SAFE Schools NEWSLETTER

Start the Year Off Right with Great Parent Communication

Communication with parents not only benefits students academically, it also strengthens security. At Maxwell Elementary School, Principal Melissa Hayes ensures that all stakeholders, including parents, teachers, and community members are aware of the systems and procedures the school has in place to ensure the safety and security of students. To achieve this, she employs a systematic approach to communication that incorporates Internet, e-mail, and telephone contact. Ms. Hayes also includes teachers in the communication process by delegating tasks and empowering them to act as liaisons between her office and parents.

Melissa Hayes, Principal, Maxwell Elementary School, Alabama.

Ms. Hayes regularly posts pertinent security information on the home page of her school Web site. "Our military families are very involved in our school," said Ms. Hayes. "They want to know that we have procedures in place for an emergency." Accordingly, last spring, when student arrival and dismissal procedures were temporarily altered due to flooding near the main entrance of the school, Ms. Hayes provided ongoing updates on these changes to parents via the Web page.

Often, Ms. Hayes uses e-mail to communicate with teachers, parents, and her 125 cleared school volunteers. Her teachers maintain e-mail lists for their classes. When Ms. Hayes sends information home, she distributes an e-mail to her teachers who then forward the letter to parents. This ensures everyone is involved and aware of the message. Ms. Hayes also arranges alternatives for families not using e-mail.

Another valuable resource is the emergency telephone notification system employed by DDESS. The telephone system allows principals to record a brief message and send it to pre-designated phone numbers for parents/sponsors. Ms. Hayes recently used the system during a tornado warning. "Within a minute, I was able to let 800 people know their children were safe and that I wouldn't be putting them on the buses until after the warning ended," she explained. Ms. Hayes finds the extra effort invested in communication benefits the culture of the school. "Communication is the best way to build trust with parents," said Ms. Hayes. "As long as they know you are on the up and up, they will trust you to take care of their children." ■

Inside This Issue

Reliable Sources for H1N1 Updates

As the H1N1 virus continues to spread, media outlets are increasing the number of news stories related to the virus. For administrators monitoring the developments with an eye to how the pandemic may affect local schools, keeping abreast of the ever-changing situation can be a challenge. The following Web sites provide reliable real time pandemic information:

▶ The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) offers guidance for health and school officials on how to respond to influenza during the 2009-10 school year at www.cdc.gov.

▶ The U.S. Department of Health & Human Services has established a clearinghouse for information on influenza at www.flu.gov.

▶ The Department of Defense Pandemic Influenza Watchboard offers a far more comprehensive overview of the pandemic. This site includes research studies, news articles, and DoD policy for the management of public health during a pandemic emergency. The Armed Forces Health Surveillance Center provides continuous updates and recent reports on the spread of the virus. This site also contains a link to the official flu-related news stories. To access the DoD watchboard, visit http://fhp.osd.mil/aiWatchboard/.

One action administrators can take is to remind students of the power of personal hygiene. Rose Chunik, Chief, DoDEA Office of Safety and Security (OSS) said, "Some of the best ways to prevent others from getting sick are to stay home if you feel sick, cover your cough, and wash your hands." Finally, the decision whether to close schools for health reasons would be made by the Installation Commander in coordination with the Public Health Emergency Officer and school officials. ■

Security Officers Synchronize Approach to School Security

Safety and security specialists from across DoDEA met in Germany, July 27-31, 2009, to ensure they are supporting administrators with a standardized approach to school safety and security. This sixth annual World-wide Office of Safety and Security conference included all DoDEA safety and security professionals.

One highlight of the meeting was an overview and training on the new DoDEA Multi-Hazards Preparedness and Response program presented by Adam Bergstrom, DoDEA headquarters Antiterrorism Program Manager and Ronnie Martin, Physical Security Program Manager. Mr. Bergstrom and Mr. Martin conducted working group exercises and briefed the status of DoDEA's efforts to implement an integrated multi-hazard approach to school security.

Conference participants included the Safety and Occupational Health Manager from each area. The DoDEA Safety Cadre consists of:

◆ Donald Golaszewski, Headquarters
◆ Michael Bradford, DoDDS-Europe
◆ Mark Hotelling, DoDDS-Pacific
◆ Victor Padilla, DDESS

For additional information, visit the OSS Web site: www.dodea.edu/offices/safety/index.cfm. ■

Lockdown Drills 101: Simple, Quick, and Could Save a Life

Lockdown drills do not have to take a lot of time out of the academic day. "Properly executed lockdown drills should take no more than five to seven minutes," said New York/Virginia Assistant Superintendent Gary Gerstner, while observing school lockdown drills recently at Marine Corps Base Quantico in Virginia. During the drills, all of the schools at Quantico and nearby Dahlgren implemented lockdown procedures in fewer than seven minutes.

The series of drills was organized by Henry Gregorich, DDESS Antiterrorism Officer, in coordination with Superintendent Michael Gould and Mr. Gerstner. Mr. Gregorich explained why he conducted a lockdown drill which was followed immediately by an evacuation: "Many situations that start out requiring a lockdown evolve into a situation where we need to evacuate students, so that's how we conduct the drills."

Such awareness was particularly evident at Quantico Middle/High School where students had practiced for the observed drill. As Assistant Principal Daniel Mulhern explained, "So long as we have classes interrupted for a lockdown, we usually go ahead and practice all of the protective actions in quick succession, including shelter-in-place, take cover, and evacuation. It just makes sense."

Administrators at Burrows Elementary School take attendance during a lockdown drill.

Benefits of Conducting Drills:

▶ Provide more opportunities for the entire school population to practice lockdown procedures.

▶ Help school staff and administrators identify ways they can improve coordination and crisis response procedures.

▶ Foster communication between emergency responders and school administrators.

▶ Familiarize emergency responders with lock-down procedures.

▶ Inviting drill observers frees the school principal to actively participate in the drill as he or she would in a genuine crisis.

Mr. Gregorich was impressed with the evacuation drill at QMHS. Once all of the students were assembled at the evacuation site, he inquired about one particular student by name. Administrators were able to pinpoint her location in less than a minute.

The drill observers included officials from Quantico Physical Security, Quality Assurance, Military Police, Quantico Fire Department, and DoDEA Headquarters. Afterwards, Mr. Gregorich met with the visiting security experts and listened to their feedback. He then conducted a verbal debriefing for each of the principals and their crisis management teams.

Many of the principals, who had served overseas in areas of heightened security, deeply understand the need to invest a few moments practicing drills that could save lives. Donna Kacmarski, principal of Russell Elementary School, explained, "I was recently the principal of a school in Seoul, Korea and we didn't mind interrupting learning for a few minutes to practice procedures because everyone understood the threat." She added, "Keeping our students safe is worth five minutes." ▪

September Crisis Management Meeting "Kicks-Off" a Safe School Year

Administrators preparing the crisis management team for the new school year can simplify the task by concentrating on the fundamentals: team, purpose, communication, and action. The Crisis Management Team consists of individuals within the school building who assist the principal in responding to crisis situations ranging from incidents requiring immediate implementation of a protective action to ongoing situations such as helping students cope with deployed parents or responding to a suicide or death in the community.

During the initial meeting, remind participants of the purpose of the team. This generates enthusiasm and helps everyone concentrate on priorities. In addition, scheduling drills and exercises far in advance keeps the actions manageable by distributing the activity over the course of the school year. Use the following sequence of actions to ensure a productive kick-off meeting:

- ◆ Contact team members individually and invite them to participate on the Crisis Management Team. Explain their duties using the description of roles and responsibilities summarized in the DoDEA Crisis Management Guide (pages 17-18) available online at www.dodea.edu/instruction/crisis/resources/docs/DoDEA_Crisis_Manag_Guide_07.pdf.
- ◆ Distribute the crisis management plan and complete a roster (Crisis Management Guide, pages 19-20) with updated phone numbers, e-mail, and contact information. Team members should keep a copy of the roster at home so it is available if an incident occurs on the weekend or after hours.
- ◆ Throughout the year, invite installation command, school liaison officer(s), and emergency responders to attend the Crisis Management Team meeting.
- ◆ Schedule meetings and drills to let the team practice adapting to a variety of situations.
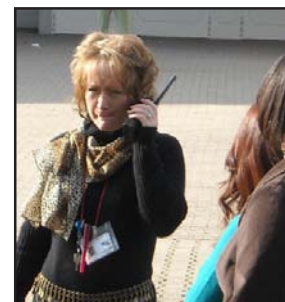
It is not necessary to complete all of these actions to have a successful kick-off meeting. If the team accomplishes the two critical actions of providing their updated contact information and reviewing the crisis management plan, they will have a head start in crisis preparedness. For specific questions contact safeschools@csc.com. ■

DSSO Develops Beginning of the School Year Checklist for Administrators

Michael Bryant, District Safety and Security Officer for the 19 schools around Kaiserslautern, Germany, developed a checklist to assist his administrators in preparing for the start of school. "Principals are just so darn busy at the beginning of the school year. There is a lot to read and remember," noted Mr. Bryant, pointing out that administrators must sift through regulations to see which apply to their situations. "This puts everything in one place with blocks they can check off as they get it done."

Some Highlights from Mr. Bryant's Safety and Security Checklist:

- ▶ Check Force Protection Conditions (FPCON) exterior door signs.
- ▶ Ensure all intercoms work.
- ▶ Inventory and check status of all hand-held radios, cell phones, emergency backpacks.
- ▶ Ensure staff rosters are updated with home phone numbers and tested.

Mr. Bryant recommended gathering "multiple minds to produce and share the best tools possible." For a copy of the list, contact safeschools@csc.com. ■

DoDEA Issues New Cybersecurity Guidelines

Computer users within DoDEA may have noticed changes in the log-on procedures this school year. These changes are part of a larger effort by DoDEA to stay a step ahead of evolving cybersecurity threats such as viruses, infiltration, and spyware. Since September 2008, DoDEA Chief Information Officer Jeff Friedler has been implementing these changes and updating DoDEA's network systems to align with DoD Information Assurance standards. "With each subtle change we make, we tighten the layers of security within the DoDEA system," explains Mr. Friedler. "Even small changes have the potential to make a huge impact on our cybersecurity."

This school year, DoDEA has altered cybersecurity procedures. The majority of these changes are transparent to "end-users" such as DoDEA educators and staff. However, both staff members and students will benefit from new password guidelines. The password requirements were defined through joint discussions with the DoDEA Headquarters Information Technology and Education Offices.

Computers will also automatically "lock out" for a short period of time after repeated unsuccessful attempts to enter a password to prevent unauthorized users from accessing DoDEA systems. In addition, any computer left unattended and unused for a given period of time will automatically revert to a screen saver. When the user returns to his or her computer, a password will be required to unlock the screensaver.

"As a Department of Defense organization we face the reality that we too are under attack every single day," Dr. Miles stated in a June 2009 DoDEA memorandum on the subject. "While we don't handle guns or missiles, or move troops, we are interconnected to the military networks in various ways," she wrote.

While passwords and screensavers may seem like small changes, these measures exponentially improve cybersecurity for the worldwide DoDEA system. "We can never take security for granted," says Dr. Miles. "Every user in our system has a responsibility for computer security." If you have specific questions or concerns about the changes, contact DoDEA CIO Jeff Friedler at jeffrey.friedler@hq.dodea.edu. Additional information on cybersecurity topics is available from safeschools@csc.com. ■

Creating Fun, Strong Passwords

It seems like everything from online movie rentals to credit unions now requires a password. These days, passwords are getting longer and may include a random mix of letters, numbers, and special characters. Here are some tips on how to speak in "license plate English" to create strong passwords that are easy to remember:

▶ Think of a "memory phrase." Use the first letter of each word in that phrase.

▶ Remove vowels from words.

▶ Change letters to numbers or symbols that look similar (e.g., the at symbol "@" for "a", or an exclamation point "!" for "i").

Practice matching the passwords below to the appropriate memory phrases (answers on page 6):

Password	Memory Phrase
1) Agr8_Pr!nc!p@l	a) I love to teach math.
2) sc!ence15c00L	b) 30 great kids to teach!
3) i<3_2tch_m@th	c) A great principal.
4) 30gr8kds2tch!!	d) 80 percent ain't too bad.
5) 80%a!n't_2_b@d	e) Science is cool.

Psychologists Share Resources and Knowledge Online

DoDEA psychologists and counselors share expertise and professional resources via an electronic mailing list, popularly referred to as the "listserve." DoDEA counselors and psychologists can check the listserve for updates on the recent training with Marlene Wong regarding psychological threat assessment, and the antibullying training with Trevor Romain. Occasionally colleagues also post specific information about helpful government publications. For example, Holly Hasenbuhler, School Psychologist for Ramstein Elementary School and Ramstein Intermediate School fifth graders, recently suggested the "EdPubs" site as a resource for crisis management information.

EdPubs is an on-line clearing house maintained by the U.S. Department of Education for education-related materials. The site includes over 6,000 resources related to a range of issues. Ms. Hasenbuhler noted that she and her crisis management team members have found several publications particularly useful. These include:
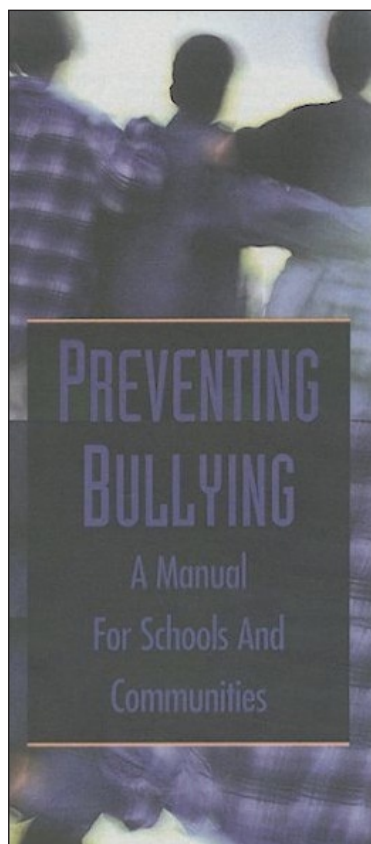
Tips for Helping Students Recovering from Traumatic Events. This publication provides practical information for parents and students who are coping with the aftermath of a natural disaster, as well as instructions for teachers, coaches, school administrators, and others helping those affected. Although the focus is on natural disasters, the Department of Education points out that these tips apply to other traumatic experiences as well.

Preventing Bullying: A Manual for Schools and Communities. This pamphlet defines bullying, discusses the seriousness of this behavior, the effectiveness of a comprehensive approach, and presents strategies for teachers, students, and parents to use when dealing with bullying. It also offers examples of various approaches used by schools across the United States.

Threat Assessment in Schools/The Final Report and Findings of the Safe School Initiative. This is actually two booklets about school safety. The EdPubs site states: "The first publication, *Threat Assessment in Schools: A Guide to Managing Threatening Situations and to Creating Safe School Climates*, sets forth a process for identifying, assessing, and managing students who may pose a threat of targeted violence in schools." The second publication, "*The Final Report and Findings of the Safe School Initiative: Implications for the Prevention of School Attacks in the United States*" is the result of collaboration between the U.S. Secret Service and the U.S. Department of Education to determine how to predict and prevent attacks on schools. This document contains information about "attack-related" behaviors, motives for school violence, and target selection.

The Department of Education recently updated the EdPubs Web site. Users now create a log-in account, and then click on items which then go into a "shopping cart." Paper materials are delivered via United States Postal Service and downloaded materials are sent to an e-mail in-box. While it is initially time consuming to create a user-account, having the information sent to an inbox makes it convenient to distribute the materials as needed. "Since ordering, I periodically get an e-mail from them informing me of new materials," notes Ms. Hasenbuhler. To set up a user account and access these free materials, visit www.edpubs.ed.gov. ■

Answers to "password" quiz on page 6: 1) C, 2) E, 3) A, 4) B, 5) D.