



SCHOOL SAFETY INFRASTRUCTURE COUNCIL
MEETING MINUTES

Meeting Date: 8/8/2013

Meeting Location: New Britain High School

Approval: 9/26/2013

Recorded By: Jason Crisco

1 ATTENDANCE

Name	Title	Department/Location	Present
Donald J. DeFronzo	Commissioner	DAS	Y
Stefan Pryor	Commissioner	SDE	Y
Pasquale J. Salemi	Deputy Commissioner	DCS	N
William Shea	Deputy Commissioner	DESPP	Y
John Woodmansee	Education Consultant		Y
Richard E. Morris	Dir. Public Safety & Emergency		Y
Frank J. Costello	Structural Engineer		Y
Ronald Jakubowski	Former Asst. Superintendent of Schools for Operations and Facilities		Y
Steven Waznia	Firefighter		N
Adam Byington	Police Officer		Y
Irene Roman	Public School teacher		Y

2 MEETING LOCATION

Building: New Britain High School, New Britain CT

Room: Tercyak Lecture Hall

3 MEETING START

Meeting Schedule Start: 6:00pm

Meeting Actual Start: 6:00pm

4 AGENDA

- Opening Remarks by Chair
 - Chairman DeFronzo opened the meeting by thanking everyone for joining us for the fourth SSIC meeting. He gave a special thanks to Paul Salina and New Britain High School for allowing the SSIC to use their lecture hall. He also thanked the State Department of Education for helping to put together the list of invited speakers for tonight's meeting. He mentioned that tonight's meeting will see comments from school education professionals. Members were also notified that CTN would be recording the meeting.
- Approval of June 25th Minutes
 - Chairman DeFronzo asked for a motion to approve the minutes from the previous meeting. A motion to approve the minutes was made by Ron Jakubowski and seconded by Commissioner Shea. The minutes were then approved with no corrections.
- Presentations

- **Ron Chivinski, Vice-President - American Federation of Teachers CT (AFT-CT)**
- Chairman DeFronzo introduced Ron Chivinski, Vice President of the American Federation of Teachers-CT and a member of the Sandy Hook Commission, as the first speaker. Mr. Chivinski gave a brief overview of his involvement with the Sandy Hook Commission and emphasized the importance for a creating a safe learning environment. He feels classroom door locks should be at the front of the school safety conversation. There is no greater investment than school locks. All staff should have the ability to lock down an assigned classroom in case of an emergency. Mr. Chivinski mentioned that The National Clearing House for Educational Facilities (NCEF) clearly states that all classrooms should have the ability to lock rooms from inside. Some of the highest scoring mechanical lock technology has been in existence since Columbine. A school's last line of defense is mechanical locks. The Sandy Hook Commission preliminary report highlights the importance of requiring that all schools be equipped with locking doors.
- Mr. Morris asked what would be needed to prevent an intruder from breaking through glass and reaching inside to unlock a door. Mr. Chivinski replied that he wasn't necessarily sure, but agreed that locking doors is an easy solution.
- Mr. Woodmansee asked if Mr. Chivinski would endorse keeping doors locked in schools all the time. He replied that he would.
- Chairman DeFronzo asked if you've considered auto lock doors. Mr. Chivinski replied he wasn't familiar the technology.
- Chairman DeFronzo asked (with regard to how prescriptive the SSIC standards should be) if door locks should be mandated. Mr. Chivinski replied that he felt they should.

- **Jeff Leake, Vice-President - Connecticut Education Association (CEA)**
- Jeff Leake, Vice President of the Connecticut Education Association, gave the second presentation. He began by discussing how the idea of school safety has drastically changed over the last 40 years. Mr. Leake then gave an overview of a recent poll conducted of its members. He stated that the poll indicated a high level of security and safety among personnel and students. However, the poll did show members' concerns of not having their voices properly heard with regard to school design and security. He mentioned the importance for teachers to be provided information quickly. CEA supports remote entries and cameras where possible. Communication among staff (including substitute teachers) and locking of environments should be made a standard.
- Chairman DeFronzo (clarifying a response about teacher input in school construction plans) stated that by the time plans reach the state level; virtually all significant changes have been made. It's not likely that additional people would be brought in at that point. Mr. Leake replied that he understood.
- Chairman DeFronzo asked if safety procedures involving substitute teachers is something that has been discussed with CEA members. Mr. Leake replied that there has been some discussion about this. He feels that someone who is in charge of children should know the safety procedures of the facility they're working in. Substitute teacher training is also a high priority for CEA.

- Ms. Roman (concerning communications) asked if you would recommend a two way radio in every room or some other system. Mr. Leake replied that some form of communication is needed, either a lighting or audible system that could indicate a problem.
- Commissioner Shea stated that traditionally schools rely on speaker system. He asked for Mr. Leake's feedback on how reliable speaker systems are. Mr. Leake replied that generally they can be hard to hear and understood. Commissioner Shea asked if this is still the primary method of communication in schools. Mr. Leake replied that it is.
- Ron Jakubowski mentioned that there has been a big paradigm shift on how we run schools. He asked if it would be prudent to include safety training as a requirement. Mr. Leake replied that he thought this would clearly be a good use of time.

- **Gary Maynard, President - CT Federation of School Administrators (CFSA)**
- Gary Maynard, President of the CT Federation of School Administrators, was next to present before the council. Mr. Maynard stated that CT does have a crisis management system that we use. It explains what students and faculty should do in the event of an emergency. Mr. Maynard (referring to the earlier discussion on substitute teacher training) stated that there is a process in place for training substitute teachers during the hiring process. CFSA recently asked its administrators what they thought would help them most with regard to school security. A majority agree that the presence of a School Resource Officer would be most effective. They all agree that this should be a single consistent person, who could become familiar with staff and students. The officer should be trained in how to approach people and how to deescalate a situation. Mr. Maynard feels the officer should be armed. Mr. Maynard feels that it's very important to consider playgrounds and athletic fields when discussing school safety. It's important both playgrounds and athletic fields are surrounded by fences with locked gates. Location of playgrounds should be an important factor when designing a new school. He suggested that playgrounds be placed so that the school itself acts as a perimeter. It should have easy access in and out for students and faculty. He feels gymnasiums and cafeterias should have lockable entries. He's also in favor of a remote locking system. The council should also look at better ways to design bus drop off and pick up areas. Limiting time students are outside during this process is also very important. There should also be consideration given to parent drop off and pick up areas.
- Chairman DeFronzo mentioned that during one of the SSIC's earlier meetings, officers from the Office of Counter Terrorism at DESPP stated that despite having a well designed school safety plan, the human factor can still be an issue. While conducting assessments they've witnessed things like cones or rocks being placed to prop open doors, obstruction of windows etc. Chairman DeFronzo asked Mr. Maynard if he found this to be a real problem. Mr. Maynard replied that he feels a good percentage of staff does comply.
- Ms. Roman asked, in fostering a warm school climate for kids, what is your opinion on keeping doors locked all the time. Mr. Maynard thought this was a good idea and that people would grow accustomed to the policy over time.

- **Don Romoser, CT Parent Teacher Student Association (CT PTSA)**
- Don Romoser from the CT Parent Teacher Student Association gave the fourth presentation. He feels that relying too much on technology could lead to a false sense of security. Any approach to school security should be comprehensive in nature. He feels that the education environment is dynamic and suggests a balanced approach to school safety. He's and advocate for locking doors, state of the art communication systems, video etc, anything that can help make schools safer. He mentioned that schools should remain a warm and welcoming place for all students.
- Ms. Roman asked if any parents have expressed an opinion on school resource officers. Mr. Romoser feels that parents are supportive as long as the officer is appropriately trained and is an actual school resource officer.
- Mr. Woodmansee asked if parents feel like they're part of security decisions at schools. Mr. Romoser feels that they are involved in the process.
- Ms. Roman asked what the PTSA's stance is on school resources officers given tight school budgets. Mr. Romoser asked that school resource officers be suggested but not mandated by the state. Given some school budgets, school resource officers may not be a possibility.
- Mr. Morris asked if the PTSA is suggesting that school resource officers be present in all k-12 schools. Mr. Rosomer replied that they aren't suggesting, but thought it would be a good idea.

- **Joint Presentation**

- **Joe Cirusuolo - Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents (CAPSS)**
 1. Joe Cirusuolo from the Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents gave the first presentation. After Sandy Hook they asked what could they do to make schools safer? As a result, a safety symposium was held in conjunction with the Federal Department of Education. Mr. Cirusuolo then gave an overview of some of the issues raised during the symposium. The first thing they learned is that there isn't a "magic bullet" or one thing than can be done to ensure safe schools. A set of strategies is needed in order to be successful. We can't take a one size fits all approach or be highly prescriptive. Every school district should have a school safety program in place that follows an all hazards approach. An expert should be brought in to help with the process. Each school should have a crisis plan. The plan can't be put in a folder and filed away. It needs to be practiced a few times a year and reviewed at least once a year. It needs to be a "living" document.

- **Karissa Niehoff - Connecticut Association of Schools (CIAC)**
 1. Ms. Niehoff gave a brief overview of the School Security Symposium. Surveyed members were invited to give recommendations on school security. Ms. Niehoff mentioned that there isn't a one size fits all plan.

Security standards should only be explored if within school budgetary limits. Ms. Niehoff suggested clear lines of sight to parking areas; advanced PA systems and technology (other than email, texts) to immediately notify parents of security issues should be included in the SSIC standards. Ms. Niehoff also mentioned a recent report released by the National Association of School Resource Officers. The report highlights the importance of School Resource Officers (SROs) and how “school safety law” has changed over the last thirty years. The report can be found here - www.nasro.org.

- **Robert Rader - Connecticut Association of Boards of Education (CABE)**
 1. Mr. Rader agreed with Ms. Niehoff and Mr. Cirusuolo concerning the idea that a “one size fits all” approach to school security is a bad idea. He mentioned that new schools should not be built like fortresses, but be inviting to all. He asked that the council take an “all hazards” approach to developing new school safety infrastructure standards. He advised that the standards should include active shooter scenarios, but also natural events. Mr. Rader also mentioned concern over mandates and forcing schools to make changes beyond their budgets.
- **Rich Carmelich, President-Elect - Connecticut Association of School Business Administrators (CASBO)**
 1. Mr. Carmelich gave a brief overview of school safety changes that have been completed in region 7. He mentioned that soon after the Newtown incident, they were fortunate to have a parent who also was also a security expert. He created an assessment at no charge. Based off of this report, they installed new cameras, added a reflective film to the cafeteria and other common areas, added new monitors to a security room for greater visibility and granted access to their security feed to the Winsted police department. They’re currently working on improving their PA system and providing self defense classes for some staff. Budget played a huge role in what they could and couldn’t afford. Budget restrictions prevented them from hiring a school resource officer. A second challenge was determining what “best” practices are. He mentioned that guidelines from the state would be very helpful. Mr. Carmelich gave an example of a recent issue that came up with their local fire marshal. In the event of a lock down where students and staff are ordered to take refuge, what happens if a fire alarm is pulled? Their fire marshal said this can’t be done, students and faculty must vacate in the event of a fire. They would like some clarification from the state on this issue. He also has heard conflicting views if window blinds should be closed or remain open. He mentioned that the SSIC should be mindful of mandates, but providing a framework for schools to work off of would be incredibly helpful.
- Mr. Cirusuolo (in summary) asked that the standards developed by the SSIC, suggest items that they should address, but then give school districts the flexibility to meet those requirements.

- **Joint Presentation Questions**
 1. Commissioner Pryor asked if they're aware of any school districts now that have established their own guidelines. Mr. Carmelich replied that he wasn't aware of any. Mr. Cirusuolo mentioned that a lot of architects they've spoken to are very up to date on school safety.
 2. Commissioner Pryor asked if there are any school security features that are too pricey and have made it difficult for school officials to get through the design process. Mr. Carmelich replied that there has been a lot of discussion concerning locks. Most folks don't understand their cost. They can be very expensive. Bullet proof or resistant glass is also very costly. Mr. Cirusuolo thought that if the state could provide a list of "best" practices with regard to school security infrastructure design, it would be incredibly helpful.
 3. Chairman DeFronzo stated that the state spends about \$500-600 million a year on school construction. The standards the SSIC develops will apply to new construction and as a result, may prompt others to retrofit. The SSIC will make sure best practices are part of that plan. Staff will review standards and determine if they're acceptable. The chairman also mentioned that as we promulgate these rules and regulations, there needs to be a willingness to comply. Mr. Cirusuolo replied (concerning the human element) that when there are procedures in place, there should be a requirement that those procedures be practiced on a regular basis. He believes this will help change the culture over time.
 4. Mr. Morris asked if there is a national trend to put SRO in schools. Ms. Niehoff replied that SROs is an encouraged topic, but faces funding and officer number issues.
 5. Officer Byington made the comment that an SRO gives you the ability of a first responder on site. SROs can direct other resources appropriately due to their familiarity with a school. He also mentioned that having local police come into a local school to train for an active threat would be extremely helpful. This could be conducted during a time when students aren't present (summer, nights etc.). He asked if there would be a willingness among school officials to do this. Ms. Niehoff responded that she felt principals would be very open to this, as well as other school officials. She feels it's a partnership that absolutely must exist.
- Review of Next Public Session
 - The next SSIC meeting will be open to the general public. It will also include legislators and first responders
 - The SSIC is looking for a location in Middletown, CT to host this public meeting.
- Time and Date of Next Meeting
 - To be determined
- Adjournment

5 MEETING END

Meeting Schedule End: 8:00pm

Meeting Actual End: 8:09pm