



Tabletop Exercise: Anonymous Tip Says Student Plans to Bring Weapon to School

The anonymous tip came in at 1:43 A.M. but was not reviewed by office staff until school doors had already been open for an hour.

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Scenario-based training exercises, sometimes referred to as tabletop exercises, bring together a wide variety of stakeholders to test a school or campus' emergency plans.

Practicing your campus' response to a wide variety of emergencies is essential to keeping staff, students, patients and visitors safe. Since full-scale exercises pose significant challenges for many organizations and require lots of resources, conducting a tabletop exercise is a solid alternative that can be done on a regular basis.

Since October, Guy Bliesner, an analyst for the Idaho Office of School Safety and Security (IOSSS), has provided *Campus Safety* with incidents that happened at Idaho schools in the last five years, how administrators responded, and what changes were implemented as a result.

Each scenario sets the scene for the day and describes the event in detail, along with the actual outcome of the scenario and findings from an after-action review. They are designed to be completed in 10-15 minutes as part of an administrative meeting.

The next scenario is detailed below.

Scenario

- **Season:** Winter
- **Day:** Tuesday
- **Time:** 7:09 A.M.
- **Weather:** Clear and cold
- **Temperature:** -3 degrees
- **School type:** High school (grades 9-12)
- **Event:** You are notified by your school secretary that a message left on the school phone message system said a specifically named student (a recent transfer to your school) was planning to bring a weapon to school with the intent to cause harm. The caller indicated that the information was found on a social media page of the named student. The call came in at 1:43 A.M. and was anonymous. You are unfamiliar with the student

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named. Your school has been open at multiple entry points for early morning activities (sports team practice, music, drama and three scheduled early morning or 0-hour classes) since 6:00 A.M. with approximately 200 students in the building. **What steps should you take?**

How the School Handled the Situation

The principal called the cell phone of the school resource officer (SRO) assigned to the school but the SRO was involved in traffic enforcement in the school zone and didn't take the call. The principal then tried to contact the school counselor assigned to the student but the counselor wasn't at school yet as staff contract hours begin at 7:30 A.M.

The principal then contacted the other two members of the school administration team and a brief conversation was held. The student's profile on the Student Information System (S.I.S) was accessed but was lacking a photograph. The student's home phone was also called with no answer. By 7:26 A.M., students started to enter the school from the student parking lot and buses were set to arrive within the next 5-7 minutes.

At 7:29 A.M., the SRO returned the principal's call. Buses arrived and nearly 400 students began to enter the school from the bus drop-off. The SRO was then en route and four other law enforcement officers (LEOs) were dispatched to the school. At 7:33 A.M., the LEOs started to arrive on campus as approximately 900 students were now moving throughout the school with more on the way.

At 7:35 A.M., a brief meeting was held in the main office. The SRO and a school counselor started to search for the social media post. LEOs were paired with a school admin or counselor and two pairs began to move through the common areas looking for the student. One other pair was using the school's video surveillance system and the last pair went to the student's assigned first-period class. This pair asked the teacher to identify the student when he arrives.

The overall effort was hampered by the lack of a photograph. The time was now 7:53 A.M. and both student body and staff became uneasy after noticing the LE presence in the school. Numerous questions were sent to the school office via intercom, phone, and in-person, overwhelming the office staff.

At 8:00 A.M., the first bell rang and students began to move to their classes. The student was then identified in his classroom and escorted to the office. In the meantime, the SRO found the social media post and while concerning, determined there was not a specific threat against the school or to use a weapon.

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After-Action Review Findings

An after-action review (AAR) of a campus' response should always be completed following an incident. See [Part 1](#) for questions that IOSSS says should be used to review a response.

In this case, the AAR determined the incident response put staff and students unnecessarily at risk. It also indicated the need for a developed policy, process and procedure that would mitigate several noted exposures. Here are changes the school made following the incident:

- A curated tip-line or reporting system would have acted on this report when it was made in the early morning and the situation would have likely been resolved prior to impacting the beginning of the school day. Such systems were researched and then one was implemented.
- Communication processes with the SRO and LE, in general, were reviewed and updated.
- As part of the registration process, a student photograph requirement was added to the S.I.S.
- The open nature of the school in the morning prior to the beginning of the school day greatly increased the number of [access points](#) for a potential threat. A significant number of doors into the building are secured with students routed through a limited number of monitored doorways for early morning access.
- Students continued to arrive throughout the incident. A [mass text notification system](#) to notify students was developed. A procedure for [notifying bus drivers](#) not to deliver students to a school was also developed.
- Procedures for an enhanced security posture prior to the beginning of the instructional day were developed.
- A Behavioral [Threat Assessment](#) and Management procedure was developed, and a team was identified and trained.

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Tabletop Exercise

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Rock, A. (2021, February 19). Tabletop Exercise 9: Anonymous Tip Says Student Plans to Bring Weapon to School. <https://www.campussafetymagazine.com/news/k-12-tabletop-exercise-9-anonymous-tip/99164/>

KCSS Resources

Emergency Guide: <https://kycss.org/emergency-procedures/emergency-guide/>

School Violence: <https://kycss.org/school-safety-issues/school-violence/>

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