

New York State Guide to School Emergency Response Planning

July 2018



Somers Central School District

With District Offices in:

Somers Middle School *Superintendent / Special Education
/Personnel*

Somers Intermediate School *Business Office / Buildings and
Grounds / Transportation / District Safety*

DISTRICTWIDE Emergency Response PLAN



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I. INTRODUCTION

Emergencies and violent incidents in school districts are critical issues that must be addressed in an expeditious and effective manner. Districts are required to develop a district-wide school safety plan designed to prevent or minimize the effects of serious violent incidents and emergencies and to facilitate the coordination of the district with local and county resources in the event of such incidents or emergencies. The district-wide school safety plan is responsive to the needs of all schools within the district and is consistent with the more detailed emergency response plans required at the school building level. Districts stand at risk from a variety of acts of violence, and natural and technological disasters. To address these threats, the State of New York has enacted the Safe Schools Against Violence in Education (SAVE) law. Project SAVE is a comprehensive planning effort that addresses risk reduction/prevention, response, and recovery with respect to a variety of emergencies in the school district and its schools.

When a crisis is well-managed, school personnel, students and staff feel safe and secure. Further trauma can be avoided and mass confusion abated. This plan outlines how all individuals in the school community including administrators, teachers, parents, students, bus drivers and support staff, will be able to identify and respond to an emergency.

The Somers Central District supports the SAVE Legislation, and intends to engage in a planning process. The Superintendent of Schools encourages and advocates on-going district-wide cooperation and support of Project SAVE.

A. Purpose

The Somers Central Schools District Emergency Response Plan was developed pursuant to Commissioner's Regulation 155.17. At the direction of the Somers Central School District Board of Education, the Superintendent of the Somers Central School District appointed a District Emergency Response Team and charged it with the development and maintenance of the District Emergency Response Plan.

The Safety Plans were developed by the Somers Central School District and the District Emergency Response Team based on Project Save and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), utilizing components from FEMA E362, the Multi-hazard Safety Program for Schools, as well as from documents from the FBI Bomb Data Center, NYS EMO, NYS Police, NYS Center for School Safety and NYS Education Department. These were also developed to comply with Governor Pataki's Executive Order #26 which requires all agencies, including school districts, to use the Incident Command System (ICS), as developed by the National Interagency Incident Management System, for all emergencies.

B. Identification of District Emergency Response Team

The Somers Central School District has appointed a District Emergency Response Team consisting of administrators, school safety personnel and other school personnel. The members of the team and their positions or affiliations are as follows:

Joseph Bernardi	Supervisor Transportation/Safety
Raymond Blanch	Superintendent
Matthew Carr	Human Resources/Student Services Mgr.
Maryanne Castro	District/ SHS Nurse
Kenneth Crowley	Assistant Superintendent
Julie Gherardi	Assistant Superintendent
Robert Klick	Supervisor of Buildings & Grounds
Anna Maggio	Director of Special Education
Theresa Reda	District Social Worker
Philip Kavanagh	Director of Guidance

C. Concept of Operations

The District Emergency Response Plan is directly linked to the individual Building-level Emergency Response Plans. Protocols reflected in the District Emergency Response Plan will guide the development and implementation of individual Building-level Emergency Response Plans. Lines of communication, levels of command, and notification chains are defined and will be used to manage the crisis.

In the event of an emergency or violent incident, the initial response to all emergencies at an individual school will be by the School Emergency Response Team. The Superintendent of Schools or Designee will be notified and, where appropriate, local emergency officials will also be notified.

D. Plan Review and Public Comment

This plan will be reviewed periodically during the year and will be maintained by the District-wide School Safety Team. The required annual review will be completed each year after its adoption by the Board of Education. A copy of the plan will be available in the Superintendent's Office, Primrose elementary School, Route 139, Lincolndale, New York 10589.

Pursuant to Commissioner's Regulation 155.17 (e) (3), this plan will be made available for public comment 30 days prior to its adoption. The district-wide and building-level plans may be adopted by the school board only after at least one public hearing that provides for the participation of school personnel, parents, students and any other interested parties. The plan must be formally adopted by the Board of Education.

While linked to the District Emergency Response Plan, Building-level Emergency Response Plans shall be confidential and shall not be subject to disclosure under Article 6 of the Public Officers Law or any other provision of law, in accordance with Education Law Section 2801-a.

Full copies of the District Emergency Response Plan and any amendments will be submitted to the New York State Education Department within 30 days of adoption. Building-level Emergency Response Plans will be supplied to both local and State Police within 30 days of adoption.

Risk Reduction/Prevention and Intervention are comprised of activities that are taken prior to an emergency or disaster to eliminate the possibility of the occurrence, or reduce the impact of an emergency if it does occur.

A. Prevention/Intervention Strategies/Program Initiatives

The District utilizes programs and activities to improve communication among students, between students and staff, to promote community involvement and to report potentially violent incidents.

Name of Program				
Conflict Resolution				
Cultural Awareness Program				
Dealing with Stress and Conflict				
Guidance Programs				
Health Curriculum				
Instructional Strategies/Targeted Lessons				
Intergenerational Programs				
Life Skills & Habits of Mind				
Mentoring Programs				
Parenting Workshops				
Peer Leadership				
Peer Mediation				
PTA Arts in Education				
Red Ribbon Week				
SADD				
Social Studies Curriculum				
Student Bill of Rights				
Student Council				
Student Newspaper				
Tolerance and Respect Project				

Anti-Bullying Programs

Bullying is a range of behaviors both verbal and physical that intimidate others and often lead to antisocial and unlawful acts. Staff, students, and parents/guardians need to understand that bullying is a pervasive problem that leads to violence. Bullying should neither be thought of as a “kids will be kids” occurrence nor accepted as a way of life. Anti-bullying programs include the following school-wide, classroom, and individual tactics:

- a) Clearly define what constitutes bullying activity with input and involvement from the school community (students, staff, parents, teachers, volunteers, and law enforcement). Communicate that definition to students, teachers, parents, and staff. The definition should include physical, verbal, and psychological aspects of bullying.
- b) Based upon the above, establish specific rules prohibiting, and consequences for, bullying activity as part of a comprehensive school code of conduct.
- c) Seek information about the motivations behind specific incidents of bullying.
- d) Establish a reporting mechanism by which incidents of bullying can be reported and recorded immediately after they occur.
- e) Ensure reporting procedures address with whom and under which circumstances information will and will not be shared. Care should be taken to:
 - Protect witnesses and victims from retaliation.
 - Meet applicable standards for confidentiality.
 - Ensure that personnel involved with victims and bullies have the information they need to effectively work with them.
 - Protect the accused from false allegations.
- f) Notify parents/guardians of both victims and perpetrators whenever a report of bullying is formally filed. Establish protocols regarding the circumstances under which parents/guardians of bullies and/or their victims should be called in for an on-site conference.
- g) Continually monitor the number of reported incidents of bullying.
- h) Regularly assess the prevalence, location, and kind of bullying activities that are occurring. Also address bullying activities that occur on the way to and from school. Work with community policing efforts to help make students’ journeys to and from school safe and free from acts of intimidation. For surveys requiring student input, follow administration guidelines regarding the possible need for parental approval.
- i) Consider holding focus groups on an on-going basis to discuss the nature of the problem of bullying and ways to solve it.
- j) Identify community resources that can be utilized to intervene immediately, as well as those that can be used to develop additional intervention and/or prevention programs. Ensure adequate social service and mental health resources are both available and being utilized.
- k) Take actions to identify bullies and victims and to promote intervention at the classroom level and at other student contact points within schools. Develop a program that provides victims with immediate support services and referrals, as well as teaching avoidance techniques and coping skills. Refer offenders to available support services.
- l) Advise teachers and staff to record events, as well as the interventions and strategies that are implemented to address different instances of bullying.

Anti-Gang Programs

Gang membership is destructive to a healthy school environment. Members of gangs are more likely than other students to carry weapons and engage in acts of violence.

- a) Establish partnerships with law enforcement in order to exchange information and educate teachers and staff about the presence of gangs and their activities.
- b) Become aware of gang-related clothing, paraphernalia, and behavior. Establish a school dress code that would exclude outward manifestations of gang membership.
- c) Inform parents/guardians if their children are suspected of involvement in gangs and give them relevant information, counseling, and access to available pertinent resources.

Suicide Prevention

Suicide is a far more common form of violence involving students than school homicide. In some cases, perpetrators of school shootings felt their actions would lead to their being killed by police, which also could be considered a form of suicide. It is hoped that effective suicide prevention will decrease the occurrence of both self-inflicted suicide and violence by students who believe their acts will result in their being killed by others.

- a) Develop a plan that specifies how to identify students at risk, how to handle threats, and what actions to take in the event of a suicide.
- b) Ensure that students have, and are aware of, easy ways to get help, such as access to suicide hotlines, counselors, and written/visual materials.
- c) Educate students, parents/guardians, teachers, and other school personnel on how to identify and get help for troubled students before they become victims of suicide. Include how to get immediate help to prevent or respond to suicide attempts.

Programs to Reduce Isolation and Alienation and to Promote Respect

School administrators and teachers should identify and implement programs that increase positive self-respect and respect for others. In general, these programs should:

- a) Establish standards for how people should treat each other.
- b) Promote and ensure that classroom standards are consistent with school and district policies.
- c) Ensure classroom standards are reviewed in class and that a copy of them is sent to the parents/guardians.
- d) Coordinate a cooperative effort to create and disseminate statements of values that all affiliates of the school will be expected to follow. All members should be able to state their school's values.
- e) Establish better lines of communication with students who may feel alienated or isolated and/or have low self-esteem.
- f) Increase the number and diversity of extra-curricular activities available to students.
- g) Help students become more successful in achieving desirable short- and long-term goals and increase the likelihood that their progress is recognized and rewarded.
- h) Teach students how to resist efforts by others to intimidate or isolate them.
- i) Value and promote community service opportunities for students.
- j) Model and reinforce values such as learning, respect, character, and cooperation.

- k) Encourage students to work together through the use of cooperative learning techniques such as team projects.
- l) Encourage the contemplation of core values (respect, responsibility, trust, sharing, etc.) through the use of age-and curriculum-appropriate writing assignments and class discussions.
- m) Encourage students to become actively involved in the school community.
- n) Recognize and reward students who exhibit positive and responsible behavior.
- o) Offer troubled and withdrawn students, including victims, help outside of class with schoolwork and personal problems.
- p) Develop a climate that encourages open communication between students and adults. It should maximize the options by which students can transmit their concerns about violence to school personnel, foster an environment of trust, and be sensitive to their fears of retaliation.

Prevention: The Role of School Administrators, Teachers, and Staff

To be effective, violence prevention programs require community-wide collaborative efforts that include students, families, teachers, administrators, staff, social and mental health professionals, law enforcement, emergency response personnel, security professionals, school board members, parents, and the business community. School administrators should bring together all of the above constituencies to develop strategies appropriate for their own particular school and community environments.

While school boards and administrators set the climate of safety within schools, teachers, especially, must be directly involved and supported in all stages of developing and implementing programs to achieve safer schools. Teachers establish the first line of school safety frequently because they have the most direct contact with students. Also, they have great insight into the potential problems and realistic solutions applicable to their school.

Training, Drills and Exercises

- All district personnel (faculty, support staff, custodial staff, office staff and administrators) will attend an orientation to the District's Emergency Procedure Manual on an annual basis. The orientation will focus on the policies and procedures for fire evacuations, emergency response codes, emergency communications and the district's incident command system. (Substitute Teachers will receive the Emergency Procedure Manual and other district policies and procedures in the emergency substitute folder.)
 - Each emergency response code procedure will be practiced at least on an annual basis as part of a regularly scheduled staff meeting.
 - Building evacuation procedures will be practiced a minimum of 12 times per school year. These procedures will be tested during the facilities fire evacuation drills.

- The district will conduct one early go-home drill (annually) to test its alerting and warning procedures, communications procedures, resources, staff readiness, transportation procedures, public information procedures, and evacuation procedures.
 - The emergency plan for sheltering in the event of severe weather threat, such as a tornado or thunderstorm, will be practiced on an annual basis to test alerting and warning communications, staff procedures and the movement of students to designated areas within the school building.
- Following a program orientation or a drill exercise, participants will forward their observations to their “Building Safety Committee” for further review and/or discussion. If immediate action is needed, the Building Principal will be notified in order to take corrective action.
 - A safety assessment of the District has taken into account school climate, school attendance, personal safety and overall school security. A review of the data in each school including incident reports, site reviews which focus on school climate and perceptions about behavior and safety issues support relying on the vigilance of teachers, administrators, support staff, monitors, aides, and bus drivers. In addition, all schools should, on a regular basis, monitor the lobby to provide lobby security and screen visitors. Each school should identify and publicize individual(s) as the person(s) to speak to if any individual observes or knows of concerning behavior. A review of such material should be a regular feature of administrative and faculty meetings when appropriate. Also, at the secondary level, hall duty is routinely performed by professional staff. (The use of School Resource Officers will be considered at selected schools.) Other staffing options include in-house security and contract security for special events. Weekend security or overnight security in buildings during selected times is used as well.

Implementation of School Security

The level of physical security may need to be modified in order to lower a school’s vulnerability to violent behaviors. Different strategies will be required to address needs specific to individual elementary, middle, and high schools. Administrators should initiate a comprehensive security assessment survey of their school’s physical design, safety policies, and emergency procedures.

The assessment should be conducted in cooperation with law enforcement, custodial, building and grounds personnel, fire and other emergency service personnel, teachers, staff, students, and other school community members. Using the conclusions of that survey, administrators should assign a safety and violence prevention committee composed of all of the above representatives to develop a comprehensive security plan (Building-Level Safety Plan). Based on each school’s needs, school safety plans may include some or all of the following suggestions:

- a) Consider utilizing local law enforcement agencies to provide School Resource Officers (SRO) including the DARE Program and other school-police-community initiatives. SRO’s often provide law-related counseling, and law-related education to students, faculty, and staff. Continuity of officers within individual schools should be encouraged, so that students and SRO’s develop rapport.

- b) Utilize personnel hired specifically to assist teachers and administrators in monitoring student behavior and activities. Continuity of monitors within schools should be encouraged to facilitate good rapport with students. The number of monitors used should be based on the number of students, the extent of problems at the school, and the space and layout of school grounds.
- c) Develop and enforce restrictions about students loitering in parking lots, hallways, bathrooms, and other areas. Publish restrictions in the student handbook/code of conduct.
- d) Adopt policies for conducting searches for weapons and drugs. Publish policies in the student handbook/code of conduct.
- e) Require visitors to sign in and sign out at the school office and to wear visible visitors passes. Post prominent signs at all school entrances instructing visitors where to sign in and out. Publish the policy in the student handbook/code of conduct.
- f) Encourage school personnel to greet strangers on campus and direct them to sign in if they have not. Also instruct school personnel to report visitors who have not signed in.
- g) Continue a closed campus policy that prohibits students from leaving campus during lunch.
- h) Establish a cooperative relationship with law enforcement and owners of adjacent properties to school that allow for joint monitoring of student conduct during school hours. Encourage neighboring residents and businesses to report all inappropriate activity and unusual incidents. Establish a protocol within the school to handle calls from the neighborhood.
- i) Consider providing and making use of alarm, intercom, cell phone, building paging, and two-way radio on school campuses.
- j) Consider the need for employing outside security personnel during school functions.
- k) Patrol school grounds, especially in areas where students tend to congregate such as parking lots, hallways, stairs, bathrooms, cafeterias, and schoolyards.

Vital Educational Agency Information

The District maintains information about each school in a central database. District information can be accessed from Central Offices whereas school-specific information can be accessed at each school. The data consists of information such as school enrollment, number of staff, transportation needs, and the home and business telephone numbers of school officials and the parents/guardians of students.

Early Detection of Potentially Violent Behaviors

It is important to prepare a threat assessment strategy so that when a threat occurs, everyone will know there is a policy and understand what actions to take. Threats are alarming statements or behaviors that give rise to concern about subsequent violence. Among the possible components of threat assessment strategies are:

1. Identify personnel who would be used to assess the credibility of, and needed response for, serious threats. The team should include school and school district administrators, legal counsel, and representatives from law enforcement. It might also include security personnel, mental health professionals, threat assessment experts, and any other person who could contribute in a meaningful way.
2. Define the nature and scope of threats that require a response from the Threat Assessment Team. The range of threats may include bomb threats, threats against children by parents/guardians in custody battles, personal vendettas between students, threats against

teachers or staff involved in domestic conflict, threats of retaliation, efforts to intimidate, and any other type of alarming behavior that involves members of the school community or its property.

3. Establish a policy to assure that reports of threats submitted from both inside and outside the school are routed to the appropriate administrator and investigated.
4. Establish procedures for recording and monitoring threats.
5. Ensure cooperation between law enforcement and school authorities in collecting and preserving evidence of threats.
6. Evaluate situations when a threat has been made and if warranted, notify the potential victims.
7. Counsel potential victims about the various civil and criminal options available to them, such as obtaining a restraining order. The potential reactions of the offender should be considered in whether or not to seek a restraining order. Additional security precautions should be taken if the offender is likely to respond negatively to the intervention chosen, especially during the period immediately following the initial application of that intervention.
8. Learn what procedures should be taken to screen mail and packages left on school sites after a threat has been made. Contact the U.S. Postal Service, local police, or the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms for guidance.
9. Establish policies for releasing any threat-related information to either the school community or media, giving consideration to the potential consequences of choosing to, or not to, disseminate information pertaining to serious threats.

Training of Students

Students pose unique challenges in teaching them how to identify and, more importantly, **report** threats and other concerns about School place Violence. One of the greatest hurdles with students is their extreme loyalty to their peers, as opposed to their parents and teachers. This loyalty results in a “**Peer Code of Silence**” wherein critical information about a student’s violent intentions may not be revealed until it is too late. After-the-fact analysis of School place Violence incidents reveals one steadfast rule: the kids always know first. By the time concerns are reported to teachers or other adults, the situation is usually very serious. One approach to overcoming the Peer Code of Silence is to educate students about **Victims of Chance** and **Victims of Choice**. Students need to understand that even if they are not the identified targets, they could be killed or injured by stray gunfire or shrapnel. Alternatively, even if **they** escape, one of their friends may become a victim.

In order for student training to be effective, a certain trust level must be established. It is important to present training to students as something done **for** them, not **to** them. Training and education about the warning signs of School place Violence is the most critical piece. Students do not typically recognize behaviors they see in classmates as warning signs of impending violence. They may harbor the false belief that a student who makes a threat

would never actually follow through with it. They also may not realize that threats of suicide could lead to acts of violence towards others. Students need to be taught that all threats need to be taken seriously and report any threats to someone in a position of authority. Reporting procedures established by the school should be highlighted in the training session. Working with the District and School Safety Team, each principal will develop training programs for early fall which are age appropriate.

The following topics will be addressed in training sessions:

- ❖ Categories of School Violence
- ❖ The Warning Signs of Violence Potential
- ❖ Learning to Distinguish Types of Threats
- ❖ Victim Typology
- ❖ Victims of Chance and Victims of Choice
- ❖ Myths About School place Violence
- ❖ Barriers to Reporting
- ❖ Parallels between Suicide and Homicide
- ❖ School-wide Reporting Procedures
- ❖ The School's Investigation Protocol
- ❖ Survival Strategies When Violence is Occurring
- ❖ School Crisis Plans and Procedures

Following training on School place Violence prevention issues, students shall be encouraged to form student-based organizations dedicated to school safety. Guidelines for forming these types of organizations may be found through the "Ribbon of Promise Campaign", a nationwide organization started in Arkansas. More information is available at www.ribbonofpromise.org. Services provided by this group includes community-based training, suggestions for relevant curriculum changes, and organization of non-violent conflict resolution training programs, peer mediation programs, youth courts, and other school safety programs.

Students should be trained in ways to handle and deal with teasing and bullying at school. Bullying has become a serious problem in many schools. The Center for Disease Control estimates that 5% of students miss at least one day of school a month in an effort to avoid, or for fear of bullies. A study conducted by Nickelodeon, the Kaiser Family Foundation and Children Now (2001), revealed that 80% of 8-15 year-olds said students at their school were bullied or teased, and 61% of them consider it "a big problem". Other research on bullying indicates that it has long-lasting, negative psychological effects for both bullies and their targets. Too often, however, parents and school officials ignore this problem or discount a "normal" part of childhood.

Schools should promote an atmosphere of intolerance for bullying behavior and implement specialized programs to assist all involved parties. Appropriate consequences should be imparted to any student found guilty of bullying behavior. At a minimum, the school should acknowledge that this is a ubiquitous problem and provide students, staff and parents with education and resources aimed at addressing this.

Hazard Identification

Faculty and/or staff will conduct a daily inspection of their classrooms, specialty rooms, playground, athletic fields and/or office area to identify, evaluate and, if needed, to report any potential hazards associated within their work area. All concerns should be reported to the Principal or Designee for correction.

The district will continue to work with outside emergency response agencies and the Putnam/No. Westchester BOCES Risk Management Department to evaluate potential hazards associated in transporting and/or educating the children within our district. See "Building Level Response Plans" for a list of specific hazards associated with each building.

Reporting

Establish a climate that encourages and enables students, teachers, and parents/guardians to report threats and acts of violence.

- a) Within the limits of legal guidelines and statutes, maintain confidentiality.
- b) Develop and adequately communicate reporting procedures with input from district school officials and local public safety agencies. Standard procedures should include definitions of pertinent information and how and where information should be distributed.
- c) Consider establishing a properly staffed, confidential hotline for reporting issues of harassment, safety, vandalism etc. If answering machines are used, calls need to be retrieved in time to effectively address threats of violence. Advertise the hotline number to students and parents/guardians in student handbooks, on posters throughout the school, on pencils, student IDs, lockers, etc. Parents and students should also be advised when to use 911 rather than the hotline.
- d) Obtain training to recognize whether reports of threats or acts of violence are false and/or malicious.

Student Rules

Student rules must be communicated, understood, and consistently enforced. They also must comply with constitutionally guaranteed due process procedures. The District has adopted a Code of Conduct and committees have formulated "age appropriate" student handbook and procedures which:

- a) Establish rules of conduct pertaining to improper student behavior using input from students, parents/guardians, staff, public safety officials, mental health agencies, and legal counsel.
- b) Annually review, and if needed, revise rules of student conduct.
- c) Ensure that all rules have a purpose that is clearly understood. They should be clear and communicated to all students in both written and verbal formats. A student's comprehension of the rules should be assessed.
- d) Post summaries of rules of student conduct in classrooms and throughout the school.
- e) Send rules home to be read by students and parents/guardians. Include an acknowledgment form for students and parents/guardians to sign and return to the school. Hold meetings to

- communicate rules to parents/guardians, and to the extent practicable, make sure they understand them. Invite parents/guardians to call if they have questions about the rules.
- f) Apply rules in a consistent manner. Have pre-established consequences for rule violations.
 - g) Develop a consistent, timely, and effective means to notify parents/guardians of rule violations and consequences.
 - h) Establish clearly defined rules and appropriate consequences for all types of harassment, intimidation, and disrespect. Rules should cover student behavior at all school events. Parents/guardians and teachers need to act as positive role models for students.
 - i) Suspend and recommend expulsion of students or initiate the process of discipline for staff for serious rule violations. Serious rule violations include:
 - 1. Possession of a firearm on school property or at school events. The 1994 Gun-Free Schools Act mandates a one-year expulsion for students who bring a firearm to school. The chief administrating officer of the local education agency is able to modify the expulsion requirement on a case- by case basis. All local education agencies that receive funding from the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) must require all students found carrying a firearm to be referred to the criminal justice or juvenile justice system.
 - 2. Possession or use of a weapon on school grounds or at school events that is capable of inflicting serious bodily harm.
 - 3. Physical assault of a teacher, administrator, staff member, or student.
 - j) Suspend and consider the appropriateness of expulsion for the following:
 - 1. Verbal threat to a teacher, administrator, staff member, or student.
 - 2. Possession, sale, or use of illegal drugs on campus.
 - 3. Actual or threatened retaliation against persons who report threats or acts of violence.