



**Tabletop Exercise: Student on School Roof Threatens Suicide**

A substitute teacher informs an administrator that one of her students climbed onto the roof and is threatening to jump if anyone attempts to make contact. What should they do?

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Mental health continues to be a major concern among campus protection professionals. Nearly 60% of college students have received mental health care during their K-12 years, according to a recent study. Additionally, suicide threats were the second most common tip reported to Michigan's OK2Say anonymous tip line in 2022.

In fact, since 2013, suicide threats have been the top concern flagged each year by Safe2Tell Colorado, an anonymous tip line service. During the 2012-13 school year, there were 421 tips related to suicide and self-harm. In the 2018-19 school year, that number jumped to 3,668.

While much of emergency planning for schools focuses on active threats, these concerning and overwhelming statistics are proof that mental health and student supports need to be at the top of the list for making schools safer.

An effective way to test a campus' readiness to respond to mental health concerns is through scenario-based training exercises, often referred to as tabletop exercises. These exercises bring together a wide variety of stakeholders to test a school or campus' emergency response to a wide variety of incidents.

In the real-life tabletop scenario discussed below, which involves a student who threatened to jump off a roof, you'll see that many campus employees played a role in the response, emphasizing the need to involve an array of employees in these exercises.

This scenario, provided by Guy Bliesner, an analyst for the Idaho Office of School Safety and Security (IOSSS), 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.

**Scenario**

- **Season:** Late spring
- **Day:** Wednesday
- **Time:** 10:37 A.M.
- **Weather:** Sunny
- **Temperature:** 47 degrees
- **School type:** High school

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- **Event:** The school office is notified by a student runner that a substitute teacher needs help with a belligerent student. The substitute teacher is on her first day and the student has a known and documented history of defiance. An administrator responds to the 3rd-floor classroom to assist and finds the class and substitute teacher in the hallway. The substitute teacher says that the student found an unlocked window and climbed out onto a parapet overlooking the football field and is threatening to jump if anyone attempts to make contact. **What steps should be taken?**

### How the School Handled the Situation

The administrator contacted local law enforcement through the school resource officer (SRO). The entire facility was placed into a “Hall Check” response to curtail normal student movement, confining students to their respective classrooms. Since the suicidal student was directly above one of the primary evacuation routes and in full view of the primary assembly area, the school could not be effectively evacuated. Students in the affected wings of the building on all three floors were moved to unaffected parts of the building out of view of the incident and the response.

The SRO and an assistant principal started an initial dialog with the student in an attempt to build rapport while the rest of the students were being moved. City Crisis Negotiators arrived approximately 30 minutes later and were able to support the SRO and the assistant principal in their efforts.

The standoff persisted for nearly two hours, resulting in large disruptions to school operations, including mid-day bussing, lunch service, and class changes. It also garnered a significant level of media interest.

Law enforcement worked in conjunction with a district spokesperson to give clear information and control rumors. Student social media content generation was significant and uncontrollable, creating a significant barrier to getting clear information to the parents and community.

Eventually, the SRO, assistant principal and the Crisis Negotiation team were able to convince the student to come back into the school and receive a medical and mental health evaluation.

### 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.

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### Tabletop Exercise

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Overall, the AAR determined the school emergency team was faced with a dynamic and unusual situation and handled the incident appropriately and in a manner that protected student safety.

As with any incident, the AAR revealed several areas of potential improvement or planning gaps:

- High levels of disinformation from student social media accounts effectively buried the traditional media outlets and bypassed the standard informational gatekeepers and fact-checkers.
- Alternative evacuation plans and assembly points were developed to allow for an evacuation when a primary route is compromised.
- Meal service, medication delivery and behavioral supports for students developed alternative plans for service delivery during an extended Hall Check or Lockdown.
- Transportation coordination became a designated role within the district response plan as a result of the continual close management needed for bus cancellation, routing and rerouting.

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*If you or someone you know might be at risk of suicide, call, text, or chat with a 988 Lifeline counselor for help during difficult moments anytime, day or night.*

Rock, A. (2024, January 22). Tabletop Exercise: Student on School Roof Threatens Suicide.

CampusSafety. <https://www.campussafetymagazine.com/news/k-12-tabletop-exercise-student-threatens-suicide/100476/>

#### KCSS Resources

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

Suicide Prevention: <https://kycss.org/school-safety-issues/suicide/>

[Suicide Prevention Training for Educators](#)

[Suicide Prevention Resources](#)

[Suicide Links](#)

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