

Dear Texas Schools,

At the Texas School Safety Center, our prayers go out to the students, staff, first responders, and families impacted by today's horrific tragedy. In the wake of the tragic event at Santa Fe High School this morning, the Texas School Safety Center has prepared some points of consideration to assist you in the coming days, weeks, and months:

1. Review your access control measures with all staff. Only admit people to your building once you know who they are, and that they have a legitimate reason to be in your building. You have the right to deny admittance to your building and do not hesitate to call law enforcement immediately if you consider something to be suspicious. This may be a good time to conduct periodic sweeps of the school and check for propped doors. Remind all visitors of the requirement to check-out at the office when leaving the school.
2. Take this opportunity to visit your safety and security processes and have collaborative conversations with local law enforcement and emergency management agencies in your efforts to continually identify and improve safety and security challenges. Consider taking a few moments to discuss safety with your staff and students. This is an appropriate time to review your district and campus emergency operations plan with staff, specifically intruder protocols, and even offsite reunification protocols. The Texas School Safety Center provides a toolkit on developing a high-quality emergency operations plan, along with a sample plan at <https://rmt.txssc.txstate.edu/tools/hq-eop>.

Additionally, the Texas School Safety Center provides a toolkit on the K-12 Standard Response Protocol (SRP) which offers guidance and resources for incorporating the SRP into an emergency operations plan for critical incident response within individual schools in a district. This SRP (Texas Edition) Toolkit can be found at <https://txssc.txstate.edu/tools/srp-toolkit>.

Further, the Texas School Safety Center provides the K-12 Standard Reunification Method Toolkit. School emergencies may require an evacuation or change in operational schedules of a school, necessitating a well-organized and structured way to reunite students with parents. This toolkit can be found at <https://txssc.txstate.edu/tools/srm-toolkit/>.

3. Research shows that most school attackers tell someone about their plans, and that there was identifiable cause for concern prior to the attack. Remind students of any anonymous reporting systems, or other means to report issues of concern. A simple announcement or flier that states "if you see something, say something", and that school safety is everyone's responsibility would be appropriate.
4. Be prepared to address your parents and the community. After the Sandy Hook tragedy, many schools took proactive measures with a message or letter home to parents. Wording can be similar to the following:

"The tragedy at Santa Fe High School reminds us all of the importance of safety and security in schools. We want to assure our families that our district and schools have an updated emergency operations plan that has been created/reviewed in collaboration with local law enforcement. The members of our staff have been trained on the specifics of this plan, and we conduct periodic drills to ensure that everyone knows their role during a crisis. Our district's school also has specific protocols for entry to our schools, and we appreciate the understanding of our parents as we enforce these protocols for the safety of our children. The safety of our students remains our highest priority."

Parents may want to learn more about your plan, or even review the plan. Please be aware that your district's emergency operations plan is subject to disclosure regarding certain information as outlined in [Texas Education Code, 37.108 \(c-2\)](#), therefore you should not disclose any details of the plan beyond what is allowed that would compromise the integrity of the plan itself. Be very general when discussing details of your safety plan, and cite the previous code as justification.

5. You should be aware that often schools experience an increase in incidents during the coming weeks following such a tragic event with regards to hit lists, threats, and rumors. Experience has shown there is a "contagion effect" that impacts communities after a highly publicized event such as this. Social media will likely play a role in upcoming incidents, so consider your role in monitoring and addressing this outlet and listening to students reporting concerns. All threats should be taken seriously. Remember to use local resources and collaborative partners in law enforcement to investigate. There are several threat assessment resources available at <https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources/school-safety-and-crisis/threat-assessment-at-school/threat-assessment-for-school->

administrators-and-crisis-teams, but working with your local resources is key.

6. Meet with local first responders and request increased law enforcement visibility at your schools. Offer tours for law enforcement who may not be familiar with the school. If you have had difficulty working with local first responders, there is no better time to address that issue. Working with your local first responders and county emergency management to discuss safety plans and concerns over specific threats is critical. Information sharing is absolutely key when preventing attacks on schools.
7. With social media being a part of youth's lives from such an early age, we need to make extraordinary attempts to reach youth when these major events occur. Digital natives - youth for whom social media has always been a part of their lives - are apt to look to their peers for support in the aftermath of troubling events, and all of that happens out of our view. Unless adults in kids' lives bring something up in conversation, youth often assume that they "should" be able to cope with it on their own. That means youth have only the level of wisdom of their peers to help see them through these difficult times. However, it would be more beneficial if they have these conversations with adults who can provide a sense of context and safety.

As there will be a tremendous amount of media coverage on this event in the coming days and weeks, it is worth taking a moment to think about the importance of starting the conversation in a way that will invite youth into the conversation and avoid making them defensive. One way of doing that is making the youth "the expert". So instead of mentioning the shooting and asking whether your child/student is anxious, consider framing it something like, "*There has been a lot of coverage in the news about the shooting at Santa Fe High School. When that happens, how do you think that affects [your peers] [students] [kids your age]?*" And then just listen. We often jump in too quickly to reassure youth, when what they really want and need is for us to listen to their concerns. When we move too quickly to reassurance, we stop the conversation at that point. It is far more effective to ask them to tell us more. Then, engage youth in conveying their thoughts about a range of ideas or possible solutions. Some questions to ask youth include:

What might help students feel or be safer in school?

What could parents do to help youth feel safe? What could teachers do?

What kinds of things has your school done to address school safety?

What do students wish adults understood about what it is like to be a teen today?

The greatest outcome of these conversations is when we leave youth knowing that we are willing for them to talk with us about anything. An expression in the crisis response community is "never waste a crisis," and this is your opportunity as well - don't waste this opportunity to connect deeply with your children/students, setting the stage for more open communication about all kinds of things in the future is key.

Please visit the Texas School Safety Center website for more information about resources and training at <https://txssc.txstate.edu>.

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Director

Texas School Safety Center