School Facility Safety Roundtable Discussion Report

Inside

Congressman Rokita speaking with Indiana House Education Committee Chairman, State Representative Bob Behning. Also attending were State Senator Pete Miller and State Representatives Peggy Mayfield and Jeff Thompson.

Foreword: by U.S. Representative Todd Rokita

I am pleased to publish this report chronicling my effort to bring together schools, law enforcement, community leaders, and safety industry experts to discuss how to collectively make our schools safer for students and teachers.

I have visited more than 30 schools over the last few years. Among many of the issues brought up during these visits, school safety is always a major concern. I have also studied school safety technologies with the security industry and discussed best practices with law enforcement. One of the things I learned is that these groups were not always communicating with each other.

I intended for this event to reverse that trend. That is why my office reached out to constituents in our district and Hoosiers throughout the state and facilitated a half-day discussion at the Indiana Law Enforcement Academy in Plainfield. During our discussion, there was a focus on three distinct areas in which strategies discussed would fit: awareness, school resource officers, and infrastructure technology. All three would need to be addressed to help solve the security challenges faced in our schools.

The information contained in this report is not necessarily meant to be a best practices document. It is meant to capture the points made at a unique convocation of leaders. It is meant to be an aid to further discussions that need to occur all over our state and country. This report should not be considered an endorsement of any particular technology or potential solution. The purpose of the report is to collect the information shared at the event, disseminate it, and serve as a basis for further action among local stakeholders.

I thank those leaders who participated and everyone's commitment to ensure our children get a high quality education in a safe environment. I intend to continue these discussions and I welcome anyone reading this document to contact me. My contact information is at the end of this document. I look forward to exploring ways to put this discussion on school safety into practice across Indiana.

                           - U.S. Representative Todd Rokita

Introduction

In November 2015, U.S. Representative Todd Rokita convened a leadership summit of nearly 100 local stakeholders, security organizations, and security professionals at the Indiana Law Enforcement Academy in Plainfield, Indiana. Among those stakeholders were school administrators, teachers, students, law enforcement officials, school board members and state legislators. The purpose included sharing ideas and concerns on how to keep our children safe in their schools. There were representatives from across Indiana's 4th Congressional District and the entire state from as far as DeKalb County in the northeastern part of Indiana. Also providing great insight to the issue of school security were professionals from the security industry, sharing new technologies and best practices from communities across the state and nation.

U.S. Representative Todd Rokita addresses participants at the School Facility Safety Roundtable Discussion in Plainfield, Indiana on November 20, 2015.

Participants were divided into two groups where both groups discussed current and ongoing efforts within their communities and the challenges associated with providing a safe and secure environment for our children to learn. After these sessions concluded, the participants convened in one large group to continue the discussion and share what they learned earlier in the day. The event concluded with a keynote address by Brownsburg Police Chief, Michael Dove, which focused on best practices and thinking differently about active shooter situations.

Student participants discuss school safety in the small group breakout session.

Brownsburg Police Chief, Michael Dove, delivers the event's Keynote address.

Challenges

Participants identified several challenges to school safety during the small group breakout sessions. These challenges led to a large group discussion about potential solutions. This is not an exhaustive list and there are certainly more challenges to identify based on the situation at any given school. Solutions to these challenges are discussed further in a subsequent section of this report.

- Student Threats—It is becoming more challenging to protect students from threats from other students, especially since threats often occur over the internet on social media. Since the summit, we have had three school closings based on threats involving schools in the 4th District alone. Older Buildings—Another common challenge was the age of many school buildings. These buildings were not constructed to integrate the infrastructure needed for technological solutions. Narrow hallways and door frames are often unsuitable for point of entry safety infrastructure. Additionally multiple points of entry multiply the need for more equipment.

- Fire Code Restrictions—There are fire code restrictions that make more durable security solutions difficult to implement (e.g. door locks, barriers, etc.).

- Community Culture of Schools—It is difficult to protect students, parents, and others when schools are often the hub of community activities (e.g. sporting events, performances, art shows, dances, etc.) and after normal school hour access is needed.

- Assessment Tools—There are no standardized assessment tools that schools can use to determine the level of their facilities defects. Determining school safety is often subjective and definitions of what adequate safety measures are taken vary dramatically.

- Standards—There are no federal or state standards, and merely a few local standards, that determine the level of safety needed in schools.

- Keeping an Open Environment—It is a challenge not to stifle the learning environment with a "prison-like" atmosphere. Learning centers should reflect the pride of a local community and having bars and locked doors doesn't foster an inclusive learning environment.

- Funding—Schools cited the lack of consistent and dedicated school safety funding. More discussion around this issue is needed, including answers to the following questions: 1) Is more funding needed generally, or rather a re-prioritization of how funds are used? 2) And where would such funding come from?

Above right: A participant addresses local challenges in the large group session.

Right: Participants taking notes during the smaller group meetings.

Potential Solutions

While discussing the challenges schools face in improving the safety where our children learn, there were several solutions that participants presented. The non-exhaustive list shared that afternoon includes the following ideas that communities across the state and nation have already put into place and are actively practicing.

- Restrict Access—Southwestern Consolidated Schools in Shelby County restrict access to all outside individuals during passing periods when students are out of their classrooms. No exceptions, not even for parents.

- Panic Devices—Every teacher could carry a device that they can use to alert senior campus official and local law enforcement in the event of an emergency.

- Student Fees—Assess a small monthly safety fee to parents to help fund safety upgrades in school buildings. Southwestern Consolidated Schools implemented this idea.

- Community Involvement—Involve parents, law enforcement, school officials, fire marshals, and students in a local discussion about school safety. Determine what is best for the local community and look for ways to implement those changes.

- Student Involvement—Hold annual school safety days where students can meet with local law enforcement and discuss safety issues.

- School Resource Officers (SROs)—There are state grants available to help put SROs in schools to deter threats. SROs are often seen as counselors in some ways to students, and are a valuable resource in identifying potential threats to students and teachers.

- Assessment Tool—Find or develop an assessment tool that communities can use to determine the level of security for their school facilities.

Moderators State Rep Peggy Mayfield, Southwestern Consolidated Schools Superintendent Paula Mauer, and Secure Schools Alliance Board Rep. April Dalton-Noblitt listen to a participant discuss possible solutions to school safety challenges.

- Standards—Create a set of locally designed security standards all schools must meet.

- School Budgets—If security is not a line item in the annual budget, consider making it a dedicated line item with adequate funding.

- State Funding—Increase funding for SROs or facility improvements through grants. Find a permanent funding source for this grant program.

- Federal Funding—Designate a portion of homeland security grant funds for school safety measures (one way to do this would be to define schools as "critical infrastructure" making them grant-eligible).

Consensus Opinions

- Standards—During the sessions where participants discussed the challenges and possible solutions, there was seemingly unanimous agreement that the federal government is not the answer. The local participants did not want the federal government to hand down burdensome and overreaching standards for school safety or assorted regulations. They agreed that this is a local matter that should be resolved by local community stakeholders. The solution is not a "one-size-fits-all" package. Participants vocalized that rural, urban, and suburban schools have different threats and challenges to overcome. However, many participants distinguished standards versus the need for assessment tools. Objective, detailed assessment tools, such as checklists, or the like would indeed be helpful to ensure a local school or corporation considered all the issues. However, the way in which a local school board addressed the issue brought by the assessment tool should still be left to the local school board, school corporation, school, and law enforcement agency.

- School Resource Officers—Participants agreed that School Resource Officers (SROs) are not the only answer, but could serve as a complement to whatever structural and procedural improvements schools put in place to improve school safety.

- Larger Discussion is Needed—Schools and law enforcement should bring more individuals to the table for this discussion. Any school safety improvements will confront compliances that schools must meet. We cannot ignore The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and fire code requirements. The next summit should include: fire marshals, teachers, students, and more members of the disabled community.

- Awareness—Teachers, staff, and students need to be aware of potential threats and be vigilant protectors of themselves and their peers. They should be able to go to someone to report potential threats and that person needs to follow up on those reports before it is too late.

- Assessment—There needs to be a uniform assessment tool, taking into consideration the big picture, but allowing for flexibility based on location, student body size, age of the facility, local resources, etc. Schools should schedule the assessment regularly and update as to account for new threats and situations (e.g. biennially, every four years, etc.).

Above left: Participants discuss the day's events.

Directly above: During the large group discussion, many participants spoke about meeting the challenges facing communities. This included addressing awareness, School Resource Officers, infrastructure needs, and the appropriate level of federal involvement.

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Participants

There were nearly 100 stakeholders represented during the event including, representatives from 12 different security companies and groups, 27 different schools or school districts, 14 different law enforcement groups and both chambers of the Indiana General Assembly. The following organizations were represented at the event:

- Allegion
- ASSA ABLOY Door Security Solutions
- Avon Community School Corp.
- Benton Community School Corp.
- Brownsburg Community School Corp.
- Brownsburg Police Department
- Carroll Consolidated School Corp.
- Cloverdale Community School Corp.
- Columbia Middle School
- Covington Police Department
- Danville Community School Corp.
- DeKalb Co. Central United School District
- Electronic Security Association of Indiana
- Goodwill Education Initiatives, Inc.
- Howard Co. Sheriff Department
- Indiana Criminal Justice Institute
- Indiana House of Representatives
- Indiana Law Enforcement Academy
- Indiana Sheriff's Association
- Indiana State Police
- Indiana State Senate
- Indianapolis Public Schools
- Ivy Tech Community College
- Jasper County Sheriff Department
- Lafayette Police Department
- Lincoln Middle School
- Mill Creek Community School Corp.
- Monroe-Gregg School District
- Morgan County Sheriff Department
- North Putnam Community Schools
- North Putnam High School
- Northern Rush County Schools
- Northwestern High School
- NSCA
- Our Kids Deserve It
- Plainfield Community School Corp.
- Plainfield Middle School
- Plainfield Police Department
- Safety Committee DeKalb County
- Secure Schools Alliance
- Security Industry Association
- Slide to Safety
- South Putnam Community Schools
- Southeast Fountain School Corp.
- Southwestern Consolidated Schools of Shelby Co.
- Stanley Mechanical Solutions
- Stanley Security
- Stratus Solutions
- Tri-West High School
- Tyco Integrated Security
- Wabash College
- West Lafayette Police Department
- William Henry Harrison High School

Security Resources

There were several representatives representing the security industry and their individual companies and organizations at the discussion. Their expertise and insight are helpful in determining possible solutions to the security challenges facing schools today. This is a list of those who participated in the event.

- Allegion
- Stanley Security Solutions
- Tyco Integrated Security
- Slide to Safety
- Secure Schools Alliance
- Security Industry Association
- Status Solutions
- ASSA ABLOY
- Our Kids Deserve It
- Electronic Security Association
- National Systems Contractors Association

Helpful Links

- Indiana Department of Homeland Security –Secured School Safety Grant Program: **www.in.gov/dhs/securedschoolsafety**
- Indiana Department of Education School Building Physical Security and Safety: **www.doe.in.gov/safety**
- Indiana School Resource Officers Association: **www.insroa.org**
- Indiana State Police School Safety Information: **www.in.gov/isp** (see the "Resources" section)
- U.S. House Education and the Workforce Committee: **www.edworkforce.house.gov**

Next Steps

   Local communities interested in reviewing their school safety readiness, should be as inclusive as possible. Parents, students, teachers, and emergency personnel should be invited in addition to law enforcement, school administrators, and security professionals.

   A good place to start the discussion is where the communities' schools stand in relation to the three main concepts discussed during this school safety discussion. Those areas being: awareness, School Resource Officers, and infrastructure technology. This report includes a great mix of individuals and organizations that can be called upon to help provide information and assistance when determining what challenges exist and the right solutions for the community.

   Our children deserve a quality education in a safe environment. To help improve school safety, it is important for communities to conduct a collaborative discussion to talk about how schools can utilize cutting-edge safety technology in order to facilitate a productive and safe learning environment.

Moderator and Danville School Board Member, Luke Stephenson, leads the discussion during one of the small group session.

Participants discuss school safety challenges during the School Safety Roundtable Discussion on November 20, 2015.

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