Summary Framework & Recommendations for Action

Keeping Wisconsin Schools Safe: A Safe Schools Initiative
July 16-18, 2013

Background: The school safety summit at Wingspread was organized as a means to examine the current condition of school and student safety in Wisconsin and to identify strategies and resources that could be marshaled to maintain or enhance a high level of safety. Together with the Johnson Foundation at Wingspread, a planning committee consisting of representatives of the following organizations planned the summit and the process by which recommendations from the participants would be incorporated into an action plan:

- Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction
- Wisconsin Association of School Boards
- Wisconsin Association of School District Administrators
- Wisconsin Council of Administrators of Special Services
- Wisconsin Education Association Council
- Wisconsin School Safety Coordinators Association
- Wisconsin Association of School Business Officials
- Wisconsin School Public Relations Association
- Association of Wisconsin School Administrators

In addition to the core planning committee, representatives from other statewide organizations and emergency services providers/first responders, as well as Native American tribes, participated in the 2+ day summit. After hearing from content experts in children's mental health service delivery, creating safe and positive school climates, enhancing physical environment school security, and establishing sound policies and procedures, small discussion groups deliberated on and generated recommendations in each of the four arenas of action. The information that follows comprises a summary of those discussions and recommendations for action.

Cross-Cutting Beliefs: In each of the four action arena presentations and discussion, common themes kept re-emerging that were not restricted to one aspect of school safety. It is important that these be considered integral to work in all of the action arenas and they be seen as critical to the collaborative and cross-cutting work that lies ahead.

- ***Addressing the mental health crisis and the lack of appropriate services for youth must be a top priority as we strive for safe schools.*** A significant contributing factor to unsafe school environments is the estimated 20% of all students with mental health issues. Wisconsin research indicates 80% of these students will not receive the services they need to function and thrive in school and in life.
- ***Every school should be a warm and welcoming place for students, parents, staff, and the community.*** It is integral to the mission of the school that attention is paid to development of a climate and culture that invites inclusiveness, celebrates diversity, promotes participation, and enhances safety. We must find the balance between creating

nurturing, inspiring, flexible physical environments with the need for controlled access and high visibility.

- *Leadership matters*. The responsibility for creation and maintenance of a safe school starts at the top, but is the shared responsibility of everyone that works, learns, volunteers in, or visits the school. A safe school must start with a trained leader committed to creating a school safety culture to be shared with and adopted by school board members, administrators, staff, students, and the community.

- *Relationships matter*. How individuals treat each other in a school, at all levels, is a reflection of the climate and culture of the school, and the value held on respect, civility, and tolerance. If dignity for all is the established as the norm, issues that threaten this culture from within will be noticed more quickly, allowing intervention to begin immediately. We don't solve a "bullying problem" if we only focus on isolated episodes of conflict. By focusing on building strong, healthy relationships, we go a long way toward creating or maintaining safe schools.

- *Practice must follow good policy.* In order to have a consistent approach to creating and maintaining safe schools, well developed plans and policies -- adopted by the Board with input from all key stakeholders -- should drive the actions of all responsible for carrying out these critical plans. *Wisconsin statute 118.07 (4)(a) 1.1 states that "each school board shall have in effect school safety plan for each school in the district."*

- *Collaboration is key.* Safe school environments are strengthened by deep partnerships and collaboration among district stakeholders, local professional agencies, community organizations, and even businesses. Students are truly one of a community's most valuable resources and it takes a joint effort to protect and provide for them effectively. *Wisconsin statute 118.07(4)(b)(b) states that "a school safety plan shall be created with the active participation of appropriate parties."*

- *Investing in preparation and training is essential.* Failure to provide the necessary training and crisis preparedness is not only unacceptable in terms of safety implications, it will likely cost far more in the long run. Additional law enforcement and juvenile justice system costs, health care cost outlays, lost productivity and lowered student achievement will impact communities for years. Providing prevention programs, screening and triage, staff training and community education, can help schools and communities respond more effectively to safety concerns, as well as reduce long-term costs. *The 2013 Sandy Hook Commission Report stated that "the effective training of staff resources provides the most critical, timely, and effective mechanism for resisting a threat to schools based upon a human actor."*

- *There are no "one size fits all" approaches.* While research based practices can and should be adopted where data indicates such interventions are warranted, it is critical to be aware of cultural differences and community traditions. Safety plans must be tailored to each school/community.

- *We must listen to students' voices.* Students need to be encouraged to provide input and offer perspective on improving school safety based on their experiences, concerns, and ideas. Surveys, student advisory councils, facilitated focus groups, and data analysis are all meaningful ways to get the pulse of the students that attend and learn in our schools every day.

Recommendations for Action

After hearing from content experts in each of four action arenas, summit participants identified strategies that are recommended for a **coordinated, statewide approach**. Consensus recommendations include the following:

I.   Mental Health

A. Coordinate and integrate with the Governor's Mental Health Initiative and other state and federal mental health initiatives. Define the role of schools in meeting the mental health needs of students, and address gaps and access to services.

B. Develop and identify best practices, at the local level, in meeting the mental health needs of students, including examples and resources. Further exploration of existing programs should include (but are not limited to):
   - Trauma Informed Care
   - School-based mental health services/clinics
   - Expansion of PREPARE training (Prevent, Reaffirm, Evaluate, Provide and Respond, Examine)
   - Colorado Bridges Program
   - Screening, Brief Interventions, and Referrals to Treatment (SBIRT)

II.   Climate and Culture

A. Assist, facilitate, and encourage more schools to adopt a prevention-based, evidence-based behavioral system of support (e.g., Positive Behavioral Intervention and Support or PBIS) and support continued implementation including making connections to other mental health and culturally responsive practices.
B. Develop a deeper awareness and understanding of the importance of a systematic approach to address climate and culture in school and community settings
C. Seek resources to support efforts and initiatives at school/district levels;
D. Identify other best practices to promote positive school climate, including:
   - Character Education
   - Asset Building
   - Peer lead efforts
   - Anti-bullying efforts

III.   Physical Environment

A. Recommend each school district identify and train a safety response and planning team for each school building **annually** (e.g. administrator, teacher, student, parent, buildings and grounds, fire, police);
B. Recommend in addition to the safety planning team review required by WI state statue 118.07, we recommend that every three years, each school building conduct a comprehensive endorsed safety/security site assessment (e.g. FEMA Guide for Developing High Quality School Emergency Operations Plans);

C. Advocate for funding (e.g. State funding and/or revenue limit exemption) to provide specific staff safety training, emergency management/readiness programs, and equipment.
D. Develop best practice examples and guidelines, including resources to ensure educationally sound, accessible, and safe school environments exist, includes:
- o Controlled access
- o Visitor management
- o Secure technologies (cameras, distress buttons, two-way radios, signage)
- o Student Resource Officers (SRO's) and safety personnel
- o Comprehensive threat assessment of each school
- o Balance between safety/security and maintaining welcoming atmosphere

IV. Policies and Procedures

A. Create uniform templates for exemplary policies, practices, and procedures, including sample communications (print, electronic, social media)
- o Uniformity
- o Sustainability
- o The exploration of a creation of a statewide School Safety Center
- o Local and statewide crisis response teams
- o Every school have a Safety Planning Team (per FEMA recommendation)
- o Every school have an Emergency Operation Plan (per Act 309)
- o Every school have one person responsible for the safety plans (per DPI guidance)

B. Recommend National Incident Management System (NIMS) training model as a statewide standard for crisis preparedness and response, including:
- o Research statewide adoption
- o Research alignment between WI state statutes and Federal guidelines

For more information on the Safe Schools Initiative and resources provide at the Wingspread Summit, please visit http://sspw.dpi.wi.gov/sspw_safeschool.

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