

INTRODUCTION: What Makes Schools Safe?

Can anything be done to prevent the kind of violence that occurred in Newtown? The answer—the only answer—is “We have to try.”

– Dr. Lawrence S. Feinsod, Executive Director
New Jersey School Boards Association¹

On December 14, 2012, a gunman blasted through a glass entryway at the Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut, and within minutes murdered 20 children and six adults. Since the day of the tragedy, local boards of education throughout our nation have faced the question: What else must be done to ensure the safety and security of schoolchildren?

1. *Is the solution in-school security personnel?*

- On July 15, 2014, Sussex County’s High Point Regional Board of Education adopted policy allowing the employment of two retired law enforcement officers to provide armed security for its 1,100-student campus. Located in the remote corner of northwest New Jersey in a community without its own police force, the district faced a unique situation that warranted the hiring of non-police security, according to its superintendent.²
- On June 24, 2013, the Westfield Board of Education restored the position of School Resource Officer at the district’s high school. The position had been discontinued six years earlier for budgetary reasons. The town’s police chief, the district superintendent and the high school principal explained that the SRO position, which is filled by a member of the municipal police force, would focus as much on counseling, mentoring and relationship-building as it would on security.³ Eleven months later, the school board voted in favor of the reappointment of the SRO for another year.⁴ The town and the school district split the cost of the SRO’s salary.

2. *Is working with law enforcement the best approach?*

- In South Brunswick Township, specially trained police officers regularly conduct security surveys of the district’s schools, examining cameras, locks and security systems.⁵ The police

¹ Lawrence S. Feinsod, Ed.D. “Introduction: Safe and Secure Schools: Perspectives after Newtown” (a forum sponsored by the New Jersey School Boards Association, The College of New Jersey, Ewing, N.J., January 18, 2013), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VM4WtwyeTKQ&list=UU9-T5UwBZXksBK0i-ulcHWA>.

² Joe Moszczynski, “Sussex County high school agrees to hire two armed security officers,” *Star-Ledger*, July 17, 2014 (http://www.nj.com/sussex-county/index.ssf/2014/07/sussex_county_high_school_agrees_to_hire_two_armed_security_officers.html). Accessed Sept. 8, 2014.

³ Frank Mustac, “Full-time police officer to be on duty at Westfield High School starting this fall,” *Independent Press*, June 26, 2013 (http://www.nj.com/suburbannews/index.ssf/2013/06/full-time_police_officer_to_be.html). Accessed Sept. 8, 2014.

⁴ “Police officer will again be stationed at Westfield High School,” *Suburban News*, May 23, 2014, (http://www.nj.com/suburbannews/index.ssf/2014/05/police_officer_will_again_be_s.html). Accessed Sept. 8, 2014.

⁵ Janet Bamford, “Making New Jersey’s Schools Safe and Secure,” *New Jersey School Leader*, Vol. 43, No. 4 (January 2013): 28. (<http://www.njsba.org/news/school-leader/01022013/making-nj-schools-safe-and-secure.php>)

department and the school district have a strong working relationship that results in over 2,000 police patrols a year in and around the district's schools and a requirement that the officers be familiar with the layout of each one of the district's 10 buildings and its grounds. "There is a constant, visible presence," said its chief of police.⁶

- On August 13, 2014, seven southern New Jersey county prosecutors sponsored a School Safety and Security Conference at Washington Township High School in Gloucester County, the eighth such event. The meeting focused on issues ranging from family reunification following catastrophic events to threat assessment.⁷

3. *Are physical security enhancements a part of the solution?*

- On a sprawling high school campus in central New Jersey, magnetic door locks have been put in place, as has a video camera that enables identification of visitors before they are buzzed into the building. And while the district does not have walk-through metal detectors, it owns metal-detecting wands that it can use when necessary. In addition, more than 200 video cameras are stationed around the high school, and the camera locations are changed periodically. A staff member monitors the cameras at all times.⁸
- On September 30, 2014, approximately a dozen New Jersey school districts continued a trend, which emerged after the Newtown shooting, of seeking voter approval of construction projects that include at least one security component. In Manchester Township, for example, voters approved a construction plan includes creation of vestibule areas, also called "mantraps," designed to limit visitors' immediate access to a school's main office.⁹ Statewide at least ten construction plans with school safety components, ranging from security cameras to access controls, were approved.¹⁰

4. *Should we direct more attention to school climate?*

- Research by the Rutgers-based Developing Safe and Civil Schools Initiative concludes that the more positive a school ranks in five measures of a healthy school climate—overall climate;

⁶ Raymond Hayducka, "Looking Forward: State School Security Procedures and Requirements" (panel discussion at Safe and Secure Schools: Perspectives after Newtown, a forum sponsored by the New Jersey School Boards Association, The College of New Jersey, Ewing, N.J., January 18, 2013), http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B_rSGUV9skA&feature=youtu.be.

⁷ Joe Green, "South Jersey educators, authorities set annual School Safety and Security Conference," *South Jersey Times*, July 23, 2014, (http://www.nj.com/south/index.ssf/2014/07/south_jersey_educators_authorities_to_hold_8th_annual_school_safety_and_security_conference.html). Accessed Sept. 8, 2014.

⁸ Bamford, "Making New Jersey's Schools Safe and Secure": 30-31.

⁹ "BOE Approves Referendum for September Vote," Manchester Township School District, (<http://www.manchestertwp.org/site/default.aspx?PageType=3&DomainID=145&ModuleInstanceID=1159&ViewID=047E6BE3-6D87-4130-8424-D8E4E9ED6C2A&RenderLoc=0&FlexDataID=9779&PageID=448>). Accessed Sept. 8, 2014.

¹⁰ New Jersey School Boards Association, "Voters Approve \$300.2 Million in School Construction Projects," *School Board Notes*, Sept. 30, 2014, Vol. XXXVIII, No.9. (<http://www.njsba.org/news/sbn/20140930/voters-approve-300-point-2-million-in-school-construction-projects.php>)

meaningful student involvement; teacher approval; student pride; and support and care by and among school staff—the lower the incidence of violence, vandalism and/or substance abuse.¹¹

- The former principal of Piscataway High School, who is a leading expert in school security, notes that the culture of the school is just as important as the building security hardware. “That requires you have clear expectations for your students and swift and appropriate consequences when those expectations are not met.”¹²

For any given school district the answers to questions 1, 2, 3 and 4 above could all be “Yes.”

While concerned lawmakers have proposed *statewide* remedies, one year of research by the New Jersey School Boards Association, including the work of its School Security Task Force, arrives at a significant conclusion: The functions of geography, facility design and access to law enforcement result in distinct security needs in each school district. That finding underscores the importance of providing information and guidance to all local school boards. Fulfilling that need is the foremost goal of the New Jersey School Boards Association in publishing this report.

The Immediate Response to Newtown

On December 14, 2012, the day of the Newtown shooting, NJSBA Executive Director Dr. Lawrence S. Feinsod called a meeting of his senior staff to discuss the issues that the tragedy presented to local school boards and ways in which the Association could assist the public school community in moving forward.

Among the first strategies identified was *education*...to inform local school board members and their staffs of the requirements now in place and strategies they may consider. The Association’s initial effort was “Safe and Secure Schools: Perspectives after Newtown,” a statewide forum that drew over 650 people to The College of New Jersey in January 2013. The meeting featured experts from law enforcement, security, school climate, insurance, and crisis management.

To reach a vital element of the school community—that is, *parents*—NJSBA also hosted two regional forums, conducted by Immediate Past President Raymond R. Wiss with the participation of county prosecutors, local law enforcement agencies and school district officials. Additionally, “school security” became a frequent topic of county school boards association meetings throughout the year.

¹¹ Maurice J. Elias, Ph.D., “The Essential Connection between a Safe and Secure School Climate and Students’ Educational and Life Success” (presentation to Safe and Secure Schools: Perspectives after Newtown, a forum sponsored by the New Jersey School Boards Association, The College of New Jersey, Ewing, N.J., January 18, 2013), <http://www.njsba.org/training/materials/njsba-school-safety-forum.ppt> and <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VM4WtwyeTKQ&list=UU9-T5UwBZXksBK0i-ulcHWA>.

¹² Bamford, “Making New Jersey’s Schools Safe and Secure”: 31.

Formation of the School Security Task Force

Based on observations from these forums and other sources, NJSBA President John Bulina identified a need to provide the Association's membership with additional guidance and direction on school safety issues. Therefore, he appointed a School Security Task Force in March 2013 and charged the group with the following tasks:

1. Survey school districts on their security practices and consult with experts in law enforcement, security, school climate, and other fields.
2. Review current developments affecting the implementation and funding of school security measures.
3. Identify best practices and changes in statute and regulation that would promote student safety and enable school boards to fund and implement security measures.
4. Review relevant NJSBA policy. If appropriate, recommend additions or changes to existing Association policy.

Indicative of the high level of interest in school safety, more than 130 local school board members volunteered to serve on the task force. Eleven were selected. (The list of task force members can be found at the beginning of this report.) The board members who expressed interest in the project but were not selected were able to participate as members of a focus group in the development of the survey on school district security practices.

Task Force Activities

Chaired by Immediate Past President Wiss and Vice President for Finance Donald Webster, Jr., the task force met eight times between March and September 2013. It administered a survey to school board presidents and school business administrators during the summer of 2013. Various results from the survey are referenced throughout this report.

The following experts appeared before the task force during its deliberations:

- **Anthony Bland**, state coordinator, Office of School Preparedness and Emergency Planning;
- **Maurice J. Elias, Ph.D.**, director of clinical training, Rutgers University Department of Psychology; director, Rutgers Social and Emotional Learning Laboratory; director, Collaborative, Rutgers' Center for Community-Based Research, Service, and Public Scholarship;
- **Anne Gregory, Ph.D.**, Rutgers University Graduate School of Applied and Professional Psychology;
- **James E. Hyslop**, president, SSC Security, Inc., Huntingdon, PA;
- **William D. (Ted) Hopkins III**, AIA, LEEDap, principal, Fraytak Veisz Hopkins Duthie PC;

- **Brian J. Klimakowski**, chief of police, Manchester Township Police Department, and New Jersey State Association of Chiefs of Police representative to the Governor’s School Security Task Force;
- **Mark B. Miller**, vice president, Pennsylvania School Boards Association, and vice president for Educational Technology, Nixle, and
- **Gary Vermeire**, coordinator of the Safe and Supportive Schools Unit of the New Jersey Department of Education.

Additional guidance came from members of the NJSBA staff, particularly Steven McGettigan, manager of Policy Services (the Uniform Memorandum of Agreement between school districts and local law enforcement), and Lou Schimenti, product and services specialist (School Safety and Security Plans).

The task force co-chairmen, Ray Wiss and Don Webster, presented a preliminary report to the NJSBA membership at the Association’s annual conference (“Workshop”) in October 2013. (See Appendix D.)

Task Force Findings

The Final Report of the NJSBA School Security Task Force includes 45 recommendations addressing local school district practices and state and federal requirements in six key areas: security personnel; school climate; policy and planning; communications/ community relations; physical security; and finances.

Each recommendation is based on findings that were developed following consultation with experts and additional research. Key findings of the task force include the following:

- New Jersey has strong and effective statewide school security measures in place. For example, our state is one of only 10 that require periodic security drills throughout the school year. It requires crisis plans in each district, as well as agreements between school districts and local law enforcement agencies. The procedures result from state law and regulation, aggressive state initiative, local school board policy, and the interest of caring adults, including teachers, parents, school board members, and law enforcement personnel.
- Effective security planning must involve every element of the school community and the broader community.
- A safe and secure environment for our students requires not only protection from outside threats, but also the maintenance of a supportive and caring day-to-day internal school climate.
- A strong, positive relationship between school officials and law enforcement/emergency responders—built on mutual respect for, and adherence to their specific roles—is a cornerstone of an effective school security program.

- An information gap persists concerning the various types of security personnel employed in schools (e.g., School Resource Officers, private security, retired law enforcement, etc.) and their training, qualifications and functions, a situation that has led to public misperception and misunderstanding.
- “Deter, Slow and Detain” intruders, a foundation of effective physical security, requires a different set of building blocks for each school and school district. However, certain low-cost options are available to address the common concern of controlling entry into schools and classrooms.
- Funding for security upgrades and strategies has become extremely limited due to competing demands of the academic program and capital expenses, state regulation over non-instructional expenditures, the 2 percent tax levy cap, and the lapse of federal funding for the School Resource Officer program.

How to Read this Report

A safe and secure school encompasses many elements, such as building design, a well-trained and well-informed staff, a cooperative relationship with law enforcement, and a nurturing environment. To enable readers to understand the relevant factors of a safe and secure school, the Final Report of the NJSBA School Security Task Force is organized into the following sections:

- [Security Personnel](#) (Page 1)
- [School Climate](#) (Page 17)
- [Policy and Planning](#) (Page 35)
- [Communications](#) (Page 56)
- [Training in School Security](#) (Page 61)
- [Physical Security](#) (Page 70)
- [Financing School Security](#) (Page 79)

Various sections, including School Climate and Training, provide summaries of current programs and available resources.

Each section concludes with a series of recommendations, based on critical information presented by the experts who appeared before the task force and the research collected by the study group. While all recommendations are compiled into a single reference (Appendix A), readers would benefit most from the task force’s extensive work by reviewing the information behind the recommendations. The narratives in each section also provide interesting, useful information about school safety and security, with extensive references to guidelines from governmental agencies, such as the Office of Homeland Security and the FBI, institutions of higher education, and presentations by the experts who appeared before the task force.

Links to most of the references used in this report are included in the footnotes in each section and in the [Works Cited/Resources](#) section (Appendix B).