Blue Valley School Safety Report

Executive Summary

As a result of the tragic December 2012 school shooting incident in Newtown, Connecticut, the Blue Valley School District Board of Education requested that a safety study be completed of all of its school campuses. The purpose of the study was to review the district's current safety practices and to consider potential additional measures to improve the district's school safety presence and environment. A special committee was created and thoroughly reviewed, assessed, and analyzed all safety practices, physical environments and emergency procedures at each of the district's school campuses. This report is the culmination of the committee’s work.

Summary of Recommendations

• Reaffirm and re-emphasize to all stakeholders that the current overall school safety philosophy of the importance of relationships, interdependencies and communication between students, all staff members, school resource officers, city and county police departments, the mental health community, and campus police officers is the primary focus in creating a safe school environment.

• Continue with a commitment to pinch point access controls at all front entries as the district’s primary deterrent to threatening actions.

• Continue with plans to provide seven school campuses with pinch point access controls during the summer of 2013.

• Accelerate construction plans to move the remaining 13 schools without pinch point access controls to a completion date of August 2014.
  o Doing so will complete the construction of pinch point access controls at all school campuses by August 2014.
  o To accelerate construction plans, other bond related construction projects that are not safety related may have their construction timeframes altered.
• Implement temporary, short term entry way improvements at 13 school campuses in advance of their 2014 pinch point entry way completion dates.
  o The short term improvements would be in place for the remainder of the 2012-13 school year at nine schools, and at all 13 schools by the start of the 2013-14 school year.
  o Temporary improvements will include: new and/or additional camera monitoring of the front door and entry way; a chime system that alerts office staff when someone has walked through the front door; restricting front door entry to only one door after classes begin; new and/or improved video monitors located in easy to view areas for front office staff; and the ability to lock the inside vestibule door remotely if the situation warrants, thus restricting access to the school.

• Accelerate the internet-protocol entry camera installation project.
  o This project stems from the 2012 bond referendum, and would include new camera systems.

• Develop and enforce a more stringent protocol for securing all exterior entry doors during the school day.
  o The need exists to review the protocols for how all exterior facing doors are secured during the school day, especially at schools with multiple exterior doors such as high schools.

• Examine the possibility of a secure exterior door indicator system.
  o This is an idea that needs further study to determine if a benefit to the district could be realized.

• Improve the view line of the front drive and front entry way for office staffs at each of the school campuses.
  o This may include reconstructing entry ways and/or the addition/repositioning of security cameras and monitors.

• Develop and enforce more robust code red and code red-lights out plans and drills.
• Plans should include expectations for a code red drill during recess, lunch times, passing periods and/or at other times when there is increased student movement within the building.

• Review each school campus’ communication plans to be used during code red situations.
  o This review should include potential enhancement to the safe schools hotline, such as an anonymous texting capability, as well as reviewing how a code red lockdown situation is communicated to the school campus at large.

• Develop and implement more robust security training for office staff, crisis teams, and new and guest teachers.
  o A review and improvements to security training for all office staff, crisis teams and new and guest teachers need to be completed to help provide staff with the information they need to be effective in a crisis situation.

• Develop and enforce an expectation that all guest teachers will be provided with safety plans for the school campus in which they are working.
  o The need for communication with guest teachers regarding safety plans was noted during the visits to the school campuses.

• Establish appropriate expectations for Y-Care after-hours entry procedures, including installation of a door bell to alert Y-Care staff to the presence of a person wanting to gain access into the school building.
  o The safety and security department, working in conjunction with building principals and the YMCA staff, will determine an appropriate expectation.

• Issue school campus access cards, as day and time appropriate, to Y-Care supervisors.
  o The need for Y-Care supervisors to have appropriate building access was noted during the visits to the elementary school campuses.
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Background of the study

On December 14, 2012, the nation watched in horror as the tragic events in Newtown, Connecticut began to unfold. There, at approximately 10 a.m., an armed gunman gained entry into a school equipped with a locked front door and a buzzer-only entry system, and killed 26 people before killing himself. Among the 26 victims were elementary school children, teachers, classified staff, and school administration.

As the nation struggled to understand this unimaginable tragedy, school districts across the country began to deal with new questions about safety, security, and the protective well-being of its students and staffs. The Blue Valley School District Board of Education, as a result of the Newtown incident, commissioned a study of all of its buildings and campuses to review its current safety practices and to consider additional measures in order to improve its safety presence. A special committee\(^1\) headed by Deputy Superintendent Al Hanna and Assistant Superintendent Mike Slagle led an effort to thoroughly review, assess, and recommend practices and procedures that will improve the safety environment in Blue Valley. This report is the culmination of the committee’s work.

Purpose and goals of the study

The primary purpose of the study was to review and assess the current safety environment and baseline safety philosophy that exists in the Blue Valley School District, and to make recommendations regarding actions that may serve to improve

\(^1\) Other study committee members included Dennis McCarthy, School Safety Consultant; Russ Kokoruda, Executive Director of School Administration, West Side; Sue Denny, Executive Director, School Administration, East Side; Dan Carney, Director of Safety and Security; Dave Hill, Executive Director of Facilities and Operations; and Kristi McNerlin, Director of Communications. A steering committee helped guide the study committee’s work. In addition to the study committee, other members of the steering committee included Tom Trigg, Superintendent; Tom Mitchell, Board of Education Member; Pam Robinson, Board of Education Member; and Sue Dole, Deputy Superintendent.
schools safety in terms of mitigating violent threats. To that end, the following outcomes were developed to be studied, and serves as the outline for this report:

- The study committee evaluated the current safety practices/measures at each of Blue Valley’s schools and campuses.
  - This part of the study focused on a school-by-school description and analysis of current safety practices as it related to creating and maintaining a secure environment.
- The study committee analyzed safety improvements that are already planned for the school campuses in the Blue Valley School District with particular attention placed on the timeframe for those improvements.
  - In this section, the focus was on articulating the bond-related safety improvements schedule, and potentially moving the safety improvements up in the schedule.
  - Additionally, focus was also given to an articulation on what temporary improvement could be made prior to permanent improvements being completed in some of Blue Valley’s school buildings that have limited site line visibility and no current pinch point access control.
- The study committee analyzed additional layers of safety protection that the Blue Valley School District may want to incorporate into its schools.
  - In this section, the focus was on a number of additional school security measures that the school district may want to consider to add to its safety strategy. Some measures were suggested by parents and residents in the aftermath of the Newtown incident. Some were suggested by staff and administration as they looked at best practice research of what other school districts are doing across the country in terms of school safety.
PART I: Evaluation of the current safety practices and measures at each of the District's schools and campuses

Over the course of several weeks, Blue Valley district office staff visited every campus in the district and talked with building principals and other leaders to evaluate current safety practices, environments, and measures. These visits included all schools, the ACCESS House, the Wilderness Science Center, the Center for Advanced Professional Studies (CAPS), Blue Valley Academy (BVA), the not-yet-opened Early Childhood Center, and District Center West. The committee developed a scoring rubric designed to evaluate important and needed elements of a comprehensive safety strategy. The findings of these evaluations are as follows:

Facility Evaluation

- Slightly less than half of Blue Valley School District facilities (49%) have unobstructed views of the front drive and front entry door of the facility. Approximately 15% of the facilities utilize a front entry camera with monitors in the office. Three facilities had a front entry “chime” to alert the office staff of individuals entering the building.
- Schools are keeping exterior doors, other than the front entry door, locked throughout the facility. Many buildings (66%) have a specified procedure to double-check for locked doors throughout the day.
- Exterior card readers exist at outside physical education and recess doors at most (92%) buildings.
- Approximately half (49%) of the facilities have security cameras at locations other than the front entry door.
- Almost two thirds (62%) of the facilities have foyer doors that can be locked.
- Nearly all of the buildings have classroom doors that can only be locked from outside the classroom. Some classrooms exist with inside locks in a small number of the buildings.
Safety and Security Planning

• Nearly all facilities (92%) have code red plans and code red drills are practiced. Building leaders were asked to provide detailed information about the timing of plans and drills (class time, passing periods, recess, and lunch time). Buildings have excellent plans and have practiced code red drills during class time. The data on code red plans and drills at other times of the day indicated a smaller number of buildings had not prepared for drills at those times, including recess and lunch time.
• Most facilities (85%) have distributed walkie-talkies to locations throughout the building. Most buildings (74%) have established a staff communication plan during code red situations.
• Approximately two-thirds (69%) of our facilities have first aid and emergency kits distributed throughout the building.
• At the elementary schools, slightly over half (55%) of the buildings have entry procedures for Y Care.
• Guest teachers are given a classroom door key in all schools. Nearly all buildings (86%) provide guest teachers with a summary of the safety plans for the building.
• Full-day school resource officers (SRO) and campus officers are found only at the high school level. Middle schools have half-day SRO presence. There is no designated SRO presence at the elementary level.
• Building leaders can provide specific evidence of staff emergency training and fire and tornado drill compliance.
• All schools have an identification plan to identify at-risk students who may have tendencies for violence.
• All but a few buildings (86%) have their Safe Schools Hotline poster displayed in the building.
After analyzing the data, the study committee recommends that the following changes and enhancements be considered for the Blue Valley School District:

- Improve the view line of the front drive and front entry way for office staffs at each of the school campuses. This may include reconstructing entry ways and/or the addition/repositioning of security cameras and monitors.
- Develop and enforce a more stringent protocol for securing all exterior entry doors during the school day.
- Develop and enforce more robust code red plans and drills. Plans should include expectations for a code red during recess, lunch times, passing periods and at other times when there is increased student movement within the building.
- Review each school campus’ communication plans to be used during code red situations.
- Establish appropriate expectations for Y-Care after-hours entry procedures.
- Develop and enforce an expectation that all guest teachers will be provided with safety plans for the school campus in which they are working.
PART II: Analysis of safety improvements that are already planned for the schools and campuses in the Blue Valley School District with particular attention placed on the timeframe for those improvements.

Blue Valley’s current entry way safety philosophy revolves around three primary tenets. One, all exterior doors are locked and secured against unauthorized entry at the start of the school day. The only entry that is not locked is the front or main entry. Two, all foot traffic into a building after the beginning of the school day must enter through the main entry and proceed through an office/reception area before gaining entry into the remainder of the building. This is what is known in Blue Valley as a “pinch point” entry. Three, adequate sight lines allowing front office staff to view incoming foot traffic into the building is a priority.

The Blue Valley School District has school campuses in various stages of implementing the physical improvements necessary to meet the expectations of the current safety philosophy. As a result of strong Blue Valley School District patron support for the 2005 and 2012 bond referendums, funds exist to make the needed safety philosophy improvements to all school campuses. Prior to the Sandy Hook tragedy, this work was scheduled to be complete by the 2018 school year. In an effort to make needed changes sooner, a study sub-committee analyzed each school campus’ physical environment, and has made several recommendations regarding the timing of entry way campus improvements.

Currently, there are sixteen school campuses that have pinch point entries already in place and are in no need of addition front entry work at the present time. Those campuses are, in alphabetical order: Aubry Bend Middle School, Blue Valley High School, Blue Valley North High School, Blue Valley Southwest High School, the Center for Advanced Professional Studies (CAPS), Cottonwood Point Elementary School, Harmony Elementary School, Heartland Elementary School, Mission Trail Elementary School, Oak Hill Elementary School, Overland Trail Elementary School,
Prairie Star Elementary School, Sunrise Point Elementary School, Stanley Elementary School, Timber Creek Elementary School, and Valley Park Elementary School.

Another set of school campuses that currently do not have pinch point entry ways are scheduled to receive construction improvements to their buildings during the summer of 2013. By August of 2013, the following school campuses will have pinch point entries: Blue River Elementary School, Blue Valley Academy, Cedar Hills Elementary School, Lakewood Elementary School, Lakewood Middle School, Liberty View Elementary School, and Sunset Ridge Elementary School.

Given the current and planned construction schedule, fourteen school campuses did not have pinch point entries currently or planned for the summer of 2013. The safety study sub-committee worked with staff from the Business and Finance Department, Facilities and Operations Department, and the Superintendent’s Office to bring a recommendation to the Blue Valley Board of Education to accelerate the construction of pinch point entries at those thirteen schools. Construction plans are being developed to move the remaining schools to an entry way completion date of August 2014. Those schools are, in alphabetical order with prior construction completion date in parenthesis: Blue Valley Middle School (2018); Blue Valley Northwest High School (2015); Blue Valley West High School (2014); Hilltop Campus (2014); Harmony Middle School (2016); Indian Valley Elementary School (2015); Leawood Middle School (2018); Morse Elementary School (2016); Oxford Middle School (2018); Overland Trail Middle School (2015); Pleasant Ridge Middle School (2018); Prairie Star Middle School (2017); and Stilwell Elementary School (2017).

In order to accomplish the changes in the construction timeframe for projects associated with the 2012 bond referendum and achieve pinch point entry way access at all of its school campuses in August of 2014, other projects that were planned during that timeframe had to be slightly delayed. Those projects include the following: library media upgrades moved from 2013/2014/2015 to 2016/2017/2018; Cottonwood Point Elementary School classroom size modifications from 2014 to 2015; flooring replacements from 2014 to 2015; K-5 playground upgrades from 2014 to 2015; track
maintenance from 2014 to 2015; summer pavement from 2014 to 2015; and Stanley Nature Park improvements from 2014 to 2015.

In addition to moving the entry way construction schedule forward so that all school campuses have a pinch point entry way by August 2014, the following schools were noted to have an immediate short term need due to having very limited visibility and no current pinch point access control: Blue Valley Middle School; Blue Valley Northwest High School; Blue Valley West High School; Harmony Middle School; Indian Valley Elementary School; Leawood Middle School; Morse Elementary School; Oxford Middle School; Overland Trail Middle School; Pleasant Ridge Middle School; Prairie Star Middle School; and Stilwell Elementary School. The study committee has recommended many of the following items for these schools in advance of pinch point entry way construction: new and/or additional camera monitoring of the front door and entry way; a chime system that alerts office staff when someone has walked through the front door; restricting front door entry to only one door after classes begin; new and/or improved video monitors located in easy to view areas for front office staff; and the ability to lock the inside vestibule door remotely if the situation warrants, thus restricting access to the school.
PART III: Analysis of additional layers of safety actions that the Blue Valley School District studied

In the days and weeks that followed the Sandy Hook tragedy, several new and additional school security measures were suggested for the Blue Valley School District. Some measures were suggested by parents and residents. Some were suggested by staff and administration as they looked at best practice research of what other school districts are doing across the country in terms of school safety. The safety committee studied each of these suggestions and makes the following recommendations.

Recommended Actions

PHYSICAL SECURITY

• Entry Camera: Main entry cameras would be installed in schools that currently do not have them, along with monitors in the front offices to allow administrative assistants to clearly see who is entering their school building. These cameras are part of the IP camera projects currently scheduled as bond funds become available.

• Acceleration of IP Camera Installation: $1,700,000 was allocated in the Bond for IP camera installations at all high and middle schools. These funds were budgeted across 7 years, i.e., $242,000 per year for this project. Blue Valley North High School was the first installation, and the winning bid was approximately 20% lower than anticipated. All other bids were significantly higher. If bids continue to come at this lower rate, there would be sufficient funds to consider IP camera installations in the elementary schools. The new systems would include cameras that could view each entrance on any computer in the building.

• Secure Exterior Door Indicator System: This system would allow a staff member to view a map of the building on a monitor. The map would identify exterior doors and their status, i.e., open, closed or latched. This system would be operated through our current card access system. The recommendation is to
study this system further to understand if this system is a beneficial enhancement to an overall safety philosophy.

TRAINING

• Training for Office Staff, Crisis Teams, New and Guest Teachers: The Safety & Security Department would conduct training specifically tailored to violence prevention and reaction to armed intruders.

• Code Red Lights-Out Protocol Enhancement: This measure would expand upon the current Code Red framework, outlining procedural options for various scenarios, e.g., a percentage of students are on playground, shots are fired in building but no Code Red announcement, teacher sees an armed person walking in hallway, etc.

• Increase the Number and Comprehensiveness of Code Red Drills: Currently, schools are required to conduct one Code Red drill per semester. This measure would increase the number and require that drills be taught and discussed during lunch, a passing period or other time when students are not all in classrooms.

Y-CARE

• Issuance of Access Cards to Y-Care Supervisors: This measure would allow Y-Care supervisors to take children to recess without having to prop a door open. This effort is currently underway.

• Installation of a Y-Care Doorbell-type System: After hours, parents/guardians would press a “doorbell” at the Y-Care entrance, notifying a Y-Care employee of their presence. The Y-Care employee would need to recognize the parent or guardian in order for them to gain entry into the building.

Other actions considered, but not recommended
The following are actions that we considered by the committee, but were not recommended for a variety of reasons.

PHYSICAL SECURITY

• Telephone Integration Intercom System: This system would allow a staff member to either make an announcement and/or activate a pre-recorded public address announcement to the school from any phone in the building in the event of an intrusion. A specific code would be needed to access this system.

• Lockdown Alert System: A manually activated lockdown warning system would be installed with manual pulls placed either throughout the school building (as with fire alarm pulls) or in key designated areas. When the system was activated via one of these pulls, a pre-recorded message would alert occupants to go to lockdown or Code Red Lights-Out status.

• Classroom Door Lock Switch To Allow Locking From Inside: Currently, many classrooms have doors that require a teacher to open the door and step into the hallway in order to lock the door, as the key entry is on the outer side. This measure would change the locks to allow for a teacher to lock his/her door from the inside without opening it.

• Laminated Glass: Laminated glass is a type of safety glass that holds together when shattered. In the event of breaking, it is held in place by an interlayer, typically of polyvinyl butyral (PVB), between its two or more layers of glass. A person attempting to shoot their way through laminated glass would be delayed in their efforts because of the nature of this glass. Commercial and residential laminated glass applications are not considered bullet-proof.

• Classroom Door Reinforcement: This measure consists of adding additional barricade measures to classroom doors for the purpose of complicating efforts by an intruder to enter an area where students are present during a lockdown.

• Buzzer System: This system would require all doors to the school be locked. Visitors would press a “doorbell” at the main entrance, notifying an administrative assistant of their presence. The assistant would either view the visitor on a
monitor or through a direct line of sight through the window. If they did not recognize the person they could communicate via an intercom, asking for reason for visit, identification, etc. Once the assistant was satisfied the visitor was legitimate they would push a button unlocking the door and allowing entry.

- **Classroom Door Lock Switch:** This measure consists of altering classroom door locks so that they cannot be changed to an unlocked status with the use of a key. The key would only allow a person to open the locked door, but once the key is removed, the door defaults to a locked status.

- **Metal Detectors:** A metal detector would be placed inside the main entrance to each school. Students, staff and visitors would pass through the detector prior to moving beyond the main entryway. These detectors would be monitored by a security guard. Each person would remove metallic items from their pockets, keys, belts, etc., before passing through the detector. Backpacks and purses would either be hand-searched or put through an x-ray machine.

- **Perimeter Fencing:** A 6 foot chain link fence would encircle the outer perimeter of each school’s boundaries. Gates would be placed at each entrance and visitors would be checked by a guard prior to entering.

- **Automatic Section Door Closing:** This proposed measure would create control switches that would allow a staff member to close and lock interior fire doors, thus isolating various parts of the building from an armed intruder. The Overland Park Fire Department has indicated they would prefer we not lock these doors at any time, as it would hinder their ability to move freely throughout a school in the event of a fire. It should be noted that interior fire doors may only be locked by code if there still exist multiple exits for the isolated area.

**SECURITY PERSONNEL**

- **Campus Officer for Elementary Schools:** This person would be a Blue Valley Campus Police Officer whose primary responsibility is the safety of our 20 elementary schools. The officer would patrol elementary schools, responding to calls for assistance including custody issues, suspicious persons, ambulance,
and other safety related concerns. The officer would provide “Officer Friendly” safety education classes upon request and serve as a crime prevention expert for the Campus Police Department.

- **Armed Staff:** Administrators and teachers would be armed with handguns and given ongoing training to ensure proficiency.

- **Armed Guards:** School resource officers are already assigned to high and middle schools. Armed guards would constitute 20 additional non-commissioned, security personnel assigned to elementary schools.

- **Additional School Resource Officers:** This plan would add a school resource officer to each elementary school and make the current school resource officers at the middle schools full time rather than half time. This plan would be subject to the agreement of the local police departments, whose costs would be greater than those of the school district.
Part V: Other Considerations

While this study has focused on many of the physical improvements that can be made to the district’s school campuses to make them more secure, the foundation of the district's current school safety philosophy needs to be remembered; for it is upon this foundation that all other safety measures that the district utilizes on its school campuses either stand or fall.

In the aftermath of the April 1999 incident in Columbine, Colorado, a large body of research has informed school districts, law enforcement professionals, and safety experts about a comprehensive school safety approach that can minimize the possibility of a violent incident on a school campus. This research, collected and analyzed largely by the United States Secret Service and the United States Department of Education in the Safe School Initiative Study², has informed practices that have become embedded in the culture of the Blue Valley School District, and which needs to be re-communicated to parents, patrons, staff and community. At the heart of the district’s efforts is a prevention philosophy modeled after the Secret Service Study; that is, to identify, assess and manage potentially violent or troublesome persons or situations before a violent incident is committed.

There have been a myriad of safety-related activities that have been put in to place in Blue Valley over the years: job tasks have been changed, training has occurred, and communication has been made more effective, all toward the goal of identifying, assessing and managing potentially violent offenders before an incident is committed. The current overall school safety philosophy that is rooted in the importance of relationships, interdependencies and communication between students, all staff members, school resource officers, city and county police departments, the mental health community, and campus police officers cannot be understated. In the analysis of any current or future changes to the physical environments of our schools, this

foundation needs to be re-affirmed, nurtured and possibly enhanced in order for the district’s school campuses to continue to be the secure environments they are for the students and staff.

The School Safety Study Steering Committee made a special acknowledgement of this fact, and recommends to the Board of Education a continued emphasis on this philosophy in addition to the recommendations pertaining to the physical environments of the school campuses contained in this report.