

City of Madison, Alabama School Task Force



PRELIMINARY REPORT

**MADISON SCHOOL TASK FORCE
CHARTERED ON 15 FEB 2010**

**CHAIRMAN, GENERAL (R) ROBERT DROLET
CO-CHAIR, DR. MARY JANE CAYLOR
CO-CHAIR, MR. REX REYNOLDS**

21 APRIL 2010

Overview



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Our STF Charter



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

Primary Task:

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

Our Vision



To instill into the community a collaborative effort that results in Madison City Schools being recognized as one of the safest learning environments in the nation.

Our Goals



- To identify areas of risk in our schools and develop strategies to lessen our vulnerability to such risk.
- To assess and place emphasis on Deterrence, Prevention, Preparedness, and Responsiveness.
- To inculcate a shared responsibility for ensuring a safe learning environment.
- To ensure the well being of our children.

The STF Organization



- **School Task Force**
 - Brigadier General (R) Robert (Bob) Drolet - STF Co-Chair
 - Dr. Mary Jane Caylor - STF Co-Chair
 - Mr. Rex Reynolds - STF Co-Chair
- **STF Security Team**
 - Mr. Terry E. Odum - Chairman
 - Sheriff Blake Dorning - Co-Chairman
- **STF Communications Team**
 - Mr. Rodney Pennywell - Chairman
 - Mr. Tim Solley - Co-Chairman
- **STF Chief of Staff**
 - Ms. Kara Manning
- **STF Communications**
 - Ms. Barbara Nash

Security Team



- Mr. Terry E. Odum, NASA Special Agent
- Mr. Rob Broussard , Madison County District Attorney
- Mr. Harwell Davis, Federal Judge
- Ms. Debi Edwards, Principal, Hampton Cove Middle School
- Mr. Dennis James, Principal, Columbia High School
- Mr. Doug Martinson , Huntsville School Board
- Blake Dorning, Madison County Sheriff
- Mr. Robby Parker, Principal, Bob Jones High School
- Ms. Margaret Petty, Teacher, Columbia Elementary
- Mr. Kerry Straub , FBI Special Agent
- Sgt Clayton Jordan, Madison Police
- Mr. Jeff Anderson, Madison County School Board

Communications Team



- Mr. Rodney Pennywell, Co-Founder, Falcon List
- Ms. Beth Agee, President, Discovery PTA
- Mr. Tom Drake, Principal, Grissom High School
- Mr. Marc Jacobson, Madison Resident
- Mr. Brad Jefferson, Teacher/Coach, Discovery Middle School
- Sgt Steve Wilkerson, Madison Police
- Ms. Paulakay Lane, Co-Founder, Falcon List
- Mr. Tim Solley, Madison County Director
- Ms. Missy Ming Smith, Madison County Commission
- Mr. Chris Newlin, Exec Director, NCAC
- Mr. Brandon Pressnell, Minister
- Dr. Roger Rinn, Psychologist
- Mr. Eric Terrell, Teacher, Bob Jones HS

Rules and Guidelines...



- Follow the Department of Justice “*Guide for Preventing and Responding to School Violence*” as our safety blueprint.
- School support will be requested through Dr. Dee Fowler.
- Police support will be requested through Chief Muncey.
- Interviews and/or Press releases will be approved by the Co-chairs and released through the STF Lead, Communications.
- A web site will be established on the Madison City Web page to collect community feedback.
- Input will be solicited from all constituency groups.
- Findings will be attributed to the School District not the individual schools.

Rules and Guidelines... (cont.)



- Details of the incident that occurred at a Madison Middle School are under investigation and are not part of the STF tasking.
- STF is totally independent. Initial 8 member team was expanded by 19 members to add broad-based experience and delve deeper into Madison City and to reach across the greater community.
- Free to “go where we want and look at what we want” to identify rational ideas on what can be done better in a school safety program.
- STF efforts take considerable time. However, nothing is more important than the education of our children in the proper environment.

What We Are Doing...

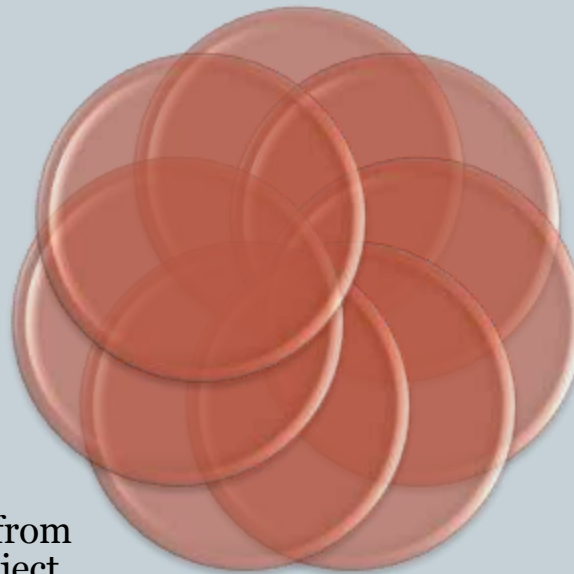


Solicited input from
the Madison City
Schools Central Office

Met with the
Teacher's Advisory
Panel and
Elementary School
Principals

Solicited input from
administrators,
faculty, students, and
parents

Evaluated Safe
School Model
Guidelines and
developed a
comprehensive
school safety
assessment checklist



Conducted five in-
school interviews
and assessments to
look for safety gaps

Solicited advice from
Safe School Subject
Matter Experts and
Groups and
researched incident
case studies

Reviewed PRIDE
Survey and Student
Incident Reports (SIR)

What We Are Doing... (cont.)



Solicited input from the Madison County and Huntsville City School Districts

Solicited initial input from the community via the *Talk to the Task Force* website and developed additional survey instruments for stakeholders

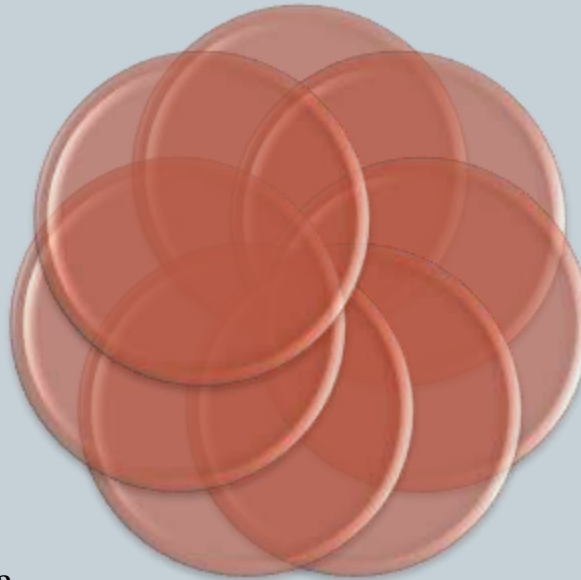
Reviewed the 2009 School Resource Officer National Survey

Observed a demonstration of the *Virtual Alabama School Safety Program*

Solicited input from SROs and local Law Enforcement officials

Observed a demonstration of a web-based texting tool used by over 300 schools

Monitored blogs to gauge student and parental concerns



What We Observed...



- Impressive, dedicated, and competent people throughout the system.
- High commendations are directed at the Administrators and faculty.
- The dedication and professionalism of the Madison Police Department and its SRO's must be noted.
- Schools have effective leadership, have considerable support from all stakeholders; and in general have federal and state compliant policies and procedures with the basics understood and followed.
- School officials face increasingly limited time for school safety efforts due to academic and other demands and are reasonably meeting the challenge.
- Having noted many positives, we also indentified risks and produced strategies that will help the district create a safer learning environment.

Fundamental Strategies



- Emphasize *prevention* through faculty and staff awareness training, parental involvement, collaboration, and information sharing.
- Further integrate the School Resource Officer (SRO) program.
- Phased upgrade of the surveillance / monitoring program in concert with the Homeland Security Office, *Virtual AL Safe Schools* initiative.
- Constituencies commit to collectively attain the desired level of safety.
- Continue to explore lessons learned from other schools.
- **KEY RECOMMENDATION:** Establish a “Supervisor of School Safety and Communications” position to assist all administrators in maintaining a safe environment and to enhance communication between all constituencies.



**SCHOOL TASK FORCE
SECURITY TEAM
OBSERVATIONS, STRATEGIES, AND APPROACHES**

TERRY E. ODUM

Security Team

Observations, Strategies, and Approaches



- The prevailing level of violent incidents in our schools is not believed to be a systemic problem.
- However, risks, left unmitigated, will likely grow along with the growth of our schools and our community.
- Some risk factors are beyond the control of educators, e.g., a child's home and after-school environments.
- Effective safety planning requires diligence.
- Student Code of Conduct, consistently applied and with consequences for violations, is vital to achieving safe schools.
- Preparedness is critical to reach a true readiness posture.
- Investments in technology and resources must be made. Pursuit of available federal and state grants will help offset the investment.

Security Team

Observations, Strategies, and Approaches (cont.)



- Standardization and clarification of some policy/procedures is needed.
- Increasing communication will aid immeasurably in prevention efforts.
- Technology can be a catalyst for early *identification, intervention, and prevention* of threatening behavior.
- Implemented solutions must ensure a balance between good safety and an environment conducive to learning.
- Early efforts in student character education help to mitigate risk.
- Research-based anti-harassment policy and anti-bullying programs must be more closely evaluated for adoption district-wide.
- Best safety practices exist in our schools and should be widely shared.



**SCHOOL TASK FORCE
COMMUNICATIONS TEAM
OBSERVATIONS, STRATEGIES, AND APPROACHES**

RODNEY PENNYWELL

We Asked for Community Feedback...



- Talk to the Task Force (*TTF*) was established to ask the community for their input on ensuring safe schools.
- The primary community concerns were:
 - Training (practice more lockdown drills)
 - Use of metal detectors (consider pros and cons)
 - Access Controls (consistently implemented)
 - Traffic Planning (prepare for road shutdowns and bus transport in a crisis)
 - Reunification (reuniting students to parents)
 - Communication (let students and parents know what's going on)
- STF strategies are responsive to immediate community concerns and will enhance school safety. However, no set of strategies will provide a 100% guarantee against threatening behavior or violence.

Phase II School Safety Community Survey



- During Phase I, community input was solicited through the Talk to the Task Force website to identify the urgent concerns and solicit ideas.
- Effective 21 April, a Phase II community-wide survey on school safety is available on the Madison City School Task Force portal.
 - www.madisonal.gov
- Survey is open to all residents and is partitioned into 4 segments: Parents, Students, Teachers, and other Residents.
- Questions are limited to 12 questions in each group, so it is an easy survey to complete.
- Personal data is not requested in order to maintain confidentiality.

Student Face to Face (F2F) Interviews



- Informal student feedback on school safety concerns was initially solicited outside the school system to gauge the student's concerns and sense of safety.
- STF is now in the process of developing a F2F interview methodology.
 - Direct feedback from middle and high school students is highly desired.
 - Range of subjects may include the school environment, intimidation, bullying, drugs, gang associated activity, overall perception of discipline in the schools, etc.
- Parents – if you would like for your child to participate, please go to www.madisonal.gov under “Talk to the Task Force” and provide contact information.



HOT BUTTONS, SUMMARY, AND CLOSING

GENERAL DROLET

What are the Hot Buttons?



- Safety costs should be defined as part of an annual budget to ensure adequate funding for security and SRO staffing.
- Physical security measures such as communications equipment and camera systems; staff training; upgraded technology for proper entry control are needed.
- Vulnerability of “ portables” and other outside school areas.
- Exchange of student information between schools needs to be proactive and timely.
- Allocation of SRO’s and integration into all aspects of the school.
- Need for a Supervisor of School Safety and Communications at the District level.

What are the Hot Buttons? (cont.)



- Achieving more year-round Parental involvement.
- Expedited communications from schools to parents.
- Reaching out to connect with students.
 - Use technology that students most often use in order to build trust and confidence that observed or overheard threatening behavior is *Safe to Share*.
- Providing intervention tips on dealing with *behavioral warning signs* and expediting communications from parents to schools.
- Student accountability, parent-student reunification, and media management during a crisis are critical components of a school safety/crisis plan.

Next Immediate Steps



- **Tasks to Be Completed:**
 - Evaluate the proximity of first-responders to schools (Fire/HEMSI) and understand their supporting capabilities.
 - Further assess the School Drug Awareness Programs and the impact of drug use on potential violence.
 - Further assess potential risks associated with Alternative School.
 - Review nationally recognized Gang Awareness training.
 - Further review the model SDE Anti-Harassment Policy and any draft school district implementing policy under development.
 - Further study of behaviors that intimidate others, i.e., bullying.
 - Develop additional community feedback information.
- **Final Report will be released by 7 May 2010**

Summary



- The community can be proud of its school system and the dedication and professionalism of its teacher-school staff and law enforcement support.
- STF is taking advantage of state and national resources to evaluate best practices and products upon which findings and recommendations are made.
- Policies/procedures/processes/ and tools are in place but can be improved.
- Ongoing dialogue and shared responsibility with all stakeholders is vital to the long term success of a safe schools program.
- Increased parental engagement/involvement is necessary in our schools.
- The current system needs attention and there are areas that call for improvement.
- Providing schools and law enforcement with the tools and resources they need is essential to maintaining a secure educational environment.
- Must continue to find creative ways to teach and encourage positive behavior.
- It is a “SHARED” responsibility of all stakeholders to achieve the recommendations made by the STF.



BACKUP

Our Key Observations...



Commitment: Central Office shares a commitment to taking the necessary steps to ensure student safety

Honesty: Administrators offered honest opinions and were open to new ideas

Passion: Faculty and staff were passionate and strive daily to keep students safe

Concern: Parents and members of the community were compelled to offer safe school suggestions and advice

Experience: SROs are experienced and have a good rapport with students

Safety: The *overall* school environment is safe, yet the school system and our community will benefit by making reasonable adjustments and investments

What are the Essential Components?



Essential components of safe school planning

- Create intervention and prevention strategies
- Develop emergency response planning
- Develop policies and understand legal considerations
- Create a positive climate and culture
- Implement ongoing staff development
- Ensure quality facilities and technology
- Foster school/law enforcement partnerships
- Institute links with mental health/social services
- Foster family and community involvement
- Acquire and use necessary resources

Special Interest: Cyber bullying



- Recent incidents of school bullying have the attention of cities and schools across the nation.
- Technology has given students a new means of creating disorder inside and outside of our schools.
- Students can cyber harass each other through:
 - Emails
 - Instant messaging
 - Text or digital imaging messages sent on cell phones
 - Web pages
 - Blogs
 - Chat rooms or discussion groups
 - Other information communication technologies

Special Interest: Cyber bullying



- Research suggests that cyber bullying differs from more “traditional” forms of bullying in a number of ways:
 - It can occur any time of the day or night.
 - Harassing messages and images can be distributed quickly to a very wide audience.
 - Students can often be anonymous when cyber bullying, which makes it difficult to trace them.
- A research-based effective bullying and cyber-bullying program is necessary to reduce possible victimization and address this national concern.