



# Community Education Council 31

Department of Education of the City of New York



Michael Reilly, *President*   Frank Squicciarini, *1<sup>st</sup> V.P.*   Miguel Rodriguez, *2<sup>nd</sup> V.P.*   Irene Maiello, *Rec. Secretary*   Aaron Bogad, *Treasurer*

*Council Members:*  
Alexandria Ichizili  
Evelyn Cardona  
Kidert Jean Mary  
Lucia Curatolo-Boylan  
Michelle Lee  
Mike Rosen

*Community Superintendent:*  
Anthony Lodico

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## Committee on Homeland Security: School Security

Michael Reilly  
President, Community Education Council 31

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member and Honorable Members. Thank you for inviting me to testify today.

One of the most frightening things a parent can hear is that there is an emergency incident at their child's school. We feel vulnerable and our first thought is to immediately go to the school.

Parents and guardians should **NOT** respond to the school unless they receive official notification to do so.

If a school has activated a **Shelter-In** (the incident is in close proximity but outside the school building) or a **Hard Lockdown** (incident is in the actual school building) parents and all non-emergency personnel will **NOT** be allowed into the building and all staff and students will **NOT** be allowed to leave the building without authorization from emergency responders.

An increase in vehicles and people at the school can interfere with emergency personnel responding to the incident. The first priority is to have a clear pathway for emergency responders to ensure everyone's safety.

### COMMUNICATION

There are certain circumstances when the NYPD and DOE will limit what details are released. Although that may seem inappropriate, there is a legal reason. If preliminary details are included in a community notification and later determined to be inaccurate, that may jeopardize a criminal case. All paper work and communications generated by the NYPD and DOE are evidence, and as such, required to be handed over to a defendant's attorney.

For instance; if a community notification lists a specific license plate, color, make and model of a vehicle used in a crime and then it is determined that the initial information provided was incorrect, the suspect's defense attorney could use the incorrect information to possibly raise a reasonable doubt, limiting the chances of a conviction in a case.

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When an incident happens, word can travel like the telephone game. With today's technology, it spreads faster with even greater twists and embellishments. It is understandable that, in many cases, schools can't release specific details about an incident. That can change when the incident is deemed under control. Schools can and should communicate with families to address any safety concerns they may have. An email, letter, or robo-call acknowledging an incident occurred and reassuring that safety protocols were implemented can help alleviate community concerns.

Providing notification to the school community should be a crucial part of a school's emergency response system. Communication builds trust and collaboration. Lack of communication leads to mistrust, and gives the illusion that nothing is being done. That can be extremely damaging to a school community.

It is also important to note that New York Education Law and the New York State Education Department mandate each public school to conduct at least eight evacuation/fire drills and four shelter-in/lockdown drills each year.

## NYC DOE SCHOOL SAFETY: EMERGENCY READINESS

"A vital component of emergency readiness within the DOE is the School Safety Plan (SSP). As part of the Safety Plan, schools/campuses must identify individual staff members to become Building Response Team members (BRT). In campus settings, each school must have one representative on the BRT. The BRT members are hand selected by the Principal to manage all school-related emergencies until the first responders arrive. In addition, all schools implement General Response Protocols (GRP), which outline the initial actions to be taken if an incident requires Evacuation, Shelter-In, or a Lockdown. These actions are based on the use of common language to initiate the measures all school communities will take in a variety of incidents.

All staff and students receive training in the GRP and drills are conducted at various times throughout the school year. Lessons have been designed for different grade levels so that the information is delivered to students without causing unnecessary alarm."

Information about NYC DOE General Response Protocols is provided to parents on the schools.nyc.gov website to help guide conversations with their children about emergency readiness in schools.

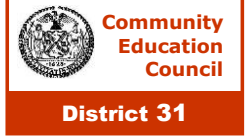
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Community Education Council 31 has been advocating for greater security protocols for several years. In 2012 CEC 31 introduced a proposal -- titled Comprehensive School Safety and Security – which included: locking all doors; installing security cameras at main entrances to school buildings; improving School Building Response Team training; overhauling School Public Address systems, and incorporating retired police officers as special patrolmen to supplement school security.

After discussing the proposal with our local, state and federal representatives the plan was introduced in state legislation and signed into law by Governor Andrew Cuomo in 2014. The laws authorized the NYS Education Department to provide grant opportunities to schools to improve infrastructure security (ie. Replacing doors, installing cameras and other technology) for school buildings, mandating increased training for school emergency response teams and more frequent security drills. The law also allows school districts to hire retired police officers as School Resource Officers. In addition, in the same time period, DOJ authorized the use of civilian clothes school resource officers, which aligned with the CEC 31 plan. Until then, the federal grant opportunity only applied to uniformed school resource officers.

After the Sandy Hook tragedy, a principal on Staten Island was proactive and locked the front door. Unfortunately, the School Safety Agent assigned to the school filed a grievance, claiming it wasn't in their job description to get up each time someone knocked to open the door. These types of shortfalls in security can and must be adjusted to ensure the safety and security of our schools.

Some have raised concerns that locking the front door may hinder emergency responders because they may not be able to access the building as quickly as possible. I believe the use of a “Key Fob” pass key or another similar technological access device could be utilized, allowing immediate entry for emergency responders. The FDNY has a similar system where they utilize a “Master Key” for elevator access across the city.

It is important to remember that it is impossible to prevent all incidents, but we must continually try our best to limit the impact if an emergency occurs.

CEC 31 believes there are several other protocols and supplemental supports that can help school communities. Improving communication between agencies would be beneficial. The NYPD and DOE do a tremendous job protecting our schools, but like everything else there is always room for improvement. Having a regional “Fusion Center” model to monitor and track incidents and threats to schools could

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streamline information sharing to mitigate the possibility of missing an important trend or piece of information.

Additionally, providing training and potential requirements at the federal level for school districts to report incidents of bullying, threats etc. as well as the disposition of all incident investigations could help identify students who may need additional support and/or counseling. Adding additional counselors to our schools would be a proactive step, but as I am sure you are aware that requires funding.

Lastly, after a recent incident at a High School involving a potential threat with a firearm, we held a safety meeting with our elected officials as well as the DOE and NYPD. We spoke about the impact to the response caused by parents and caregivers rushing to the school at the onset of the emergency situation.

During that meeting we discussed incorporating a family staging area in school safety plans. This staging area would be a safe distance away from each school building. The school would send an initial family/community notification that would include the staging location, which would be positioned a safe distance from the school building. Having a staging area would could reduce potential obstacles emergency responders may encounter, increasing response times and saving lives. A staging area would allow emergency responders to focus resources on the initial incident and not redirect personnel for crowd control at the immediate incident scene.

If possible, would DHS consider incorporating a parent/community video and training piece in the Emergency Management Institute Independent Study program, suggesting schools incorporate a staging area and the importance for parents and other community members to wait for a notification and only respond to officially designated staging areas?

I thank you for your time and consideration and the opportunity to discuss the challenges we face with school security.

Michael Reilly  
President,  
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