

NATIONAL CAPITAL REGION SCHOOL PREPAREDNESS SEMINARS EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

August 2014



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Executive Overview

The Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (MWCOG) National Capital Regional (NCR) Planners, also known as the “Regional Planners”, hosted three seminars focused on preparedness for K-12 schools within the NCR. The seminars were held during the spring of 2014 throughout central points of DC, Maryland, and Virginia. The NCR School Emergency Preparedness Seminars provided a forum for school administrators and personnel to discuss current trends and topics, share information about the latest tools and technology in school crisis preparedness, and network with local and state officials from emergency management and law enforcement.

Cumulatively, more than 500 individuals attended the three seminars. Attendees ranged from public and private school principals, administrators, safety personnel, to members of law enforcement and emergency management. Each seminar included both keynote and panel presentations, with question-and-answer segments following each presentation. This provided an open discussion environment that encouraged participants to actively engage in critical discussions about school safety. The seminars covered preparedness concepts across the federal, state, and local levels.

NCR Exercise and Training Officers assisted the NCR Regional Planners in evaluating the discussions that took place during the discussion sessions. Based on the evaluator notes and participation feedback, this Executive Summary will capture the following: the discussions, lessons learned, and key areas for development to plans in order to address the challenges of school preparedness. This Executive Summary will be aligned with the established objectives and provide a synopsis of the discussions in each seminar. It will provide guidance for future regional initiatives.

Seminars were supported by the Homeland Security Urban Area Security Initiative Grant through the National Capital Region Exercise and Training Operations Panel and were free of charge for attendees.

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Seminar Overview

Seminar Name: NCR School Preparedness Seminars

Seminar Dates:

- § DC Seminar – George Washington University Marvin Center – March 12, 2014
- § MD Seminar – Silver Spring Civic Center – March 25, 2014
- § VA Seminar – George Mason University (Fairfax campus) – April 30, 2014

Purpose: The purpose of the seminars was to provide a forum to discuss current trends and topics along with sharing information about best practices in school crisis preparedness.

Scope: Seminars were limited to independent/private, and public school administrators and personnel, emergency management personnel, law enforcement, public health officials, and organizations involved with school emergency preparedness.

Mission Areas: Prevention, Mitigation, Response

Core Capabilities: Planning, Community Resilience, Long-Term Vulnerability Reduction, Risk and Disaster Resilience Assessment, Threat and Hazard Identification, Health and Social Services.

Objectives:

- Recognize threats to school safety and present strategies to prevent, mitigate, and respond to situations;
- Identify school and community partners to develop and implement best practices strategies in school safety;
- Understand and recognize safe school strategies to identify vulnerabilities using a multidisciplinary, all hazards assessment approach;
- Recognize Homeland Security and Safe School resources for school and community stakeholders; and,
- Identify school and safety issues to address in crisis plans.

Sponsor: MWCOG National Capital Regional Planners

Participating Organizations:

- Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments
- City of Alexandria Office of Emergency Management
- Arlington County Office of Emergency Management
- District of Columbia Homeland Security and Emergency Management Agency
- Fairfax County Office of Emergency Management
- City of Fairfax Office of Emergency Management
- Loudoun County Office of Emergency Management
- Maryland Emergency Management Agency
- Manassas City Office of Emergency Management
- Montgomery County Office of Emergency Management and Homeland Security
- Prince George’s County Office of Emergency Management
- Prince William County Office of Emergency Management

- Virginia Department of Emergency Management
- Training Outreach, LLC
- Washington Area Boards of Education
- Independent Education
- University of Maryland Center for Health and Homeland Security

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Seminar Design

The NCR School Emergency Preparedness Seminars were designed to provide a low-stress open-discussion environment which encouraged participants to actively engage in critical discussions about school safety. Seminar sessions encouraged stakeholders, at all levels of educational institutions, to exchange ideas and collaborate to protect the lives of staff and students from various emergency incidents. Each seminar included both keynote and panel presentations, with question and answer segments following each presentation. The seminars discussed preparedness concepts ranging from the federal, state, and local level. The seminars assisted local educational institutions to improve their knowledge, competency level, and collaborative skills.



The seminar design encouraged participants to collaborate and network with law enforcement, emergency management officials, and other stakeholders.

The keynote speaker for all three seminars was George Roberts, principal of Perry Hall High School, located near Baltimore, Maryland. Principal Roberts discussed the Perry Hall High School shooting, which occurred on the first day of school in August 2012. In recounting his story, Principal Roberts discussed his communication and response, and that of his staff, during and after the event. Guest and panel speakers at all three seminars presented on topics including active shooter, behavioral health and psychological first aid, federal guidance, and homeland security initiatives for school safety.



Throughout the seminars, local emergency management agencies provided outreach material to the attendees. Following each event, attendees were provided with a recap of the seminar and all the presentations that were shown during the event, as well as other resources.

Washington, DC Seminar Analysis

The Washington, DC Seminar was held at the George Washington University Marvin Center on March 12, 2014. Most of the attendees consisted of K-12 public and private school principals and administrators. School resource officers and law enforcement officers attended as well.

David Esquith from the US Department of Education presented on Federal guidance on developing a School Emergency Operations Plan. All three NCR School Preparedness Seminars included panelists to discuss challenges towards school safety from the Federal, State, and Local perspective.

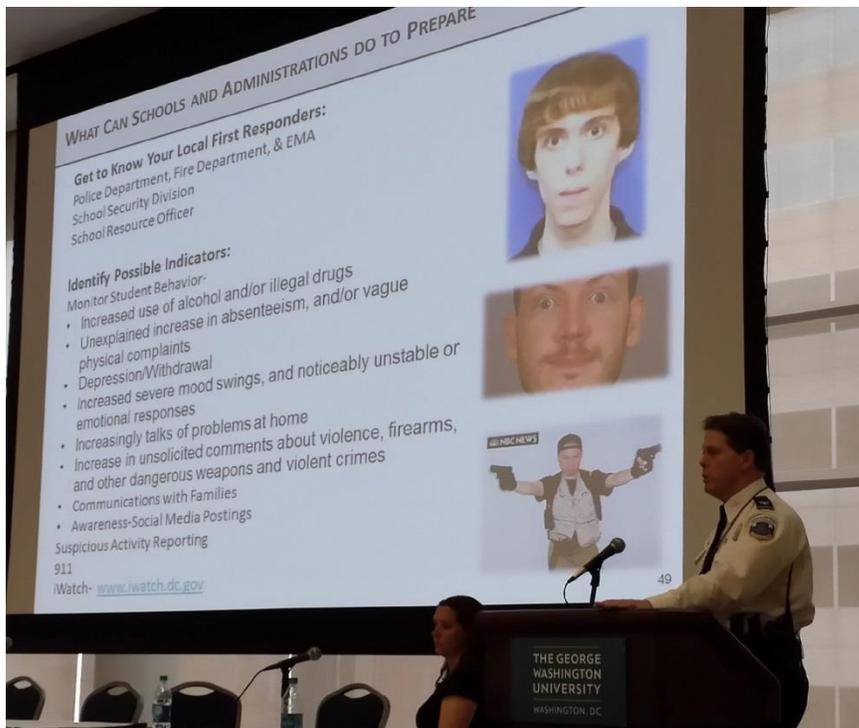


Based on the feedback received, participants learned a great deal about active shooter, psychological first aid, shelter-in-place, federal guidelines and policies, tactical responses to school crises, and responding to first responders. The participants also learned where to get sample emergency response plans; the need for school based plans; how to create a plan; how to individualize a checklist; the need for reevaluating plans; and, the importance of getting buy-in from students, staff, teachers, parents, and first responders. Participants gathered resources available to schools; talked about risk assessments; emphasized the need for communication; and learned about evacuation plans followed by reunification plans for students and families. The presentations received favorable reviews, especially the keynote speaker and the DC government representatives; specifically, one of the local public school principals discussed building their robust emergency response plan by using resources provided by the District and the Emergency Safety Alliance (ESA).



Many participants were able to follow up with the speakers after their presentations to learn more about local resources and developing partnerships.

The DC School Preparedness Seminar provided knowledgeable speakers and a venue to share best practices. The morning included a discussion of biggest challenges in school safety. Many concerns were raised such as the balance of safety and a friendly school environment. Participants began to think beyond the normal school day to after care, after school activities, and field trips. Communication was a theme throughout the day. Communication can be viewed as a three part strategy—the first part is for receiving information from law enforcement, the second part is for informing school personnel of an emergency, and the third part is for communicating with parents. Various speakers stressed the importance of backup or alternative modes of communication.



Commander Steven Sund from the DC Metropolitan Police Department's Special Operations Division presented on law enforcement's response to an active threat in a school environment.

Many practical planning tools were shared. As it pertains to planning, ownership by teachers is very important as well as ready-to-use resources that are available online for public, private, and charter schools. Speakers and participants discussed training and drilling after planning is complete.

Speakers presented on topics ranging from biochemical hazards, psychological impact of disasters, shelter-in-place, SWAT's focus during an emergency, to local DC resources. The Senior Deputy Director for the Office of Health and Emergency Preparedness and Response Administration (HEPRA) addressed on how to respond to major public health issues, such as setting up points of distribution for medication and supplies. The afternoon keynote speaker, Sue MacLane, highlighted the fact that children's reactions to trauma can be difficult to predict and that the response depends on the age, personality, maturity, and past experience of the child. Finally, the Senior Program Manager from the All Hazards Consortium discussed the concept of sheltering in place and highlighted several incidents where that would be the best course of action. This session was particularly relevant to Washington, DC since it experienced a damaging earthquake in 2011.

Areas of Concern

The following were areas of concerns raised during the Q&A sessions following the keynote and panel presentations. Participants felt they were least prepared in the following:

- Planning – Creating and updating plans.
- Shelter-in-place – Especially extended shelter-in-place.
- Communication – Creating a common language, messaging to parents, and communication within the school.
- Understanding the New Active Shooter Protocol
 - New protocol (Run, Hide, Fight) seemed drastic to some of the administrators.
 - Concern that young children were being asked to fight armed attackers
- Concern based on lack of safety planning for mass gathering at the school facility after hours, sporting events, school plays, or field trips.
- Resuming daily operations after an active shooter incident.
- Sending robo calls and receiving direction from police command.
- Some schools do not have School Resource Officers.
- How to communicate with first responders if they don't allow school personnel to use radios.
- Expectation of teachers and staff to check their e-mail during a response.
- Evacuations during bad weather.
- With whom do police communicate during lockdown situations?
- For widespread emergency incidents, how are inquiries from parents responded to?
- Safety of students using social media.
 - Cyber-bullying, for example, was a huge concern of administrators. Stressed trust between students and faculty in reporting disturbing online messages from classmates.
- What to tell students regarding how/whether to communicate with electronic devices during a lock down.
- Schools are breeding grounds for germs. What are some ways to prevent spread of germs in classrooms?
- How serious of a threat to schools are:
 - Bioterrorism
 - Bio hazards
 - Chemical Hazards



Maryland Seminar Analysis

The Maryland School Preparedness Seminar, held on March 25, 2014 at the Silver Spring Civic Center, was very successful and, based on comments submitted by attendees, much-needed. The Maryland Seminar also had a considerable number of attendees from private and independent schools.

When asked to identify the top three things that they learned at the seminar, participant responses covered a broad spectrum of topics. The most frequently mentioned learning point was the importance of developing a comprehensive emergency plan, or to enhance the existing plan. Several respondents also noted that they learned a lot about the availability of resources to assist them in their planning and preparedness efforts, including grant funding and Department of Homeland Security Protective Security Advisors' free assessments. Other frequently-noted topics include:

- The importance of coordinating and establishing relationships with local police and fire.
- The many forms that preparedness takes.
- George Roberts' first-hand experience in an active shooter event.
- Reverse evacuation and shelter-in-place procedures.
- The importance of being alert and aware of the school's climate and risks.
- Communications during a crisis.
- Psychological first aid and behavioral health.
- The need to build and train a strong crisis team.

Other benefits of the seminar that were frequently mentioned were the availability and sharing of resources, the morning speakers, the overall choice of speakers, and networking opportunities.



Moderator Vernon Herron, Senior Policy Analyst from the University of Maryland Center for Health and Homeland Security, facilitated the discussions during the Q&A sessions for all three of the NCR School Preparedness Seminars.

The first session was a panel discussion on the 'Biggest Challenges in School Safety'. The panel stressed the importance of developing an emergency plan, training students and staff on how to

respond to an emergency, and communicating with first responders as well as with parents, before and during an emergency.



The NCR Exercise and Training Officers assisted the NCR Regional Planners by evaluating the seminar discussions, and provided collaboration and support on a regional level.

The next session was a panel discussion on ‘Preparing for the Unpredictable.’ Panelists discussed all-hazards planning for schools, providing information on best practices. The audience’s questions primarily focused on accessing planning materials and assistance with preparedness planning. The discussion focused on: cost of school safety assessments, and how to access free resources; balancing educational environment through open design space with security measures, which often dictate a more enclosed design; financing security upgrades, which may be done through grants from NPOs; collaborative preparedness and planning efforts; the importance of assessing risks before developing a school’s Emergency Operations Plan; and, emotional reaction to a crisis as a planning assumption.

The afternoon keynote speaker, Sue MacLane, spoke about ‘Behavioral Health and Psychological First Aid.’ This also proved to be a popular topic among the attendees, providing insight into the psychological impacts of a crisis. Her talk focused on the following issues: psychological first aid is driven by the concept of “first, do no harm” – it is not full counseling; children react to trauma differently, and their reactions can vary greatly; and, the basics to address are protect, direct, connect.

*Sue MacLane LPC,
CEAP presented on
psychological first aid
and behavioral health
at all three NCR School
Preparedness Seminars*



Areas of Concern

When respondents were asked which areas they are least prepared in, and which issues they would like to see their schools focus on, the most frequent responses were the following:

- Active shooter.
- Shelter-in-place/lockdown – specifically, extended shelter-in-place as a particular area of concern.
- Psychological first aid and behavioral health.
- Evacuation and reverse evacuation, including identification of staging areas.
- Communication, be it with parents or with other external entities.
- Planning for natural disaster/weather emergencies.
- Writing or improving emergency plans.
 - Emergency plans in general are not adequate.
- Policies.
- Reunification procedures.
- Training and drills for staff and students.
- Collaborating or building relationships with first responders and outside entities; including local fire and police, as well as state and federal agencies.
- Unique planning and response challenges faced by some schools were also mentioned, including schools with children aged 5 and under, and those that have special needs populations.
- Participants from private schools felt that they often do not receive the same communications from local authorities as their public school counterparts during lockdown scenarios.
- They also expressed that they lack the budgets to improve security at their schools, and will seek assistance through grant funding.



The Maryland NCR School Preparedness Seminar was held at the Silver Spring Civic Center in Montgomery County, MD and had a tremendous showing of private and independent, as well as public school participants.

Virginia Seminar Analysis

The Virginia School Preparedness Seminar was held at George Mason University (Fairfax Campus) on April 30, 2014. The order of panels and discussion was preparedness and policy, school violence occurring (panel and keynote), and school safety and communicating through events. The morning preparedness discussion and active shooter panel were dynamic and well-received. Participant feedback was overwhelmingly positive, especially Reed Smith's Black Swan presentation. Shellie MacKenzie from the Virginia Center for School Safety presented on the Center's initiatives for helping schools in Virginia take an all hazards approach to planning and address challenges.



Establishing a relationship or partnership between an emergency management agency and school system is very important. Developing an understanding of what each needs in order to address their threats and concerns is a critical step in becoming better prepared and establishing a coordinated response effort.

Schools are regimented organizations and that rigidity bleeds over to safety and security. They do an excellent job conducting fire drills, but do not focus on shelter-in-place or lockdown procedures. Once schools familiarize themselves with conducting lockdown drills, they should begin conducting lockdown drills during lunchtime or the beginning of school, or other times when fire drills have not traditionally taken place.

*Falls Church City
Public Schools
Director of
Communications,
John Wesley Brett,
presented on the
importance of
messaging and the
use of social media
during a crisis*



The Virginia School Preparedness Seminar included a presentation from John Wesley Brett, the Director of Communications from the Falls Church City Public Schools, in the use of social media and messaging. During the presentation, it was clear that social media will be used during an emergency. School officials and emergency responders need to tackle this challenging issue and figure out a way to incorporate social media into emergency response plans. Incorporating social media into emergency response plans is important. Ensuring public messaging is

coordinated among all response partners – including the school – is also integral. Training and exercises should include this aspect of the response to the greatest extent possible to promote familiarity with and evaluate established procedures.

Overall, attendees felt that more seminars, training, go kits, and shelter-in-place kits would be a great way for them to support their school’s mission. They also mentioned partnering or communicating more proactively with first responder and mental health agencies.

Bob Smith from Arlington Public Schools presented on security design and all-hazards planning to school buildings. Although active shooter has been one of the hot topics throughout the seminars, schools deal with a great number of safety issues during their daily operations.



Areas of Concern

In concurrence with what areas of concern were observed in DC and Maryland, participants also conveyed that they wish to learn more about how to write a plan, create flip cards, administer psychological first aid, and communicate. Trainings and resources were very important to the respondents. When respondents were asked which areas they are least prepared in, and which issues they would like to see their schools focus on, the most frequent responses were the following:

- Shelter-in-place.
- Go kits.
- What to do after an incident.
- Communications.
- Psychological First Aid.
- Health focus.
- Training programs.
- Partnerships with local first responders.
- Lockdown procedures.

The attendees appreciated the personal perspective and examples that the speakers brought, as well as the information given out.



Loudoun County Sheriff, Michael Chapman, was one of the panelists who presented on his personal perspective about school safety and his work in law enforcement.

Keynote Speaker

Attendees greatly appreciated Principal Roberts' account of a shooting at his high school. He incorporated a mix of humor, lessons learned, and refreshingly candid admissions about shortcomings in his school's preparation. This was, by far, the most popular part of the program for all three seminars. The audience was enthralled as Mr. Roberts walked the attendees through the active shooter event at his school. One of the major lessons-learned was the importance of communication – with first responders, with staff, and with the students' families. Mr. Roberts also learned the importance of communicating with his own family, as they heard about the shooting on the news and did not know whether he was safe.

Many questions focused on the process of releasing a student to the hospital for medical care. The top issues to consider from Principal Roberts' talk were the following:

- Schools need a parent liaison to manage parents and family members during an incident—it is recommended that this person be a school administrator(s).
- There must be communication redundancies between teachers, emergency personnel, and staff in case one form of communication goes down (e.g. not able to use the school's public address system).
- Schools should consider revising cell phone policies by making them time-specific. Students that could text their families letting them know they were safe helped calm the anxious parents waiting outside the school.
- Ensure that the Emergency Operations Plan addresses how the school interacts with and is incorporated into local response efforts. Specifically, ensure that there is a media liaison, an Emergency Medical Services liaison, a police liaison, etc.



Principal Roberts' presentation on his experience in dealing with the shooting at Perry Hall High School in August 2012 was highly beneficial for all attendees and received a tremendous amount of favorable feedback.

Feedback

Based on feedback from participants and evaluators, the seminar was very successful. The evaluators' reports and participant feedback generated a tremendous amount of suggestions about future events. It was, in the words of some of the attendees, "long overdue", and it was recommended that the seminar be repeated next year, with some modifications such as:

- Additional time for small group breakout sessions. Participants could discuss issues among themselves or they could learn to create, test, and evaluate plans. If the small session could be led by someone knowledgeable in developing and implementing plans, then this would lead to a very professional result.
- Make it a two-day conference with more breaks, more time to process the information, and more time for questions. Also, a longer conference could include school teams who work together in a tabletop exercise which would increase interaction. It would also help schools to walk away knowing exactly what to do.
- The seminar could be held at a school, and it could include an interactive safety hazard assessment.
- Participants could be offered the option to register as school teams and break out into small groups for one or two sessions. They could create, test, and evaluate plans or they could engage in a tabletop exercise with a communication-centric scenario.
- Alter the format of the seminar. Rather than a full day of lecture and panel discussion presentations, provide a mix of plenary sessions and breakout sessions for special areas of interest.
- Offer separate breakout sessions for private vs. public schools as their needs and access to resources are in many ways different.
- Consider interactive workshops, small discussion-based exercises, etc.
- Address emergencies other than active shooter, to possibly include natural disasters/weather events, chemical spills, etc.
- Dig deeper into some of the issues that were touched upon at this year's seminar (grants, availability of resources, planning specifics, etc.).

Participants told us that they would like to get more detailed information regarding many of the following issues:

- How to apply for/obtain grant funding.
- How to access some of the information resources that were mentioned in the presentations.
- Who to contact for plan development assistance, plan reviews, and risk assessments; shelter-in-place; and evacuation procedures.
- Some attendees from private schools said that they would like to know how they can have access to the same resources and information that public schools have, including during a crisis occurring near, but not at, their schools.

Recommendations

The Regional Planners should provide input to the NCR Exercise and Training Oversight Panel (ETOP) to develop future events based on the feedback received by participants, and focus the events based on the 'Areas of Concern' identified throughout all three seminars. Following the seminars, a survey was sent out to all the registered participants of the three seminars. Based on the results of the survey, the feedback from the seminars, and evaluators' notes; the top areas of concerns of K-12 schools throughout the National Capital Region are as follows:

- Active Shooter
 - a. Policy, Planning, Protocols
 - b. Lockdown procedures, drills for staff and students
 - c. Planning and Response challenges with younger children (children under the age of 9) and those with special needs populations
 - d. Evacuation and Reverse Evacuation
- Crisis Communications
 - a. Communicating with first responders and creating a common language
 - b. Messaging to parents, media, external entities
 - c. Unified messaging
 - d. Communicating during a lockdown procedure or during a crisis
- Continuity of Operations and Emergency Plans
 - a. Planning and updating plans
 - b. Resuming daily operations after an active shooter incident
 - c. Long Term Recovery
 - d. Natural Hazards and Weather related events
 - e. Shelter-in-Place – especially extended shelter-in-place
 - f. Hazardous Material and chemical hazards
- Family reunification
 - a. Staging Areas
 - b. Reunification Procedures
 - c. Communication with parents and media
 - d. What to do after an incident
- Behavioral Health / Psychological First Aid
 - a. Anonymous Reporting
 - b. Cyber-bullying
 - c. Safety of students using social media
 - d. Counseling for staff and students after an incident – and funding options
- Field Trips, After School Events, and Off Campus Activities
 - a. Lack of safety planning for mass gathering at the school facility after hours, sporting events, school plays, or field trips.
- Building relationships with Local Authorities
 - a. Collaborating planning and response efforts with local police and fire
 - b. Especially helpful for private and independent schools that do not have the organized administration as the public schools

The Regional Planners should continue to provide planning support for school preparedness planning efforts in the NCR by continuing to coordinate with the regional partners from the NCR

Exercise and Training Officers, along with leadership support from the Emergency Managers in collaboration with various stakeholders in the NCR.

The NCR School Preparedness Seminars have created a solid foundation for regional goals to be attained. In addition to an annual event such as a seminar or workshop, the Region should look to create a Strategic Plan or Framework for an NCR School Preparedness Initiative that supports school preparedness planning efforts. This Strategic Plan or Framework should be led by the NCR Regional Planners; however, the planning group should involve members from the following external entities: public school officials from various NCR jurisdictions, Independent Education.org, Washington Area Boards of Education, NCR Exercise and Training Officers, and pertinent members of the RESF groups that are housed at MWCOG. Once the Strategic Plan or Framework has been created and approved, a clear vision of the development of the School Preparedness Initiative can be used as a guide for the Regional Planners to collaborate with schools at all levels and to continue to enhance preparedness efforts.

Conclusion

The NCR School Preparedness Seminars have demonstrated a clear need for enhanced partnership-building opportunities throughout the region for schools. Most of the seminars' strengths as identified by participants fell into four categories. The greatest strength, by an overwhelming majority, was the speakers' and panelists' knowledge base. Several respondents specifically mentioned the quality of the keynote speaker, George Roberts, and the variety of agencies that presented. The other major strengths were the topics presented, the information that was provided, and the overall structure of the seminar. Finally, one participant stated that the seminar's major strength was that it provided the "ability to focus on this topic for a full day – it escapes me otherwise – falls to the bottom of my list even though I know it is important."