

# **PTACHC School Safety Committee Report and Deliverables**

**August 28th, 2023**

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**PTACHC School Safety Committee  
Report and Deliverables  
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# PTACHC School Safety Committee Report Cover Letter

## **PTACHC School Safety Committee Background**

The PTA Council of Howard County (PTACHC) School Safety Committee (**hereafter the Committee**) was a time-limited committee that was formed by the PTACHC Board and approved by the PTACHC membership in February 2023. The Committee Co-Chairs were Beth Anna Varson and Lisa Krausz, 1<sup>st</sup> Vice President and President of the River Hill High School (RHHS) PTSA respectively. The Committee's work grew out of RHHS PTSA's school safety advocacy which took place in the aftermath of the RHHS lock-downs on October 4<sup>th</sup> (a full lock-down) and October 11<sup>th</sup> (a subsequent modified lock-down).

The Committee's objective was to create three deliverable "products" (i.e., resources) that could be leveraged by future school safety advocates, committees, and or local PTA/PTSA units to help improve the emergency preparedness and safety responses of their school, HCPSS and the Howard County Police Department (HCPD).

The three resources the Committee produced are:

1. The **PTACHC Action Step Template** that local PTA/PTSA units can use if they undergo a school safety threat and want to take greater action within their school community in the aftermath of this experience; the template includes sample questions to support a parent post-threat survey process.
2. The **RHHS PTSA School Safety Survey Report (hereafter the Survey Report)** which was based on parent survey data collected in the aftermath of the October 2022 RHHS lock-downs and reunification process; the report includes a summary of the questions and answers that were provided during the subsequent RHHS School Safety Panel held in December 2022 (we have included the **School Safety Panel Summary of Q&A** as a separate section in this document).
3. The **PTACHC School Safety Committee Emergency Preparedness and Response Recommendations Report (hereafter the Recommendations Report)** which details recommendations gleaned from RHHS PTSA school safety advocacy, undertaken in the aftermath of the October RHHS lock-downs and reunification experiences; this report can be used by school safety advocates to push for improvements in their schools, HCPSS and HCPD emergency preparedness and safety responses.

The Committee completed its work on May 31, 2023. This report represents the culmination of its school safety advocacy.

## **Background of RHHS PTSA Advocacy**

In the aftermath of the school lock-down on October 4<sup>th</sup>, the RHHS PTSA decided to address this traumatic experience by taking further action. At the PTSA October General Membership meeting on October 10<sup>th</sup>, parents were debriefed by Ms. Lidgard, RHHS Principal, about the October 4<sup>th</sup> lock-down and were able to ask many questions. The PTSA decided that evening to create a School Safety Survey (**hereafter the Survey**) to gather information from parents about their own and their child's experiences

during the lock-down and to help identify next steps to address school safety. Beth Anna Varson, Sanjoy Sandaval, Ms. Lidgard and Lisa Krausz worked collaboratively on the survey, which was sent out in mid-October to parents and closed on November 6th. Beth Anna Varson analyzed the Survey results and produced the Survey Report, which was shared with Ms. Lidgard and HCPSS. The Survey Report was also shared with RHHS PTSA officers and general membership in December 2022. The Survey Report generated three suggested action steps: (1) the creation of a School Safety Working Group, (2) holding a School Safety Panel, and (3) helping to create School Safety advocacy at the county level.

The RHHS PTSA School Safety Working Group was formed in late November and was comprised of Lisa Krausz, Beth Anna Varson, Ms. Lidgard and Lori Scott. This group coordinated an RHHS PTSA School Safety Panel (**hereafter the Panel**), which was held December 12, 2022 at RHHS. The Panel was comprised of the following guests: Patrick Saunderson, Community Superintendent, Area 1, HCPSS; James LeMon, Executive Director of Community, Parent and School Outreach, HCPSS; Jahantab Siddiqui, Chief Administrative Officer, HCPSS; Caroline Walker, Executive Director of Program Innovation and Student Well-Being, HCPSS; Janice Yetter, Director of Special Education, HCPSS; Ian Rifield, Director of Security, Emergency Preparedness, and Response, HCPSS; John T. Ridgely, Manager Crisis Teams, HCPSS; Major Justin Baker, Deputy Chief, Field Operations Command, Howard County Police Department; and Mikaela Lidgard, Principal, RHHS.

Beth Anna Varson culled questions for the panelists from the concerns raised in the survey results. The Panel provided an opportunity to have a substantive discussion on the process and procedures that the RHHS school community experienced during both RHHS lock-downs in October. The panelists answered questions and shared information, and parents had an opportunity to ask questions and share information about their experience and concerns. Concrete suggestions were made to HCPSS and HCPD during this discussion. The suggestions made during the survey process have served as the basis for the final recommendations in the Recommendations Report.

### **Intended Use of PTACHC School Safety Committee Resources**

The Committee requests that these resources be posted to the PTACHC website with a special page devoted to school safety issues and that they be made available to HCPSS and HCPD. Future advocates can use these materials to continue to press the county to make improvements in their emergency preparedness and response measures. Local PTA/PTSA units can use these materials if they undergo a school safety threat to help their own school. The Committee wishes to state that these resources are here to strengthen school responses and are in no way indicative of harsh criticism in the wake of school safety threats. To the contrary, HCPSS and HCPD deserve commendation for their emergency preparedness response last Fall, as the favorable findings from the Survey Report attest. Nonetheless, it was a traumatic experience for all of us, and we should learn from these experiences and continue to refine the responses.

# PTACHC School Safety Committee Action Template & Sample Survey Questions

## Purpose and Background

If your school has undergone a school safety threat, the PTACHC School Safety Committee has devised this Action Template to provide possible steps you could take in the aftermath of such an event. The Action Template is a series of possible steps that could be taken that have been drawn from the experiences of River Hill High School (of HCPSS) in the aftermath of such threats in the Fall of 2022.

## I. Initial Communication, Convening & Debriefing

1. Notify your school community that a school safety threat has occurred and provide any other relevant, yet factual, information in your communications. Direct your parent body, PTSA members and school community to **additional resources** to help support recovery from this incident: investigate National PTA resources and Sandy Hook Promise resources, among others.
2. Convene a PTSA Meeting or utilize an existing meeting to invite parents and other school community members to participate in a discussion about the school safety threat as soon as possible after the event.
3. Invite your principal, and any other administrators from your school, to this meeting to assist in answering questions and to debrief those who attend this meeting.
4. Broadly communicate that you will be holding this meeting to your school community and/or membership.
5. Identify 1 next step at the end of that meeting that your PTSA can take in the aftermath of the school safety threat, which could include any number of possibilities, including but not limited to: convene a broader debriefing forum for the school, conduct a school safety survey, or organize a larger school safety panel. Make this decision as a group within your PTSA that evening at your meeting.

## II. Possible Next Steps

1. If your parent and membership body has expressed interest in taking further action of some sort, it may be useful to **convene a School Safety Working Committee** for your school. In this case, identify the people who will work in this group and set your first meeting date.
2. Develop a **School Safety Survey** to send out to parents to seek feedback on how the school safety threat process was handled and to give community members a chance to let their voices, opinions and thoughts be known. See additional information (i.e., sample survey questions) provided to serve as a possible guide for your survey.
3. Convene a larger **School Safety Panel** at your school to continue the process of debriefing, to provide parents and others a forum to ask questions and give some feedback, and to help glean lessons learned from the school safety threat.
4. Invite a **school safety speaker** to your school to discuss this event and additional steps that can be taken for your school.
5. **Communicate** with your parent body, PTSA members and school community about the action you are taking to address school safety issues.

6. Take up **advocacy** within Howard County and through PTACHC to continue to strengthen school safety protocols and procedures.

### **III. Sample Survey Questions & Information**

To move the survey process from an idea to a reality, a means for distribution needs to be identified to get the surveys into the hands of the school community. Many tools are available to survey a group of people, so it is recommended to use something that is user-friendly and both easy to distribute and administer. RHHS PTSA used a paid subscription to Survey Monkey\*, which allowed ease of distribution, prevented multiple responses by a single email address, and enabled ease of reporting. Buy-in by school administration is important to support the widest distribution in the roll-out of a survey, as they have reach outside of PTSA membership (although surveys can still be effective limited to only PTA/PTSA membership).

\* Many survey tools are available via free or paid subscriptions. Survey Monkey is a free software, but certain limitations exist necessitating a paid subscription for respondents over a certain number. Other survey tools that have a free version include: Survey Planet, Jotform and Zoho Survey

#### **Reporting & Communication**

Reporting and communication back to the school community brings the greatest value to the process. Without this feedback loop, survey respondents could feel that their concerns have gone unheard and unvalidated. A good survey tool can help ease the burden of evaluating the information and summarizing it in a way that is easy to understand. It is important to understand that using a mostly open response survey format has the benefit of collecting lots of valuable feedback, but a drawback of requiring more time and effort to identify trends and common themes. Lastly, any report created should be made available to the school community. This distribution is important as a way of engagement, because even those that did not complete a survey may benefit from the results.

Category/Question Used in RHHS Survey? (Y/N)	Category	Question	Answer Type	Answer Options (if not Free Form Comment)
Y	<b>The Execution of the Lockdown / Modified Lockdown Process by HCPSS</b>			
Y		My overall satisfaction with the lockdown / modified lockdown process was:	Free Form Comment	
Y		What was your experience during the lockdown / modified lockdown (feelings, observations, etc.)?	Multiple Choice	Very Satisfied; Satisfied; Neither Satisfied Nor Dissatisfied; Dissatisfied; Very Dissatisfied
Y		What questions do you have regarding the lockdown modified lockdown process?	Free Form Comment	
Y		What suggestions would you like to share regarding the lockdown / modified lockdown process?	Free Form Comment	
	<b>The Process by Which the Evacuation was Conducted</b>			
		My overall satisfaction with the evacuation process was:	Free Form Comment	
		What was your experience during the evacuation (feelings, observations, etc.)?	Multiple Choice	Very Satisfied; Satisfied; Neither Satisfied Nor Dissatisfied; Dissatisfied; Very Dissatisfied
		What questions do you have regarding the evacuation process?	Free Form Comment	
		What suggestions would you like to share regarding the lockdown process?	Free Form Comment	
Y	<b>Law Enforcement/Police Response to the School Safety Event</b>			
Y		My overall satisfaction with the law enforcement / police response was:	Free Form Comment	
Y		What was your experience during the law enforcement response (feelings, observations, etc.)?	Multiple Choice	Very Satisfied; Satisfied; Neither Satisfied Nor Dissatisfied; Dissatisfied; Very Dissatisfied
Y		What questions do you have regarding the law enforcement response?	Free Form Comment	
Y		What suggestions would you like to share regarding the law enforcement response?	Free Form Comment	
	<b>Emergency/Medical Response to the School Safety Event</b>			
		My overall satisfaction with the emergency / medical response was:	Free Form Comment	
		What was your experience during the emergency / medical response (feelings, observations, etc.)?	Multiple Choice	Very Satisfied; Satisfied; Neither Satisfied Nor Dissatisfied; Dissatisfied; Very Dissatisfied
		What questions do you have regarding the emergency / medical response?	Free Form Comment	
		What suggestions would you like to share regarding the emergency / medical response?	Free Form Comment	
Y	<b>The Reunification Process to Reunite Students with their Parents/Guardians</b>			
Y		My overall satisfaction with the reunification process was:	Free Form Comment	
Y		What was your experience during the reunification process (feelings, observations, etc.)?	Multiple Choice	Very Satisfied; Satisfied; Neither Satisfied Nor Dissatisfied; Dissatisfied; Very Dissatisfied
Y		What questions do you have regarding the reunification process?	Free Form Comment	
Y		What suggestions would you like to share regarding the reunification process?	Free Form Comment	
Y	<b>Post-Event Support, Communication and Availability of Resources Provided to the Student and Parent/Guardian Community</b>			
Y		My overall satisfaction with the post-event support, communication and availability of resources was:	Free Form Comment	
Y		What was your experience regarding post-event support, communication and resources (feelings, observations, general impressions, etc.)?	Multiple Choice	Very Satisfied; Satisfied; Neither Satisfied Nor Dissatisfied; Dissatisfied; Very Dissatisfied
Y		What questions do you have regarding post-event support, communication, and resources?	Free Form Comment	
Y		What suggestions would you like to share regarding post-event support, communication, and resources?	Free Form Comment	
Y	<b>Recommendations for PTA/PTSA Next Steps</b>			
Y		Additional post-event supports, resources and actions I would like to see are (select all that apply):	Multiple Choice / Free Form Comment	Representatives of other groups (e.g., Central Office, Law Enforcement, etc.) speak at a PTSA Meeting; Develop a PTSA School Safety Committee; Other suggestions you have related to next steps and future actions (with free form comment box associated with this response)

RIVER HILL HIGH SCHOOL

**PTSA**<sup>®</sup>

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**School Safety  
Survey Report  
December 2022**





# School Safety Survey Report

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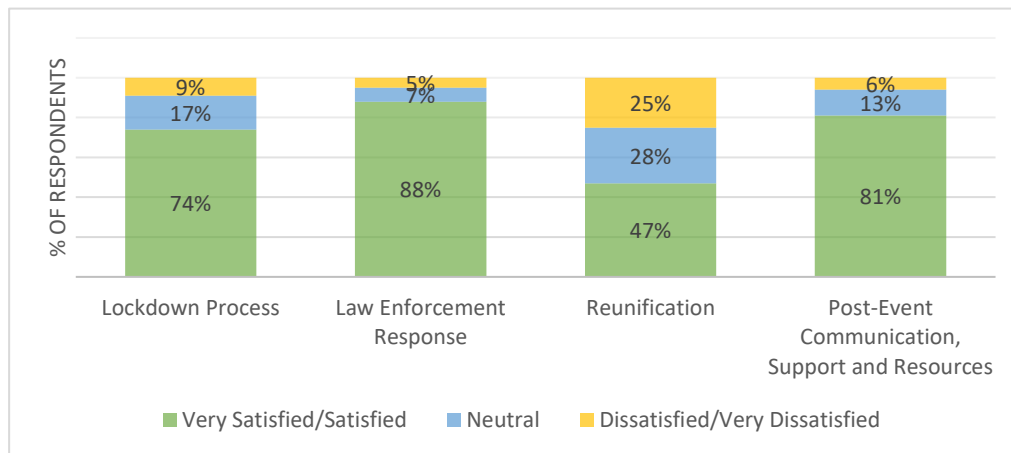
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## River Hill High School – PTSA School Safety Survey Report

### Survey Summary Results

As a result of River Hill High School’s (RHHS) October lockdown (10/4/2022) and modified lockdown (10/11/2022) events, the RHHS PTSA created its first School Safety Survey with the goal of gathering, analyzing and reporting on the feedback received from parents/guardians in order to work towards a better future process. The survey was distributed on 10/21/2022 through the RHHS all-school newsletter and on 10/26/2022 through a direct email to the RHHS PTSA membership. From these communications, 118 responses were gathered during the approximate two (2) weeks the survey was open for completion. To follow is a summary of the quantitative responses, the themes identified in the qualitative answers, as well as next steps identified through this survey process.

The survey was organized in four (4) sections reflective of the chronology of events and groups with responsibility/accountability: 1.) lockdown process; 2.) law enforcement/police response; 3.) reunification process; and 4.) post-event support, communication, and resources. Each section contained a required quantitative assessment of the parent experience on a scale from “Very satisfied” to “Very dissatisfied”, and optional open-ended questions to gather information regarding the parent experience, questions and suggestions.



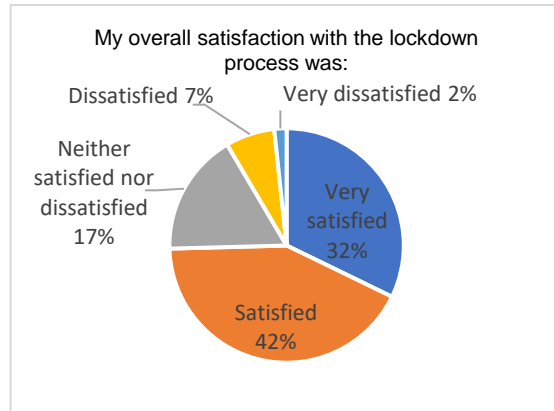
The above chart shows the percentage of “Very satisfied” and “Satisfied” parent responses to their experience with each of the event areas outlined in the survey, with Law Enforcement Response receiving the highest percentage of favorable responses at 88% and the Reunification receiving the lowest percentage of favorable responses with 47%.

For each event/responsibility area outlined in the survey, a chart is provided showing the respondent satisfaction ratings and key themes are outlined based on the free-form responses given to the following questions for each event area:

- What was your experience?
- What questions do you have?
- What suggestions would you like to share?

### Lockdown Process

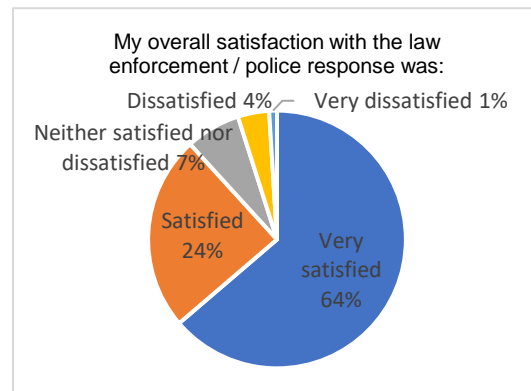
Based on the quantitative ratings given by respondents, 74% of respondents reported being “Very satisfied” or “Satisfied” with the lockdown process. Of the remaining respondents, 17% noted that they were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with their lockdown experience and 9% noted that they were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the process.



Upon review of the comments received from respondents regarding their experience with the lockdown process, it was noted that over 40% of respondents expressed feelings of fear, anxiety, or terror because of the lockdown. However, respondents noted they were consoled by communications from students, information communicated both through official and unofficial channels, and/or the extensive and swift police response. Additionally, over 20% of respondents expressed concerns with the delay of initial communications and/or sufficiency of information being communicated to contend with rumor and social media information/misinformation. Communication concerns also included dependence on cell phones for parents/guardians and students to effectively communicate and remaining informed. Requests for quicker information and more details regarding status, student/staff well-being and specific instructions for parents/guardians were amongst the feedback. Lastly, teacher responses/reactions were explicitly noted by about 10% of the respondents, with the majority of that feedback praising teachers for the calm and order brought to the stressful situation, and the minority noting teachers not appearing to adhere to process and continuing with instruction.

### Law Enforcement/Police Response

Based on the quantitative ratings given by respondents, satisfaction with the law enforcement/police response was the highest in the survey, with 88% of the respondents reporting being “Very Satisfied” or “Satisfied” with the law enforcement/police response. Of the remaining respondents, 7% noted that they were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with their law enforcement/police response experience and 5% noted that they were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the process.

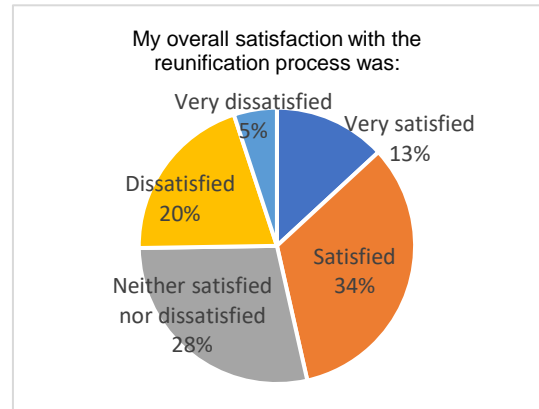


Upon review of the comments received from respondents regarding their experience with the law enforcement/police response, the vast majority of the comments were those of support, appreciation and praise for the seriousness, professionalism and bravery exhibited by law enforcements response, 30% explicitly noting the timeliness of the response. Although most were comfortable with the extent of the response based on the lack of information about the threat at the time (including the presence of

SWAT in tactical gear), approximately 10% were concerned that the presence of that magnitude of weaponry was excessive and added to the anxiety and fear of students and parents/guardians. Lastly, 5% of respondents expressed concern regarding how and where law enforcement detained students who were found unaccompanied by adults, specifically questioning why they were handcuffed and why they were detained in public view.

**Reunification**

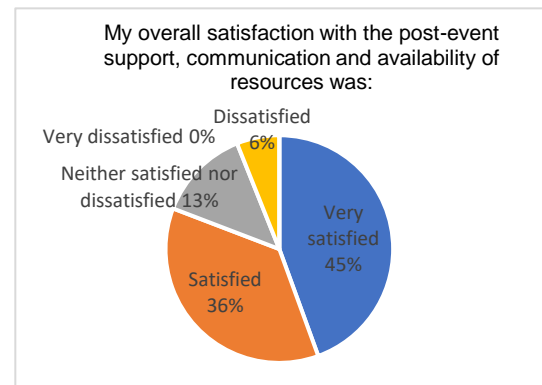
Based on the quantitative ratings given by respondents, satisfaction with the reunification resulted in the lowest satisfaction rating among the four areas surveyed, with only 47% of the respondents reporting being “Very satisfied” or “Satisfied”. Of the remaining respondents, 28% noted that they were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with their reunification experience and 25% noted that they were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the process.



Upon review of the comments received from respondents regarding their experience with reunification, almost 25% of those responding used terms such as chaotic and disorganized to explain their experience at the reunification site, mostly citing frustration over queuing, minimal instruction provided, lack of clear information upon arrival. Another almost 25% expressed concerns over the time it took to reunite children with the parent/guardian, with most of these respondents noting wait times of 2 to 3 hours upon arrival of the cite. Less than 10% of the remaining respondents noted confusion with the process, commenting again on the queuing and the multiple sign-off processes (paper and computer) that existed at the reunification cite. Despite the concerns with the process, over 25% of respondents acknowledged that those responsible “did their best given the circumstances”.

**Post-event Support, Communication and Resources**

Based on the quantitative ratings given by respondents, 81% of respondents reported being “Very satisfied” or “Satisfied” with the post-event support, communication and resources. Of the remaining respondents, 13% noted that they were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with their experience and 6% noted that they were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied.



Upon review of the comments received from respondents regarding their experience with post-event support, communication and resources was generally positive, with 26 of the 39 respondents to this question noting a positive experience and general appreciation for information and resources provided. Most favorable comments (30% of comments provided) noted the quality and timeliness of post-event

communication, with half of these specifically praising the timeliness and informative nature of the principal's post-event emails. There were approximately 10% of respondents to these questions commenting on the inconsistencies in post-event messaging in the classroom, with some teachers speaking little to it and others dedicating time for discussion. Suggestions were made for more messages directed to/towards students, support to utilize resources, and possible school-wide communication (e.g., assembly) to ease return-to-school concerns of students.

### **Actionable Steps to Move Forward**

Based on the information gathered and analysis performed, the RHHS PTSA has identified three (3) next steps to help support our school community moving forward from these two (2) events.

1. Create a School Safety Working Group – This working group within the RHHS PTSA will be tasked with analyzing the underlying individual survey data, issuing the School Safety Survey report, and managing next steps. This working group will include the PTSA President and RHHS Principal, at a minimum, and will be open to any PTSA members who express an interest.
2. Facilitate a Platform for School Community Discussion– Based on the number of respondents requesting further information from administration, Central Office and/or law enforcement, the PTSA will be inviting representatives to RHHS for an opportunity for community engagement to address questions, concerns and suggestions provided by survey respondents. Responsibilities for this opportunity for direct community engagement will reside with the School Safety Working Group.
3. Explore a Potential Standing Committee at the County Level – Approximately 25% of those surveyed expressed interest in the creation of a PTSA School Safety Committee. The mission of this group would be to engage county wide and possibly state-wide advocacy organizations in addressing school safety issues.

Updates regarding the below action items will be provided to the PTSA membership through our bi-weekly newsletters and through the weekly all-school newsletter as updates become available.

## **School Safety Panel Summary of Q&A River Hill High School (RHHS) December 12, 2022**

### **Moderators:**

- Beth Anna Varson, RHHS PTSA 1<sup>st</sup> Vice President
- Lisa Krausz, RHHS PTSA President

### **Panel Participants:**

- Mikaela Lidgard, RHHS Principal
- Major Justin Baker, Deputy Chief HCPD
- Ian Rifield, HCPSS Director of Security, Emergency Preparedness and Response
- Jahantab Siddiqui, HCPSS Chief Administrative Officer
- Janice Yetter, HCPSS Director of Special Education
- Dr. Caroline Walker, HCPSS Executive Director Program Innovation and Student Well-Being
- Patrick Saunderson, HCPSS Community Superintendent Birth - Grade 12, Area 1
- James LeMon - HCPSS Executive Director of Community, Parent, and Student Outreach
- J.T. Ridgely - HCPSS Manager, Crisis Teams

### **STRUCTURED Q&A**

Please note, the questions and answers below have been summarized to provide the main points of the conversation, as determined by the RHHS PTSA moderating the discussion, and are not a full transcription of the panel discussion. The questions asked and responses provided are not direct quotes, unless documented as such. This summary is being provided as a resource to students, parents and the community regarding how the emergency event at River Hill High School on October 4, 2022 was handled, including some references to a later October 11, 2022 event. Any questions regarding this summary should be directed to the RHHS PTSA President at [President@riverhillptsa.org](mailto:President@riverhillptsa.org).

### **Question 1 & Answer(s)**

Moderator - Can you explain what the general process should be for various threats (including the process for students/teachers inside and outside of classrooms) and if that process was properly followed?

Lidgard – A brief overview of the lockdown, modified lockdown processes and other emergency scenarios can be found on the school website. When announcing a drill, the first statement is “This is a drill”. In the event it is not a drill, a message such as “Lockdown, lockdown, lockdown” is made multiple times to indicate to staff that it is not a drill. Staff are then expected to look, open their doors (looking for students not in classrooms), make sure the door is then closed and locked, turn out the lights, close any blinds, and sit on the floor with students away from line of sight from outside. Students and teachers not in classrooms should find the place they can get to the quickest and secure themselves there. We don’t want teachers so locked into a process that they lose the ability to make on the spot decisions that the situation requires. Besides a bit of confusion by a couple of staff members as to whether we were in a full lockdown, the vast majority of staff and students did a phenomenal job.

Rifield – Teachers are responsible for knowing students’ whereabouts and taking a headcount. Lockdown is for students in the building and relocatables (portable classrooms) follow the same process. At this point, we begin that run, hide, fight mentality. Classrooms are dark and quiet.

### **Question 2 & Answer(s)**

Moderator - What was the process for determining the credibility of the (October 4<sup>th</sup> RHHS) threat and what protocol was to be used? Also, who was/is responsible for making that decision?

Rifield – On October 4<sup>th</sup>, there was information indicating both an armed shooter and existence of an explosive device. Based on the totality of the circumstances and understanding that firearms are the most prevalent weapon, the school made the decision to go into lockdown. There have been only 2 incidents, both over a decade ago, where explosive devices were used in targeted violence against a school. Knowledge of prior incidents are part of the thought process to determine credibility of the threat.

Baker – Information about the call was immediately relayed to the SRO, which was related to police dispatch at 1:46pm. Officers were on the scene within 6 minutes of the call coming in and within another 7 minutes, tactical officers were in the building. When we (police) arrive on the scene, we create a joint command with school administration and representatives of the school system and then make the decision to alter course if necessary. The decision of the lockdown was the appropriate decision.

### **Question 3 & Answer(s)**

Moderator - What is the process to continue refining communication protocols to families (relating to security threats), including timing and frequency, for future events?

Lidgard – Our first priority is the safety of the people in the building, so we rely on Central Office to help us with communication.

Siddiqui – The primary objective of the school is the safety and security of the school’s students and staff. Once it was understood what was going on, communication was sent out and this communication was within 15 minutes of when Central Office received the call. Central HCPSS sent out messages on behalf of the school as they are busy with gathering safety equipment. A Community Superintendent was sent to the school and I shortly followed, sending updates back to Central Office so additional messages could be sent out. Central Office was ready to send a message at 1:50pm, but information was still being gathered and we didn’t want to create a level of panic beyond what needs to be created. In these situations, we’ve seen communications from students and on social media. While we are sorting things out, we don’t want to put out information that can be misinterpreted. We want to strike a balance of timely information, reassurance and next steps. Don’t call the school or Central Office. In this situation, it took us time to triage, because we also recognized there’s a second school on the campus being impacted, we are close to high school dismissal time with buses arriving, students would be returning from ARL, and bus delays from River Hill impact other schools. The principal gets a copy of all communications before they are sent out. We were able to handle the October 11<sup>th</sup> threat communication a little differently and leverage messaging from October 4<sup>th</sup>.

#### **Question 4 & Answer(s)**

Moderator - Per protocol, should students be on their phones (due to a school safety threat) and is there anything that can be done regarding connectivity concerns in certain areas of the school (for communication)?

Siddiqui – If your child does reach out to you (during an event), reassure them that school is following protocol, the principal and adults in the school know what they are doing and are focused on their safety, and you are waiting to get more information from the school. We ask that parents partner with us to help us as you’re communicating with your child: let them know you are waiting to get further communications from the school system and that there are protocols and safety procedures in place that guide this process.

Lidgard – We ask students not to text or be on their phones, as we don’t know when students are going to need to get directions to be immediately followed. Also, with students on social media, we don’t want information regarding locations and what is going on to be posted; this is not a safe practice. We also want to make sure phones are silenced and not flashing to draw unwanted attention. We are trying to strike a balance with cell phone use, as we know parents and students are scared.

Rifield – We prefer students are not on their phone. As for connectivity, the goal is to establish communication baselines. 13 schools were identified by the county cell phone provider and signal boosters (for that provider) were provided to those schools.

Siddiqui – We have our own system of communication that doesn’t rely solely on cell phone service to communicate internally and with police and public safety partners. Since many of the schools were built 30 or 40 years ago, you would expect some areas to be without service.

Rifield – Pursuant to state law, we must provide redundant systems. The classrooms have landlines and emergency radios are available within the schools to get directly to police dispatch.

#### **Question 5 & Answer(s)**

Moderator - How were these (basic biological and emotional) needs met during the (extended) lockdown and how can these needs be better met should a situation like this happen in the future, including those students with special needs?

Walker – We have had conversations as a team and would not change our actions (on that day). The classrooms are the safest place, but we’ll continue to research and look into the topic. However, there may always be space that is not as well prepared. I certainly have a lot of empathy for wanting to provide everything to them at that moment but if there’s an incident in the hallway I would much rather have me in the classroom with whatever happens.

Ridgely – The announcement of “Lockdown, Lockdown, Lockdown” raises everyone’s perception of threat anxiety. Since we can’t really reduce that initial anxiety much for teachers, students, and parents, what we can do is look at how we prepare and train people so that everybody has a good understanding ahead of time so they know what to expect. It is important for students to see adults following a procedure because that presents a level of calm.



Yetter - For those students with special needs requiring specialized emergency plans, these plans have been incorporated into their IEP. Any parent who feels additional considerations are needed for their child in the event of an emergency should contact their case manager or IEP team leader.

Walker - There is also the ability to have a health plan in place through the school nurse.

Saunderson - We have looked at the situation that took place on October 4th at great length, including the basic things in classrooms school-wide and what took place at Ten Oaks (reunification site). As we review our emergency operation and notification plan, we are looking into how we address certain needs (restroom, water, food, medical) and making sure we are thinking of all the possibilities, while Caroline (Walker) reinforced that safety comes first.

### **Question 6 & Answer(s)**

Moderator - Can you provide information regarding how quickly law enforcement was able to arrive on site after the call was received on October 4<sup>th</sup> (regarding River Hill High School's safety threat event)? Has there been post-event debriefs to determine if this level of response (extent of weapons brought onto school ground) would be used in future events?

Baker - We had information that there was a subject with a rifle, so a handgun would be no match for someone with a rifle. When tactical comes, they not only bring weaponry, but the necessary equipment for the job; things we might use to open rooms. I'm not going to send my officers in with something less powerful than what they need to neutralize the threat. We also need to clear and secure the reunification site and leave visible law enforcement presence there to handle any threat. We have done several post debriefs internally and with the school system on what we did right, what we did ok, and what we did wrong. We had to change the reunification site because the original one was too far. Improving the process is a continuing evolution as we move forward.

### **Question 7 & Answer(s)**

Moderator - Can you explain the protocol in place for detaining certain individuals (during a threat event) and if there has been communication since this event to reevaluate how your protocols can be followed while still protecting/sheltering students from public scrutiny/site?

Baker - We had a call that there was a subject in the bathroom with an AR 15 and a bomb. Tactical made entry into that bathroom and found an individual there. Based on the threat and the circumstances surrounding how the student was found, he was brought out, handcuffed, passed off to control, and brought outside. I don't want to handcuff students, but officers entering the school don't know what they don't know, so they came in with the assumption that there could be an active shooter. Until we can make sure there's not an active threat, we are going to take precautions to protect everybody. We have talked about another way we can do this, because the situation with people in the parking lot and being close to dismissal was not ideal. We talked about if there is a way to get the students out of the public eye, but looking at the totality of the circumstances, that might not be possible. On behalf of the police department, I apologize to those students and their families. It's a horrible thing to have to go through. Unfortunately, I think the officers were doing the best they could at the time.

## **Question 8 & Answer(s)**

Moderator - Who makes the determination as to whether students need to be evacuated to a second location or dismissed directly from school (as a result of a school safety event/threat), and were there protocols in place within the school to accommodate this (at the time of River Hill High School's October 4, 2022 event)?

Rifield - On the day of the incident, there were protocols in place, but we hadn't had a chance to drill them in recent time. The decision for reunification is based on the totality of the circumstances. In this case, there was a possibility of the explosive device, so we need to get the kids out of school and then dismiss them from there (reunification site). We had a site picked, but we knew Ten Oaks was available and close. We could get those children from the school to Ten Oaks quickly, instead of going a greater distance to one of our relocation centers. The police knew it was ready, they were there, so I made the decision to go with it. It is more important to get folks out of the danger zone and begin the process.

Baker - We can plan all day, but the circumstances are going to dictate what we have to do in that situation. This situation highlighted our ability to move quickly on our feet and change direction and be able to pick a different reunification site that was more beneficial for the situation.

## **Question 9 & Answer(s)**

Moderator - Has this (reunification) process been reevaluated (since River Hill High School's October 4, 2022 event) in the event that students will need to be dismissed from an alternative site in the future? Also, has any consideration been given to different dismissal protocols for students that walk or drive, or how information should be collected in the Family File for those authorized to pick up students in situations like this?

Lidgard - Part of our emergency plan is the process of reunification, going to another site, and how to release students. This is the first time that we have done off-site reunification in Howard County. This process is normally for situations where we have had an act of violence and injured students or staff. What we have talked about felt very, very real, but the plans we have for a reunification would take place in the aftermath of a much more heightened traumatic event.

Rifield - The reunification plan is being looked at as we speak. Dr. Walker's team and my team are heavily engaged in rewriting, simplifying, and improving. I do realize that there are different high schoolers in different classes, but at that point I had 58,000 kids I'm responsible for. How many students left their phones, phones died, or have a 20 minute walk home. I am responsible for your children from the time they leave your house to the time they get home. There are legal constraints and morally, I could not put a parent through that torture, wondering where their kid was. We are looking at better ways of releasing students, but at the time that appeared to be the best way to do it to me.

Ridgely - This is the first time we've done this, so it gives us a really good chance to look and see what our lessons learned are, and there's lots. We have had district level and school level crisis team training in 2019 on reunification. We were working on it then, and then priorities changed when the pandemic hit. One lesson learned is the need for white boards, as a lot of kids put in earbuds or headphones and could not hear us repeatedly calling for them. I think the parent was probably a little bit anxious that they saw me go in and out three different times trying to find her child.

Siddiqui - This is one instance where cell phones help, because we could say, "OK, does your child have a cell phone?" and have them keep an eye out for a person looking for them. That's how we ended up reunifying.

Yetter - From a reunification site perspective, I would say that many of our (special needs) students have adults with them. A reflection for us would be to make sure that we're going back and asking the adults that were with our students for their perspective on how things happened on that day and if they have enough directions, so we can make sure that they have everything they need to provide those supports to our students.

Lidgard - One of the things in the moment that we were able to collaborate with the police on was the order in which they cleared each classroom. We were able to prioritize our students with significant special needs who had been waiting for a very long time and were starting to struggle. That group was one of our early groups, so that we could get your students in wheelchairs and students who require additional mobility assistance on a bus. I think that is a lesson learned, so that's certainly something you want to do if we ever have to do that again.

LeMon - I was based out of Central Office, but I was working very closely with the school management team. I was talking to Mr. Saunderson, Dr Walker and others throughout this process. I thought with 1500 kids that we're going to be there until 9:00 pm, but was pleasantly surprised that we didn't have to be there so late. There is a lot to learn from this, sure, but we actually never went through the whole reunification effort in the system before.

Ridgely - I'll just add I was at the reunification site. One of the things that we've mentioned is we have different sites and each of them have pluses and minuses. One of the things that was a struggle at Ten Oaks is there's only really two big rooms to put students in, so there were a number of students with special needs who had different things that could be triggering for them. Plus River Hill has a preschool program and their staff was doing a fabulous job of really trying to separate those students and the younger children in a way that kept them a little bit out of the mix. I want to commend the River Hill Administrators who were creating spaces for those students.

Saunderson - And there were some simple things, that you even mentioned, talk about Whiteboards. When you're in a school, of course those supplies are all here. We're down in Ten Oaks and don't have the same supplies, so we are talking about as a school system outfitting one of our vans with supplies. Each school has emergency bins, but making sure that it has improved supplies and resources. White boards seem so simple but it would have been huge to have whiteboards over at Ten Oaks. Between this situation and a follow up situation we had at Reservoir not that far after, this is a continuous learning process. As Ms. Lidgard mentioned, we're continually revising, reviewing, and updating simple things and then systemwide things.

### **Question 10 & Answer(s)**

Moderator - At the reunification site, were any mental health or emotional support services available for students or families? If not, is this being considered as processes are being evaluated for improvement/change?

Walker - Dr. Ridgely manages our crisis teams for the county, so part of what we're doing is pretty clear in the literature. The best thing we can do for families is to reunify with their children. That's not the time for a counseling session. In some ways we were fortunate that we had the next day that we were not scheduled to work and our children were not scheduled to be in the building. We were able to meet quite a bit with Ms. Lidgard, virtually, and make some plans for the following day.

Ridgely - We did have members of our crisis team, members of leadership, River Hill Student Services, and one of our counselors on the district crisis team at the reunification site. We were monitoring the two rooms and visually checking in on students, but as Dr. Walker said, one of the key priorities is also how we can help the team reunify as quickly as possible.

Walker - Ms. Lidgard knew the students that were most impacted. One of the things we did was get in touch with those families first to make sure that services were in place. Our counselors who were there the next day were able to reach those students first thing and have those conversations. The knowledge of the students and the information about what happened, shaped how we reacted and responded. Some students may have come to seek support that wasn't anticipated and that's always welcome and encouraged in a crisis situation, but a lot of it is also pre-planning for the students for which we do anticipate this being a challenge.

Ridgely - As Mr. Saunderson was alluding to, we have a district level crisis team for the whole county that's made-up of trained, school-based student services staff, school psychologists, school counselors, social workers, pupil personnel workers, and of course the nurses. Some were called to go to the reunification center, and we had twenty members of the crisis team with the River Hill staff when students returned 2 days later. We worked with the River Hill team to identify what their needs were, so they weren't all here at the same time. We have about 12 people in the morning and then about 8 people in the afternoon to help support students or staff that were asking for support. The school asked for four people to come back on Friday, so we had 4 members of our district level team come back.

Saunderson - And those supports were offered to Clarksville (Elementary) also?

Ridgely - They did not ask for support, but we made sure we had staff.

Siddiqui - I will add, we haven't said this, but we all know this and we said this in the days after. Your students did a phenomenal job. The calmness, the maturity that the students demonstrated that day was absolutely phenomenal. 1200 students packed into Ten Oaks ballroom with barely any chairs, sitting on the floor, organized alphabetically, people coming in that they have never seen before, screaming out their names and kids were helping each other out. So kudos to your students and if you haven't already, I strongly recommend continuing to sort of lift up what they did that day too.

### **Question 11 & Answer(s)**

Moderator - Now that we are months removed from the situation, is there information that can be shared regarding the investigation or how processes are being evaluated for the future?

Baker - From a law enforcement perspective, it is an ongoing investigation. I don't want to get into too much detail about where we stand with that investigation. I can tell you that we haven't ruled out local ties, but we believe it has ties that are outside of the state of Maryland. We have been working with our state and federal partners and it's a lengthy investigation for the simple fact that we're dealing with phone calls and different records that take a while to get and to analyze. What I would ask students,

parents and staff alike is, hoax or no hoax, if you have information, you see something or something just doesn't feel right, you need to alert law enforcement. The week after we got the second call, we handled that a little bit differently based on the facts of the call and what we knew from the previous call. I have talked to Richard Gibson from the State's Attorney's office and he will prosecute and so, we take it very seriously. So from a law enforcement standpoint that's where we are with the investigation. It is an active investigation, so I can't talk too much on that front.

Rifield - From an emergency management perspective, every school has an emergency operations plan. Every plan has been reviewed and we are working on getting feedback to all the schools that require feedback or modification to their plan. As part of professional development, we've gone over some tabletop exercises with the principals and the assistant principals, specifically on how to handle situations. Again with the reunification plan, it is under extensive review and revision. One of my philosophies with security is security can be good but if it's good why can't it be better? If it's better, make it best, so we're working with that philosophy. We had a good base plan, we tried it, we found some issues, now we can make it better. I'm not gonna wait until a second incident. About a week to the day prior to the incident, there was a meeting between Howard County OEM (Office of Emergency Management), the police, the school, and fire rescue. We're starting the planning of our new full scale field exercise and the topic of, "hey let's not stop short when the threat goes away", let's take this one all the way through unification. So we are looking to improve and revise, and steps have been taken to do that.

LeMon - I'll just add from a school management team, we meet with the police on a regular basis as well. The leadership of SRO's (Security Resource Officer) come to Central Office at least every month. We've been doing that prior to this incident, so we have a great relationship with the Howard County Police Department and slowly it's getting stronger. We also have processes for after action that we review as well, not just the River Hill situation but other ones as well.

## **OPEN AUDIENCE Q&A**

Audience Member - I know there's a lot going on in the background, but I believe as a parent, it would be very helpful to have some type of debriefing forum prior to 2 ½ months later. It would've been better a week or two or three weeks after the incident to have you all and have parents sitting here being able to ask questions a little sooner than now to have a debriefing about what happened and what the incident was about, get students in here to talk about their feelings for the situation. Maybe a community safety group? I don't know if there's some discussion happening in the central office about having some stakeholders and some safety group being involved in conversations about safety in general.

Mainly my other question is for the police officer. I know that the school district does a really good job in managing through the IEP process and the evacuation/emergency response for kids like this. Please assure me that your staff is well aware that these kids exist in all of our schools and that there are extra protections in their mind when they're coming to the schools, for these children and their staff. Oftentimes they're housed in a very specific location-- the basement and the back, and I'm always concerned that your staff need to be aware of the specialties that arise in those types of classrooms, the fear and the noise that these kids can make, that they can't be quiet, they cannot run, they cannot hide and they can not fight. And the second question I have for Ian is that a lot of times the doors, especially

our door in the front-- we do not have a single point entry that is ADA accessible. And that is really something I would like you guys to consider. Through all the buildings, our single point access entry is not ADA accessible. That's a problem for evacuation and there's a lot of spaces in this school where what would happen if there was a huge incident going on on one side and we need to evacuate kids out of the basement on another side. Are they all accessible to get out? Are we going to put her wheelchair in dirt and not be able to have access? So those are long-term things, and I would love to be able to advocate on your behalf because I think that they're important.

Major Baker - I do think you bring up a good point and I think it's something we should probably think about when we do, not only table tops but the full scale exercise. We're only going to get this information from this feedback. If we can plan that maybe into our next incident that we have, maybe we have some students that have some difficulty with mobility and we have to get them out or get in a rescue task force. That might be something we add in.

Rifield - Again, part of my projects since I started-- physical security evaluation. First thing I wanted to make sure that all the locks on interior and exterior doors are functioning. Also, my philosophy when it comes to our populations is to look at our most vulnerable populations. I had to talk with our management. Every student is important, but looking to fix things first for those kids who are most vulnerable, the ones who can't run, who can't hide, and certainly can't fight. I realize now, to be honest with you, I did not know that the situation with the front door here and ADA accessibility, so that would be a topic for our operations leadership team this week but we're doing our best, it's just working with buildings that were not originally designed with ADA accessibility and there are some funding constraints and I promise you we'll work on the issue.

Moderator - Two other issues that were raised were the questions of group debrief sooner, also community safety group. Did anyone want to speak to those questions, and any thoughts on that?

Saunderson - We're definitely taking notes as you can see, I'm writing very feverishly as we go throughout the program tonight. Things for us to think about the future in terms of timing, we were trying to figure out what we are doing as a school system, also working with HCPD as we had unfortunately several incidents occur in a very short amount of time and then trying to figure out how to follow up on them. As far as the citizen advisory, we do have in other parts of our school system, a citizen advisory group and special education citizen advisory group. We have our business partnership so it's something I'm sure Ian will take, as he programs forward to see if there's some way we can bring people together to get that kind of feedback, like the front door here at the school. These are things that, the more people we have involved in the process, the more knowledge we receive.

Rifield - I welcome and value your feedback. I really do, particularly geographically, in the area we're in, there are some true subject matter experts residing in this area. If you ask me right now to read the book to get into the nuts and bolts of every plan and I say no, please don't be offended. Yeah, there is the other piece. The vast majority of this book is not subject to MPIA (Maryland Public Information Act). I can't bring a lot of people in, so they can't reverse engineer the plan. I would love to speak to committees in generalities but I can't always get into nuts and bolts.

Siddiqui - So, two things I want to add. Most of our plans are not public documents. I remember Mr. McNeal and you (Audience Member above) worked together on aligning our emergency operations plan with the needs of our students. That was about 5 or 6 years ago when we talked about wheelchair

accessibility and what happens during an evacuation proceeding. What we may be able to come up with is perhaps some opportunities to take some input and concerns from community members. Going back to that reassurance piece, being able to let you know that we will factor those into our plans to the best of our abilities, as possible. The other piece that I want to just raise up as far as security of doors and other pieces, one of Dr Martirano's directions during the last school year was to prioritize safety, safety upgrades and safety issues that are in our buildings, doing an assessment of each of our buildings to try and do what we can. Ian (Rifield) has brought several things to me over the last few months and said I really need to get this done, I really need to get this done and the consistent message from us is when it's a safety issue, it's a security issue. You tell us what the cost is going to be and we're going to have to go to bat and figure out a way to make this work but it will come at the expense of something else but if it's a safety and security issue, I don't want to be a CEO that is saying no you're going to have to hold off on this until after the budget process. We're really doing everything we possibly can do to expedite that.

Rifield - Please realize that I don't believe in just throwing money at a problem. I always balance being a good steward of the taxpayers' dollar and balancing what I'm doing, making sure it's done in the most fiscally responsible manner as well.

Moderator - I'm going to take a question here.

Audience Member - Ok thank you, all of you, that was a tough situation for everyone and was handled beautifully. Certainly, you're prioritizing the safety and the management of the kids was where it needed to be and was done well. If you want to just get back to reunification, I was one of the first parents who was there once we learned where that was going to be and what was really lacking, I saw, was crowd control of the parents, because we were told at first and word got around once the kids started arriving. We said okay well if you see your kid get off the bus, raise your hand and we'll let you into the Ten Oaks Ballroom and I'm sure at that point you weren't ready to release kids anyway. As more and more kids came and more parents are thinking "oh I should be able to go in now cuz I see my kid", and eventually a large mob of people started going to one side of the ballroom and I was actually trying to find the officer, somebody, to say hey put us in a line please. Give us some control over where we are supposed to be. I don't know if you're going to be able to prioritize the parents who saw that their kids were there because there was no way you were going to reunify the kids with the parents as fast as the kids were starting to roll in, so my suggestion would be, parental crowd control and somebody out there with a megaphone to just be able to tell people, this is what's going on this is what's going to happen and if you had somebody who was there with some tape or barricades and someone told me they were going to come with cones to try to line up the parents. If the unification process is going to work better, there needs to be parental crowd control and communication.

Walker - I think we just accept your suggestions.

Moderator - I have the lady in the purple sweater, and then we have the lady in the red coat and the lady here so we are supposed to end at 8:30 so please...there's also time to speak afterward for people as well. Let's try to wrap it up by 8:30.

Audience Member - I wanted to thank you for using the word "real". The news was using "hoax" and that really stung because it did feel real. I was working from home, I got the text from my son and it was basically a goodbye text so my heart dropped. I was at the school in 5 minutes but I was so grateful he was texting me and I was texting back and forth with him. I'm just wondering if the teachers are given

any kind of information on how, in a setting like this, to check in with the students, and make sure they're okay.

Lidgard - So we did, and we have done an internal kind of debrief after action with our staff and then all of these amazing folks, that included what we heard from parents at that first PTSA meeting and through the individual emails. One of the things that one of our staff members did, which we have kind of shared and I think might be being explored, they said "I want everybody to take out your cell phones. Text your parents, let them know I'm ok and I'm with this teacher and then let's all put our cell phones away" and I know some of the feedback both from parents and from students and from our staff was that that felt really helpful. I appreciate hearing that that was reassuring for you, although it's a horrible text to receive.

Moderator - The lady in the red coat.

Audience Member - Again thank you all for all you do for our kids every day and always. I have one comment related to the keeping tabs on the kids. I have two, one is a 9th grader, the other one is a senior. The day of the incident, my senior was already at home when he heard the news and I came by the school and then by the ballroom. But then I received my kid, finally after 4 hours in the rain and everything. I've seen that my other daughter's name is in the roster, so, obviously nobody knew that she was already released.

Lidgard - The rosters that we were using actually contained the name of every single student in our school and each individual had a stack of the entire student body, so we had about 12 different rosters and the individual person who did the running was highlighted and we then were able to look and make sure for all of those many copies of the roster, who had been picked up and who hadn't.

Audience Member - Yeah, maybe it would be helpful if you have them in a separate roster. Another comment, I know that emergency response plans are a little bit different than your security and safety plans, so let's have that kind of mindset when we are planning for our response. Thank you.

Moderator - All right the lady here in the burgundy coat.

Audience Member - Hi. I agree (with the person that spoke earlier) that there should have been some communication a little sooner, but beyond that I understand it's an ongoing investigation. I think that the county could provide a lessons learned document and you also mentioned, Mr. Saunderson, that there were a lot of different incidents and the schools were inconsistent in how they implemented their different responses. I think you need to have a county-wide, community event to get input from the parents, but I think also sharing out. I understand we're not going to give the Emergency Safety Plans as that would be opening up threats. So, I'd like to see why we can't get, like a document that says, hey we learned a lot; here's a frequently asked questions. If you have further questions, send them to blah, blah blah. I respect that you guys did a great job of responding to the emotional well being of the students, but it was a couple of days later. There are a lot of kids who would not be your normal kids that you would say, "oh yeah they're going to have problems--I need to make sure I'm and on top of that". Something like this, it triggers the hidden situations and so I really felt like that was not a good response. Any time something like this happens, I think there should be immediate resources.



Audience Member - Yeah to couple with that, I was just going to say are there plans to share this? Thank you for being here so much. Great experience and input here. Are there plans to share more broadly in the community?

Moderator - Yes, right now we are taping and we're going to transcribe that and we're going to have people look at it to make sure there isn't anything too sensitive and then I believe we would probably share that with parents.

Lidgard - That's my understanding.

Audience Member - Outside of the River Hill Community too?

Moderator - Yes, and it might take a little while. We also have, I do want to point out, we have Terry Marcus here tonight who is the VP of issues for PTACHC and we're hoping to also utilize this as a foundation for moving forward at the county level.

Audience Member - Yeah and PTACHC at our last meeting did have this as a topic with a guest speaker.

Audience Member - I did have a question very quickly for the policeman. So my kid was in social studies. I'm not sure where that is in the building but they heard the other kids get arrested from the restroom and then she wasn't evacuated until a few hours later cuz I didn't get her until 6:00. I don't know how you guys were done at 6 cuz that place was still packed at 6:00, ok, and she was upset. I mean, she's an ok kid, she's smart and everything, but it was traumatic and I agree with her and anybody else who feels that impacted kids even though they probably say "Oh I'm fine.." They're really not.

Audience Member - It's trauma and it shouldn't be called a hoax. Whoever put that out there, is making a mistake because it should be referred to as an unsubstantiated threat. It's not a hoax when the kids are looking at it and they are in the dark and they are walking out like this.

Baker - Yeah I mean it's dangerous in any situation.

Audience Member - It's terrorizing.

Baker - But we have to come in and don't know what we're facing. It's dangerous for everybody.

Audience Member - So I don't know anything about the other schools. I don't know how many other schools this happened to. I don't listen to the news that much. How many were there?

Rifield - Oh in Howard County?

Audience Member - Yes, in our county how many schools had to go through that terrorizing experience?

Rifield - So we've only done one reunification but there've been several, they call them swatting incidents. We have been able to work very closely with the police department, mitigating the response and establishing some protocols.

Audience Member - So only River Hill had to be reunified?

Baker - Based on the threat that day, yes. The following week we had another threat here. Based on the threat, the way the threat came in, phone number kind of stuff, we made a decision to not evacuate. We did a modified lockdown that day.

Audience Member - That was at River Hill.

Baker - There have been other schools.

Lidgard - We had those two calls and they were very different. There were similarities but there were also stark differences that influenced the way that we reacted. I'm not at those other schools, but I would imagine while we're calling all this swatting, that the details of the calls and the details of the individual threat really have impacted how people have responded.

Siddiqui - And the other challenge is the timing. The threat came in shortly before dismissal.

Audience Member - They did that on purpose.

Siddiqui - The other threats came in much earlier in the day. The second River Hill threat was earlier in the day. It was like 10:30 or so. The one at Reservoir came in at about 12:15 or sometime around that time where we end up delaying dismissal, but we knew and we were sort of right at the edge of making that decision of whether are we going to have to do a reunification center or do we think we can do a dismissal still and will the police have enough time and they ended up having enough time.

Baker - Yeah, we were making plans at Reservoir for reunification and they did evacuate. It just so happens that the threat in that situation, we were able to get the dogs in the school, sweep the school for the threat, say it wasn't a threat, and you guys are able to go back into the school as opposed to a reunification site.

Audience Member - Was it just those two schools? Were there any others?

Baker - There have been others in the county, yes.

Audience Member - At this point, I would request you consider parents in your team, because we are on the same page and we care about our children, everybody's children. Don't keep information from us, as county residents, as parents of these kids, even if it happens in the school next door, it's our problem. It's our community.

# **PTACHC School Safety Committee Emergency Preparedness and Response Recommendations Report**

## **PTACHC School Safety Committee Recommendations Background**

The recommendations contained in this report are drawn from the substantive discussion undertaken during the River Hill High School (RHHS) PTSA School Safety Panel (**hereafter the Panel**), which in turn grew out of the RHHS PTSA School Safety Survey (**hereafter the Survey**). Each advocacy step undertaken by RHHS PTSA added to the pool of knowledge from which these recommendations were drawn, some come directly from parent suggestions, while some come from information gathered as a whole from these advocacy steps.

The Committee hopes that these recommendations will be taken seriously by HCPSS, the HCPSS Board of Education, by each school, by HCPD, and by future school safety advocates, as we believe that emergency preparedness and response procedures can be refined and, in some cases, greatly enhanced by heeding these recommendations.

The recommendations are broken into four larger categories, which reflect the categories that parents were queried on in the Survey and are reported on in the RHHS School Safety Survey Report (**hereafter the Survey Report**), with a fifth section added below covering additional feedback. The categories below were also used to inform the Panel questions. The overarching categories are:

1. The Lockdown Process
2. Law Enforcement & Other Emergency Responses
3. The Reunification Process
4. Post Event Communication, Support and Resources
5. Additional Feedback

In each section, an attempt has been made to cross-reference the recommendations with HCPSS's Emergency Preparedness and Response Policy (HCPSS Policy 3010)<sup>i</sup> to help create greater integration with existing policy and to help ease the advocacy process. The cross-referenced information is provided in parentheses after each recommendation or after subheadings where relevant. The aim is to locate the recommendations within the existing 3010 Policy, where the recommendation could be added to HCPSS operations.

Here are the recommendations:

## **I. Lockdown Process**

### **1. Emergency Preparedness – Recommended Policy Addendum (IV. A)**

A. The HCPSS Board of Education should create a new line in Policy 3010, under Section IV. Standards, A. Preparedness, which would dictate the need for the school system to also provide educational training to parents and students for emergency preparedness; specifically, this line would call for the need for pre-incident training to increase cooperation from parents, and help students better understand the

strategies they should employ during a school safety threat. Language recommendation: “The HCPSS will develop education training materials for parents and students to be distributed prior to the beginning of each school year. These materials will provide information and guidance to students and parents regarding school safety and emergency response.” This policy addendum would serve as the basis for the development of the trainings noted in the recommendations below.

## **2. Emergency Preparedness - Parent and Student Training Program (IV. A)**

A. Create a short Emergency Preparedness and Response educational video, article, or training for parents to access at the beginning of the school year to lay the groundwork for better collaboration between parents and the school system during school safety threats. The information should be sent out to every HCPSS parent/guardian. Items to be addressed in the training could include, but not be limited to the following:

- How parents can partner with HCPSS during school safety threats.
- Descriptions of and differences between various emergency responses, such as full lock-down, modified lock-down, and shelter in place.
- Relay to parents requested communication practices, such as not calling the school or HCPSS Central offices, but to wait for text and email alerts.
- Ask parents to avoid school grounds until further notification.
- Provide basic guidelines and/or suggestions for parent cell phone usage with students: i.e., quick check-in if possible, otherwise, do not text or call during lock-down as can create unsafe situations for students and staff.
- If parents are in contact with students, parents should provide reassurance that school administration and staff have been trained and are following established procedures for their safety.
- Stay alert for HCPSS texts for updates and accurate information.
- Provide guidance to limit wide distribution of inaccurate information during the threat, including but not limited to sharing pictures or information via social media, email or text with other parents or the community (though HCPSS understands parents crave information during this time, sharing this type of information can add unnecessary risk and cause undo harm to any individuals - adults or minors - included in such pictures).
- Include information for parents with children with special needs: e.g., how to talk with their IEP coordinator and/or the school nurse about emergency preparedness for their children as well as other options.

B. Create a short Emergency Preparedness and Response educational video, article, or training for students to access at the beginning of the school year (developmentally appropriate) to help better prepare them for what they should do in emergency situations. Items to be addressed in the training could include, but not be limited to the following:

- Descriptions of and differences between various emergency responses, such as full lock-down, modified lock-down, and shelter in place.
- Run, hide, and fight strategies – brief overview in developmentally appropriate ways that do not frighten students, but reinforce safety practices.
- Best practices for cell phone usage during the emergency for students.

- Guidance to not share information or pictures on social media, email or text (as it can undermine safety), unless sharing is promoting their own safety in the moment (HCPSS: decide on best practices here).
- Any relevant information that can be shared with students to help ease anxiety and aid in emergency response actions, such as reunification processes (e.g., pay attention to administrators looking for students, look at the white board for your name when it is your turn to be picked-up, etc.).

### **3. HCPSS Communications (IV. B. 5.)**

A. Create a process to send more immediate status communication to parents of any school safety threat, even if no information is available with the goals of minimizing communication of inaccurate information and increasing parent cooperation.

### **4. Cell-Phone Usage During Lock-Downs**

A. Adopt a best practices strategy for cell phone use for students and (recommended process) for parents during school safety threats. (IV. B. 5.)

B. Continue to improve internet connectivity in all HCPSS schools. (IV. A.)

### **5. Students with Special Needs (IV. A. 1)**

A. Increase ADA accessible doors at single entry points used during evacuations.

B. Seek feedback from parents of children with special needs regarding emergency operations and planning.

## **II. Law Enforcement & Other Emergency Responses**

1. Ensure HCPD and other emergency responders (1) know where the current ADA accessible doors are located in each school, (2) are trained in their use during evacuation scenario training, and (3) informed where student with special needs may be located within the building to facilitate evacuations.

2. HCDP should prioritize the clearing of classrooms with students with special needs during evacuations, if possible. (IV. A. 1.)

3. HCPD should utilize available resources (e.g., rooms, vehicles, privacy screens, etc.) where feasible to screen minors (those being held in police custody) from public view and scrutiny.

4. Other emergency responders should utilize available resources, where feasible, to screen minors (and possibly adults) from public view and scrutiny.

## **III. Reunification Process (IV. A. & C.)**

1. Create a HCPSS emergency response kit (or outfitted emergency response vehicle) with such things as lightweight room dividers, privacy screens, white boards, water, snacks, and other resources that could be utilized at a reunification site (and possibly at the school site, if safe) to better meet a range of student needs and improve reunification.

2. Improve student identification and communication process during reunification efforts (e.g., explore cell phone applications, utilize white boards, etc.).
3. Prioritize reunification of students with special needs. (IV. A. 1.)
4. Improve parent crowd control methods (e.g., utilize bullhorns, cones, safety tape, and/or lightweight barricades to create queues, etc.).
5. Improve parent reunification communications (e.g., explore cell phone apps, utilize white boards or makeshift screens, etc.).

#### **IV. Post Event Communication, Support and Resources**

1. Initiate prompt psychological resources for the kids most impacted by a school safety threat immediately after the event, if feasible, and provide follow-up support the next and following days. (IV. A. 8.; IV. C. 2.)
2. Update parents and the school community about improvements to school safety processes in the days, weeks and/or months following significant school safety threats. (IV. A. 2.)
3. Central HCPSS should debrief with parents and school community in aftermath of a major school safety threat, within approximately 4-6 weeks. (IV. A. 2.; IV. A. 3.)
4. Create a lessons-learned document for parents in the months following a significant school safety threat. (IV. A. 2.)

#### **V. Additional Feedback**

1. Utilize the language “unsubstantiated threat” as opposed to a “hoax” when referring to school safety threat, as the traumatic impacts are the same. (IV. B. 5.)
2. Consider how a day off (the next day) may benefit some families and students, but disadvantage others. Seek feedback here. Consider developing a policy or procedure around this feedback for a best practice. (IV. C. 3.)
3. Include parents on your team of collaborators in Emergency Preparedness and Responses strategies. Utilize their feedback; create an opportunity for public feedback on Emergency Preparedness and Response strategies; include parents with children with special needs in these discussions as well. (IV. A. 2.; IV. A. 1.)

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<https://policy.hcpss.org/3000/3010/#::~:~:text=An%20HCPSS%20employee%20who%20supervises,or%20the%20incident%20is%20resolved.>