



To: School Committee
From: Toby N. Romer, Assistant Superintendent for Secondary Education and Special Programs,
Chair of the NPS District Safety Team
Date: December 1st, 2022
Re: School Safety and Emergency Planning Update

Members of our Newton Public Schools District Safety Team, including representatives from our city partners in Health and Human Services, Newton Police and Newton Fire, will join me at the school committee meeting on December 5th, 2022 to share an update on school safety and emergency procedures and preparedness. I will outline key developments and background information here, and look forward to presenting further and answering your questions at the school committee meeting.

The Newton Public Schools have robust safety and security systems and protocols in place to maintain secure buildings and safe school communities. We work very closely with our city partners - Newton Fire, Police, and Health and Human Services - on prevention, preparedness and response to a wide range of scenarios.

Recent Safety Updates

From 2018 to 2019, the Newton Public Schools safety team worked in partnership with the Newton Fire Department, Newton Police Department, the Newton Teachers Association and the City of Newton to update the district-wide emergency operations plan. The team worked closely with Preparedness LLC, a nationally-recognized security and risk assessment firm, to review the existing emergency operations plan and update it to reflect current requirements and best practices for school safety.

The result is an updated, research-based emergency operations plan that provides guidance to administrators and staff for the most foreseeable types of emergencies. Importantly, the plan includes not only pre-existing protocols for evacuation, shelter-in-place, and lockdown, but added a specific “hostile event” response. The plan incorporates an options-based response to an active shooter scenario, similar to the well-known ALICE Protocol (Alert, Lockdown, Inform, Counter, Evacuate), as well as research-informed learning from analysis of real active shooter events. New tools, including online and hard copy handbooks as well as classroom posters, were developed to guide staff and students in the event of an emergency.

The four core responses to an emergency event at school in the Newton Public Schools are:

- **Evacuation** "*Get out, stay out*" - This response is used when there is a fire or other internal unsafe condition. Students and staff evacuate to designated assembly areas.
- **Shelter in Place** "*Stay inside, stay safe*" - This response is used when there is an external security threat, severe weather, or an airborne hazard. It is also used when there is a medical emergency. Students and staff stay inside classrooms with little or no use of hallways or common areas. External doors may be locked based upon the specific situation. Instruction will typically continue.
- **Lockdown** "*Silent and invisible*" - This response is used when there is an internal security

threat. Students and staff are hidden and quiet in locked and darkened classrooms.

- **Hostile event response "Run, hide, fight"** - This response is used when there is an active shooter or other act of violence in progress. Students and staff assess the situation and determine the best course of action. They may evacuate immediately or they may follow lockdown procedures described above until a safe method of evacuation is identified. The situation is assessed continuously and groups of staff/students are empowered to adjust course in response to specific events.

In addition, grants from the federal government have allowed the Newton Public Schools to implement additional security and safety improvements, including updating shades on classroom windows, locks on classroom doors, and keyless entry to buildings for staff. A two-year grant to the Newton Police Department, called Secure our Schools, funded security cameras at our high schools, as well as replacement of exterior doors, and installation of emergency and exterior lighting. An additional grant has also allowed cameras to be installed at our four middle schools, as well as in our new elementary buildings and in key external areas at other schools as needed. We continue to work closely with the police department on this type of safety and security measure.

NPS Safety Teams

The Newton Public Schools organizes safety teams at each of our school buildings and at the district level to prepare for and coordinate response to crisis situations and other emergencies. The district safety team is responsible for updating and disseminating emergency policy and procedures, training materials, and assembling to determine a course of action in times of citywide crisis. The team meets monthly and includes representatives from the different school levels and roles, our school nursing staff, as well as the Newton Police Department, Newton Fire Department, our NPS psychology department, and other school and community-based mental health professionals.

Each individual school also has a safety team that includes administrators, teachers, and other staff from that school. The team meets periodically throughout the year to review procedures and plan for emergency response. Our school safety teams also are convened as needed to evaluate and respond to challenging community situations, plan next steps and offer support to children, parents, and staff. The district safety team offers resources for school-based safety teams to refine their practice, and also supports specific school teams with resources and staffing as needed in the event of a crisis.

Safety Training and Drills

The district has established protocols for addressing a range of crises and emergencies. Each fall, new school leaders are trained in district-specific safety procedures, and all school leaders participate in a refresher training with specific areas of focus for the year. School staff are trained annually in emergency procedures at each school to ensure that all educators, as well as support staff, are prepared to handle any emergency. Each school has supplemental emergency procedures specific to its site and facilities that are part of the annual training. In addition, staff review the emergency procedures poster that is posted in every classroom, as well as the entire emergency operations plan document which is available to all staff as a part of our internal emergency preparedness resources.

Each year, staff and students in all schools practice the full range of drills for our emergency procedures and protocols. As is done for all safety drills, the practice is tailored to grade levels, using developmentally appropriate language and discussion topics. Scripts are provided for classroom teachers that provide specific examples of developmentally-appropriate language to use in explaining the purpose and procedures of each day. Drills each year include:

- 4 Evacuation Drills (required by Fire Safety law)
- 3 Shelter-in-Place/Lockdown/Hostile Event Drills
- 2 Bus Evacuation Drills

Most NPS schools will complete a full series of these drills in one day as a part of an annual safety day in the fall, with a focus on the continuum of response to a safety event and the importance of coordination and communication. In addition, our school nurses also organize drills for our internal Medical Emergency Response Teams, who practice how to respond to a non-responsive individual or other medical emergency.

As we conduct these drills, we remind staff that talking about school safety and particularly the hostile event response can be anxiety inducing for staff and students alike. The language we use is important and varies by the level of our students. The feedback from our middle and high school students across the district indicates that the vast majority are already thinking/talking about issues related to school shootings/hostile events and they will feel more secure when it is addressed directly in school. This is reflected in the national research as well, with some suggesting that elementary school students are also feeling this way.

Our educators are prepared to address student questions directly while providing reassurances about their overall safety and the overall safety of schools. We also recognize that responding to questions can be helpful for troubleshooting and helping all students feel prepared, but it can also cause more anxiety because there will always be another “what if” question or scenario. Therefore, educators are coached to stick to the key messages in each drill and reassure students of their overall safety.

Communication Systems

The Newton Public Schools works closely with the staff in our Office of Information Technology to ensure up-to-date communication tools are available to support our emergency response systems. NPS utilizes the SchoolMessenger communication system, which allows us to alert staff and families through a phone call, email, or text message in an emergency. We are able to communicate with families, faculty, and staff 24 hours a day and in multiple languages. SchoolMessenger utilizes data (phone and email address) entered into the district's student information system, Aspen. Families also have the choice to opt out of this messaging, and can change their settings by logging into the Aspen student information system (<https://aspen.newton.k12.ma.us/>) and adjusting their communication preferences and contact information.

Schools are also equipped with public address systems to allow for announcements to be made in the building, and building administrators also have “walkie-talkie” systems that allow for direct communication with one another. Newton has also installed hard-wire radio connections between each building and the City of Newton dispatch center, which allows for an emergency call to be made in the event of a hostile event, cutting the time of response for first responders. Annual training is now provided for our main office staff in communicating with the dispatch center in a crisis. The district also offers a 24-hour crisis phone for school and district leaders that is staffed by a highly trained psychologist to support and coordinate responses to events outside of school hours impacting our community.

Telephone systems at schools include the ability to dial 911 directly. Staff and students are encouraged to call 911 immediately for any emergency, in addition to our internal communication systems. Phone systems in schools that rely on internet connectivity also include backup, traditional copper phone lines to specifically route emergency calls. Staff and students are also encouraged to enable WiFi calling on their cell phones to mitigate cell coverage issues in buildings.

Social and Emotional Health

Research demonstrates that some of the most important safety work we do is the support of the social and emotional health of our students. We know that it is most important for students to feel connected to their school community and supported by their peers, teachers, and other trusted adults. When we create connections and support, faculty and staff can more effectively address student needs or concerns when they arise. Some of the social and emotional initiatives we have in place include:

- Signs of Suicide (SOS) curriculum and screenings of 7th, 9th, and 11th grade students.
- School connectedness surveys conducted regularly in grades 3-8 and high school.
- Anti-bullying programs and reporting systems.
- Lessons on social and emotional competencies combined with cross-grade connecting activities and additional support for students in need in grades K-5.
- Advisory programs connecting smaller groups of students and adults in grades 6-12.
- Mental health professionals, including psychologists, counselors, or social workers in all buildings, as well as school nurses.
- Close partnerships with the Newton Health and Human Services department and outside agencies.

NPS Facilities

Our school leaders and safety teams work closely with the NPS facilities staff to ensure that our buildings meet all safety requirements and are maintained to support our safety protocols and procedures. All middle school and elementary school doors are locked during the day with only one point of entry. Visitors are granted entry to the building through a buzzer system. At the high school level, the open campus system has been adjusted in recent years to respond to student and family concerns about security. While upper class students at the high schools are still allowed to leave campus and return during the school day when not assigned to classes, only the main entrances are accessible during the day, and these are adjacent to the main offices in each case. Additional key card and passcode entrances have been created to adapt the architecture of the schools to a more secure environment. Parents/families and visitors are required to enter through the main entrance doors and sign in at the office, which is an expectation across all schools PreK-12.

City Partnerships

We work closely with our city partners on all aspects of school safety. In particular, our Newton Health and Human Services (HHS) colleagues are active partners on our district and school safety teams, and our nursing staff is a part of HHS as well and participates actively in all aspects of emergency preparedness. We are currently partnering with Newton HHS to share resources for families regarding gun safety in the home as well, in order to complement our school safety procedures.

Our Newton police colleagues include the NPD Community Services Bureau, which includes four dedicated School Resource Officers or “youth officers” who collaborate actively with our school leaders, provide feedback and supervision for our safety drills, and are consistently in our school buildings.

Our Newton fire colleagues are also active participants in all of our emergency preparedness work, including the Fire Prevention, Fire Alarm & Wire, and Training and Safety Divisions. These firefighters work closely with the our district safety team and provide guidelines and supervision for

our quarterly evacuation drills, as well as facilities requirements.

We look forward to presenting further on these topics on Monday evening and we encourage anyone seeking more information to review our website as well, <https://www.newton.k12.ma.us/Page/1164>. A copy of our classroom emergency procedures poster is attached for your review as well.

NEWTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS EMERGENCY PROCEDURES

EVACUATION



"Get Out, Stay Out"

- Leave belongings behind.
 - Assist students and staff with disabilities.
 - Walk, do not run, do not use elevators, close doors behind you.
 - Take classroom roster and communication device (cellphone, radio). Evacuate to designated assembly area.
- Commence headcount and inform incident commander/administrator of missing persons or medical emergency.

SHELTER-IN-PLACE



"Stay Inside, Stay Safe"

- Shelter-In-Place is a response to a security threat outside, severe weather or an exterior airborne hazard, or when it is necessary to clear the hallways.
- All staff and students remain inside in classrooms and exterior doors are locked. The school is closed to visitors, and students remain out of the hallways. Follow instructions carefully.
- For a threat outside the building, remain inside and in a classroom, away from the threat if possible.
- For severe weather (e.g., tornado), move to interior rooms or basement. If necessary, get under and hold onto a sturdy desk or heavy table.
- For exterior airborne hazards, close exterior doors and windows and move to inside rooms above the ground floor.

CALL 911 FOR LIFE-THREATENING EMERGENCIES



- Contact the main office for all safety concerns.
- Every staff member is empowered to call 911 to report a potentially life-threatening emergency.
- Call from a landline, if possible. Dial 8 if necessary first.
- Report your school and exact location and/or room number.

FIRE



- If you see fire or smell smoke, pull the nearest fire alarm.
- If you hear the alarm, evacuate the building.
- Know your classroom's primary and secondary evacuation route and assembly area. Evacuate to designated assembly area.
- "Stop, drop, and roll" if clothes catch fire.
- Do not re-enter the building until the all clear has been given.

MEDICAL EMERGENCIES



- Stay with injured/ill person.
- Send someone for the school nurse and contact the main office.
- If unconscious, call 911, start CPR, send someone for the AED.

LOCKDOWN



"Silent and Invisible"

- Lockdown is a response to security threats inside the building, including intruders or a threatening person with a weapon.
- Immediately take refuge in nearest classroom; close and lock the door; pull down any interior shades; and turn out lights.
- Become silent and invisible. Silence cell phones.
- Sit away and out of view from windows and doors.
- Remain in lockdown until you hear official instructions or police enter.
- Do not respond to a fire alarm unless smoke or fire is visible.

HOSTILE EVENT



"Run, Hide, Fight"

- A Hostile Event response occurs if there is an active shooter or another armed act of violence in progress.
- Evacuate the building whenever it is safe to do so. Classes exit with their teacher if possible.
- Move to alternate school site if able to evacuate.
- If unable to evacuate, take refuge in nearest room and follow the Lockdown procedures above.
- Be prepared to barricade the door or fight an intruder as a last resort.
- Continually assess if it is safe to evacuate the building in order to exit as soon possible.

BOMB THREATS



- Threats can be received by email or telephone; surface on social media or through rumor; or be communicated in writings on paper, walls, and objects.
- Notify the main office immediately.
- Share and obtain as much information as possible, including the time, using the "NPS Bomb Threat Checklist."
- Preserve email, note, voicemail, other evidence.
- Await further instructions.

SUSPICIOUS PACKAGE



- Alert everyone in the immediate area to stay away.
- Do not move or touch the package.
- Notify main office to call 911.
- From a safe location record information about the package to communicate to Police.
- Await further instructions.

ODOR OF GAS OR CHEMICAL



- If you smell a heavy odor of gas or chemical, evacuate the area and call 911.
- Notify the main office.
- Await further instructions.

WHAT EVERY STAFF MEMBER SHOULD KNOW

VISITOR PROCEDURES

Be aware of and report any visitor in the building without a badge. Escort visitor(s) to the main office where they may obtain a visitor's badge and sign in. If visitor/intruder refuses to cooperate, do not escalate the situation. Call the office and give a detailed description.

HOW TO BEHAVE IN AN EMERGENCY

Stay calm and be mindful of body language and tone of voice. Avoid overreacting. Communicate clearly with students and staff. Ask for help if you need it. Continually assess the situation that you encounter, communicate with others, and be prepared to take action.

HOW TO RESPOND TO A FIGHT

Call the main office immediately. Remove students from the area quickly. If possible, separate the individuals involved to different areas.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SHELTER-IN-PLACE AND LOCKDOWN

A Lockdown is a protective measure when a security threat is inside the school. A Shelter-in-Place is a protective measure when a security threat or other hazard is outside the school. A Shelter-in-Place may also be used in other scenarios where it is helpful to keep students out of the hallway temporarily (e.g. a medical emergency). Follow instructions carefully and keep calm.

THE POSSIBILITIES FOR SHELTER-IN-PLACE

A Shelter-in-Place may be called if there is a security threat outside, a weather hazard (such as a tornado), an airborne hazard (such as a chemical spill), or if it is necessary to clear the hallways. Keep everyone in the classroom and clear corridors. Be prepared in case a lockdown or hostile event response is called.

- **SEVERE WEATHER:** Severe thunderstorms can spawn tornadoes and you would shelter away from windows, corridors, and open spaces such as gyms. Protect yourself from falling debris by getting under sturdy furniture or kneeling on the floor with head down covered by your arms and hands.
- **AIRBORNE HAZARDS:** Close exterior windows and doors and relocate to inside rooms, preferably above the ground floor.

THE OPTIONS IN A HOSTILE EVENT

In a hostile event response, any individual should exit immediately if near an exterior door. If you are inside with a class, follow lockdown procedures, but continue to assess if escape is possible. If you are outside, you should move away from the threat to an assembly area or a safe shelter.

