

# Strengthening Pre-Incident Planning and Preparation for School Communities Prior to an Active Threat Incident

**Nazmia Comrie**

*00:00:02*

Hello, everyone, and thank you for joining us today for the fourth webinar in the COPS Office Critical Incident Review Implementation Strategies Webinar Series. My name is Nazmia Comrie. I'm a sociologist at the COPS Office, the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, at the U.S. Department of Justice. Thank you so much for joining us today.

Just a couple of housekeeping. Please stay on mute when you are not speaking. That way, we don't have any background noise and we can really hear the speakers present their various perspectives and experiences. At the same time, if you have questions, I encourage you to put them in the Q&A function that you'll find at the bottom of the screen. We'll be taking those questions as we're having the conversation, and we'll also have some dedicated time at the end of the presentation to be able to answer those questions. If you are watching this webinar with a group of individuals, if you could just please put in the number of people that are watching in the chat function. That way, we can just make sure we're capturing the number of people that are with us today.

So while the primary goal of school districts across the United States is to educate, they must also prepare for various threats to school safety and security, ranging widely in scale and seriousness. In addition to certain safety functions maintained at the school district administration level, such as threat assessment teams, school safety committees, student counseling services, and physical security maintenance and upgrades, many school districts throughout the nation partner with local law enforcement agencies to establish school resource officer programs as well as creating their own police departments. This panel will provide strategies and critical approaches to school safety in advance of an active assailant incident, as well as share available resources to help school communities.

Before we get started, I want to provide just a quick background on the COPS Office and our Critical Incident Review. The COPS Office provides a range of resources, support all of your communities, so state, local, tribal, and territorial law enforcement agencies and the communities that they support. We do this through funding, training, technical assistance, and resources.

Specifically on our technical assistance side of it, we can provide no-cost training, policy assistance, consultation, assessments and more to assist your agency and implementation of the strategy shared throughout this webinar, the Critical Incident Review report, or more than 60 other topics. As part of our assistance to the field, the COPS Office led and managed the Critical Incident Review, Active Shooter at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas. We conducted an in-depth analysis of the tragic shooting where the lives of 19 children and two teachers were lost.

As a result of the Critical Incident Review work, earlier this year, the Attorney General of the United States released a nearly 600-page comprehensive report detailing our observations and recommendations of the multiple failures in leadership, decision-making, tactics, school safety, policy, and training, as well as provision of trauma and support services. This webinar is part of the COPS Office effort to help agencies and communities implement those recommendations.

I think it's also important that before we get started, just to give some space to dedicate our work to all those who lost their lives and were impacted by the tragedy at Robb Elementary School and those impacted by mass violence and gun violence across the country.

So today's webinar will be a facilitated conversation with three experts in the field of school safety and security. Again, I encourage you to use the Q&A function in the chat to post questions and comments throughout the discussion. And I thank you in advance for your support, your attention today, and giving us a little bit of your time during a really busy moment.

So I'd like to turn to each of our presenters to provide a brief introduction of themselves and the organization or association they represent before we get started with our conversation. So with that, Mo, I'd like to turn to you first.

### **Mo Canady**

*00:04:09*

Good afternoon, everyone, and Nazmia, thanks for having me for this today. I'm really looking forward to spending time with everyone. And I am Mo Canady and I serve as the executive director for the National Association of School Resource Officers, also known as NASRO.

### **Justin Heinze**

*00:04:28*

And hi, folks. My name is Justin Heinze. I am a faculty member in the School of Public Health at the University of Michigan. I am the co-director of the National Center for School Safety, which is a BGA-funded training and technical assistance center for students, teachers, and officers preventing school violence grantees all around the country.

### **John Shanks**

*00:04:48*

And good day. My name is John Shanks and I am the executive director of the National Association of School and Campus Police Chiefs. We are a relatively new non-profit that focuses on school policing leadership for chiefs of police, directors of safety and security and things of that nature. So we'll be talking about things from that perspective. Personally, I'm retired police officer. Also retired from the United States Air Force.

## **Nazmia Comrie**

*00:05:18*

Thank you all so much for joining us today, and love to just get right into the conversation. And so I'm going to start with a broad question to get us started.

When we're considering school safety and security, a lot of times the conversations revolve around target hardening and then prevention, but how do we achieve a balanced approach when it comes to safety and security in schools? And I'd like to turn to each of you to see what are your thoughts on that. And if you'd like, we can start with the order we went. So we can go to Mo, Justin, and then John.

## **Mo Canady**

*00:05:51*

Well, thank you. I think it's critically important that, and this is going to sound so simplistic and we've been talking about this for over 25 years now, but if we don't have an environment where students and faculty are safe, then teachers can't teach and students can't learn. But it is finding that balance between creating levels of safety but not going to such a degree that students feel like they're coming to school in a prison or in a detention facility. So it really is one of those things that we really have to find the right balance for. I always try to encourage school districts and our members to make sure that you're attending to the basics first. We all know that locked perimeter doors, secured perimeter doors are critically important, and sometimes we can find ourselves going after the shiny object, which again can create an imbalance if we're not careful. So striking that right balance is so critical.

## **Justin Heinze**

*00:07:04*

Yeah, I couldn't agree with Mo more. And thinking about that reciprocal relationship that one is going to feed into the other. So on the one hand, we want to have secure perimeter doors. On the other hand, we want to have these positive social environments. And then to help students understand that yes, we are a welcoming school, that does not mean that we open the door, we prop open doors to allow folks to come in, but there are channels that need to be followed. And you can use almost any example of either a physical hardening or security feature as well as some of these social-emotional interventions that we're using to promote safer schools as well, where they feed off of one another.

And so thinking through some of those scenarios, thinking through some of those implications, if these are the strategies that we're selecting, how are the physical things that we're doing going to affect our social environment? And in contrast, how are some of the social things that we're doing going to affect our ability to keep the building and grounds physically safe as well? So it is that constant balance. I like that word because it's not going to be one or the other. And so striking that balance in a way that's going to be appropriate for each individual school is what we're working towards.

## **John Shanks**

*00:08:17*

I couldn't agree more with Mo and Justin. I think finding the balance between a positive educational environment and a secure environment is always going to be challenging.

One of the things we focus on and I think is very important is as we recruit folks into this world of school safety and security is treating a school like a school, not treating a school campus like a business. I can lock down my manufacturing plant and keep my employees safe for the most part from somebody coming in from the outside, but is that really what we want for a school environment? So really thinking outside the box to be able to find that mix of safety and security, but also having a good social environment's important, but a place where kids and teachers can both feel safe and education can take place.

If the kid's worried about who is coming through the door, they're not really paying attention to the teacher or their studies. So we want them in a good position, in a good place to where they can learn and grow and the teachers feel safe in doing that as well. So I think we're all on the same page in this, that we don't want our kids going to school in a prison or even a locked down business. I think it's important to have a welcoming environment in a school.

## **Nazmia Comrie**

*00:09:47*

I think that's a really good point. And each of you talking about that balance and then also talking about keeping not only the students safe, but then also the staff, right? Because it's also, it's the teachers, it's the auxiliary staff, it's keeping everybody safe that's on that campus. So keeping in mind this comprehensive school safety approach, I want to drill down into a couple of different topics here. And first, I'd really like to talk about collaboration and partnerships. So John, I'm going to be coming to you first. And who are the partners that you should have at the table when we're starting to discuss safety and security? Is it just the law enforcement agencies and the school administrators, or should we really be thinking in a broader sense on this?

## **John Shanks**

*00:10:32*

Well, the short answer to that is everyone, so anybody who touches the school, enters the school, and is even outside of the school. So what role do the teachers, the administrative support staff, the kitchen staff in the cafeteria, the janitors, anybody, contractors, who are coming to the school, when you think about people who might be on campus when an emergency happens.

I also encourage people when we think about emergencies, don't always go for that worst case scenario, Robb Elementary. The emergency could be that the coach is having a heart attack or a seizure or a child broke a leg or maybe there's just a child that's disoriented and can't find his classroom and is having a breakdown. What is everyone's role?

So on the public safety side, police, fire, and EMS, absolutely. And I absolutely encourage school districts to have a dialogue with their 911 call center giving that dispatcher the opportunity to know about the school, for the school to know what the dispatcher, what information they're going to need, what are they going to ask so that the dialogue becomes natural versus a forced conversation of, "I feel like I'm being interrogated." I've heard that. They can have that conversation, provide the information, and really expedite the response and return that campus back to safe as quickly as possible. So anybody and everyone, right? Police, fire, EMS.

And think outside the school, even to neighboring jurisdictions. I don't think it'd be a bad idea for, once a year, for a school to host a security and safety day and just invite everybody who might show up in time of an emergency and allow them to visit and talk through and understand what's going on.

And then most neighborhoods, especially in elementary and middle schools, they're in a residential community. So what role do those neighbors play when an emergency happens? Might kids be knocking on their door seeking safe haven, right? So there's a lot of, again, just thinking outside the box from the norm of let's lock it down and keep everyone safe because we know when everything breaks loose, things change rapidly and there is no norm. So the short answer, I gave you the long one, but everybody.

### **Nazmia Comrie**

*00:13:21*

No, I appreciate that. When you're talking about 911 and call takers, it made me think about something that we were discussing as part of the Critical Incident Review report is that 911 also has to be aware of the schedule to a certain extent of the local schools. When are major holidays? When is summer break? Because one of the things we had heard is that for some of the law enforcement, they didn't think school was still in session. And so having that just building those relationships, I think, is so important. I also think it's so important when you're talking about the residential aspect. Sometimes we forget these schools are not just an island. They're surrounded by residents, HOAs potentially, other associations, and making sure that there's that open dialogue. I really like when you're referencing the phrase dialogue. But Mo, what are your thoughts on this or anything you want to add?

### **Mo Canady**

*00:14:16*

Yes. John laid out a great list, and I certainly agree with the fire department, EMS, that's they need to be heavily engaged. I would also suggest if you have a children's hospital in your region, that's a great partner to collaborate with just on a number of issues.

And this may sound a little strange, but think about collaborating with the media, especially the local media. They can be a great, great partner. In my former career as a police officer working in the district that I did, we were able to connect with several with our local media, reporters who we knew were very interested in all things education and especially safety. And so they were really able to help us in a

number of circumstances where we needed help pushing out information or supporting what it is we're doing in schools. And then one other thing that is on my mind a little bit is that if your school doesn't have a mental health specialist, and many schools do not, consider partnering with local mental health services to help in that regard.

### **Nazmia Comrie**

*00:15:32*

All really good points. Thank you. So I feel like Justin, I want to bring you into this because we're really talking about this public health approach to school safety. And I know that's really something that at the National Center for School Safety, you all really. . . That's the framework that you have with everything you're doing. And so using this lens of a public health approach, what else should law enforcement and school officials consider when it comes to the partnerships and the collaboration?

### **Justin Heinze**

*00:15:58*

Yeah, I appreciate that question. I think for folks on the call, if you've never really engaged with public health and public health framework, we're often using very similar ideas but perhaps different language. And so from us, we think about things from a sociological perspective. It's multi-level. It's basically that our students don't operate in a vacuum. And I think this is a perspective that John alluded to just a little bit ago. Our schools do not operate in a vacuum, but they're going to be affected by the surrounding communities.

We also talk about primary and secondary and tertiary prevention. So what is happening upstream? What's happening at the time of incident? What happens afterwards? Again, lots of different things that other fields are thinking about. We're just using a different set of lexicon, and that's okay so long as we're all on the same page.

And another big part of the public health approach is leveraging these community voices and partnerships. So again, lots of things that my colleagues have already mentioned here in terms of we're not expecting schools to be the resources for everything. They don't need to have innate knowledge of law enforcement or first responding, or they don't need to have an innate knowledge of mental health services. Leverage those voices within your community when you can.

And I'll add to that earlier conversation, we don't want the first responders' very first time in a school building to be in response to an emergency. That's the whole idea around signage and around school mapping so that we're not, when someone comes to the door, it's not, "Hey, go to Mr. Johnson's room," but we're going to room 125 and we know exactly where that is, and we have a procedure to make sure that students are out of the hallway so that there's unobstructed access. So having those conversations early and leveraging your partnerships on how to best to do that.

Because again, our teachers and our administrators, we get some training, but this is not really built into your standard teacher education curriculum. And so having those conversations early and often helps to not only educate folks that are in the building, but then is also bringing in the expertise of those outside of the building.

And again, with John's point, it is everybody. It's bringing parents into the conversation, community members into the conversation. Mo, I thought a great point about bringing media into that conversation as well. Everybody sorts of have a role in keeping a school safe. And I think the more people internalize that role, the more they're going to be proactive in their own engagement with you rather than schools always needing to be the ones to reach out.

### **Nazmia Comrie**

*00:18:23*

So many great points. We should not be exchanging business cards in the hallway of an incident. And I think that's really what a lot of you are talking about, right? We need to know who are those various partners, and every single person has a stake when it comes to security and safety.

I think about from a safety perspective, if you see somebody walking down the hallway and they don't have a visitor's badge or they're not part of the school, that it's on everyone's. . . Everyone has a responsibility to stop that person to determine who that person is and to help them find the front office if need be. It shouldn't be, well, that's just a school security perspective.

And so in this vein of pre-incident planning, Mo, I want to turn to you and really how can we engage all of these partners as we're really focusing on pre-incident planning and preparation? Should we include them in developing policies? Should they be part of our emergency operation plan? How can a school's community really make sure that they're truly engaging those partners?

### **Mo Canady**

*00:19:27*

Well, before I get into that, I think that there were some things you were bringing up that led me back to something I really wanted to mention, and that is culture and climate. The culture and climate that we develop within our school is really going to be the telltale in terms of how safe our school is because it is, just like you were talking about, it is everyone's business. It is there needs to be a sense of ownership there that if I'm a teacher walking down the hallway and I see someone walking through the hallway that it doesn't appear they should be there or they don't know, they're lost or whatever it is, we need to give educators, teachers in the building, everyone, the right training to be able to engage with that person in an appropriate way. And that makes everything more safe.

And so I think that when we talk about how do we go about developing these collaborations and how do we use our partners in this regard, I think about two different levels. One is at the district school level and then at the individual school levels. And really, at the district and then at the individual schools, there really do need to be multidisciplinary school safety teams. Again, one that represents at the overall district level, but then that each school has one. And so it really becomes on those

multidisciplinary school safety teams to then determine when they need to bring a partner in to help with a policy issue they're trying to figure out, or to help with a training they're trying to pull together, or just to get their advice in regards to maybe a security technology, that we need someone who has a little more knowledge of that, that we would collaborate with them and bring them in on helping us to shape policy and making the right decisions about what kind of technology we put in place.

### **Nazmia Comrie**

*00:21:37*

That's great. Thank you. And John, keeping in that same vein of conversation, what types of policies and emergency operation plans should you be having at those two levels? And anything else you want to add to what Mo just said?

### **John Shanks**

*00:21:55*

Yeah. Well, the types of policies I think are going to be safety. How do we get the campus back to safe from any given situation? And to elaborate on what Mo was saying, really getting those folks together and not just in an email conversation, but meeting on campus, talking, getting ideas, sharing ideas, I think, is going to be important for developing those plans.

I think the best-case scenario is get people together early and often so that they feel like they have ownership in the plan. Most people don't like to be handed a plan and say, "Here, follow this," and now they've got to spend time reading it and they probably forget it as soon as they're done reading it. If they're part of the process and developing the plan, when it comes time to implement the plan, then it's in their mind. They helped create it. They know the parts of it. They know the ins and outs. They know what they're supposed to do as well as what other people are supposed to do.

A lot of times in school safety over the last several years, we've talked a lot about trauma, secondary trauma to children for doing drills. So implement and practice your plan sometimes without students on campus or do tabletop exercises so that the people who are responsible for executing the plan can carry out what they need to do without creating that additional trauma. And I talked about students, but even teachers have talked about the trauma they experience during these active shooter drills and because they become so realistic and it just really has an impact. So I would emphasize on getting together, getting people together early, often everybody has a role in developing a plan, and then practice the plan but be cautious and judicious in how you do that.

### **Nazmia Comrie**

*00:24:17*

Yes, Justin?

## **Justin Heinze**

*00:24:20*

Yeah, if I could just say I like, John, that these points about how important these relationships, the building pieces are, and I think about big-P policy and little-p policy and to make sure that we do have the latter accompanied. So you might have a district policy or statewide policy that you are to have a behavioral threat assessment team, but do you have another policy that would be, “Hey, if we see somebody in our building that looks like they’re having a hard day, do we stop and say hello?” Are we including some of these small normative things that we think are going to help build trust within buildings and on campuses? And encourage sharing of information, encourage positive relationships I think can all benefit those policies that schools are going to have at the district level, at the school level, and sometimes even at the state level too.

## **Nazmia Comrie**

*00:25:11*

No, that’s great. And when you were talking about stopping somebody that may be having a hard day, it made me also think about something that you all are really talking about, that this is not just in preparation for a potential act of assailant, but this can be used for so many other things. You have a student that may be disoriented and stopping that individual to determine that maybe they actually do need medical assistance. So I think just connecting all of this and that culture piece is so important. So it’s all coming together.

But Mo, I’d like to turn to you because John was just referencing drills and practicing and exercising. And how should schools and law enforcement agencies and officials, what are some of the things they should consider when preparing for a drill and conducting a drill?

## **Mo Canady**

*00:26:02*

Well, I think we really have to get our hands around the correct terminology, the difference between a drill and a scenario or even a full-scale scenario, all right? And so I recall I was an SRO in Alabama on the day that the Columbine massacre occurred, and it seems like I can almost feel like I jumped on the pendulum with everyone else and rode the pendulum swing. And the next thing you know, we’re doing close to full scale scenario drills with adolescents in the building. It didn’t take us long to figure out that’s not a great idea. We could be doing a lot more damage to students than we can being helpful. So we went back to the drawing board a little bit.

And you think about fire drills. Fire drills have saved multiple lives, untold numbers of lives, when it comes to the K through 12 school environment. But we don’t start a fire to do a fire drill, and the same applies to a severe weather drill. We don’t wait for a tornado warning or a hurricane to do a severe weather drill. So what we need to accomplish here is teaching adolescents, teaching students a bit of muscle memory in terms of what they’re supposed to do in any particular drill in a low stress situation. We don’t need to simulate gunfire or have a SWAT team knocking on doors to see if they can get anyone

to come and answer it. It really is important that we're training them in that low-stress environment, giving them the information that their adolescent brains can absorb, quite frankly, and be able to operate in the real situation.

And they also need to be learning in that situation to follow the direction of their teacher. So it is really important that as we're going to a higher level of training with these drills, that we're doing a little more education with teachers and giving them all of the supports and training that they need.

### **Nazmia Comrie**

*00:28:16*

That's great points, and I really like the piece where you're also emphasizing the age-appropriate drills, that something that you do for kindergarteners or sixth graders may be very different than what you're going to do for a twelfth grader. So I think that's a really important piece. So Justin, I'd like to get your perspective when we're talking about the drills and the scenarios that Mo was talking about. And then I'm going to ask you to also talk a little bit about really training and practicing. What are the exercises? What are things that agencies and school communities should be doing prior to a drill? So if you can address both those aspects.

### **Justin Heinze**

*00:28:53*

Yeah, it's a good question and I might not have a sufficient answer. I think part of it is because at least from my perspective, from a research perspective, there's not a lot of great data out there to support exactly what types of drills are effective. We've benefited from, for example, NASRO's partnership with the National Association of School Psychologists to at least get some guidelines because oftentimes states have requirements or districts have requirements, and that's really the onus is on the schools, or it might be local law enforcement, to come up with the preparation or drills or whichever it's going to be that are going to be implemented. And those guidelines can vary from maybe one time a year to multiple times or even within a semester, all of which makes it very difficult to understand how well are these drills preparing students for an actual emergency.

And then to Mo's point, are these drills, and potentially, are they causing psychological harm? Are they leaving students with more questions than answers? And so we're trying our best to collect some of this information and find ways to provide some sort of standardized guidance. But to some of the points that Mo had mentioned, avoiding simulations, we haven't found, or at least I've not seen any data to suggest, that simulations are an effective way to train students and teachers to respond to a threat. Whereas those that can be done in a tabletop or that can be done without students might still impart some of the same information for those that are going to be making decisions during an emergency without creating that anxiety and fear for students. It's trying to create that muscle memory. It's trying to create the ability to respond to instructions in the case of an emergency, which then might complement other drills or trainings that they're doing around severe weather event or a fire drill, that type of thing as well.

So I think there's some learning that we can do from some of the other forms of drills that have been in place for a long time, like Mo is talking about. Personally, I think there needs to be a little bit more work to be done around notification and then potentially debriefing. So it's again having some of those eyes on the ground that if you have done some form of a training that's created some salience around the fact that there could be an active shooter within a building or that a building might not be safe in some circumstances, how are you going to identify those students and have some of those conversations so they can be assured that yes, there are adults that are thinking about this, that we are doing the things that we need to do to make sure that you're going to be safe in this learning environment.

And so it's not in the data that we've collected, and I've seen it's not a response that every student has, but it's a non-trivial percentage. About a quarter of students respond this way. So recognizing that there's going to be some post-work that needs to be done and building that into your schedule and how that's going to happen, I think, were all considerations if you are working with your law enforcement partners on how to do these within a school.

### **Nazmia Comrie**

*00:31:43*

Thank you. John, anything you want to add when we're talking about other drills or talking about exercises? Anything in this space?

### **John Shanks**

*00:31:52*

Yeah, just everybody's spot on with this. But again, I think it's training, right? When we do fire drills, we don't put a fire in the hallway. So having the SWAT team throwing flash bangs and shooting blanks and chaos going on isn't really training because you're creating a chaos. So creating an environment where I'm probably the only one on this call who remembers the drills in the '60s where we got under our desk because the big one was coming, but we trained on how to do it, how to hold our heads and put our hands. It was training.

And also keep in mind, if you do an active shooter drill once a year, how many times do we do a fire drill? We do lots of fire drills, and it is done systematically and orderly. And back to most, muscle memory. I know where I need to go, how I need to get there, and you can do the same thing with every emergency on the campus. Let's learn it, practice it, and remember it. So I think that's the drum beat we need to get behind to keep our schools safe and our teachers and our students feeling good about it and feeling that when an emergency happens, they can actually carry out those skills.

## **Nazmia Comrie**

*00:33:25*

Yeah. Thank you, all. I think just to reiterate for everyone is when we're talking about the training in advance of these drills, I think it's also important to make sure that there are options. So we're not just teaching one option of maybe hiding or one option of running, thinking about what are the options that we're also providing those that are in classrooms or other vulnerable locations. I know we're focusing on school safety today, but I think it's important to think about that for other locations.

And I really like the point, John, you were saying about the exercises should not necessarily only be once a year. And so I encourage you that all of you that are listening is that if you are undertaking tabletop exercises in anticipation of these drills or these full-scale scenarios that you're doing them on a more regular basis. And again, keeping in mind that you need to be knowing who are all the players that are going to be responding, you need to work all that out.

And to Justin's point, you need to not just be practicing and doing the exercise of the incident itself. You have to be doing the notifications. You have to be doing everything in advance to that. And then also thinking post. And so I'm going a little off, but so many times we don't practice a reunification as an example. And so I think it's important to really think when we're doing drills, exercises, and all of these various types of training, that we're keeping these pieces in mind.

So Mo, I think this brings to mind some of the school resource officer programs, and I know that NASRO has been doing a lot to make sure that there are recommendations around SRO programs. And I just wanted to see if you can spend a little bit of time describing some of those recommendations that those that are listening may find interesting or helpful.

## **Mo Canady**

*00:35:16*

Well, we do have a published set of SRO recommendations or recommendations for SRO programs, and I would encourage you to go to our website and grab that. It's a great document. Very helpful. Our board is about to do a refresh on that. There's some things that we want to add to it. I think that there are three things, and it seems like whether it's within our training or our advocacy, we use the idea of the three-legged stool. And if one leg is missing, the stool is not going to stand. So there are three key components, I think, are important for people to walk away with. And first of all, when it comes to school resource officers, there's a definition. That's not the three components yet. There's a definition, and the definition clearly states that school resource officers should be sworn certified law enforcement officers.

Now, it goes to a whole different level than that, of course, of just being a sworn certified law enforcement officer because, number one, they have to be carefully selected. This is without a doubt the most unique assignment that we'll ever put a law enforcement officer in. There's nothing like it. And there's a different level of vulnerability in this assignment, both for the law enforcement agency and the school district and the officer themselves. There's a lot that they have to know. They have to be carefully

selected. They have to be the best of the best that your department has to offer. There was a time it wasn't always looked at that way. I hope that we've changed over the last few decades into realizing that these men and women need to be the best any law enforcement agency has to offer. So very careful selection in terms of who we assign to this.

Secondly, the second leg is training. They must be specifically trained. We're talking about things like training on adolescent brain development, adolescent mental health issues, special needs, how that works in schools, school law, some of the uniqueness of how the law applies in a school environment and what the SRO's role is in that. So again, careful selection, specific training.

And then finally, they must be properly equipped. I've seen some nightmare scenarios where law enforcement officers have been assigned to work in a school and they have. . . Without their equipment, they're not allowed to have their firearm or any other of the tools that they need. And so our recommendation on this is that SROs are equipped in the same manner as the other officers within their department. They need to be properly equipped to provide the highest level of protection to that student body and the faculty that they possibly can. And an officer in a school not properly equipped creates a huge liability. So those are three things that are really critically important at the foundation of making this work.

### **Nazmia Comrie**

*00:38:27*

Thank you for that. And I really appreciated you also talking about the special work that goes into school policing. We're going to talk a little bit about that. But before that, I'd like to turn to you, John, to talk a little bit about, I imagine a lot of those same principles apply to school-based law enforcement agencies, but I'd really like to give you some space to talk about school-based law enforcement programs and recommendations that, again, school communities should be thinking about.

### **John Shanks**

*00:38:54*

Yeah, absolutely. And Mo couldn't be more spot on on having the right people doing this, but the difference is policing in a school is very different than policing in a city or even with the county sheriff's office. The school is its own little community, and it's a special community. It's got great people in it, youth, adolescents, teachers, and even the administrative staff and support staff. Everybody there is dedicated to taking care of our children, our most precious resource. So having the right people there to be able to take care of them.

I've talked to a lot of school district police chiefs who are retired city policemen, and they said, "Boy, on my first month on this job, I was like, 'What the heck did I get myself into?'" Because it's a different environment. And if you're in a middle school, just multiply that by ten. It's just the hormones and everything that's happening in the middle school environment.

But it really is we do a training session that's called "Now I'm A School District Police Chief, Now What?" because it is so very different. So making sure that the right people that are on the campus as SROs all the way up to that leadership, whether it's a school safety director or a chief of police, needs to be the right person for the job and that they have the vision and the ability to see things in a different light than traditional law enforcement.

Because I went through the NASRO training many years ago, and one of the things that I learned there and I love is that an SRO needs to be a mentor before they're anything else, right? They're only a police officer when they need to be, but when they need to be, the most point, they need to have their tools and resources available to them. But day in and day out, they're a mentor and they're a teacher and they're interacting with everybody on that campus and they're engaging with them in meaningful ways that creates that safe environment for our children.

### **Nazmia Comrie**

*00:41:21*

That's great. Great. Thank you so much. I know we're going to be winding down the conversation, and so I know we're starting to get in some questions so I encourage everyone to continue putting your questions in the Q&A. But before we get to those questions, Justin, I'd like to turn a little bit to the topic of threat assessments. And I know the National Center for School Safety launched the threat assessment toolkit. We'll be providing the link in the chat. Could you describe a little bit on the approach you all took to this toolkit what schools should be considering from a threat assessment perspective and challenges you see?

### **Justin Heinze**

*00:41:56*

Sure. So behavioral threat assessment is one of these school safety programs that I think we actually do have a fairly established evidence base to suggest that when done appropriately can be an effective way to mitigate violence and prevent injury on campuses.

One of the things that we hear is that there are often challenges that schools are facing. So whether it's the formation of a threat assessment team, whether it's actually identifying and determining the validity of a threat, and then certainly management side. So we worked with our partners at the University of Virginia, Dewey Cornell and Jennifer Maeng, to develop a toolkit, and it was really crowdsourcing information. So we reached out to threat assessment experts from around the country because the idea was not to promote a single specific model, but to find some of the common, again, language and approaches that could be utilized as well as some of the common challenges and barriers.

And so the intent behind the kit was to not only just share folks' knowledge and experiences from the field, but to give folks on the ground some practical steps on how to do these things. So definitions, examples, scenarios, worksheets, all these things that if you've gone through two-day, eight hours a day training for threat assessment, whether it's NTAC, whether it's CSTAG or whichever, yes, that's excellent information, but then six months later, a year later, how is that starting to look in practice?

And so the toolkit is designed to be something that folks can use with their threat assessment partners hopefully to just facilitate this continued practice because it is something that teams, as they develop experience, they get better and more efficient over time. It is a complex procedure, even though we're thinking about three main facets of threat assessment. Each one of those facets, whether it's identification, whether it's assessment or management, has a lot of nuance to it. And there are places where things can and have gone wrong with very unfortunate consequences.

So it's trying to increase the fidelity that threat assessments are being implemented. It's trying to raise awareness where some of those challenges are, like for marginalized populations or students who are learning with disabilities that might be identified at a higher rate, but then perhaps do not need to follow through with certain steps at a higher proportion than what we see within the field. So trying to mitigate some of those concerns around threat assessment because, again, when it is implemented properly, there is now a pretty large evidence base to suggest that it can be very effective. So we're just trying to increase awareness and knowledge and hopefully positive implementation of this procedure without necessarily, I guess for folks who can't have consistent refreshers and stuff with their trainings, whichever organization they're working with.

### **Nazmia Comrie**

*00:44:50*

That's great. Thank you so much. So I'm going to shift a little bit to some of the questions we're receiving, and if I have time, I may ask some more because I could probably spend a very long time with you all, but I want to be mindful of everyone's availability today. So we have a question on the cell phones and cell phones usage in schools and really that there are some school districts and some communities that are moving to being cell phone-free. And whether you all have any recommendations, any thoughts to this balance of parents wanting their children to have access to their phones from a security perspective while also making sure that students are able to learn in schools. And so I don't know who wants to take that or if all of you want to provide a response.

### **Mo Canady**

*00:45:44*

Well, I'll start with this. When I was in school, my parents didn't let me take a cell phone to school. I'll let that settle for just a minute. Yes, I'm old. So it's amazing how this transition has taken place over really about three decades. Where we went from, it was unimaginable in our minds that a student would have this kind of device to bring into a school.

Look, I personally applaud school districts who try to get some control of this. And what we're hearing, and I haven't seen any data on it, so this is anecdotal for me, but what I'm hearing anecdotally is that the level of learning, the ability for learning to take place goes up exponentially when they don't have that distraction, that device, and that they eventually get used to it. Now, I think that what Molly is posting or putting up in the chat there is really important because you have a lot of parent opposition to this. How do we get past that?

And I think one of the things is that maybe through some surveying, we find out truly what percentage of parents are at odds with this, what percentage of parents are pushing back on the idea of the schools figuring out ways to control this a little bit better? And I think one way that schools can get ahead of this, and it takes a little time to develop this course, but is to really build a good relationship with parents in terms of how the school communicates and to ensure parents. Maybe there's even some level of training that we could take parents through to ensure them that the school has an excellent system of communication, training, and knows how to do this so that they don't have to depend on their child in that circumstance really many times sharing inaccurate information. So there are a lot of things that we can do to build that trust and that relationship better.

### **Nazmia Comrie**

*00:47:57*

Thank you, Mo. John.

### **John Shanks**

*00:48:00*

Yeah. So Mo's right. And actually he hit it on the head at the training. The parents have to understand what the benefits and the distractors are. And by communicating with the parents, one of the things I think about. . . And as a first responder and having done work in 911 call centers, imagine if you will, being at a call center when 500 911 calls all hit it simultaneously. It just can't be managed. There's no way they're going to be able to answer all those calls, get all the information. Cell phones have GPS chips on them. They're going to show exactly where that call is coming from. All of that's going to be there, but it'd be better to have three or four good quality calls with good quality information than 500 calls. So the idea of kids calling 911 in an emergency is good, but that's to me not why we need to have cell phones.

There's an education side. And I think in an extreme emergency too, cell phones could be a hindrance in identifying the location of students, their desire to talk on them or to text, and then the sounds that are associated with it could become a hazard. So we really got to look at the pros and cons by having that cell phone and then talk with parents about, okay, what's the end result here? Is it that I'm not going to be home when you get home from school, or is it that I need to have my kids be able to reach out in an emergency? When I was in school, if I needed to contact home, I went down to the office and contacted home when I needed something. We didn't have a cell phone to rely on. And I do think it does enhance the learning when students are focused on learning.

### **Justin Heinze**

*00:50:22*

That part, I can actually speak a little bit too from a data perspective. Yes, I think cell phones have been linked to distractions. The American Academy of Pediatrics just released a nice little report that talks about some of those relationships. We've also seen within the data that cell phones can be used by students during school for bullying-related behaviors.

On the flip side, just like John said, this is not just a black and white issue. There is some nuance to it. We are asking students to be our eyes and ears on the ground. So when we have statewide anonymous reporting systems, the students might be using that technology for those reasons, or at least that's what we'd hope they might use them for. We also have to think a little bit about equity issues in terms of not every single student has access to a Chromebook or a laptop or whichever, and sometimes are doing legitimate schoolwork on their phones because that's what they have available. So I think this is a question that it's very new. I agree with Mo. I was surprised at the vehemence of the arguments on both sides for why this needs to be happening. So I sound like a broken record. More data, but there are some very clear cons, and I think there might be a couple of those too.

### **Nazmia Comrie**

*00:51:28*

No, this is really helpful. And I want to just reiterate the piece about engaging in conversations with parents. And taking this back to our initial part of the conversation, is about engaging all these partners. I think whichever direction schools are going in on this or other topics is having that engagement I think is just such a critical piece. So wanted to flag that.

One of the other questions that has come in is slightly different from that one, but it's really focusing on the calls that we have been seeing. And I can't speak to the data because I know Justin would probably, but the number of calls or potential threats that some of the school districts have been dealing with in the sense of calls or text messages or things on social media. Is there anything that any of you can say in terms of how school communities could be addressing these resources that are out there to assist them with some of these potential threats?

### **John Shanks**

*00:52:30*

Certainly. We had a called-in threat at a school here in Maryland. I was watching the news and listening to the story, and people were getting excited about this increase in school threats. If you think about it, again, I refer back to my days in the '70s and school, and kids would pull the fire alarm at the end of the hall.

So threats to schools are not new. I think the way we receive the threats with technology and it's almost becoming more acceptable. And part of that is accountability, whether or not they're able to identify the people who are doing it and holding them accountable and educating them why it's a bad idea and things of that nature. But this is something, we've used the term adolescence many times today in the last 45 minutes, but when you're dealing with that adolescent brain, consequences aren't an issue. They're not thinking through to the end result. So I hate this term, but these are things we deal with in a school environment, especially when we're dealing with adolescents.

So is it more training? Now, big difference between training and education. Training with young people, training with parents, how do you talk to young people about these threats and the consequences of those threats, those are all things that I think can help reduce those, but it's so easy to do it and do it

anonymously now, and you don't have to go down to the end of the hall and pull the fire alarm. In high school, we had call-in bomb threats. Clear the campus because guess what? It's finals week. So these are things that we've been dealing with in education for many, many years.

### **Nazmia Comrie**

*00:54:30*

Right. Thank you. And I recognize we're winding down. So I'd actually like to give each of you an opportunity to just share one final consideration or recommendation that we didn't cover in the conversation or you want to emphasize. So maybe I'll go to Justin and then I'll go to John and then Mo, go in order of my screen here.

### **Justin Heinze**

*00:54:51*

Hey, so I feel like I shouldn't be the one to get to speak to this, but if you take just a second and you think back to your school days, I bet you every person on this call can remember somebody that made a difference in their lives. For me, it was Mrs. Wakowzki. I bet you a school resource officer could be that person, that person that students remember 20 years, 30 years down the road. And it starts with what most are referred to earlier, is developing that relationship, being that accessible person, being the right person for that job. And I think that's a different way to be thinking about part of that role of the school resource officer is that another person that a student's going to remember 20 years down the road, 30 years down the road that changed their life in a meaningful and positive way. But thank you for listening. This was a great conversation.

### **Nazmia Comrie**

*00:54:51*

Thank you, Justin. John?

### **John Shanks**

*00:55:41*

So first off, I want to thank everyone who's called in and has stayed with us because the number of attendees has not changed throughout the hour. So with that and the conversation, I'm going to go back to cell phones for just a minute. How many of you have looked at your cell phone during this call? And if we were to have a written test in 15 minutes about the conversations on this call, could you pass it? Just think about that.

Well, Justin, I know you haven't been on your phone, but just think about that. We do it. Our children learn from us and if we are constantly on our phone, if we are constantly not paying attention. In my house, I look at my wife and shake my head because she's in her tablet during a TV show, but she amazes me because she can tell me what's going on in the TV show. I'm not that talented. But in this case, okay, if you have looked at your phone, if you have sent a text, answered an email, done work, how much of this webinar have you really been able to absorb?

So that's what happens in a classroom as well when we introduce these devices. So I'll get off my horse, but thank you all for being here. If anybody's calling in from Florida, hope you and your families are safe, and we really appreciate this opportunity to share with you.

### **Nazmia Comrie**

*00:57:09*

Thank you, John. I really appreciate that example. And Mo, I'd like to turn to you.

### **Mo Canady**

*00:57:15*

I'm laughing because I love that we had an attendee that self-confessed in the chat box. That was awesome. I think that if I could leave you with one word, it's relationships. And I think when we talk about school safety and we talk about culture and climate, relationships are foundational to a safe school environment, and we hammer this with SROs in training. You need to be about building positive relationships with students, with faculty, and with parents. The end result of that becomes excellent information sharing that leads to things like averted school violence that we don't hear about on the news. How many lives have been saved through good relationships that led to information sharing. So relationships, I'll leave you with that as my word of the day.

### **Nazmia Comrie**

*00:58:12*

That's great. Thank you. I don't think I could summarize. You three really were great at summarizing all that. What I would just say is for those of you listening, thank you so much for giving us your hour. I promise there's not a test at the end of this, but I do want to just quickly reference some of the resources that the COPS Office has. We'll also put them in the chat and we'll be sending them out after. But I encourage you if you have not seen the Critical Incident Review report, we have some links here, some QR codes. You can access the report, both English and in Spanish, the executive summary.

Anything that we've talked about today or anything that's related to the Critical Incident Review or policing, we can provide you no-cost training and technical assistance. So I encourage you to reach out to the COPS Office to see about getting access to that.

And most importantly, on this website, we also have remembrance profiles for those that lost their lives that day at Robb Elementary School. And you can read those in both English and in Spanish.

If you have further questions, my contact information is there. I also encourage you to sign up for our next webinar. That'll be December 12th at 1:00 PM. They'll be focusing on emergency management. With that, I thank you all so much for giving us your time. Thank you for keeping all of our communities safe and our schools safe. And a very big thanks to Justin, John, and Mo for spending some time imparting their expertise and their perspectives today. Thank you so much and have a great day.