



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF  
**School Psychologists**

## Questions to Ask When Considering Armed Assailant Training

### Emergency Operations Plan Development/Revision

1. How does this fit into a comprehensive school emergency operations plan (EOP)?
2. Have all relevant stakeholders been consulted and involved in reviewing possible programs/approaches?
  - a. Superintendent and district leadership staff
  - b. Law enforcement (district and community law enforcement agencies; school resource officers)
  - c. District safety and security officers
  - d. Mental health professionals (school psychologists, counselors, and social workers)
  - e. Health Services
  - f. Principals and teachers
  - g. Parents and students (as age appropriate)
  - h. School Board members
3. Is this supported by a needs assessment that determined the most likely crises to occur in the district?
4. Has a cost-benefit analysis of the potential training been done, considering financial costs in relation to the likelihood of a particular crisis?
5. What evidence is there that the procedures being considered have been evaluated for effectiveness?
6. What evidence is there that the procedures are aligned with the guidelines of the U.S. Department of Education (2013) and allied professional organizations (National Association of School Psychologists and National Association of School Resource Officers (2014)? Note: The US Dept of Ed. does not mandate school districts to conduct armed assailant/active shooter exercises.
7. Are the procedures in compliance with state laws and school board policies?

### Designing and Selecting the Types of Threat-and Hazard-Specific Annexes and Drills

1. Does the training teach multiple types of annexes to respond to an armed assailant scenario (i.e. lockdown, evacuation, etc.)?
2. Does the training consider all available types of drills to teach participants the appropriate annexes?
3. Does it follow a hierarchy from simple low-cost discussion-based activities to operations-based activities?
  - a. Orientations
  - b. Workshops
  - c. Tabletops
  - d. Drills
  - e. Advanced Simulation Drills and Exercises

4. Has the readiness and trauma histories of the staff members and students been assessed before determining what drills are most appropriate?
5. How will the types of drills be selected to use with students?
6. What accommodations will be made in the drills for students with physical, sensory or other disabilities?
7. Will simulations be used? Will students and staff practice “counter-type” strategies (i.e. throwing books, chairs, backpacks, etc.), if applicable? If so, how will they be designed to be developmentally appropriate?
8. If simulations will be used, has the district consulted with their legal team and insurance provider to identify possible risks and liabilities (i.e. there have been lawsuits filed by school staff for physical injuries and emotional trauma as a result of forced participation in armed assailant/active shooter exercises).
9. Has the district set monies aside to repair possible damages to building and district goods as a result of a simulation exercise?

### **Designing Student Instruction**

1. Is there a lesson plan for providing developmentally appropriate training for students?
2. Are instructional experts and school employed mental health professionals involved in designing and implementing developmentally appropriate curriculums for elementary, middle and high school students?
3. Does the plan identify potential training goals, objectives, measurable outcomes, and obstacles?
4. What accommodations will be made in the lessons for students with special needs?
5. How will teachers receive critical background information, including:
  - a. Considerations for students with physical, sensory or other disabilities
  - b. Developmental guidelines for instruction and drills, i.e. typical knowledge/understanding; typical response capabilities; age-appropriate explanations, procedures, activities and drills.
  - c. Recognizing common trauma reactions to help identify when a student, fellow staff member or him/herself needs to be removed from a drill.
  - d. Identifying someone that needs mental health support after the drill.

### **Physical and Mental Health Considerations**

1. Does the training balance the need to empower school staff while minimizing potential harm (e.g., triggering stressful or traumatic reactions to live simulation drills)?
2. What are the considerations to mitigate potential physical harm during drills?
3. What financial and medical support is available to address potential physical damage during the drills?
4. What are the mental health supports to mitigate potential psychological harm, such as identifying prior traumatic experiences in participants?
5. What emotional supports will be in place during and after drills for students and staff?

### **Opt Out Options**

1. How can students or staff members opt out of drills or simulations?
2. If staff or students opt out, how will they receive comparable, less intense instruction?
3. Can parents opt their student out of the drills?

## Communication

1. What is the parent and community education and communication plan prior to implementing the training?
2. Will parent consent be obtained prior to student participation in the training? Will it be active or passive?
3. What is the parent and community education and communication plan whenever drills are conducted?
4. How will parents and the community receive communication during an actual armed assailant crisis?

## Evaluation

1. What is the feedback and evaluation process from participants and parents?
2. How will the knowledge and training be maintained and built upon?
3. How will new staff members and students be trained?
4. What is the evaluation process for determining the efficacy of the training and assessing ongoing and/or changing preparedness training needs?

## References

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