can tell them to 'wait over there,' but with children they might wander off if not supervised."

In addition, school administrators familiarized themselves with the vast array of installation resources that are available to support the school. This exercise was the first time some of the school representatives had come face to face with the various agencies represented in the EOC that are available to support them during a crisis.

The exercise concluded cordially with a discussion of areas for improvement and lessons learned. Dr. Fordyce Stone, Educational Operations Manager for the Georgia-Alabama District, who played the role of the District Schools Office, went on to thank exercise participants for helping keep DoDEA's students safe. As the participants exited Freedom Hall, one summed up the feeling for the entire group when he remarked quietly, "These are our kids, too."

Education Issues



The Parent-Child Reunion

The crisis management team can use February to complete planning and coordination to ensure the school is prepared to reunify parents/sponsors with their child following a crisis event. Fortunately, the U.S. Department of Education guide, *Practical Information on Crisis Planning*



(pp. 6-32 to 6-34) outlines specific actions that crisis management teams can use to ensure accountability of students and smooth family reunions. The following suggestions are based on the tips in this guide.

Communicating with Parents/Sponsors

Plan three layers of communication to direct parents/sponsors to information about the incident, and a location where they will eventually be reunited with their child(ren). This prevents parents from flooding phone lines that are otherwise needed to coordinate crisis response, or driving to the school and inadvertently interfering with rescue activities. School officials typically use e-mail, automated phone messages, announcements on the school Web site, and notification via the local TV and radio stations. Naturally, arranging for these channels of communication requires coordination in advance with the installation and school Public Affairs Office. In addition, agree on procedures that allow appropriate school officials, installation command representatives, and emergency responders to coordinate the content of facts released to the media to ensure the installation officials are all speaking with one voice and through one spokesperson.

Select an Alternative Site

Consult with the Provost Marshall's Office/Security Forces, and representatives of the Installation Command, to determine which buildings would usually be available, that could provide food, shelter, and bathrooms for students. Ensure parents/sponsors and students could gather in two separate rooms so that they do not see each other until the adult has signed for their child.

Transportation to the Alternative Site

Ensure the District Superintendent's Office (DSO) knows who to contact to request logistics support such as transportation. The buses that are usually used to transport students might not be available during an incident, but military installations that regularly transport service personnel have vehicles that can be scrambled to transport staff members and students.

Establish Sign-out Procedures

Include parent/sponsor sign-out cards and a description of the sign-out procedures in the office Grab-and-Go Kit. For example: "Check photo identification of parent/sponsor, then send

a human runner to the other room to bring that adult's child to them." Do not allow the mass of waiting parents to see the arriving children or they will run together and all accountability will be lost. Coordinate with security officials in advance to learn how they plan to assist with crowd control.

Smoothly reunifying parents/sponsors with their child reassures the community that the principal and crisis management team are organized and prepared to do everything possible to care for families affected by the incident. Copies of the 132-page guide *Practical Information on Crisis Planning*, are available from the U.S. Department of Education at www.ed.gov/admins/lead/safety/crisisplanning.html. For additional information, visit the DoDEA Office of Safety and Security at www.dodea.edu/offices/safety and select Safe Schools Program on the left.



Teaching Digital Citizenship Can Help during a Crisis Event

One of the thorniest crisis management issues concerns the use of student cell phones during a crisis event. Text messages sent by nimble student fingers could result in parents arriving at the school while emergency responders are still establishing a security cordon and rescuing the wounded. Some U.S. public schools have also had to activate crisis procedures to respond to rumors started by parents sending text messages to alert their children about a news media report of a crisis at school. One example of the potential harm from irresponsible cell phone use is the possibility that parents/sponsors might receive inaccurate information about their child.



Two trends have increased the sensitivity regarding cell phones. In recent years, parents have decided to give cell phones to students at younger ages. And increasingly, these phones have greater capability such text and video. Parents have explained that they want students to be able to contact them in the event of an emergency and summon help from others if necessary. Some parents also feel that sharing a technological link with their child via text messages, strengthens their connection when they cannot be together in person after school.

Most U.S. public schools have adjusted to the presence of phones by allowing students to bring cell phones to school as long as students do not use the devices during the school day. Schools usually require phones to be out of sight and turned off during classes, however students may have immediate access to their phones during a lockdown. One disadvantage of individuals distributing their version of an incident, is that they might not have all of the facts, and sometimes exaggerate reports of injuries.

Fortunately, crisis management teams planning actions to correct rumors sparked by messages sent from cell phones have two places to start:

- ✓ Response: The best antidote for rumors are facts this requires close coordination with the Public Affairs
 Office and Provost Marshall's Office/Security Forces so that verified information can be provided during a
 crisis to reassure the community.
- ✓ Prevention: Helping students develop empathy and judgment regarding their online communication cultivates a sense of responsibility essential to navigating a digital world.

Representatives from education, government, and industry are working together to establish standards for educating students about responsible use of digital communication technology. These standards are summarized in the concept of Digital Citizenship: preparing students to function in a society full of technology. Just as students growing up in a mobile society learn how to look both ways before crossing the street, or merge with traffic, students growing up in an interactive digital world need to learn about etiquette, digital law, and the rights and responsibilities of online communication.



Digital etiquette, for example, includes understanding how electronic messages can affect others' feelings. Without thinking about the consequences, teens could post a picture that would have cruel consequences for the subject. The same lessons on empathy taught during bullying prevention lessons, can be extended to the online environment. Help children think about how they would feel if their picture, or their name, were circulated included in a widely-read message.

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Prevention Programs

CDC Encourages Teens to "Choose Respect"

Dating violence is more common than many adults perceive. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), one in 11 teenagers reports having been hit, slapped, or otherwise harmed by a dating partner in the past year. Girls are particularly vulnerable to dating violence; one in five reports having been abused by a romantic partner. Teaching students how to recognize the signs of dating violence, and avoid abusive situations, keeps teenagers safe. Enhanced awareness also gives students important life skills they can carry into their adult relationships.

The CDC offers a comprehensive Dating Violence Prevention Program for high school students. "Choose Respect" is available entirely online via PDF at no cost to educators. An online training module for educators and other adults who work with youth, "Dating Matters: Understanding Teen Dating Violence Prevention," is also available with the program. This 60-minute course prepares educators to effectively implement the "Choose Respect" program. During the online training, educators become familiar with the issues surrounding dating violence, its prevalence, and the typical behaviors and risk factors.

"Choose Respect" is designed to appeal to the tastes and interest level of teenagers. The program begins with a thought-provoking 13-minute educational film, "Causing Pain." This film presents a variety of dating situations, some of which turn violent. After students watch the film, the facilitator uses the accompanying guide, called the *Play Book*, to lead students through the program activities.

The *Play Book* gives educators an array of activities and discussion questions to select based on both the interest of their students and their relative maturity level. For example, there are role playing activities appropriate for a theater arts class. The scripted discussions, that encourage students to reevaluate the way dating is portrayed in the media, would fit into a language arts curriculum. The Play Book also includes art projects and athletic games.

Warning signs that a person may be a victim of dating violence:

- ✓ Losing confidence or becoming depressed.
- ✓ Losing interest in own hobbies and activities in favor of those of the dating partner.
- Worrying about making a dating partner jealous or angry.
- Excusing the dating partner's bad behavior.
- Isolating oneself from family or friends.
- Spending too much time with the dating partner.
- ✓ Acquiring suspicious bruises or injuries.

Warning signs that someone may be an abuser:

- ✓ Insulting a dating partner in private or public.
- Attempting to control how a dating partner behaves or dresses.
- Checking in constantly with a dating partner by phone, text, or in person.
- ✓ Threatening to hurt one's self or others.
- ✓ Damaging a dating partner's belongings.
- Showing extreme jealousy.
 Source: CDC, Choose Respect

Each of the program activities focuses on awareness, identification, prevention, and appropriate response to dating violence. Because dating and teen romance can be challenging topics for adults to discuss, the Play Book comes with scripted answers so that those implementing the program can be sure they are relaying the correct messages, and that the discussion reinforces the main teaching points.