



# SAFE Schools

## NEWSLETTER



### Student Leadership

Involving students in leadership activities enhances school climate. DoDEA pupils who lead student organizations and service projects inspire other students to contribute to their school and community. DoDEA students often participate in several student activities including:

- ◆ 4-H Service Projects;
- ◆ Boys and Girls Clubs;
- ◆ Power Hour Tutoring;
- ◆ Keystone Club; and
- ◆ JROTC.

For ideas that might be suitable for your school, see the bios of Army Teen Panel representatives at: [www.armyteenpanel.army.mil/bios](http://www.armyteenpanel.army.mil/bios). ■

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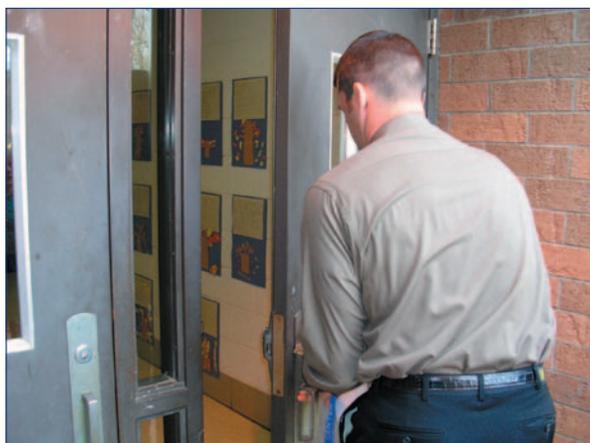
### “Warming Up” Protective Actions

The warming spring weather offers an opportunity to practice emergency responses such as lockdown drills, WMD shelter-in-place simulations, and bomb threat evacuation training. At Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, former SWAT team member and current Antiterrorism Training Program Manager, Jeff Strohmman, coordinates training recommendations for practice lockdowns and bomb threat drills with the installation emergency responders. In a recent interview, Mr. Strohmman said that three of the best antiterrorism measures consist of: “Awareness, Training, and Exercise Drills.”

Creating Antiterrorism Awareness among students, parents and staff, without overly alarming the school community, is vital. Mr. Strohmman recommends explaining the Safe School Plan at the start of the school year at Parent Teacher Organization meetings and in newsletters. At Camp Lejeune, teachers present short Antiterrorism Awareness briefs, and send a note home prior to the exercise, to alleviate parental concern.



Mr. Strohmman recommended the lockdown procedures on page 11 of DoDEA Regulation 4700.2: Internal Physical Security. “It is important to review procedures with staff and students before the exercise and let staff physically implement the protective action,” said Strohmman. This practice acclimates students to the procedure so they are not alarmed by future drills. It also familiarizes staff with their responsibilities so everyone performs better during an actual incident. Mr. Strohmman also reported, “The students don’t have to know details about Critical Incident drills, only that they are necessary and being done for their safety, and the safety of their fellow students.” He also noted the importance of concluding drills with an after-action report so that “lessons learned” can be incorporated into future plans and training. ■



## “Racking & Stacking” Protective Actions

How can you compare results from your protective action drills to see if the school is improving? One technique involves concentrating on a particular type of protective action (i.e., lockdown) and evaluating one specific area such as communications. Here are eight aspects of communication that can ensure you will be able to communicate effectively during a crisis.

- Report to the Principal** – Were office staff able to find and alert the principal immediately?
- Communication Throughout the School** – Was the principal able to use the PA system to alert staff using a plain English command or previously established code or signal?
- Communication with District Schools Office** – Was the District Superintendent or School District Office notified in a timely manner?
- Classroom Communication with Students** – What problems did teachers experience explaining the situation to students? Did students respond promptly and perform their roles properly?

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- Coverage** – Was the principal able to alert everyone throughout the school? How did the school deal with stragglers who might have been in the halls or rest rooms at the time of the incident?
- Attendance Report** – Were teachers able to take attendance and report the results to the principal?
- Equipment** – Did communication equipment, such as radios, function properly and were staff adept at using the equipment?
- Procedures** – Did you detect any flaws in your procedures that you could improve for the future?

Before a lockdown drill, principals can ask one person to observe and record how well the school performs in each of these areas. The individual could be a staff member or your DSSO. During your after-action evaluation, participants can discuss the observer’s notes to identify areas for improvement. If you find that your procedures can be implemented easily and are effective, please send us your plan so we can share it with other DoDEA administrators! E-mail: [safeschools@csc.com](mailto:safeschools@csc.com). ■

## Protective Action Drill Question of the Month:

### Q:

**How well can you communicate with your staff during an incident? How will you alert the physical education class on the playground if you have a violent intruder in the school?**

### A:

**Consider walkie talkies, or whistles with prearranged signals.**

## Lockdown: An Essential Protective Action

The January 2005 newsletter discussed the importance of access control. Events repeatedly demonstrate that the greatest safety concern for school administrators stems from violence caused by “insiders.” This includes students, parents, other relatives of students, or suspended or expelled students. The recent shooting of a high school football coach in Canton, Texas, and the Columbine-style tragedy in Red Lake, Minnesota, provide stark reminders of the reality of the insider threat. The shooter in the Canton incident was a disgruntled father who had been banned from the school’s campus and told not to attend school events, for previous aggressive behavior.

Although violence by students sounds more credible in middle and high schools, elementary schools are not immune to the threat of insider violence. Elementary school principals in U.S. public schools have called police to deal with threats of violence from:

- ◆ Non-custodial parents upset that they cannot pick up their children;
- ◆ Parents under the influence of drugs; and
- ◆ Fist fights in the school lobby between the father and the “boyfriend.”

Practicing Protective Actions enables administrators to ensure they can protect students and staff during times of school turbulence and violence. The lockdown is a critical tool because it is the most likely response to violence from an insider. Every DoDEA School is required to practice lockdowns annually. In addition, administrators could benefit from taking time to review their access control policies and procedures, and reexamining Tools 13 and 14 in the DoDEA Safe Schools Handbook. These tools provide checklists to assist administrators in assigning duties and evaluating lockdown drills.

To maximize the effectiveness of Tools 13 and 14 consider approaching lockdown drills the same way administrators have practiced fire drills for the past 50 years:

- ◆ Explain the reasons for and desired results of the lockdown drill to school administrators, teachers, students, and staff.
- ◆ Assign roles and responsibilities in accordance with Tool 13.
- ◆ Walk through the lockdown drill procedures slowly with teachers and staff without the students present. Validate and/or update the Tool 14 Checklist as required for local implementation.
- ◆ Ask teachers to discuss the lockdown drill with students and explain roles and responsibilities.
- ◆ Conduct a “walk through” lockdown drill with all school administrators, teachers, staff and students. Revalidate and/or update the Tool 14 Checklist as required.
- ◆ Lastly, practice one or more mock “real-time” lockdown drill(s) with all school personnel. Invite the cognizant DSSO(s) or military security authorities to observe the exercise.
- ◆ Critique the effectiveness of the lockdown drill using the validated Tool 14 Checklist.

History has repeatedly demonstrated that planning and practice are essential to effective implementation in the time of crisis. Lockdown may be the most important Protective Action available to school administrators in today’s environment. Don’t let a potentially life-threatening situation be the first time you experience the challenges of lockdown. ■



## Innovative Dress Codes: A Picture Is Worth A Thousand Words

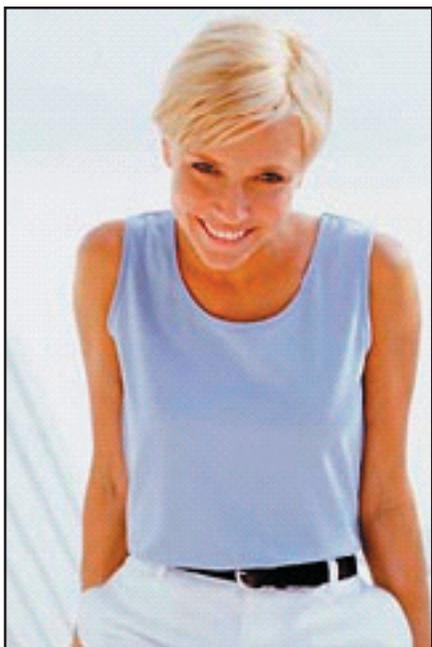
Middle and high school administrators share the challenge of establishing dress codes that balance student freedom with the need to maintain order. Dress code prohibitions in student handbooks often indicate previous adolescent creativity. For example, consider this restriction on jewelry from the student handbook of an anonymous school: “Jewelry should be appropriate for school. Long, heavy neck chains or dog collars are not allowed.”

Dog collars? Apparently at least one student found the need to make a fashion statement by wearing a dog collar. Other student handbooks include similar guidelines that prohibit pajama bottoms, halter tops, bare midriffs or excessively baggy pants.

In the U.K., Alconbury Middle/High School succeeded in helping students understand their dress code by including pictures in their student handbook. Fashion models demonstrate the “Do’s” and “Don’ts” of appropriate dress. The pictures increase the likelihood that the dress code is read and understood by students. According to Alconbury Principal, Dr. Thomas Smith, “We have been using pictures for a couple of years and it has been very successful.”

*The following pictures and captions are from the Alconbury student handbook.*

**Do:**



*“Tank tops are okay. No PE type shorts or ‘short shorts.’”*

**Don’t:**



*“Crop tops are not okay. No bare midriffs or revealing clothing.”*

The technique also demonstrates the power of letting students take ownership in school decisions where possible. “The idea originally came from our student council,” Dr. Smith added. “During the first assembly of the year, the student body officers model what is, and is not, acceptable.”

Finally, Dr. Smith describes their effective means of sanctioning violators: “Rarely do we have a student who tries to push the dress code too far. When it happens, we have clothing (not good looking items) in the office for them to change into or they put on some clothing that matches the dress code.” To access Alconbury’s student handbook visit: [www.alco-hs.eu.dodea.edu/Handbook.htm](http://www.alco-hs.eu.dodea.edu/Handbook.htm). ■

## Helping Grieving Students

An abundance of resources are available for staff aiding DoDEA students who experience the sudden loss of a family member. In their June 2004 issue brief, “Children and Grief,” The American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry offers recommendations for helping elementary school students cope with grief. The article notes that young children perceive death differently from adults and might display feelings of denial, anger, or sadness over a long period of time. The Academy offers indicators that a student might be having serious problems, including:

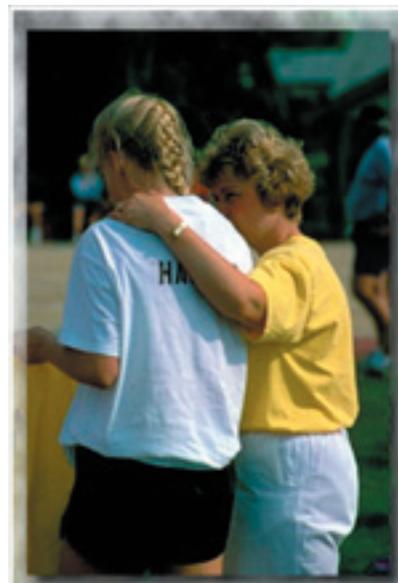
- ◆ Extended period of depression – evident through loss of interest in daily activities,
- ◆ Sleeplessness, loss of appetite, or fear of being alone;
- ◆ Regressive behavior for an extended period of time;
- ◆ Withdrawal from friends; or
- ◆ A sudden decrease in school performance and refusal to attend school.

Staff can reassure children and give them freedom to express their feelings. Adults can also help children remember and honor the person who died through positive activities such as lighting a candle, making a scrap book, or telling a story.

The National Parent Teacher Association (PTA) guide “Helping Children Cope with Tragedy” notes that elementary school students have difficulty understanding cause and effect. These students benefit from a well thought out explanation of a death that includes “concrete, specific information, supported by examples.” The guide suggests that extra attention from teachers and caregivers can provide needed emotional support. The PTA guide distinguishes between the grief of children and adults.

- ◆ Adults know they will survive; children learn this through the experience.
- ◆ Adults mourn for a while and then move on with their lives; however, children’s grief might be cyclical. Some children work through their loss again at the beginning of each new stage of their life (i.e., entering middle or high school).
- ◆ Stages of grief for children include:
  - **Early** - Talk of the deceased returning;
  - **Later** - Feelings of shock, pain, and denial; and
  - **Eventually** - Feelings of being restless or disorganized.

The Hospice Net article “Helping Teenagers Cope with Grief” offers insight into special challenges facing grieving middle and high school youth. The loss of a sibling or parent can be devastating for adolescents who are already coping with psychological, physiological and academic pressures. Hospice suggests that teachers and caring adults assist by confirming that it is all right for students to be sad and feel a multitude of emotions when someone they love dies. Adults can also remind youth that they will eventually move beyond the pain that they feel at present. School staff have an opportunity to help tremendously by giving grieving students appropriate venues to express their emotions (i.e., artwork, stories, dramatization, journals) and listening to their comments.



For additional information from The American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry visit: [www.aacap.org/publications/factsfam/grief.htm](http://www.aacap.org/publications/factsfam/grief.htm). For strategies from the National PTA visit: [www.pta.org/parentinvolvement/tragedy/grief.asp](http://www.pta.org/parentinvolvement/tragedy/grief.asp). Finally, for suggestions from Hospice on helping middle and high school students work through grief, visit: [www.hospicenet.org/html/teenager.html](http://www.hospicenet.org/html/teenager.html). ■

## It Could NEVER Happen Here

*This editorial was contributed by Paul Hersey, lead education consultant to CSC. He has dealt with more than one serious life and death situation while serving as a school administrator.*

Ten dead, many injured and a 16-year-old student at Red Lake High School in northern Minnesota is responsible. Many people in this isolated Chippewa Indian Reservation community are asking, "How could this have happened here?"



Jeff Weise came from a dysfunctional, poverty-stricken home. His father committed suicide. Jeff had a history of antisocial behavior. On a neo-Nazi Web site, he described his alienation from school and home. He even professed admiration for Adolf Hitler.

Sound familiar? Evan Ramsey, a 16-year-old student, used a shotgun to kill the principal and a student in Bethel, Alaska. Luke Woodham, another 16-year-old youth, killed his mother and fatally shot two students in Pearl, Mississippi. A 6-year-old boy shot a Michigan classmate at Buell Elementary School. The recounting of school killings goes on and on.

In every case, the signs were there, but went unrecognized. The parents and/or school personnel simply missed the signs of a youth struggling to cope with difficult home and school conditions. Bullying was often a part of the problem. In some situations, the students were loners and exhibited antisocial behavior, poor school achievement, and hatred for certain people or groups.

Preventing school shootings has little to do with putting more detection equipment in schools, or placing more security guards in our buildings. In fact, we are already placing heavy emphasis on these approaches in many communities. Some think that with metal detectors and more guards, parents need not worry about events such as those at Red Lake. However, at approximately 3 p.m. on March 22, 2005, Jeff Weise shot his grandfather and his grandfather's friend, rushed through an unlocked school door and metal detector, killed a security guard, a teacher, five students and himself – all in less than 10 minutes.

I am suggesting we place more emphasis on reducing risks in our schools by learning how to recognize the warning signs or indicators of students in serious distress. Have you provided a workshop at your school on how to identify youth who may be in trouble? Have you developed a way for troubled students to "connect" with a teacher, counselor or administrator? If you have provided this kind of risk reduction service in your school, I urge you to share the details of your program with others through the DoDEA Safe Schools newsletters.

Please remember, "it can never happen here," no longer applies to any of us. IT CAN HAPPEN HERE, unless we take the necessary steps to identify the students who need someone to help them before it is too late.

### Share Your Solution

If you would like to share a brief description of the system used in your school to help staff members identify and assist troubled students, we would like to include your procedure or technique in a future DoDEA newsletter. Please e-mail your description to: [safeschools@csc.com](mailto:safeschools@csc.com). ■