MINUTES NO. 2010-04-WS

OF A

PUBLIC WORK SESSION

OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF

THE CITY OF MADISON, ALABAMA

MAY 19, 2010

The Madison City Council met in a Public Work Session with the Madison City Board of Education on Wednesday, May 19, 2010, at 1:00 p.m. in the Main Conference Room of the School System Central Office, 211 Celtic Drive, Madison, Alabama.

The published purpose of the joint Work Session was as follows: (1) Final report from School Security & Communications Task Force.

The meeting began at 6:03 p.m. when called to order by Mayor Paul Finley.

Elected Governing Officials in attendance:

Mayor Paul Finley	Present
Council District No. 1 Tim Holcombe	Present
Council District No. 2 Steve Haraway	Present
Council District No. 3 Jerry Jennings	Present
Council District No. 4 Tim Cowles	Absent
Council District No. 5 Tommy Overcash	Present
Council District No. 6 Larry Vannoy	Present
Council District No. 7 Bill Holtzclaw	Present

Mayor Finley turned the meeting over to General (R) Robert Drolet who served as Chairman of the Task Force

General Drolet outlined tasks completed since release of the preliminary report. General Drolet reported on information received from survey that was conducted through the website and on face to face student interviews. Approximately 20 students were interviewed. An overview of the final report was given. A copy of the final report is attached to these minutes.

Following the overview, School Board President Ray White thanked the members of the Task Force for their work and stated that if the City and the School Board could never have afforded the expertise included on the Task Force if the City and School Board would have had to pay the members.

Mayor Finley, School Board President Ray White, Council President Bill Holtzclaw and Superintendent Dr. Dee Fowler will work together to move forward with the recommendations of the Task Force.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:20 p.m.

Signatures on following page.

Minutes No. 2010-04-WS dated May 19, 2010, read, approved and adopted this 14th day of June, 2010.
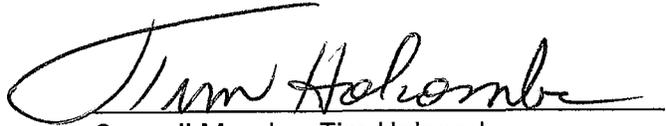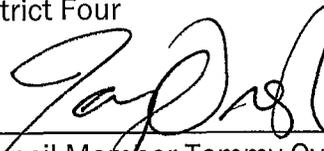
_____
Council Member Tim Holcombe
District One

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Council Member Steve Haraway
District Two

_____Absent_____
Council Member Jerry Jennings
District Three

_____Abstain_____
Council Member Tim Cowles
District Four

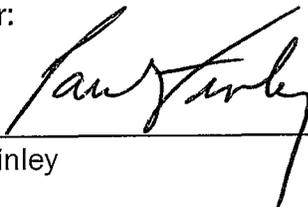_____
Council Member Tommy Overcash
District Five

_____
Council Member Larry Vannoy
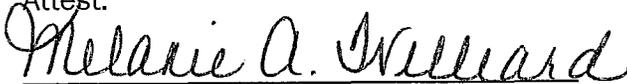District Six

_____
Council Member Bill Holtzclaw
District Seven

Concur:

_____
Paul Finley
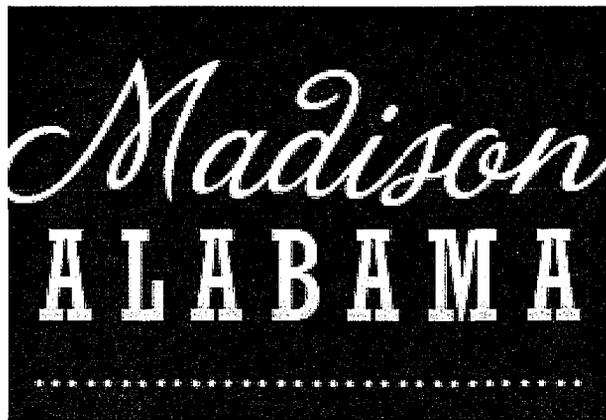Mayor

Attest:

_____
Melanie A. Williard
City Clerk-Treasurer

SCHOOL TASK FORCE

City of Madison, Alabama

Final Report

Findings and Recommended Strategies
5/19/2010

Executive Summary

The School Task Force Charter

- Chartered the Madison City Council, The School Board, The Chief of Police, The School Superintendent, and the Mayor, on 15 February 2010

- Focus on identifying ways that help ensure our children are safe at school.

The safety of Madison's students, always a priority, has been elevated with a renewal of commitment to safety excellence. City and School District leaders established a School Task Force (STF) and charged the members with identifying ways to improve school safety.

STF members focused their assessment work in two primary areas – safety/security and communications. The team solicited input from school administrators, faculty, students, parents, subject matter experts, other school systems, law enforcement personnel and School Resource Officers, as well as other stakeholder groups. Madison's citizens provided over 30 responses via the "Talk to the Task Force" mechanism and almost 500 responses via the survey instrument provided on the Madison City web site.

The STF talked to many dedicated and competent people throughout the school system. The findings and recommendations referenced in this Final Report capture the collective thoughts of the STF, the school district, and the community and serve as a useful tool for district officials to consult when expanding their vision for enhancing the school safety program. Key safety improvement themes among the 24 findings and 32 STF recommendations offered for consideration by the school district include:

- Establishing a full-time Supervisor or Safety and Communications position.

- More focused safety planning, awareness training, and drills.

- Improved maintenance and use of security technology controls.

- Use of a student-friendly confidential reporting tool.

- More parental engagement and partnerships.

Questions regarding this Final Report should be directed to the Superintendent, Madison City Schools in Madison, Alabama.

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Madison City School Task Force

Final Findings and Recommended Strategies

F = Finding   **R = Recommendation**   **C = Comment**

F1 – <u>SAFETY/SECURITY PROGRAM OVERSIGHT</u>: Schools are not insulated from the realities of our society. Understandably, the potential for safety/security risk in our schools could be on the rise due to contributing factors such as 1) city and school district growth over the past 10 years; 2) projected growth in the next 3-5 years; 3) uncontrolled societal influences, and 4) the routine use of messaging technology by students that has contributed to the rise of non-traditional threats, i.e., cyber bullying, sexting, etc. The increased risk demands greater time and attention on risk mitigation of the already heavily tasked Central Office, School Administrators, and faculty. Efforts to ensure students remain safe are noteworthy but more can be done to further reduce safety risks.

- **R1** – The district should consider establishing a Supervisor of Safety and Communications position with full-time responsibility for effectively planning, coordinating, managing, and auditing school safety. This position could also be responsible for planning and implementing an approach that opens a two-way communication with all stakeholders to share information on safety/security matters. If adopted, the incumbent would provide safety/security advice and assistance to the Superintendent and first-hand support to Administrators in conducting all hazard response planning and training. The district should also consider establishing a new line item in the budget for school safety that begins to address the strategic safety investments identified in this report and accepted by the district.

- **C1** – Excellent resources are available to safety/security coordinators for preventing and responding to school violence. For example, the primary guide used by the STF is the Department of Justice developed "Guide for Preventing and Responding to School Violence" 2nd Edition. Other valuable resources include the National Alliance for Safe Schools at <u>www.safeschools.org</u> and Awareity at <u>www.awareity.com</u>.

F2 – <u>MANAGING SAFETY/SECURITY RISKS</u>: Considering the full range of safety/security risk the schools must address today, the process for managing the risk becomes a critical success factor. During the assessment, the process of managing threat statements/behaviors varied among school Administrators. In most cases, Administrators believed they could identify students of interest who exhibit troublesome behavior and then practice a "prevention through intervention" approach in cooperation with others, and then rapidly deal with concerns as they arise. Past experience with incidents that resulted in no serious consequences may lead Administrators to view a reported incident simply as middle or high school "drama," thus there is a risk that the information may not be fully assessed for its impact on the victim and for its potential to escalate.

- **R2** – The district should consider evaluating and improving protocols for identifying, assessing, recording, and managing threat issues that may pose a credible health or safety concern. The SRO should be the primary point of contact on all threat situations. Other resources available to

consult with Administrators as needed to collect information and determine the best response to threat conditions include Assistant Administrators, counselors, health professionals, faculty, and even parents as needed. Types of threats requiring a greater level of assessment may include direct threats to students, reported gang associated activity, indicators of suicide or homicide, cyber threats, personal vendettas, threats of retaliation, alarming behavior by parents, bomb threats, and family violence that spills into the schools, etc.

- **C2** – Details of risk incidents, to include indicator and warning signs and steps taken to lessen the risk should be recorded and monitored for progress, tracking of trends, and preservation of evidence for law enforcement purposes.

F3 – <u>STUDENT COMMUNICATIONS</u>: Students universally follow a code of silence that inhibits effective communication of potential threats. The "rumor mill" is often a primary source of receiving threatening information. A Safe Schools Tips Line established for anonymous reporting exists and is adequately promoted, however, factors that limit its overall effectiveness may include 1) tip line is not monitored/responded to after hours, 2) tip line does not connect to law enforcement to aid in an urgent response or investigation, and 3) in today's technology driven world, the "phone" tip line may seem old-fashioned to students, doesn't provide a choice of people to report to such as a trusted SRO or teacher, and may not appeal to students as a trusted means of anonymous reporting. Student interviews indicate that students might reluctantly report the most severe cases via the Safe Schools Tip line, but they would be more likely to report critical information (red flags, indicators, and warnings) through confidential texting, if available.

- **R3** – The district embraces the use of state-of-the-art technology to provide students with access to high-quality instruction. The district should consider taking this technology-infused approach a step further to better connect to students through the use of technology they frequently use. In addition to the Safe Schools Tips Line, the district should consider implementing a student friendly, confidential reporting capability (e.g., texting and web-based messaging) that promotes "Safe to Share" reporting and invites student questions without fear of retribution. An awareness campaign should promote the system and build confidence in the use of the tool. Such a tool provides Administrators a proven means for early intervention in safety rather than responding to incidents after they happen. The tool should provide the choice to connect to a trusted source, i.e., Administrators, counselors, SROs, coach, or others. The tool can also be effective at controlling rumors by providing an avenue for sharing timely and accurate information to all stakeholders.

- **C3** – During the assessment, the team observed a demonstration of the 'Talk About It" web-based student communication tool (www.ancomm.com) in use at over 300 schools. The Huntsville City Schools system recently selected the Talk About It system for use in its middle and high schools. Similar tools are also available on the market or could be developed in-house. The most common methods used by schools nationwide to fund this tool is through soliciting corporate sponsorships, using PTA /PTO provided funds, and/or by applying for state and federal grants.

F4 – <u>ADMINISTRATOR/SRO PARTNERSHIP</u>: An effective school safety program requires a collaborative effort among many people and organizations. One key to the Madison City Schools system achieving the desired safety

goals is the partnership between Administrators and police officers assigned to the School Resource Officer (SRO) program. The Madison Police Department (MPD) SRO program is established at the middle and high school levels, as well as at elementary schools on a more limited basis. Administrators and SROs seem to have a good working relationship at each school. SROs also seem to have good rapport with students and they perform their jobs admirably given the current SRO staffing levels. However, a Madison Police Department policy that defines SRO roles/responsibilities has not yet been coordinated with the district and codified.

The assessment indicates that the use of SROs by school Administrators varies among Administrators. In most cases, the communication and information exchange is mutual and works to resolve all issues. In some limited cases, administrative policy can at times impact the SROs ability to assist the Administrator in deterring and detecting drug use and the potential for threatening behavior, e.g., limitations placed on reasonable searches by working dogs, or a restriction that currently prohibits SROs from accessing the Student Technical Information (STI) database to aid in investigations.

- **R4** – The Madison Police Department should consider codifying an SRO policy based on public safety best practices and coordinate the policy with the Central Office and school Principals to ensure SRO roles and responsibilities, working relationships, and organizational reporting chain are well understood by each party. In a School Administrator/SRO working partnership, SROs are a professional resource to Administrators for advice on all law enforcement matters and ideas for improving school safety. In the event an Administrator feels the actions taken by an SRO may not have been appropriate, the Administrator and SRO Unit Supervisor should meet to discuss the situation, clarify decisions, and discuss corrective action.

  To help ensure a rapid and coordinated police response during a critical incident, The Madison Police Department should consider codifying an Active Shooter policy and train all affected police officers, special operations team members, and affected school officials on approved response tactics. SROs should continue to focus on ensuring a safe learning environment by building student trust and confidence, providing appropriate safety/security educational programs, interviewing students on criminal matters as required, and conducting other SRO duties that may help deter drug use, harassment, violence, and other student misconduct. To optimize the SRO program, SROs should avoid becoming distracted or reassigned to non-SRO duties except as directed by the SRO Unit Supervisor, e.g., providing traffic control during peak student arrival when there is a shortage of school crossing guards,. Excellent resources for SRO educational programs is the National Association of School Resource Officers (NASRO) at www.nasro.org and The Alabama Association of School Resource Officers (TASRO) at http://taasro.org/

- **R5**– The district should consider coordinating with the Madison Police Department to reassess SRO staffing levels to identify potential gaps in SRO support to the schools. As sworn Law Enforcement officers, SROs serve as a valuable onsite resource to the district and to school Administrators at all levels. For consideration, the *optimum* SRO staffing estimated by the School Task Force based on current and projected student population, level of risk at each grade level, and ability to complete all assigned duties is 1) two SROs at each Middle School, 2) three SROs at the High School, 3) two SROs to cover all seven elementary schools, and 4) one SRO Unit Supervisor with the autonomy to support all schools and fill in for SROs as needed. The district, in partnership with the Madison Police

Department, should also consider future needs to support the new high school and take action to meet the requirement.

As an optional strategy, the district could consider the benefits and cost associated with establishing a district security (non-SRO) program that complements the SRO capability or consider expanding the private security services contract now provided at the high school. District and private security personnel would not provide the same capability or authority as an SRO, but could provide an affordable option for providing an increased security presence. The Huntsville City School District can serve as an effective hybrid security model that employs a combination of SROs and district security (non-SRO) personnel.

F5 – <u>SRO PROGRAM: ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS</u>: Elementary schools tend to be rated as low risk/high consequence for serious incidents. However, the issue of student harassment/bullying begins to form in students beginning around the 4th-6th grade levels and continues to escalate at the middle school level. Currently, one SRO is assigned to support Administrators at seven elementary schools. Several training modules are offered annually by the SRO to school personnel and students. However, support to seven schools stretches limited SRO resources, may impact SRO response times to elementary schools, and limits the positive influence that SROs have on elementary school students during their most formative years.

- **R6** – As suggested in R5 above, the district, in partnership with the Madison Police Department, should consider reassessing potential gaps in SRO support. Increasing SRO coverage from one to two SROs to support the seven elementary schools would strengthen the prevention and response capability, result in additional age appropriate awareness training, and increase the influence SROs have on elementary students.

F6 – <u>EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS TRAINING</u>: Preparing for emergencies requires solid planning and training for all affected emergency response team members. The challenge is finding time on the schedule to meet academic and administrative demands while also planning time for school safety efforts. Administrators strive to meet the minimum requirements and they seem to rely primarily on conducting scheduled monthly fire drills and occasional tornado drills to meet state standards. This approach doesn't test all the necessary actions required during an emergency and may not address how to manage all-hazard situations (i.e. intruders, active shooter, weapon on campus, cyber bullying, drug related incidents, suspicious person on property, etc.) that may occur at any time of the school day. Code Red emergencies require a response that may be substantially different than the response practiced during tornado and fire drills. Further, teachers represent the front line defense for identifying changes in student behavior, yet the assessment indicates that teacher participation in safety planning, training, and response may need additional attention.

- **R7** – The district should consider coordinating an annual safety training plan that outlines a curriculum that teaches administrator, faculty, staff, and student roles and responsibilities during all-hazard emergencies. In a healthy safety environment, everyone does their part. Administrators should be encouraged to include safety topics on the agenda during staff meetings, in-service or professional development training. Efforts to optimize preparedness should include conducting both announced and unannounced drills during all times of the day, (i.e., lunch, class change, end of day departure, etc.) table top exercises, and after-action reviews (to include faculty input). Optimally, preparedness training should result in a coordinated mass exercise that tests the full preparedness and capabilities of the school and city wide emergency

response system. Further, the district should consider assisting each school in developing a quick reference emergency response flip chart to post at key locations and in each classroom for use by faculty, new employees, substitute teachers, other persons who are regularly on school property (i.e., PTA President/members) or students at times faculty is unavailable or incapacitated. Faculty and staff should receive basic awareness and refresher training over time in areas such as conflict resolution, anger management, crisis management, harassment prevention, etc. If appropriate, include selected student leaders in training scenarios to increase student awareness of and input to safety plans. Finally, the district should consider developing school safety awareness and quick reference tip sheets for parents and student leaders.

F7 – <u>SAFETY POLICY/PLANS/PROCEDURES</u>: The safety planning process undertaken by Administrators early in the school year to clearly define and convey safety roles/responsibilities may have greater relevance and importance than the final Safety Plan itself. Safety Plans are in place at all ten traditional schools and generally meet state education standards. However, the Patriot Academy/Alternative School (PAAS) does not fall under an approved safety plan. PAAS seems to follow safety procedures generally understood by faculty and staff. In some cases, schools invested time in maturing the individual school plans. However, the plans as a whole vary in content, terminology, and maturity. To be useful, safety plans must be easy to reference. In some cases, plans are not simple to navigate in the current format, e.g. 3-ring binder without tabs to easily find information. Finally, in some cases, roles defined in the safety plans have not always been fully conveyed to the faculty or staff assigned the role or responsibility.

- **R8** – The district should consider standardizing a Madison City Schools Safety Plan format and content at the district level and advise Administrators to develop an Annex that identifies unique safety issues, personnel, risks, hazards, or concerns at individual schools. The standardized plans should eliminate unnecessary content, include a job description for each assigned role, designate Alternates to key positions, and certify that all team members understand their assigned roles. The plan Annex should meet State Department of Education minimum requirements and be updated as often as required by the Administrator or designee, reviewed and approved annually by Central Office, and updates distributed to all affected stakeholders.

F8 – <u>RISK OF BULLYING (CYBER/PHYSICAL)</u>: Bullying behavior that intimidates others has always existed as a pervasive problem that may lead to violence. District policy and a Student Code of Conduct exist to address inappropriate student behavior, yet indications are that teachers and students may at times be reluctant to get involved, resulting in the policy not being equally enforced. Student interviews indicate that more focus should be placed on bullying (to include cyber bullying) before or during middle school. However, the assessment indicates that the response to the threat of cyber-bullying varied among Administrators. Administrators and faculty may be unsure if a conflict exists between constitutionally protected freedoms, (i.e., free speech), district policy, and their legal, ethical, or moral obligation to respond or not respond when they become aware of a serious cyber threat made by one student to another student from a home computer. At what point must an Administrator take action? Traditional approaches to dealing with bullying may not work with cyber bullying. Bullying committed through the use of computers not owned by the district may still disrupt the education process or the orderly operation of the school, thus may require an active response by Administrators.

An Alabama SDE model policy regarding anti-harassment was provided to the district for consideration in developing a district anti-harassment policy. District policy on anti-harassment is currently under revision and

review by the district's Policy Committee. The date for approval of the policy and update of the Student Code of Conduct could not be determined. Note: Although a specific reference to bullying or cyber bullying is not made in the ALSDE model policy, student behaviors associated with bullying fall under the anti-harassment model policy and are referenced. It is the opinion of the STF that specific references to cyber-bulling and associated consequences should also be made in the final district anti-harassment policy and Student Code of Conduct to eliminate student and parent ambiguity.

- **R9**– The district should consider publishing the district policy on anti-harassment at the earliest possible date and ensure it is equally enforced. Further, the district should consider implementing a research-based anti-bullying program and train faculty, staff, and students annually on the provisions of the program, to include reporting and response. The district should also consider providing age appropriate curriculum on cyber etiquette, to include the consequences of cyber bullying in the student Code of Conduct. Finally, the district should consider providing anti-harassment awareness and other useful social network materials to parents through Listserv, school district website, or other approved communication means.

F9 – <u>EMERGENCY AND MEDICAL RESPONSE TEAMS</u>: The Madison Police Department, Madison Fire Department, and Huntsville Emergency Medical Services Incorporated (HEMSI) must respond to schools rapidly in order to stop a threat, restore order, respond to a fire, treat and transport patients, or save lives. Madison first-responders take over the initial life-saving efforts of faculty or staff working on a victim. Every minute counts. The assessment indicates that the capabilities, training, equipment, and emergency response times to a school incident from any of these critical city services are considered excellent.

Each organization works in full cooperation with the district and the schools and receives excellent support from the Madison City Council. At times, there could be factors that may have an impact on achieving optimum response to an incident, e.g., heavy traffic congestion during peak periods, taking Alternate routes due to road construction or weight limitations on streets/bridges, or not receiving a description of the incident location in sufficient detail during a 911 call to aid first-responders in getting to the exact scene as fast as possible, etc. Further, HEMSI incident response times may be extended at times if a HEMSI unit must respond to a call for service outside the district. Madison FD does not respond outside the district so response times remain stable. To address these limiting factors, first-responders work cooperatively with the schools and response routes and times are reviewed on an ongoing basis for improvement and adjustments are made where possible.

Upon arrival at a school, first-responders lack situational awareness and immediate access to critical information if a worst case situation arises, e.g., location of an active shooter, location of students/hostages and possible escape routes, and the identification of optimum entry points for special operations teams. To address this issue, the district initiated a pilot program to provide law enforcement first responders access to school video feeds that provide greater situational awareness. The pilot shows promise and will continue until technical issues can be resolved. Surveillance cameras that provide the feed to first-responders exist in many key areas inside/outside of schools but coverage inside the schools varies widely and has gaps. Some cameras are not functional and some cameras do not provide useful video due to outdated or poorly installed systems.

- **R10**– The district should consider developing a strategic plan that addresses a phased implementation of the State Homeland Security AL Virtual Safe School Initiative that is underway across the state. The web-based program serves to expand school surveillance coverage, provide

first-responders with critical information, e.g., video feeds, school floor plans, etc., and ultimately will increase situational awareness inside schools.

- **R11** - The district should consider initiating a study to assess the need for implementing a standardized system (e.g., alpha/numerical) for identifying locations within schools to assist 911 callers when describing the exact location of an incident requiring emergency assistance. Further, the district should also consider working with the architect/contractor selected to design and build the new high school to ensure the new school design considers a standardized system for identifying all rooms.

- **R12** – The district should consider working with first-responders and city officials on a long-term plan to conduct a mass exercise that tests the effectiveness of school Safety Plans and Incident Command System, as well as the full capabilities of the city emergency services, i.e., police, fire, medical, etc.

F10 – SECURITY CONTROLS AND TECHNOLOGIES: Security equipment should a supplement to a well-trained staff and student body. The district has disparate security systems installed throughout the 11 schools (including Alternative School) with varying degrees of coverage, functionality, and effectiveness. An effective school safety/security program represents a balance between policy/procedure, plans, people, and technology controls. In some cases, technology upgrades may be needed to establish a district security system that is integrated into a coherent whole, functions as designed, and plans for future growth.

- **R13** – The district should consider initiating a study that identifies the security technology needs and shortfalls in security controls and technology, while leveraging the use of existing security technologies and controls. A plan to maintain the systems should be in place. The district should also consider embracing a phased implementation of the State Homeland Security AL Virtual Safe School initiative (http://www.dhs.alabama.gov/virtual_alabama/school_safety.aspx). All systems should be appropriately installed to monitor common areas, while adhering to privacy concerns.

- **R14** – The district should review safety/security considerations and system specifications for the new high school construction project and adopt security design features into the school architecture and design, e.g., main entrance design, improved lines of sight in hallways, inclusion of infrastructure for access controls/keycard readers, surveillance and monitoring technology, etc. If security design expertise is not available, the district should consider the use of a licensed security consultant for this purpose. Changing project design and security specifications after final designs have been approved is expensive and could cause project delays.

- **C9** – The district may want to consider submitting a request for available federal and state Safe and Drug Free school grants to acquire funds to upgrade security controls, e.g., cameras, access card readers, electronic visitor sign in systems, etc.

F11 – VISITOR MANAGEMENT AND ACCESS CONTROL PROCEDURES: Visitor management and access controls are employed so that school officials know who is in the facility. Access control policy and procedures for visitors and the response for persons not in possession of a visitor pass are defined in school plans and are implemented at all schools. Signs are posted to direct visitors to sign in and teachers generally monitor hallways and external doors during class changes to watch for unauthorized persons. In most cases, front office personnel are alert to persons

entering the building and do an excellent job ensuring that visitors sign in. However, the visitor management tools and access controls vary in effectiveness and gaps between intentions and practice may exist.

Visitor screening and access controls can be potential "weak links" due to factors such as 1) complacency, 2) poor entrance design that blocks visibility of arriving visitors, 3) distracted front office personnel who are multi-tasking, 4) occasional failure to follow established procedure, i.e., unsupervised doors during class change, doors propped open, or not challenging a person without a visitor pass. Controls may not always be consistently followed, e.g., not always checking identification when students are picked up and parents or guardians are not personally known to staff, thus creating a gap in the front-line security posture that should be closed.

- **R15** – Administrators should consider reemphasizing the importance and responsibility for remaining alert and consistently following established access and visitor controls. To keep levels of alertness up, the effectiveness of access controls should be tested periodically with unannounced exercises, and lessons learned applied immediately. Electronic visitor sign-in systems such as Ident-A-Kid's *Complete Campus Security Solution* (http://www.betoosafe.com/) or School Check IN's *OffenderCHECK* (http://schoolcheckin.com/) go beyond pen and paper sign in and are installed at some Madison schools. Computer based identification and visitor systems should be considered for district wide deployment. Enhanced online visitor management systems, e.g., *Raptor Technologies* (http://raptorware.com) that screen a driver's license and check the National Sex Offender Registry prior to granting a pass represent a Best Practice and should be considered for future use.

- **R16** – The district should consider conducting a cost-benefits analysis of each school front entrance and office area for possible renovation that results in greater front office visibility. If adopted, the renovated design would create a secondary barrier (door) between the front door and rest of the school and require a positive action by front office personnel to grant access to a visitor, e.g., verify identification and push a button to grant entrance. Authorized personnel may enter by swiping a keycard through a reader to open the door. Some schools such as Liberty MS feature such a design and serve as a model. Such a system provides a sense of safety to parents while preventing anyone from entering the school unnoticed.

F12 – EMERGENCY COMMUNICATION SYSTEMS: The ability for school officials or law enforcement personnel to communicate in a timely manner is foundational to an effective safety program. Any limitation to communications such as the intercom system, walki-talkie, cell phone, etc., may result in an uncoordinated response and increased safety risk. The assessment indicates that two-way radio communication coverage inside many schools is affected by radio dead spots due to the facility's construction, thus rendering emergency communication and responsiveness unreliable and ineffective. Backup systems such as personal cell phones are used when necessary with a higher degree of reliability. In addition, in one case the effectiveness of a school intercom system to communicate urgent messages is questionable due to poor quality, design and installation, and noise factors.

- **R17** – The district should consider initiating an Emergency Communications Effectiveness Study to validate overall communications effectiveness at all schools and determine how all communications systems can or should be enhanced, e.g., adding secondary communications systems (private point to point), installation and use of repeaters, need for additional communication devices such as walki-talkies, bullhorns, or cell phones for faculty and staff use, etc.

F 13 –SAFETY AT PATRIOT ACADEMY/ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL (PAAS): The PAAS administration, counselor, faculty, and staff are caring and creative individuals that face a daily challenge (and some risk) working with students who require constant attention. Although economically it makes business sense for PAAS to share a campus with Discovery MS, there are certain inherent risks in having Discovery MS share a campus with both the Patriot Academy and the Alternative School (PAAS). A-School represents the "last chance" for troubled students to correct their behavior before long-term suspension or expulsion.

Administrators at both Discovery MS and PAAS take steps to monitor PAAS student behavior and mitigate security risks, i.e., 1) Start PAAS later than Discovery MS, 2) Provide a teacher escort for A-School students going to Discovery MS for meals, 3) Provide separate bus transportation for A-School students, 4) Review Intake Rules with both the student and parent/guardian and require signature by both, review A-School Student Contract with the student with a signature required, as well as complete the Daily Behavior Report, 5) Restrict A-School students from extracurricular activities with consequences for violating this stipulation, 6) Counseling is provided to help ensure students with deeper emotional issues are confirmed ready to return to mainstream school to address his/her educational needs without being a risk to himself/herself or other students, and 7) Employ the Ripple Effects process to identify and work with students on their specific behavior problems, strengths, and goals while attending PAAS.

Additional A-School risks that should be further considered for mitigation may include, but are not limited to 1) the practice of teaching A-School students in conflict with one another side by side in a confined space, 2) teaching PA students and A-School students in the same small modular unit, 3) establishing a maximum number of days (up to 9 weeks) in A-School before returning a student to his/her original school, 4) not screening A-School students daily for possible weapons or drugs, 5) not having PAAS on the Discovery MS intercom system for emergency announcements, and 6) not always having timely SRO response to assist the Administrator of PAAS. Note: A 2nd SRO was recently added to Discovery MS and this should result in a more timely response to PAAS.

- **R18** – The district should consider conducting a thorough safety/security audit to identify all inherent risks of a shared campus and develop a mitigation plan to eliminate vulnerabilities and mitigate the risk to an acceptable level. Further, the district should consider requiring A-School students to complete community service projects as a way to learn while helping others and consider the option of students wearing school uniforms to deter repeated bad behavior and a return to A-School.

- **R19** – The district should consider reemphasizing to the original school the importance of providing sufficient information to A-School either in writing or a direct call to the Administrator. Knowledge of student intention and behavior is critical to managing A-School risk. In some cases, information entered onto the A-School Referral Form or in the Student Technical Information (STI) database may not always be in sufficient detail or provided in a timely manner. The overall process does not seem to be major problem but any gaps in A-School risk should be closed.

- **R20** – The PAAS could at times be a moderate to high risk environment, depending on the acts committed by the students in attendance. The front entrance is controlled with a lock and requires a visitor to ring a buzzer to request entry. However, the front entrance is not under video surveillance and does not have an intercom for communicating with a potential visitor, thus front office personnel cannot properly and safely identify visitors prior to opening the front door. The district should consider installing a video camera and intercom system at PAAS to monitor the entrance for suspicious activity and allow proper identification of visitors. To further reduce the risk, the district

should consider the use of portable wands to screen PAAS students for weapons during the relatively short duration they will attend the schools.

- **C10** – The Administrator, counselor, and faculty of PAAS are commended for incorporating innovative teaching ideas to motivate their students to reflect on their bad behaviors and make better choices. For example, the Patriot Academy students recently took time out of the classroom to participate in a community service project at Leathertree Park involving painting playground equipment and installing landscape timbers and mulch. PA students expressed enjoyment in working as a team, felt a sense of purpose, and learned not to take their community for granted.

F14 – SCHOOLS INTERACTION WITH THE MEDIA: The media plays an important role in helping to prevent and limit the harm that results from violence in the schools. Unfortunately, confusion and the release of inaccurate information could result if Administrators don't understand how to work with the media. So a balance must be struck. Administrator understanding of their roles /responsibilities regarding media relations and interactions with the media during normal and crisis operations varied among Administrators. This seems to be an underdeveloped area in the school safety planning.

- **R21** – The district should consider strengthening the relationships between Central Office, schools, and the media. Review policy/procedure on handling media relations to ensure timely, appropriate, and reliable communication to the community. Ensure media liaisons are trained to work with the media and know how to protect the rights of the school and rights of the students in the aftermath of an incident. One useful source for developing guidelines for working cooperatively with the media is the International Association of Chiefs of Police. Information can be found at www.theiacp.com.

F15 – INCIDENT COMMAND SYSTEM: The in-school Incident Command structure is generally addressed in school safety plans, and it starts at the top with the Principal. Many day to day issues are managed by the Principal/Assistant Principal as the on scene Incident Commander without outside assistance from first-responders. However, a complete understanding of the requirement and process for transferring Incident Command authority from the Principal to appropriate first responders during a major crisis varied among Administrators.

- **R22** – First responders follow the National Incident Management System (NIMS) doctrine for Incident Command. Upon arrival of first responders, Administrators should quickly shift their Incident Command role to a key supporting role that initiates student accountability and immediate assistance to law enforcement and/or the Fire Department to work together effectively and efficiently to respond to and recover from incidents. Access to the school property, if designated as a crime scene, is controlled by the first responder assuming Incident Command. Administrators and other non-essential personnel must respect the authority and direction of the assuming Incident Commander in order to ensure command authority and preserve evidence as necessary. This process of transferring IC authority should be included as a topic in table-top exercises. Finally, in addition to assessing the findings and recommendations in this assessment report, the district should coordinate a detailed Lessons Learned review of the incident that occurred at Discovery MS to evaluate the adequacy of safety planning and identify ways to improve future incident response.

F16 – SHARING CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION: Sharing confidential information among Administrators, counselors, and SROs regarding "Students of Interest" who exhibit notable safety risk factors is an important

prevention strategy in managing potential risk. In some cases, such information may not always be directly shared from one school Administrator or SRO to another as a student progresses to the next level. To obtain this information, receiving Administrators or SROs typically would need to be proactive in pulling information from the STI database.

- **R23** – The district should consider establishing a process that encourages Administrators, counselors, and/or SROs at schools where students of interest are departing to proactively share confidential information and behavioral history to the receiving school officials who have a "need to know" so that receiving school officials can conduct their own risk assessment and intervention plan early in the new school year. In all cases, schools must comply with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) in a way that balances the need to protect students and staff while protecting the confidentiality rights of all students.

F17 – FACULTY AND STAFF ACTIVE DEFENSE: School faculty and staff are not expected or required to take action to defend themselves or students against armed aggressors. Yet incidents across the nation have shown that faculty and staff may come in direct contact with an armed aggressor, resulting in uncertainty of their responsibilities and uncertainty of on how to respond as last resort defense against mortal danger.

- **R24** – The district should consider the value of coordinating a self-defense and survival training for faculty and staff who desire the training.

F 18 – COMMUNITY AND PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT: Community and parental involvement and support is an essential element of a safe school program. Active parental involvement in the schools varies widely. Parental involvement is strong at elementary schools but typically wanes at the middle and high school levels. In some situations, parents have shown little desire to get involved at the schools. In other situations, parents desiring to be more involved at the middle school level have indicated that involvement is not encouraged. Overall, the STF survey indicates that parents desire to get involved and they want the schools to be open and honest in talking about concerns that are known to exist so that parents and schools can work together to solve them.

- **R25** – The key ingredient to getting parents involved in the students' education may be to provide them with information on an ongoing basis. The district, Administrators, and faculty at all levels should consider renewing their efforts to establish partnership opportunities that engage parents and informs them of steps they can take to contribute to a safe school environment, e.g., teach and monitor safe Internet tips at home, identify gang and drug associated behaviors, monitor their child for changing behaviors, actively participate in their child's activities, etc. Creative ideas for encouraging more parents to sign up for Listserv email messages distributed by the Central Office should be considered and pursued.

- **R26** – The district should consider the benefits of sponsoring the innovative WATCH D.O.G.S. (Dads of Great Students) program of the National Center for Fathering which focuses on prevention of violence in the schools by using fathers and father-figures to be a positive role model for students. More information can be found at www.fathers.com/watchdogs.

- **C12** – Parents and guardians have a critical role to play in school safety. To contribute to the overall safety of the schools, parents and guardians should be encouraged to openly discuss topics with their children such as school discipline, safety procedures, gang related indicators, behavior expectations,

and how to resolve problems peacefully. The district is commended for its initiative to host a Community Resources Fair on May 4th, 2010 to provide parents with valuable information and resources that are available in the community, i.e., family counseling, domestic violence information, teen parenting, and many other services.

- **C13** – Administrators should clearly communicate safety procedures that the school will follow during a crisis at their child's school and outline how parents can best assist school officials and monitor for incident updates in the midst of a crisis.

F19 – WEAPONS DETECTION AND RESPONSE: Schools have a clear no-weapons policy but their ability to effectively prevent all weapons from being introduced on campus is a major challenge. The district policy on the use of metal detectors seems to adequately provide for their use, if warranted. However, the resources to procure and implement metal detectors, provide training on the equipment, and ensure staffing of the systems are extremely limited. In light of recent Pride Survey results reporting that 171 students indicated they had brought a weapon to school during a school year, the use of metal detectors at school entrance points was a consideration during the assessment. Fixed walk-through metal detectors are most often considered for high risk or volatile environments to deter and detect weapons, e.g., Courtrooms, school districts in high risk areas, etc. The use of fixed walk-through metal detectors comes with a significant impact on the school environment and operational efficiency, and could represent a recurring cost in lost productivity. Our assessment on the use of metal detectors indicates that a level of deterrence is realized with students that have no criminal intent, however, other factors will likely result in fixed metal detectors not detecting 100% of weapons that may be introduced by determined students through other openings or at times the metal detectors are not in operation, i.e., after hours, thus limiting their value.

- **R27** – The use of fixed metal detectors is not a recommendation of the STF. The issue of weapons being introduced by students, or by others with criminal intent and no connection to the school, should remain the focus of other prevention and response efforts, i.e., teaching the appropriate response to observing a suspicious person or response to a weapon observed on school property. The district should consider the use of portable wands (metal detectors) coupled with random student searches (with reasonable suspicion) as a control at middle and high schools, e.g., upon learning of a reported threat of a weapon at school.

- **C14** – Pride Report surveys are anonymous, thus the accuracy of the statements regarding bringing weapons on school property can't be verified. Case studies show metal detectors may not deter a person determined to bring a weapon to school. The campus environment (i.e., many windows and doors), hours of operation and use by community organizations, provides numerous opportunities for a weapon to be introduced both during and after school hours by students and non-students accessing the property.

F20 – SAFETY AT SITES LOCATED OUTSIDE OF SCHOOLS: There is some inherent risk of threatening behavior occurring at outside school sites where fewer controls may be in place, i.e., modular units, bus loading/unloading areas, parking lots, sporting venues, etc. In most cases, schools do an excellent job in providing traffic duty supervisors that are attentive to the safety of the students and are sufficient in number to manage the task. In one case, during the assessment it was observed that students and *early* arriving school buses unloading students were unsupervised or had limited supervision, thus limiting the supervisor's ability to monitor for safety concerns.

- **R28** – The assessment did not conclude that the limited supervision observed during bus unloading is an ongoing problem. However, it can become a safety gap if not monitored. Administrators should consider reemphasizing the policy for supervising bus loading/unloading and parking areas and ensure supervisors avoid distractions and remain attentive to safety issues during the relatively short durations they are on duty. In addition, where necessary, safety /security considerations should be incorporated into protecting the modular environment, e.g., surveillance, defined response procedures, additional exercises, and effective communications.

F21 – RISK OF GANG ASSOCIATED PRESENCE: Parents of students want to know if there is a"gang problem." Considering the growth in the city and the school district, there may be a potential risk evolving from the gang associated behavior of a small number of individuals or cliques. Over the past several years, students transferring into the school system have attempted to align with nationally recognized gangs. The assessment indicates that a small number of students at the middle and high school levels may desire the "bad boy" image and begin to emulate national gangs through their choice and subtle display of clothing, tattoos, paraphernalia, and language. There is no indication to date that students have been recognized or been directed by nationally recognized gangs, nor is there any indication that these cliques or individuals are committing violent criminal acts to support a criminal enterprise. In most cases, the identification of these students is known to Administrators, SROs, and Madison Police Investigators who monitor the students for troublesome behavior. However, teachers are often the front line defense for monitoring student behavior in the classroom for outward signs of gang associated activity and they should play a key role in the continued mitigation of this risk.

- **R29** – The district and the schools should continue their close partnership with SROs and the Madison Police Department to monitor the potential for gang associated activity and respond immediately when behavior violates district policy or the Student Code of Conduct, to include violations of the Dress Code that reflects gang membership. The district should also assess the need for adding age appropriate gang awareness training to the curriculum at the middle and high school levels as a minimum. Finally, the best defense is for the district to teach faculty and staff about how to recognize and report signs of gang associated activity.

F22 – RISK OF THREATENING BEHAVIOR RESULTING FROM DRUG ACTIVITY: The use of drugs and alcohol is often associated with violence and troublesome behavior. Both issues are nationwide concerns and Madison City Schools are not exempt from such behavior. Students receive an extensive education on the dangers of drug use at an early age and it continues throughout their education. However, the problem is prevalent in our schools.

- **R30** – The district should continue its efforts to educate students on drug use, while also taking a more proactive enforcement approach to reducing drug use at schools.

- **C15** – During the assessment, the 5th Grade training course "Too Good for Drugs" provided by the assigned SRO to all 5th grade students was noted as a very effective course.

F23 – CENTRAL SURVEILLANCE MONITORING: Surveillance camera systems can often serve as a deterrent to bad behavior and should be a tool of any effective safety plan. Camera use is optimized when monitored for troublesome activity so that an appropriate response can be mounted before an incident occurs or escalates. Currently, cameras are monitored independently on a limited basis by each school and are generally located in clear view of non-staff entering the front office areas. Video feeds are recorded and reviewed as a key element of an investigation and active monitoring may occur upon notification of a suspicious incident in a specific location.

However, in most if not all cases, it is difficult or impossible for Administrators, SROs, or staff to monitor the cameras for suspicious activity on a routine basis.

- **R31** – As a Best Practice consideration, the district should consider studying the benefits of establishing a central monitoring capability for remote live monitoring of all risk hot spots during peak times, resulting in a more rapid response to suspicious activity observed at all schools, e.g., theft, bullying, harassment, assaults, intruders, etc. The Huntsville City School District can serve as a model in central monitoring for review and consideration.

F24 – TRANSPORTATON SAFETY: There is an inherent safety risk to students who ride on school buses due in part to the limited supervision. Assessment of school bus safety was limited due to time constraints; however, video surveillance on buses serves to deter undesired behavior and aids in an investigation. Reportedly, an estimated 50% of Madison City school buses managed by Laidlaw are outfitted with a surveillance camera and digital video recorder, procedures for responding to an incident have been defined, and drivers have been trained to respond to threatening behavior.

- **R32** – The district should consider auditing the bus transportation system for knowledge of and compliance with school bus safety protocols and concerns. The district should consider continuing to upgrade bus surveillance systems until 100% have been outfitted. Reemphasize to bus drivers that proper radio communication protocols must be followed at all times to ensure that information that has not been approved for release does not get communicated over a two-way radio.