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Illinois Statewide Interoperability Executive Committee

Donald Buttitta
Chairman

Matthew Miller
SWIC

Recommendation 1 – Common Terminologies

A common and consistent lexicon of terminologies should be used statewide by educational institutions and emergency service providers who respond to incidents involving them; those terminologies should be in plain language, without the use of acronyms or specialized words and phrases that are not widely understood by the general public.

Recommendation 2 - Testing of Technology/Practice 911 calls

Regular, routine practice and testing (at least monthly) of communication technology and procedure should be conducted, including operation of the equipment and actual communication with the appropriate emergency responder organization (911 center, PSAP, law enforcement office).

NOTE: Test calls should be coordinated in advance with the emergency responder organization to ensure the call is not mistaken for a real event.

Recommendation 3 – School Emergency Communications Planning

Schools should include in their annual emergency planning process the creation and review of emergency communications procedures, which are developed in cooperation with local law enforcement, fire department, emergency management, dispatch center, and emergency medical services organizations. Discussions with these local first responders should be held as joint, all-inclusive meeting(s) so that there is seamless coordination and cooperation among all parties. Schools should work with local first responder-communications planners to ensure the school's plans are included in the local Tactical Interoperable Communications Plan (TICP) for their jurisdiction.

Recommendation 4 – Public Messaging

In an emergency situation, verified information should be disseminated as quickly as possible to all public parties who need it. Public messaging should be coordinated and consistent with information released by first responders; however, dissemination of initial critical information should not be delayed. To facilitate coordination and timely information distribution, consider establishing procedures with first responders in advance, using multiple media/platforms, designating multiple staff capable of message activation and dissemination, and even creating pre-determined templates to expedite consistent messaging.

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Recommendation 5 - Training

Training for staff that includes emergency communications procedures and technology should be conducted at least annually. Training should be developed in coordination with local emergency management/responders and with advice as needed from technology professionals familiar with the devices (radios, computers, cameras, etc.) in use.

Recommendation 6 – New Technology

When schools investigate new/additional technological solutions for emergencies in their facilities, they should consult and coordinate with local first responders and emergency managers to ensure communications systems under consideration are compatible with first responders' systems and overall local response plans. Standardizing communications systems within school districts and coordinating with local first responders will ensure seamless and efficient communication.

Recommendation 7 – Video Monitoring

Schools that use video monitor systems should consider making live video available on-demand to local public safety entities (provided this is allowable under federal, state, and local law); this will enable first responders to see a situation/crisis in real time as they mount a response. Even if first responders can access the video feed as necessary, schools should record all video and make every effort to have school staff continuously monitor the feed to identify potential problems immediately.

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School Technology Planning.

I. Effective emergency planning is a key aspect of any school safety program. Emergency planning should be done in a way that produces straightforward plans and instructions that users can easily follow in the worst of times. A modest two-page plan that everyone understands is far better that the best two-hundred-page plan that just sits on a shelf.

II. All school emergency plans should include a communications component. Effective communications during an emergency can be planned and coordinated in advance of an event, just as other types of emergency procedures are pre-planned. The creation and review of these plans are an important step in providing for the safety of students and staff; and they establish a framework that can be used to test and drill school occupants on how to survive a variety of threats.

III. Make sure the school communications plan is not developed in a vacuum.
   a. Schools should use a planning process that includes local law enforcement, fire department, emergency management, dispatch center, and emergency medical services organizations. Discussions with these local first responders should be held as joint, all-inclusive meeting(s) so that there is seamless coordination and cooperation among all parties.
   b. Planning meetings should also include school staff, school transportation management, parents, and local media.

IV. Increase the effectiveness of the school emergency communications plan by contacting your local Emergency Management Agency and ask to be included in the county or regional TICP.
   a. A Tactical Interoperable Communications Plan (TICP) is a document which describes who, what, when, where, why, and how all the agencies in an area will communicate during incidents and events. Schools need to be included in this planning.
   b. If your school has not been included in the TICP, reach out to your local Emergency Management Agency to start the process.

V. Analyze the various types of incidents that can occur in and around a school and identify consistent procedures for communicating that are effective regardless of the emergency.
   a. For example, there is always a need to pass timely and accurate information to decision makers.
   b. There is also always a need to pass instructions and information to the people directly involved in the incident.

VI. In addition to communications between school staff and responders, public warning and notification is an especially important function.
   a. Public notification via text, e-mail, and voice technologies are a powerful tool to inform the student body, parents, educators, and others of real-time situations from snow days to emergency incidents. Messages should be standardized and pre-recorded in order to minimize potential confusion in a fast-moving event.
   b. Include representatives from local response agencies, in addition to parent groups, to develop clear and effective messaging as well as reduce the potential for unintended consequences that may harm the response rather than help it. Distribution lists should include county, local, and state agencies, so in the event of a school emergency, they can see the messaging in real time.

VII. Technology planning is another important element of emergency preparedness. Include operational and technical experts in discussions regarding the purchase or use of technology in emergency responses.
   a. Technology must support the overall school emergency plan.
      i. Technology on its own does not solve problems; simply purchasing a gadget with no plan for its use is usually a waste of precious funding. Technology has to be part of an overall solution that addresses the human factors, which are far more important.
      ii. The use of technology in a school emergency affects everyone involved: students, teachers, administrators, and responders.
      iii. Functional and operational requirements must drive the choice of technology, not vice versa.
   b. Involve local first responders in planning for the purchase of new emergency technology to make sure the proposed technology supports the overall response plan.

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Public Messaging During School Emergency Events

I. Phones or intercoms could be made available in each schoolroom or logical gathering points within a school. Connectivity should include easy contact with the central office of the school, but should also allow for direct calling of 9-1-1.

II. Routine and emergency communications should be established. This can include mass emailing, mass texting, or organized and controlled social media.

III. School officials should establish emergency and non-emergency contact methods with the local 9-1-1 Center for rapid interaction with local emergency responders. Regular testing and training on how to call 9-1-1, questions that are anticipated to be asked, and empowerment of staff to initiate a 9-1-1 call should be part of the plan. Non-emergency methods should be well known for contact of public safety officials and should also be part of the plan and integrated into staff training.

IV. In larger events which may require school evacuation, reunification centers, dangerous circumstances, or active assailants, a Joint Information Center should be considered to act as a clearinghouse for all public notifications. Input should include but not be limited to fire, police, school superintendent, principal, school resource officer, social worker or any other official. There should be a unified message to avoid or eliminate mixed messages to the general public.
   a. Benefits
      i. Tangible: Technological solutions should be designed and implemented for timely, accurate, authoritative, coordinated, and useful messaging.
      ii. Intangible: Improved communication gives the school and agencies credibility, improves trust of all stakeholders, improves staff morale, gives confidence to parents/guardians.

V. **Real-life examples of a success.**
   a. Internal phones installed in each classroom.
   b. Blast voicemail, email, and text messaging to parents/guardians.
   c. Inclusion of public safety agencies in all messaging for situational awareness, which aids in the proper tactical response.
   d. Coordinated messaging to the public, media, and social media during emergency events, arranged by a Joint Public Information Office (or Officer).

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White Paper

School Safety and Security Communication Interoperability with Public Safety
School and School Districts
Local Law Enforcement
Fire Services
Dispatch (Consolidated)
County ROE

I. Communication during a critical incident or any emergency situation has always been a challenge regardless of what entity you represent. When an incident occurs, having an effective communication plan and procedures in place plays a vital role in the effectiveness of an organization. Communication plans are especially important when actively managing a situation and assessing where things stand at a given point in time. This is most critical during the first several minutes of an event and includes the initial notification and dispatch to public safety.

II. In an effort to maximize the efficiency and accuracy of information being communicated during one of these incidents, and, based on lessons learned during after action reports, the following plan was developed to assist with interoperability.

III. After direction was provided the superintendent at the time, I developed a more robust and proactive security plan that involved upgrading personnel to fit advances in technology, while tapping into a wealth of experience with retired public safety officials. While the entire plan encompassed several different capabilities, the one applicable for this discussion was the introduction of utilizing the state-wide radio network in the school environment. This capability would provide direct and real-time communication between first responders responding to a critical incident and school personnel (security) that were on-scene.

IV. Possible pitfalls associated with the proposal and identify ways to mitigate what were reasonable concerns by those who would be vetting the process. These included:

   a. Personnel using the radio and subsequent training.

b. Storage and security of the radios.
c. Access/Subscription to the state-wide network and local channels.
d. Purchasing the radios and associated costs.
e. Implementing policy for use and inclusion to the school Emergency Operations Plan (EOP).

    i. <u>Personnel</u> – District 86 hired 15 people to fill the newly created Security Officer positions. Of those 15, 12 were retired police officers and one a current Community Service Officer at the Hinsdale Police Department who has 18 years' experience, including duties as a dispatcher when Hinsdale had its own PSAP. The remaining two employees were current employees of the District that have military experience and have worked security for an extended period of time. Both were well trained in current use of a portable radio but were required to complete a more comprehensive training component with the statewide radio and a more advanced base station.

    ii. <u>Training</u> – All Security Officers, regardless of their past experience, were required to complete an 8-hour initial training course as part of their orientation. As part of that training, use of all equipment, including radios, proper etiquette, and security measures to protect the radios (see below) were included. Officers were completely vetted during the hiring process by the District which requires that they are fingerprinted and that a background investigation has been completed. Additionally, the District was committed for all Security Officers to be approved and go through any training deemed necessary by the county Chief's Association and ETSB in regard to the radios or their use.

    iii. <u>Radio Security</u> – Each high school has a single, secure, command center where each radio base is stored and maintained. Officers are supplied with their own two-way portable radio to communicate internally and not be replaced by state-wide radio. The state radios are only be used by the officer manning the command center and

for emergency use only with first responders or the consolidated dispatch center when the assigned School Resource Officer is unavailable. Additionally, each command center is controlled by a keyless door access system that will only allow for authorized personnel to enter the room. This room acts as the hub for all intelligence, technology, and analytics for security personnel and is off limits to anyone other than Security Officers and first responders. Policy requires that radios are maintained and secured in the command centers at all times, including after-hours unless approved by the Director of Security.

iv. Network Access – This required completing the DuPage EDIRS (Emergency Dispatch Interoperable Radio System) Participation Application, which mandated documented sponsorship and support from local public safety agencies as well as the county ETSB. Additionally, an application was required for the state-wide radio oversight committee to access the system. After required appearances at board meetings for both, the ETSB approved the proposal through a resolution and an agreement was executed with the state-wide radio entity. The radios were programmed accordingly and access to the appropriate radio channels were provided. Annually, a subscription is required where the agreement is reviewed, and payment is required.

v. Policy and Procedures – Official policy and procedures on use of the radios were adopted by the district and use was added as part of the communications plan for the EOP. This is reviewed annually as part of the Regional Office of Education requirement and continues to be trained on regularly with local public safety.

V. The true benefit of this system is interoperability between responding public safety and someone trained specifically to communicate real-time information to them during a critical incident. Efficient and accurate communication during these incidents are critical to successfully managing them as best we can.

VI. This operation was implemented in the fall of 2019 and despite it being a relatively short period of time, the district has already benefited from the interoperability.
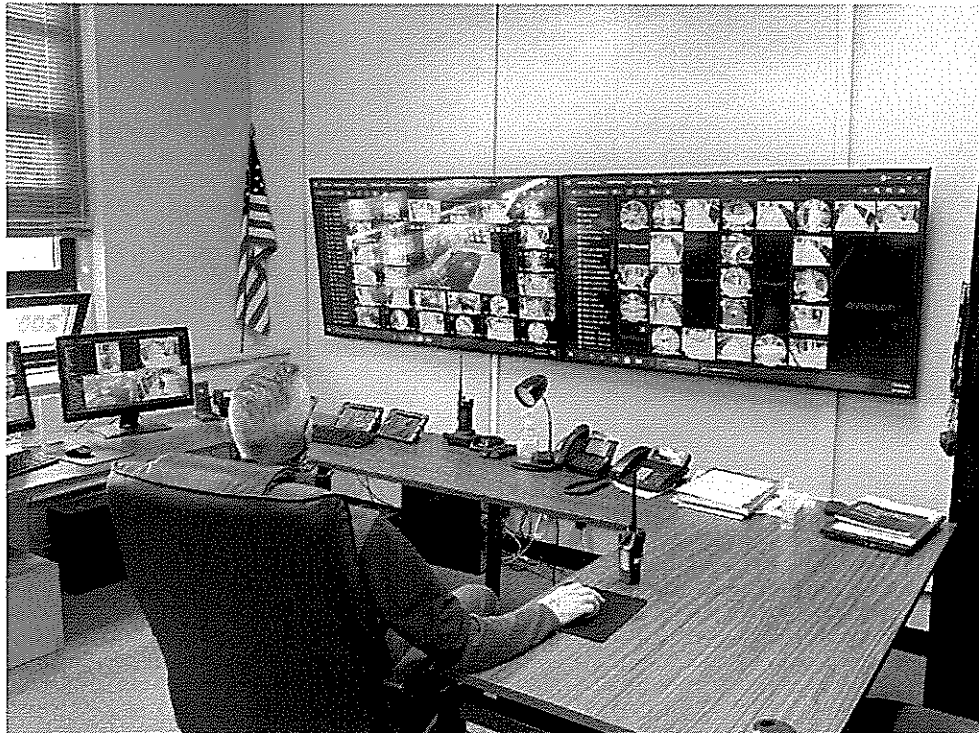
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Officers who are assigned to the command center are required to monitor the local frequencies for public safety for activity that may impact the school. In the late fall of 2019, a local jurisdiction of one of the high schools had an armed robbery occur at a convenient store approximately 2 blocks from the campus. The radio traffic was immediately heard by the officer monitoring the channel and the appropriate steps were initiated to place the school in a shelter in place. Action was immediate and not reliant on the school being contacted by a third party or as the event was evolving, thus, saving several valuable minutes to ensure students and staff safety.

Some of the indirect benefits include the immediate improvement and development of a more complete Emergency Operation Plan.

Command Center

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Illinois Statewide Interoperability Executive Committee

Donald Buttitta
Chairman

Matthew Miller
SWIC

Base Radio

Donald Buttitta
Chairman

Matthew Miller
SWIC

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School Technology Testing and Training.

Technology is an important part of any school safety program; however, regular training and testing are important to ensure that technology works, and the users can operate it properly in an emergency.

I. Testing: Technology is installed to support school safety, often for use in emergency situations. But in some cases, it is rarely tested or touched again. Then, in the event of a real emergency, that technology is not remembered and not used at all, not used efficiently, or worst of all, not working when actually needed.
    a. Three examples:
        i. By law, 911 calls must accurately show the address of the call, and in large buildings, show the location within the building. Sometimes, updates to phone systems, or even just simple building remodeling may alter location information.
        ii. Many schools use radio systems to communicate during emergencies. Often, if the radios are not tested/operated regularly, the radio batteries can go dead, or other problems may appear. Also, any type of communications systems, whether radios, cell phone, etc., can suffer from "dead spots" where they just don't work.
        iii. Many schools use various types of alarms and notification systems, components can fail, rendering a portion or all of that system inoperative.

    b. A failure of any of these types of systems during an emergency can have catastrophic consequences.
    c. All school emergency systems should be periodically and thoroughly tested on a regular, scheduled basis, preferably monthly. Some technology (radios, alarm systems, video, etc.) is intended for use only during an emergency, some is used on a day to day basis. This will affect how testing and training programs will be designed and implemented. Using our examples above:
        i. Coordinate with the local PSAP to schedule 911 call tests from various locations to be sure the call will go through correctly and ensure location accuracy. *Please NOTE: DO NOT PERFORM 911 TESTING UNLESS YOU HAVE MADE PRIOR ARRANGEMENTS WITH THE DISPATCH CENTER!!!*
        ii. If radios are not used on a day to day basis, the radios should be tested regularly to ensure the radios work in all parts of the building.

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Emergency Responders need to make sure to test their radios in all areas of the school to make sure the radios are working. Any "dead spots" should be noted, and corrective actions taken. Also, school radios should be tested to make sure the batteries hold a charge, etc.

iii. Alarms, particularly panic buttons, should be checked by the users themselves, again, *DO NOT PERFORM ALARM TESTING UNLESS YOU HAVE MADE PRIOR ARRANGEMENTS WITH THE ALARM COMPANY and/or DISPATCH CENTER!!!*

II. Training: Additionally, regular, routine training on all emergency communications systems should be performed on a regular basis.

Sometimes drills are simply conducted as a "check the box" type of activity, where everyone just goes through the motions, and do not practice the details that will make a difference during a real-world emergency.

Routine testing of technology can be used as part of a training program, especially having the users do the testing, as it helps familiarize the users with the actual operation of the devices and systems.

However, in addition to routine testing, there should be a training program that is targeted towards using the devices in an actual emergency scenario. Training should include any response partners to ensure that schools can communication with Police, Fire, EMS, and 911 Centers as intended, when needed.

If there is an exercise, make sure that communications and technology are a large part of that event.

Anytime there is a drill, that drill should include the use of the emergency communications systems. Even if there is not a direct correlation between the type of drill and the technology systems, every drill is an excellent opportunity for training on all technology types.

Repetition is key, every time someone operates a device during testing or training, they add to their "muscle memory", and vastly increases the chances that they will operate as planned during an emergency.

Under stress, people will tend to do what they are used to doing in normal circumstances. A robust training program that reinforces the correct actions will help the users automatically revert to the correct way to communicate during an emergency.

a. The benefits of this type of testing and training plan is:
    i. Correct operations of the equipment is confirmed, and equipment failures have a much higher chance of being detected and repaired before an emergency occurs.

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    ii. Users of the systems will use the systems correctly when the time comes, hopefully reducing confusion and helping the response to occur much quicker and efficiently.

White Paper Contributors:

Steve Rauter – Executive Director Western Will County Communication Center (WESCOM)

Kevin Simpson – Director of Security, Hinsdale District 86. Retired Chief of Police, Hinsdale Police Department.

Bill Springer – Communication Liaison, Illinois Law Enforcement Alarm System (ILEAS)