Schools have been the target of many attacks over the years, but school safety must be managed on a day-to-day basis to be effective during a crisis. A lot of the day-to-day issues may not seem significant in the big picture, but an agency must practice the skills they need for a significant crisis on a day-to-day basis to avoid confusion and ineffectiveness during an actual crisis.

Day-to-Day Management = Crisis Management

Most schools conduct annual or biannual drills on significant activities such as active shooter, tornado or bomb threats. It is critically important to conduct these drills as they allow the organization to practice managing these types of scenarios in a calm orderly manner. The only certainty is that nothing will go as expected. The goal of any public safety organization should be to use these crisis management tools on a daily basis to make every action muscle memory. This allows dispatchers to constantly practice their incident management skills so that when a significant emergency occurs, they are not relying on a scenario they practiced six months before.

Increasing School Safety While Reducing Liability

By Glen Haimovitz

If you are not recording what your staff is doing, you cannot know how they are performing.

Some school public safety technology innovators such as Hillsborough School System Public Safety in Florida have chosen to adopt the same dispatch and incident management tools as law enforcement. As a former law enforcement officer, Sgt. Neptune has been one of these technology innovators by implementing Cyrun's Law Enforcement Dispatch and Incident Management system in the Hillsborough School System Public Safety department. These tools allow the department to track and record every action that an officer performs from door checks and parking lot sweeps to fights and assaults on school grounds.

Officers call in to a central office informing the dispatcher of each action performed. This not only provides situational awareness for the entire public safety team by announcing their actions over the radio, but it also allows the agency to track and record everything that officers are doing in the dispatch console to understand how the agency is performing. The same information is also available to officers in the field using Cyrun's mobile data tools. Law enforcement agencies have used these same tools to redeploy officers to the locations that need the most attention as well as identifying the activities that the officers are spending the most time on.

Tracking officer activity has numerous benefits in that much of the officer's day is spent at a fixed post such as a high school. Officers are generally interacting with the students, faculty and staff throughout the day to create a positive relationship between the students and district officers. This is the same type of relationship that police agencies strive for through their Community Oriented Policing programs. When an officer is able to "friend" a student, that makes the job of de-escalating a future tense situation that much easier.

Unfortunately, most of these types of personal contacts are not documented so there is no way to identify public safety personnel that are doing an exemplary job. Innovative agencies have utilized the Cyrun Incident Management system to track this type of officer activity by having the officers call in every student or teacher interaction to dispatch to create a permanent record. School District management is now able to see exactly how much time officers are spending responding to incidents compared to the amount of time officers spend enhancing public safety by improving community relations. Both are vital functions that require documentation and recognition.

Understanding the agency's workload and performance help the school district to decide how many officers are needed and where to deploy them.

Minimizing the Use of Force

One of the biggest directives of any public safety agency is minimizing the use of force. This both reduces the school district's exposure to liability but it also improves their community standing. Any time force is required; the public safety department must show that every effort was made to verbally de-escalate the situation prior to any physical action.

Many school districts only record when

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force was actually used and not when the situation was de-escalated. Some forward thinking agencies have realized the benefits of recording the proactive positive actions of their public safety officers by adding Verbal De-escalation and No-Use-of-Force to the incident management tracking.

The inclusion of these factors allows the agency to clearly show how the agency's training is reflected in officer interactions. When an organization only records when force was used and not when it was avoided, the public safety department is often seen as unnecessarily aggressive when the reality might be quite different.

Risk Management

Minimizing risk and liability while maximizing the safety of students, teachers, faculty, and officers are the central focus of any public safety organization. Documenting the due diligence of any pro-active steps the district is taking to mitigate risk is critical to reducing liability. If a staff member walks over a crack in the sidewalk every day and does not report it, the inevitable slip and fall that might occur will be very costly. If a security officer performs a door check once an hour but does not document it, then it effectively did not happen.

Each step in an officer's day should be documented in a running log. Most police agencies have a dedicated dispatch center to track and record the officer activity. School districts like Aurora, Colorado and Hillsborough County, Florida have adopted this model by implementing these same dispatch and incident management tools that manage police agencies. This tracking provides an ongoing report of where every officer is and what they are doing, effectively tracking the due diligence of every member of the security or law enforcement team.

Proactive vs Reactive Security Responses

Most police and security departments have officers that have their eyes open looking for suspicious bags or people in places they shouldn't ordinarily be. How often are those officers identified for their proactive approach? Not often. Officers often call events or incidents into a dispatch center but rarely get recognized for their proactive activities.

While most calls initiate from the dispatch center, many officers are keeping a lookout for the unusual circumstance or something out of place. These are the officers that agencies want to promote. Some agencies have both taken the unusual step of documenting proactive vs reactive security responses to fully understand how that agency is performing. This has provided a wealth of information on how the agencies have stepped up to the plate by going above and beyond simply responding to events when called upon. These public safety departments are now the technology innovators in the world of public school district security.

Cyrun, headquartered in Santa Cruz, California, was founded in 1993 to develop and market a state-of-the-art, Windows-based integrated software system for public safety organizations. Privately funded, Cyrun's principals bring a combined 60+ years of experience in executive management, operations, software-systems development, and 20 years in law enforcement to the enterprise. Cyrun's mission is to create a new generation of software products with unprecedented usability and performance, backed by top quality support services, for the law enforcement computer software market.

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