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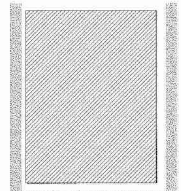
CurriculumReview

A monthly report on what works in our schools



Special Report Issue: School Safety, Weapons Violence
and Looking Back at Sandy Hook, Two Years Later

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Special Report

Threats of Violence: Safe and Anonymous Reporting

After the 1999 attacks on Columbine High School, there was a surge in the creation of tip lines for students to anonymously report potential threats to the authorities. After the massacre at Sandy Hook Elementary School in 2012, these tip lines received attention again with renewed vigor, and several private companies have started to offer related services.

In 81 percent of violent incidents, another person was aware of the threat prior to when it occurred, according to the findings of a 2008 United States Secret Service study on school violence. Clearly, there is a discrepancy between threats of violence being known and tips regarding these threats being reported.

Not all students — or even adults, for that matter — are forthcoming with this type of information when they sense a threat may be imminent. Some students may fear retaliation from peers, especially those who are potentially dangerous, or becoming known by classmates as a “snitch.” Anonymous tip lines are a way for students to report their concerns without disclosing their identity, allowing the proper officials and authorities to respond to the threats and potentially prevent violence from occurring, according to the National School Safety Center (NSSC).

While establishing or referring students toward an anonymous tip line is a strong start to combating violent events at school, it is just the beginning. According to *Education Week*, schools need an infrastructure that efficiently filters and responds to such tips as well. Some of the challenges in establishing tip lines are the setup and maintenance costs including hiring and training staff or contracting with outside

vendors. NSSC cites the importance of having municipal support in order to receive funding. Municipal support can be solicited by the school officials as well as the community, and will work best if the two are working together.

Some school districts have policies that prohibit possession or use of cell phones during school hours. If implementing anonymous tip lines, schools will also need to review and consider policies on cell phone usage during school hours.

What's Working

- » In the Weber and Ogden School Districts (Utah), school officials and local law enforcement agencies have partnered to establish an anonymous tip line for students to text concerns about friends, classmates and peers who may potentially become threats to themselves or others. As the text messages are routed, identifying information is removed from the text message to preserve anonymity, reported Salt Lake *Tribune*. The content of the message is then forwarded to the school officials and law enforcement team. The message sender receives a confirmation of receipt and instructions to call 911 in case of emergency. In this system, the sender also receives a unique code that can be used to provide additional information

regarding the same case while still remaining anonymous.

- » In the Puyallup School District in Washington State, an anonymous tip line is managed by an organization called SafeSchools, which also provides online training courses for staff within the school system. If someone calls and expresses suicidal ideation, they are connected immediately to a trained counselor at the Suicide Prevention Hotline. A bonus benefit: The district receives a discount on its annual insurance policy by providing the SafeSchools contact information to students and the wider district community, according to a district annual report.
- » OK2Say is a program that has support and funding from state government and was activated in September 2014 throughout the state of Michigan. With this program, tips can be submitted via phone, text, website or email. Threats are reported to trained operators who refer accordingly to local law enforcement, school officials or community mental health resources. Fake tips carry serious penalties and are against the law, reported local news station wwmt.com. The OK2Say program also allows reporters to attach photos and videos when filing an anonymous tip. As of October 21, 2014 the Michigan governor reported that over 100 tips had been submitted since the program started in September.

Columbine High School Massacre

On April 20, 1999, Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris, two students from Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, entered their school heavily armed with automatic weapons and homemade bombs. They killed 13 people and wounded approximately 20 others before taking their own lives.

Source: history.com

Sources: wwmt.com, 10/21/14; Puyallup School District, pullayup.k12.wa.us; secretsservice.gov