



March 31, 2023

Dear School Leaders,

The unthinkable happened in another school in the United States when three children and three staff members were shot and killed in Nashville this week. Our heartfelt condolences go out to the individuals and families impacted by the heinous and tragic shooting.

Just days later, the school day was disrupted for many of you by active shooter threats that were called in to more than three dozen schools in nearly every region of our state.

The threats are believed to be “swatting” incidents - or the false reporting of a serious law enforcement emergency, such as a bomb threat, hostage situation, or homicide. Law enforcement investigated the threats and determined them to be false, but nonetheless, they generated a great deal of stress, confusion and emotional trauma for children, parents and staff, and tied up valuable law enforcement resources. Police on the local, state and federal level are working to trace the threats and arrest those who are responsible.

It is important for school administrators and leadership teams to always be prepared for any possible incident, but in this time of heightened anxiety related to school safety, it is particularly important to facilitate a safe and calm culture of preparedness, as well as clear communication between law enforcement and school officials.

In the aftermath of a traumatizing event like the Nashville shooting and subsequent false threats of violence, school officials may wish to postpone any scheduled drills to reduce the risk of additional trauma to students and staff while maintaining awareness of processes and procedures to keep students and staff safe. Schools that conduct drills should do so with the utmost care and caution and always by informing all participants that it is a drill. After the conclusion, it is best practice to leave time to debrief with students and staff.

In addition to conducting the above reviews, school leadership should immediately:

- Review your Building-Level Response Plan, which is required under NYS education law section 2801-A and ensure that you are following the guidance on the NY Emergency Response Card S.H.E.L.L
- Meet with staff assigned to critical Incident Command System (ICS) roles
- Follow annual drill requirements, which is the best way to train students and staff on emergency response procedures.

Please do not hesitate to reach out using the contact information below if you need resources or require additional training. In addition to the close relationships you have developed with your local law enforcement agencies, NYSED and State Police will continue to monitor this situation closely, and State Police School Community Outreach Coordinators will be following up directly with the school districts who received the threats to ensure they have all the information and to answer any questions.

As an additional precaution or reassurance, State and/or local law enforcement can often increase their school presence in the days and weeks after a threat or in response to a local or national violent incident.

In 2022, Governor Hochul strengthened the Red Flag Protection Law to expand the individuals who are able to seek extreme risk orders of protection (ERPOs). In addition to school administrators and certain people chosen by the school, such as teachers, guidance counselors, school psychologist, school nurse and coaches, this includes:

- Police officers
- District Attorneys
- Family or household members. This includes:
 - people legally married or divorced
 - people with a child in common, including adopted children
 - people related by marriage, like in-laws
 - people related by blood, like brothers, parents, cousins
 - unrelated people who live, or have lived together for periods of time
 - unrelated people who are in an intimate relationship (current or former), like same-sex couples and teens who are dating.

It is vitally important that schools ensure staff and leadership universally understand the law and how it protects the school community by removing guns from those who are a danger to themselves or others. If school personnel have concerns about a particular person, the [New York State Court System's website](#) also has detailed information about the ERPO process.

Included in review of district-level safety plans, schools should consider the use of panic alarm systems, which are inexpensive and commercially available and allow staff and administrators to quickly signal a life-threatening or emergency situation requiring a response from the closest law enforcement personnel. This requirement was put in place through passage of Alyssa's Law in 2022.

Emergency Response planning resources are available on [New York State Center for School Safety's](#) webpage, including a new video titled, "[Seconds Count](#)" that was developed by the NYS Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services in partnership with the NYS School Safety Improvement Team to describe school emergency S.H.E.L.L. response procedures. *Note that the video is intended for adults and should not be viewed by students.*

The State Education Department Office of Student Support Services, in partnership with other state agencies and the State Police will continue to provide guidance and resources in the coming days. If you have questions, please contact us at SafetyPlans@nysed.gov.

Providing a safe and secure learning environment for our children and teachers is our number one priority and we stand ready to help in any way we can.

Signatories:



Betty A. Rosa

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