



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

THE DEPUTY SECRETARY

October 6, 2004

Dear Colleague:

The recent terrorist attack against a school in Beslan, Russia, was obviously a shocking incident worldwide. Understandably, the horror of this attack may have created significant anxiety in our own country among parents, students, faculty, staff and other community members, particularly in light of the graphic details that many of us saw in the news. Today, I am writing to share information with you regarding some lessons learned from the Beslan school incident in an effort to better understand how it happened and apply lessons that might be used to protect U.S. schools.

For your background, the U.S. Department of Education (ED) works closely with the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and we have teamed together with them on this important school safety issue. DHS and the FBI have recently analyzed the Beslan situation and shared their analysis with state and local law enforcement officials in your community, which is why I wanted to share that information with you as well. Again, they have done this in an effort to use the information to safeguard American schools and our students. The analysis was done proactively; it was not sent out due to any specific information indicating that there is a terrorist threat to any schools or universities in the United States.

You should also know that DHS and the FBI, as a part of their analysis, have encouraged local law enforcement officials to maintain contact and open lines of communication with local school administrators such as you and to ask personnel to report any suspicious activities.

While I am aware that many of our nation's schools have been developing comprehensive crisis plans and that ED widely disseminated informational material in August called "Practical Information on Crisis Planning," I also believe the following information will be useful as you update your plans. The FBI-DHS analysis described some specific protective measures that I would also like to share with you, many of which would be applicable to a variety of potential emergency situations, including natural disasters.

Short-term protective measures include reviewing procedures to safeguard school facilities and students and others within them. Those recommended in the DHS-FBI bulletin include:

- Review all school emergency and crisis management plans. Helpful guidance can be found at www.ed.gov/emergencyplan/.

- Raise awareness among local law enforcement officers and school officials by conducting exercises relating to school emergency and crisis management plans.
- Raise awareness among school officials and students by conducting awareness training relating to the school environment that includes awareness of signs of terrorism.
- Raise community awareness of any potential threats as well as vulnerabilities.
- Prepare the school staff to act in a crisis situation.
- Consider a closed-campus approach to limit visitors.
- Consider a single entry point for all attendees, staff and visitors.
- Focus patrols by law enforcement officers on and around school grounds.
- Ensure that school officials will always be able to contact school buses.
- Ensure that emergency communications from and to schools are working.
- Download the Red Cross brochure, *Terrorism: Preparing for the Unexpected*, at <http://www.redcross.org/services/disaster/keepsafe/terrorism.pdf> and provide a copy to students, staff and faculty.
- Report any suspicious activity to law enforcement authorities.

Long-term protective measures should include physical enhancements to school buildings. Among the measures schools should consider are the following:

- Install secure locks for all external and internal doors and windows.
- Install window and external door protections with quick-release capability.
- Consider establishing a safe area (or safe areas) within the school for assembly and shelter during emergencies.
- Apply protective coating on windows in facilities that face traffic. That and other helpful information on school facilities can be found at www.edfacilities.org/.

In the analysis they provided to local law enforcement officials, DHS and the FBI have also outlined activities to watch for that may suggest potential unwelcome surveillance of educational facilities. These indicators alone may in fact reflect legitimate activity not related to terrorism. Multiple indicators, however, could suggest a heightened terrorist or criminal threat. They are:

- Unusual interest in security, entry points, and access controls or barriers such as fences or walls;
- Interest in obtaining site plans for schools, bus routes, attendance lists and other information about a school, its employees or students;
- Unusual behavior such as staring at or quickly looking away from personnel or vehicles entering or leaving designated facilities or parking areas;
- Observation of security reaction drills or procedures;
- Increase in anonymous telephone or e-mail threats to facilities in conjunction with suspected surveillance incidents;
- Foot surveillance involving individuals working together;
- Mobile surveillance using bicycles, scooters, motorcycles, cars, trucks, sport utility vehicles, limousines, boats or small aircraft;

- Prolonged static surveillance using people disguised as panhandlers, shoe shiners, food, newspaper or flower vendors, or street sweepers not previously seen in the area;
- Discreet use of still cameras, video recorders, or note-taking at non-tourist locations;
- Use of multiple sets of clothing and identification or the use of sketching materials (paper, pencils, etc.);
- Questioning of security or facility personnel; and
- Unexplained presence of unauthorized persons in places where they should not be.

It is my hope that you carefully review this information and work with your security staff, local law enforcement, first responders and emergency preparedness personnel to ensure that these protective measures are included in your School Crisis Plan. I encourage you to visit ED's Web site on crisis planning, www.ed.gov/emergencyplan/, where additional information about key elements of a crisis plan can be found.

To help with questions that parents, students, faculty and other community members may ask, we have developed a series of the most frequently asked questions regarding the issue of responding to a crisis in general. (See attached.) I have also included a list of available resources if you would like more information on a variety of topics, from crisis planning to how to talk to children about these types of incidents. In addition, I am enclosing information about various ED grant programs concerning school safety that may be of interest.

In closing, I want to assure you that we are working very closely with DHS, the FBI, the Department of Justice, the Department of Health and Human Services and the Secret Service to ensure that our schools and our children in them remain safe. And, again, the information recently provided by DHS and the FBI to state and local law enforcement was not generated by any threats received by U.S. educational institutions -- it was a routine communication reflecting their analysis of the Beslan incident.

Thank you for your attention to this matter, and please feel free to call the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools at (202) 260-3954 for more information or if you have any questions. We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

/S/

Eugene W. Hickok
Deputy Secretary

Attachments

Resources Available for Schools

Information, Guides and Reports

Emergency Plan Web Site

The Department of Education's (ED) Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools' Emergency Plan Web site www.ed.gov/emergencyplan provides a one-stop site for information to help plan for, mitigate, respond to and recover from any emergency (natural disasters, violent incidents, terrorist acts and the like). The site provides access to ED materials, such as *Practical Information on Crisis Planning*, and links to additional emergency planning resources of government agencies, nongovernmental organizations, health-care provider resources, mental health resources, and state and local resources.

Practical Information on Crisis Planning: A Guide for Schools and Communities

This binder provides schools and communities with basic guidelines and useful ideas on how to develop and refine their emergency response and crisis management plans for each phase of crisis planning: mitigation and prevention, preparedness, response and recovery. This information is available at www.ed.gov/emergencyplan/.

Infrastructure Protection: National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities

This Web-based clearinghouse at www.edfacilities.org provides information on school safety issues, such as how to design buildings to prevent or mitigate possible terrorist attacks and violence.

Bomb Threat Assessment Guide: ED and Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms

The *Step-by-Step Guide for Bomb Threats* can assist school districts, administrators and emergency responders in planning an effective bomb threat response protocol in schools. A CD-ROM interactive planning tool provides schools with a 15-step guide. In 2003, a copy of the CD-ROM was distributed to every school district in the country. It is still available at www.ed.gov/emergencyplan/.

Campus Public Safety Guide

The Department of Homeland Security's Office of Domestic Preparedness published a series titled *Campus Public Safety: Weapons of Mass Destruction and Terrorism Protective Measures* in April 2003. This document describes affirmative steps colleges and universities can take to prevent, deter or effectively respond to an attack by weapons of mass destruction. It is available at www.ed.gov/emergencyplan/.

Safe Schools Initiative: ED and the U.S. Secret Service

The 2002 *Safe Schools Initiative Guide and Final Report* provides guidelines for managing threatening situations and offers ways to create a safe school environment. It is available at www.ed.gov/emergencyplan/.

Information Specifically for Children

A Web site with age-appropriate information for children on disasters is at www.fema.gov/kids/. In addition, the Department of Homeland Security is working to expand its citizen preparedness “Ready” campaign by getting children involved in preparing for crises. The Web site is planned to be launched later this year.

Information Dealing With Trauma

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network Web site http://www.ncetsnet.org/nccts/nav.do?pid=ctr_tool contains the following links to tools and materials that can be used by schools both for school planning purposes and as handouts to parents and caregivers:

The link to “Presentation Tools”
http://www.ncetsnet.org/nccts/nav.do?pid=ctr_tool_present allows one to view and download slide presentations on selected topics related to child trauma and traumatic stress, including statistics on the prevalence of child trauma, current interventions to reduce the impact of child traumatic stress, and an overview of the National Child Traumatic Stress Network.

The “Educational Materials” link
http://www.ncetsnet.org/nccts/nav.do?pid=ctr_tool_educ includes tip sheets for parents, caregivers, and teachers on current topics, as well as basic information on child traumatic stress for different audiences.

Grants Available From the U.S. Department of Education

Emergency Response and Crisis Management Discretionary Grants

Emergency Response and Crisis Management grants provide funds to local educational agencies to improve and strengthen their emergency response and crisis management plans. This year, ED is obligating 105 awards for a total of \$28 million. ED anticipates conducting another competition in the area of crisis planning in fiscal year 2005. We anticipate that a notice regarding the competition will be issued in a few months.

The Safe Schools-Healthy Students Initiative Grants

These grants provide students, schools and communities with federal funding to implement a comprehensive plan of activities, programs and services focusing on promoting healthy childhood development and preventing violence and alcohol and drug abuse. In fiscal year 2004, ED contributed a total of \$95 million for grants supporting this initiative. Other federal departments also contributed funds. We anticipate additional funding for this initiative in fiscal year 2005.

Questions and Answers

Q. Why is the Department of Education sending this information? Is there an imminent threat to America's schools?

A. The FBI and DHS are currently unaware of any specific, credible information indicating a terrorist threat to public or private schools, universities or colleges in the United States. The FBI and DHS have told us that there is no imminent threat to U.S. schools and that the group that conducted the operation in Russia has never attacked or threatened to attack U.S. interests. However, in an abundance of caution, the Department of Education and our federal law enforcement partners are providing state and local law enforcement officials and educators with an analysis of some of the important lessons learned about the recent incident in Beslan, Russia.

Q. Who else have federal officials contacted regarding the Beslan incident?

A. The DHS and FBI recently sent an analysis of the Beslan incident to their constituents in the law enforcement field. The Department of Education (ED) is distributing information to our constituents in the education community. Among those to whom ED is sending the information are: school police and school security personnel; school resource officers; emergency response and crisis management grantees; chief state school officers; members of boards of education; organizations representing principals; institutions of higher education; and various groups representing non-public schools. Our intent is to inform all appropriate school-related constituencies, all types of schools, whether public or non-public, and institutions of higher education.

Q. How should those informed respond to the bulletin?

A. School districts, in partnership with local law enforcement officials and first responders, should review their crisis plan, ensure that it is up to date, practice their plan, and make modifications as needed.

Q. What should we tell parents and students?

A. We believe you need to be truthful and open. You need to tell students that there are no imminent threats to U.S. schools but that there is a continued need to be prepared to deal with a wide range of crises that can occur in schools and communities.

Q. Are there any resources available at the federal level to help us with our crisis planning?

A. Yes, there are numerous Web pages, booklets, manuals, clearinghouses, etc. available to help you. A summary of resources is found as an attachment to this document.

Q. What about financial resources? Does ED have any financial resources to assist school districts?

A. ED anticipates conducting another competition in the area of crisis planning in fiscal year 2005. We anticipate that a notice regarding the competition will be issued in a few months.