

School Security & Safety Review

In Response to the November 1, 2016 Tragedy
at Abbotsford Senior Secondary School

June 20, 2017

Respectfully submitted by

Ray Velestuk, Secretary-Treasurer

Dr. Angus MacKay, Assistant Superintendent

June 20, 2017

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On November 1, 2016, a tragic event occurred in the Abbotsford School District. Two female Grade 9 students at Abbotsford Senior Secondary School were stabbed by an intruder, who had no connection to the school, in a random, unprovoked attack, resulting in one fatality. That such an event happened within the walls of a school was shocking and terrifying. In the days and weeks that followed, the school district provided support to both the students and staff at the school and the community rallied together to support the families and the school community.

Following the incident, Superintendent Kevin Godden committed to a review of the incident, including the response provided by the district.

The primary focus of this report is to review the district's crisis response procedures and practices and to consider the overall safety of the school environment. While key attention is paid to the November 1st incident, it also examines the issue of school safety from an overall district perspective.

Information for this review was gathered from both school district sources and external agencies involved in the incident. In addition, an opportunity for online feedback was provided along with a public information meeting that was held January 25, 2017.

Upon review of all of the information collected, numerous observations were noted in each of the following areas:

- School lockdowns and access to schools during a lockdown,
- Emergency/crisis management,
- Management of a site during an emergency,
- Communications,
- Overall security and access to schools and school property, and
- Contracted use of schools by third parties

These observations led to the development of 31 recommendations which are listed below.

It is recommended that by June 30, 2018 the district consider a review of the progress made on the recommendations outlined in the report.

1. The district should review how the lockdown siren at Abbotsford Senior Secondary School works and in consultation with school administration, make appropriate improvements. Such recommendations should be applied to other schools as necessary.
2. The district should review its lockdown procedures and consider how to manage a lockdown in situations where the teacher or supervising adult is not present when the lockdown is initiated.
3. The district should review its lockdown procedures in dealing with third party tenants and other school visitors.

4. The district should give consideration to how to best deal with personal issues (i.e. access to washrooms, water and snacks) during a lockdown.
5. The district should review its lockdown protocols for students who are outside of the school building when a lockdown is initiated.
6. The district should review how the notification of emergencies is communicated to staff within each school.
7. The district should consider equipping classrooms with first aid kits and information on how to provide basic first aid. Additional training for staff and possibly students could also be considered.
8. The district should develop and implement a streamlined process for schools and departments to notify senior management of emergency situations. In addition, clerical staff need to post cell numbers of district responders (senior management and district Learning Support Services administrators) near their desks.
9. The district should review and update, in collaboration with relevant community partners, the lockdown protocols to ensure first responders have ease of access to the school during a lockdown and that school personnel can adequately identify first responders and other personnel during an emergency situation.
10. The district should ensure principals have keys to access all spaces within the building.
11. The district should review how traffic on a school site could be managed during emergency situations. This should include the coordination of a dedicated muster point for parent information during emergency situations.
12. The district should ensure that all department (non-school based) employees receive appropriate emergency procedure training related to school and district emergencies.
13. The district should ensure preliminary reports for WorkSafeBC are undertaken and approved within 48 hours of a serious incident as this is a requirement of WorkSafeBC.
14. The district should endeavor to have multiple administrators trained in crisis response with an understanding of the crisis response protocols. This will ease the burden on existing staff when support is required at a school.
15. The district should review how to schedule the time of staff who provide support to students, parents and staff in serious crisis situations to better ensure they remain effective for the duration of the support period.
16. The district should review cell phone reception in all schools, create awareness of poor coverage areas and ensure that reasonable remedies are applied.
17. The district should review its capacity to respond to simultaneous emergency incidents.
18. The district should review and clarify the role of the Board of Education and individual board members during significant emergency situations.
19. The district should review its communication plans with respect to emergency communications to parents, students, staff and the community in general.

20. The district should review the communication department procedures and ensure there are backup personnel assigned to manage or assist in managing emergency communications.
21. The district should review its plans for managing external media organizations during emergencies or crisis events.
22. The district should ensure that processes exist to communicate with employees, including substitute employees, during any potential emergency situation.
23. The district should review its capacity to manage communications in response to multiple simultaneous incidents.
24. The district should consider producing a “lockdown” instructional video, in conjunction with the Abbotsford Police Department.
25. The district should continue to provide education programs to students on the appropriate use of social media.
26. The district should review how access to/from portable classrooms is managed and consider improvements if necessary.
27. The district should review and communicate the procedures for visitors attending schools.
28. The district should review the location of school offices and consider building security improvements where feasible.
29. The district should consider the installation of a barrier between the Fraser Valley Regional Library and the Abbotsford Senior Secondary library, to ensure the policies designed to control and manage access to schools can be maintained.
30. The district should improve external signage at Abbotsford Senior Secondary to better direct the general public to the appropriate services and corresponding building entrances.
31. The district should revise rental agreements (License to Occupy/Leases) with third parties to ensure incidents are reported to school principals on a timely basis.

Throughout development of this report, the dedication, commitment and expertise of staff in the district was evident. In addition, the level of community support was overwhelming and heartwarming.

1. Background Information

On November 1, 2016 a tragic event occurred in the Abbotsford School District. Two female Grade 9 students at Abbotsford Senior Secondary School were stabbed by an intruder, who had no connection to the school, in a random, unprovoked attack, resulting in one fatality. That such an event happened within the walls of a school was shocking and terrifying. In the days and weeks that followed, the school district provided support to both the students and staff at the school and the community rallied together to support the families and the school community.

Following the incident, Superintendent Kevin Godden committed to a review of the incident, including the response provided by the district. Ray Velestuk, Secretary-Treasurer and Dr. Angus MacKay, Assistant Superintendent (Middle) were assigned responsibility to undertake this review and present a report along with any recommendations.

2. Scope of Report

The primary focus of this report is to review the district's crisis response procedures and practices and to consider the overall safety of the school environment. While key attention is paid to the November 1st incident, it also examines the issue of school safety from an overall district perspective.

a. Terms of Reference

The task for the review team was to gather the facts surrounding the incident and the related response and to consider the following guiding questions:

- Are the current emergency procedures in the district effective?
- Are school staff appropriately trained in following these procedures?
- Are school security measures in the district appropriate?

b. Process

Information for this review was gathered from both school district sources and external agencies involved in the incident. Appendix 1 provides a reference to both the names and titles of the individuals referenced in the report.

A public consultation meeting was held on January 25, 2017, at WJ Mouat Secondary School (Appendix 2) to allow community members to find out about current safety and security protocols and ask questions of district staff. The district also collected feedback on school safety and security through online submissions until February 15, 2017. Approximately thirty-five people provided information through these processes.

The following report provides a summary of the incident and the subsequent response taken by the school district. It presents observations obtained from all of the input collected and concludes with 31 recommendations. The report commenced in December 2016 and was to be concluded in the spring of 2017.

3. Context

The district services a wide and dispersed audience within the city of Abbotsford (pop. 134,000). The district's forty-six schools serve almost 19,600 full and part time students at thirty elementary schools, eight middle schools, one combined middle-secondary school, and seven secondary schools.

The school district is governed by an elected seven-member board of education with a superintendent of schools designated as the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the district.

Besides being one of the fastest growing and vibrant communities in British Columbia, Abbotsford is also the 8th largest school district in the province. As the largest employer in the city, the district employs over 2,200 full and part time teaching and support staff who are committed to providing learners of all ages and abilities with a range of choices and the best possible educational support.

Abbotsford Senior Secondary School is a grade 9 to 12 school that serves approximately 1,000 students through a principal, two vice-principles and approximately eighty teachers and support staff. In 2012 the school received a significant renovation and addition which included a neighbourhood learning centre housing a number of community based services. It also includes a community public library operated by the Fraser Valley Regional Library. The library occupies a shared space with the school library, although they are operated and staffed independently.

The district has a Critical Incident Response Team (CIRT) which responds to all emergency situations in order to support a school through a crisis, while liaising with appropriate community agencies. CIRT is part of the Learning Support Services (LSS) Department and consists of helping teachers and a Child and Youth Mental Health (CYMH) clinician. It is led by the Director of Learning Support Services (off site tasks) and the Vice Principal of Learning Support Services. (onsite tasks).

The Incident at Abbotsford Senior Secondary School

4. The Incident

Shortly after 2:00 p.m. on Tuesday November 1, 2016 an intruder entered Abbotsford Senior Secondary School from the adjacent Fraser Valley Regional Library. He proceeded through the public and school libraries, which share space, into the school's rotunda area where he attacked two grade nine girls with a knife.

Staff in the school office and around the rotunda area witnessed the attack and responded immediately by initiating emergency protocols. The school was immediately put into lockdown and 911 was called.

Nearby school staff approached the scene, where the perpetrator was directed to drop his weapon, and was immediately restrained by school staff including the Principal and Vice Principal until police arrived. Two students had been attacked with one student escaping into a nearby computer room and the other remaining at the scene. Members of the school staff team began administering first aid to the student who was at the scene. School staff that provided first aid acted swiftly and appropriately in responding to this emergency situation.

At the time, the staff attending to the student in the rotunda area were unaware that a second student had been injured and had fled to a nearby computer room. Staff and students in the computer room provided first aid to this student.

The school administration made numerous attempts to contact a member of senior management to advise of the incident and request additional support. Initial contact was made with the Assistant Superintendent (Middle) who immediately contacted the district Critical Incident Response Team (CIRT) and headed to the school.

Emergency responders were onsite within five minutes. The first on scene was the Abbotsford Police Department (APD), both uniformed and plain clothes officers, followed by paramedics. School staff let these officers into the building as the school was in lockdown. Within minutes, the Abbotsford Police Department took the perpetrator into custody and out of the building.

Shortly after the incident, both students were transported to hospital where one of the students succumbed to her injuries. The other student remained in critical condition.

The school remained on lockdown while police completed their sweep of the building. During this time, the district Critical Incident Response Team (CIRT) consisting of four staff and one

Child and Youth Mental Health (CYMH) clinician were deployed and worked with police and school administration to develop communications for students and staff as well as begin the overall incident response plan.

During the lockdown, parents and community members gathered in an area of the school parking lot and Abbotsford Arts Centre, supported by educational and operations management staff from the school district. District staff helped keep parents informed about their children's safety and with information about the lockdown.

The lockdown lasted until approximately 5:00 p.m. Once it concluded, students were released from the school and school administration convened a staff meeting to debrief the events of the afternoon at which time they were informed of the tragic student fatality.

The school was closed for the rest of the week while the Integrated Homicide Investigation Team (IHIT) conducted their investigation.

5. Management of the Incident (District level)

The district's Communications Manager was notified of the incident by the Abbotsford Police Department at approximately 2:13 p.m. She immediately briefed senior management at the School Board Office (SBO) of the police report. With the Superintendent out of the country, Assistant Superintendent (Middle), was serving as Acting Superintendent. He received a call from school staff indicating a serious incident had occurred and that they needed immediate district assistance.

The Acting Superintendent immediately called the Learning Support Services Department (LSS), specifically the Vice-Principal of LSS/Safe Schools Coordinator (VP of LSS) and the Director of Learning Support Services (Director of LSS), to advise them of the situation. He requested them to immediately meet at Abbotsford Senior Secondary School (ASSS). Accompanied by Associate Superintendent of Human Resources, the Acting Superintendent attended Abbotsford Senior Secondary, while the Secretary-Treasurer, Assistant Superintendent (Elementary) and Communications Manager remained at the School Board Office (SBO) to manage communications.

Vice Chair of the Board of Education, Cindy Schafer, was at the SBO for a scheduled policy committee meeting, which was cancelled due to the unfolding emergency situation. She gathered with the management team to assist with the development of immediate communications. (It is noted that the Board Chair was out of town during this incident.)

The Secretary-Treasurer made attempts to contact the Superintendent, who was on a flight out of the country. As soon as his plane landed and he was apprised of the situation, the Superintendent made immediate arrangements to return to Abbotsford. He returned late in the evening on November 1, 2016.

The Communications Manager advised the reception desk at the SBO that an incident had occurred at Abbotsford Senior Secondary and that no information was to be released, other than an active lockdown and police investigation was taking place.

At 2:50 p.m., an emergency broadcast about the lockdown was added to the district and Abbotsford Senior Secondary and Abbotsford Middle school websites, and pushed to social media platforms.

Throughout the crisis, the communication officers with the Abbotsford Police Department (one onsite at the school and one at APD headquarters) regularly updated the district's Communications Manager. Given the gravity of the situation, the Secretary-Treasurer requested retired communications manager (Dave Stephen), to come to the School Board Office to assist with communications and media relations.

Shortly after 3:30 p.m., the district became apprised of a video of the incident circulating on some social networks. It came to the district's attention that this video was filmed by a student and was being shared widely online and with media outlets. The Secretary-Treasurer contacted the Ministry of Education to seek assistance in getting the video taken down from these social networks.

Throughout the afternoon and evening, there was ongoing communications between Acting Superintendent, who was onsite at Abbotsford Senior Secondary, and the Secretary-Treasurer, who remained at the school board office. An Assistant Deputy Minister with the Ministry of Education was also in contact with these senior district staff members, as was the Superintendent, while he waited for a return flight to Abbotsford.

At 4:26 p.m., an email message was sent to all Principals and Vice-Principals via the Secretary-Treasurer's office, advising them of the incident and active lockdown and police investigation (Appendix 3). At 5:00 p.m., a broadcast message from the Board of Education was added to the district website and pushed to all school websites and social media applications. The message was also circulated as a press release to media outlets. It was around this time that the district was advised that one of the students had passed away.

At 7:00 p.m., the Abbotsford Police Department held a press conference where it was publicly announced that one student had succumbed to her injuries and the other remained in critical condition in hospital. The Secretary-Treasurer, Assistant Superintendent (Elementary), Communications Manager and Board Vice Chair attended the press conference. The APD advised that one suspect was in custody and the incident appeared to be a random act. The Chief of Police also addressed the video of the incident that was continuing to circulate on social media. He made a public plea to stop showing/sharing the content immediately. Unfortunately, multiple media outlets disregarded this request.

6. Response to the Incident - (School Level)

Following the lockdown, the District Critical Incident Response Team (CIRT) worked with police, school administration/counselling team, and CYMH to ensure care was in place to support students and staff. An emergency staff meeting was held in the Abbotsford Arts Centre, where staff were notified of the incident including the student fatality.

District staff followed the approved protocols for Lockdown (Intruder), in accordance with its' Standard Emergency Operating Procedures, Appendix 3: Emergency Actions/Crisis Management.

The District Vice-Principal of Learning Support Services, school administration/counselling team, and CYMH, as well as members of the senior management team immediately began planning the supports that would be required for the following days. Additional school based administrators were brought in from other schools in the district, and a former administrator who was employed in a neighbouring school district returned to assist because of his familiarity with the school staff and students.

The Abbotsford Police Department advised the team that the school was to remain closed, as it was the site of an active police investigation. It was subsequently decided at a senior management debrief meeting on November 2nd that the school would remain closed until Monday, November 6, 2016.

To provide support for students and parents, the district arranged access to St. Ann's Roman Catholic Church, which is across the street from the school. This is in accordance with the district's Crisis Response Protocols. Some of the district's helping teachers worked with community counselors and other support personnel to help students and parents who came to share their grief. Approximately 350-400 people attended this site for support.

In addition, the district had support personnel (i.e. onsite counseling provided by the employee assistance plan trauma specialist and APD Victim Services), available in the Abbotsford Arts Centre for ASSS staff, ensuring care for staff was accessible.

Students set up a memorial area outside of the Abbotsford Arts Centre on November 2nd. This was the closest location available to the school due to the police tape surrounding the entrance to the school. With each day the memorial grew, attracting the attention of students, parents and community members. The memorial also attracted significant media attention who were relentless in attempts to interview students, parents and staff. On multiple occasions, district staff requested these media outlets to vacate the school property as is school district policy.

Cheri Lovre, M.S., and the founder of the Crisis Management Institute, was contacted and brought in to assist the district in the management of the response to the incident. She worked with district staff and the school administration/counselling team to ensure adequate trauma response would be provided.

CIRT staff also provided support for Abbotsford Middle School staff and students, in accordance with the district's Crisis Response Protocols, as well as reached out to other schools and/or individual staff as appropriate.

A parent forum was planned for parents and students on the evening of Friday, November 4th. This was a closed meeting for ASSS parents and staff. The forum was well attended and provided parents and students an opportunity to hear from various officials including Board Vice Chair Cindy Schafer, Superintendent Kevin Godden, Principal Rob Comeau, Mayor Henry Braun along with Inspector Carol Powell from the Abbotsford Police Department. Cheri Lovre facilitated an open question and answer period for parents and students to ask questions and address triggers that are often noticeable following traffic events. Following the forum, parents and staff were allowed to enter the school and go to their lockers to collect any personal items as needed (classrooms remained closed). A large contingent of parents, students, and teachers gathered in the rotunda area (scene of the incident) for the first time since the November 1st event to be together as a community and prepare emotionally for the reopening of school the following Monday. The students held a candlelight vigil on the school's sports field.

A public Community Forum was also held on Saturday November 5th, at W.J. Mouat Secondary School with approximately 25 community members in attendance.

The district's relationships with community partners (CYMH, APD, St. John's Ambulance) allowed for seamless support in the days following the event. While it was an emotional time for the

affected students, parents and staff, it was also difficult for those providing assistance as they worked long hours and managed a roller coaster of emotions.

In order to reopen the school with a safe yet positive energy, many strategies were planned and implemented. These included having therapy dogs onsite, flowers in the rotunda, juice and cookies provided for students, morning greeters from Abbotsford Middle School (many previous teachers of Abbotsford Senior students), food and gatherings for staff, positive messaging, police presence, and a security guard who was to remain on campus for the remainder of the school year.

The district CIRT set up a student support center in the school library conference room, which offered the counselling services of 8-12 CYMH clinicians and Aboriginal CYMH daily, reducing support as the need lessened with time.

The WorkSafeBC prevention division was immediately notified of the incident in accordance with regulatory requirements. The district provided a preliminary investigation report to them on November 14, 2016, with the full investigation report delivered on November 29, 2016. No orders were issued by WorkSafeBC as a result of this incident.

Understandably, staff members had various experiences in dealing with their own emotional reactions and those of the students, and although they were exhausted emotionally and physically, did feel their needs were being met immediately following the incident.

7. Response to the Incident - (District Level)

Following the press conference held by the Abbotsford Police Department on November 1st, a letter from Acting Superintendent Dr. Angus MacKay, was circulated to all parents/guardians in the district, notifying them of the ASSS incident and student death (Appendix 4). A copy of the letter was also added to the district's website.

The senior management team, including the Superintendent who had returned the previous evening, and Communications Manager met in a morning debrief session to plan communication and district response plans. Updates and debriefing meetings took place regularly throughout the first couple weeks to ensure strong communication and planning around supporting the school community.

The Superintendent sent an email to all Principals and Vice-Principals and Operations Management (Appendix 5) to provide information that could be shared with staff. The

Secretary-Treasurer updated SBO staff of the incident and advised that media would be onsite throughout the week.

In response to the significant pressure for information, a press conference was held at the SBO on November 2nd at 10:30 a.m. Board Vice Chair Cindy Schafer and Superintendent Godden spoke and briefly responded to questions about the incident.

Throughout the entire incident, the district worked tirelessly to provide communication updates through its' website and social media platforms. Considering the matter was the subject of a police investigation, the district did seek guidance from the APD prior to issuing any messaging with details that specifically related to the incident.

At the November 15, 2016 Board of Education meeting the Superintendent advised that a report would be prepared to examine the district security and safety procedures and protocols.

A public consultation meeting was held on January 25, 2017, at WJ Mouat Secondary School to allow community members to find out about current safety and security protocols and ask questions of district staff (Appendix 2). The meeting included the following information:

- Review of Safety and Security
 - Generally, district-wide
 - Specifically, Abbotsford Senior Secondary School
- Review of Current Practices
- Scope of Safety and Security Review
- Review current policy, practices & procedures
- Feedback and suggestions from participants

The district also collected feedback on school safety and security through online submissions until February 15, 2017. In total approximately thirty community members contributed information through these processes.

8. Observations

The following observations were gathered from incident reports, debrief meetings, input and feedback from district staff and from parents and community members.

a. Observations related to the Lockdown

The following observations were made in regard to the lockdown at the school. This information was collected from meeting notes, debriefing meetings and other communications from staff.

- i. The automatic siren and message regarding the lockdown repeated for hours without any additional messaging from the school office. This repeating siren and message added to what was already a stressful situation.
- ii. In some classrooms the teacher was not immediately present when the lockdown was announced. Students did a good job in managing this issue as they knew what to do in the situation because of previous lockdown drills. In lockdown situations like this one, that last many hours, having no teacher or other staff member available for students could potentially be problematic.
- iii. One of the students, in escaping the attacker, ran to the computer lab adjacent to the library. The librarian initiated lock down protocols in the library, while the students laid down the victim and began first aid. There was no phone, intercom or cell signal in the computer lab, which prevented first aid personnel from knowing that there was a second victim. After a period of time, one of the students in the computer lab went to the door to assess the situation and when he saw first responders he opened the door and notified them of a second victim.
- iv. The lockdown began shortly after 2:00 p.m. and lasted until approximately 5:15p.m. Those involved in a lockdown that lasts several hours may require washroom facilities, food, water or medical attention. It was noted the district's recycling program that previously removed all waste receptacles from classrooms further exacerbates this problem related to emergency washroom facilities.
- v. While school staff and occupational first aid attendants immediately responded to provide first aid to the victims, the topic of who provides first aid for students has been discussed but requires clarification.
- vi. The students and teacher in the computer lab (R102) who provided emergency first aid to the surviving student, provided sufficient care but had no first aid supplies at their disposal. While schools have first aid kits available it is not common for there to be kits in every classroom or common area.

- vii. It was noted that substitute employees may be in the building at the time of a lockdown or emergency. With communication to school employees often done through email, some of these substitute employees may have been unable to access this communication.
- viii. Parents commented on issues when students are not in the school building during a lockdown and when the teacher is not in the classroom when a lockdown is initiated.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The district should review how the lockdown siren at Abbotsford Senior Secondary School works and in consultation with school administration, make appropriate improvements. Such recommendations should be applied to other schools as necessary.
2. The district should review its lockdown procedures and consider how to manage a lockdown in situations where the teacher or supervising adult is not present when the lockdown is initiated.
3. The district should review its lockdown procedures in dealing with third party tenants and other school visitors.
4. The district should give consideration to how to best deal with personal issues (i.e. access to washrooms, water and snacks) during a lockdown.
5. The district should review its lockdown protocols for students who are outside of the school building when a lockdown is initiated.
6. The district should review how the notification of emergencies is communicated to staff within each school.
7. The district should consider equipping classrooms with first aid kits and information on how to provide basic first aid. Additional training for staff and possibly students could also be considered.
8. The district should develop and implement a streamlined process for schools and departments to notify senior management of emergency situations. In addition, clerical staff need to post cell numbers of district responders (senior management and district Learning Support Services administrators) near their desks.

b. Observations related to access to the school during lockdown

- i. First responders reported they did not have easy access to the school or the classrooms when they were onsite as they did not have building keys. Teachers are not supposed to open doors during a lockdown even if it is the police who verbally identify themselves so this required the police to work with the

Principal to get keys to enter individual rooms. School administration was busy with other matters so finding and sorting keys for the police presented as a distraction in this crisis.

- ii. During the incident, first responders, school district central office personnel and personnel from other agencies were deployed to assist in providing support at the school. Some school staff noted that it was difficult to ascertain the identity of some of these individuals as there was no visible identification.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 9. The District should review and update, in collaboration with relevant community partners, the lockdown protocols to ensure first responders have ease of access to the school during a lockdown and that school personnel can adequately identify first responders and other personnel during an emergency situation.
- 10. The district should ensure principals have keys to access all spaces within the building.

c. Observations related to management of the site during the emergency

These observations come from staff who were on site at ASSS and assisted in managing and communicating with parents and community members that had gathered outside of the school.

- i. Parents, students and siblings arrived on the Abbotsford Senior grounds throughout the lockdown. Police had blocked the Bevan Ave. exit, but there was no signage to redirect traffic, which resulted in cars entering and not being able to exit. SBO and Facilities Department staff redirected cars to back out and incoming traffic to park off-site.
- ii. Outside the Arts Center, APD's Constable Ian MacDonald provided information to parents regarding when the lockdown was expected to be concluded.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 11. The district should review how traffic on a school site could be managed during emergency situations. This should include the coordination of a dedicated muster point for parent information during emergency situations.
- 12. The district should ensure that all department (non-school based) employees receive appropriate emergency procedure training related to school and district emergencies.

d. Observations related to Emergency Management

- i. Debriefing meetings were held by senior management to review the status of the ongoing situation and the planned response from student, parent and district perspectives. This helped ensure that supportive actions were appropriate and that consistent and effective communications were in place.
- ii. The WorkSafeBC prevention division was immediately notified of the incident in accordance with regulatory requirements. A preliminary investigation report was filed on November 14, 2016, with the full report delivered on November 29, 2016. No orders were issued by WorkSafeBC as a result of this incident.
- iii. It was observed that crisis support staff worked long and difficult hours and days in response to the crisis. While they provided positive support to those affected by the incident, the impact of this work on their own health should not be overlooked.
- iv. Internal communication systems, including the availability of cellular networks were discussed often during this review. These systems perform crucial functions in emergency situations and staff rely heavily upon them. It was reported that cellular phone and text messaging functions were not available in some areas at the school. This made it difficult to effectively communicate between the school and SBO.
- v. It was a coincidence that a member of the Board of Education was at the SBO at the time of the incident. The immediate assistance of the Board Vice Chair during this significant emergency event helped expedite communications including messaging targeted to the community.

RECOMMENDATIONS

13. The district should ensure preliminary reports for WorkSafeBC are undertaken and approved within 48 hours of a serious incident as this is a requirement of WorkSafeBC.
14. The district should endeavor to have multiple administrators trained in crisis response with an understanding of the crisis response protocols. This will ease the burden on existing staff when support is required at a school.
15. The district should review how to schedule the time of staff who provide support to students, parents and staff in serious crisis situations to better ensure they remain effective for the duration of the support period.
16. The district should review cell phone reception in all schools, create awareness of poor coverage areas and ensure that reasonable remedies are applied.
17. The district should review its capacity to respond to simultaneous emergency incidents.

18. The district should review and clarify the role of the Board of Education and individual board members during significant emergency situations.

e. Observations related to Communications

- i. Numerous parents arriving at Abbotsford Senior were unaware of the emergency situation forcing the lockdown, as notifications were initially only circulated on the district, Abbotsford Senior and Abbotsford Middle Schools websites and web apps.
- ii. While communications were being developed and processed at the SBO, District Vice-Principal LSS, was on site to assist the school plan communications. Communications related to the incident at the site was also managed by the APD, as the incident quickly became a police investigation.
- iii. Shortly after 3:30 p.m., an email message was circulated to ASSS staff advising them of the lock down protocol and that police would be coming door to door.
- iv. School administration and clerical staff noted they had difficulty contacting a member of the senior management team. When they were unable to make contact with their area assistant superintendent, other contact information was not readily available.
- v. Throughout the entire crisis local, regional and national media outlets were relentless in getting the story. Numerous times they defied direction of the district to not be on school property to film and interview students, parents and anyone who was onsite. While we understood the need for the media to present details of the incident, we were dealing with a serious tragedy in our district and we felt many media outlets did not conduct themselves appropriately.
- vi. The district held a press conference at the SBO the following morning to provide information to the community and public. As it was an active investigation, the district was limited in what details could be provided. Many wanted to speak directly to the school administrators, which the district advised was not possible.
- vii. Numerous items of correspondence were circulated throughout the week, advising of the next steps (i.e. school closures), parent forum and community forum.
- viii. The district became aware of a video of the incident circulating on social media. The district immediately contacted the Ministry of Education and requested assistance in helping get the video taken off of these social media platforms. It

was later learned that a student had posted the video with no malicious intentions.

- ix. Throughout the afternoon and evening, there was ongoing communications between the Acting Superintendent, who was onsite at Abbotsford Senior Secondary, and the Secretary-Treasurer, who remained at the SBO. An Assistant Deputy Minister with the Ministry of Education was also in contact with district officials, as was the Superintendent, while he waited for a return flight to Abbotsford.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 19. The district should review its communication plans with respect to emergency communications to parents, students, staff and the community in general.
- 20. The district should review communication department procedures and ensure there are backup personnel assigned to manage or assist in managing emergency communications.
- 21. The district should review its plans for managing external media organizations during emergencies or crisis events.
- 22. The district should ensure that processes exist to communicate with employees, including substitute employees, during any potential emergency situation.
- 23. The district should review its capacity to manage communications in response to multiple simultaneous incidents.
- 24. The district should consider producing a “lockdown” instructional video, in conjunction with the Abbotsford Police Department.
- 25. The district should continue to provide education programs to students on the appropriate use of social media.

f. Observations on security and managing access to schools and school property

- i. Protocols for access to schools for visitors and guests should be clarified and communicated. It was noted throughout the input received that having line of sight to a single entry point provides adequate monitoring for schools.
- ii. The district operates many large school sites (playfields/grounds) with differing geographic features and in a variety of environmental settings. It can be challenging to continuously monitor playfields/school grounds in such settings.
- iii. The district operates ninety-two portables across the district. These portables are tied to the schools’ phone, fire and security systems. The Facilities department has had requests for peep holes in portable doors as a means of identification.

- iv. The district currently has seventy-one security cameras operating in schools and other district facilities. Of these, all are exterior cameras, except for one. These cameras have been put in place as a means to deter and detect vandalism. They are not monitored and not intended to provide security for building occupants.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 26. The district should review how access to/from portable classrooms is managed and consider improvements if necessary.
- 27. The district should review and communicate the procedures for visitors attending schools.
- 28. The district should review the location of school offices and consider building security improvements where feasible.

g. Observations on use of schools by third parties

- i. Having community/public facilities operating within a school, like the public library (FVRL) at ASSS, with no physical barrier or separation may elevate risks to students.
- ii. Following the incident at ASSS the district reviewed all incident reports from Fraser Valley Regional Library (FVRL) noting that these incidents are not routinely reported to the school administration.
- iii. School district staff have reported that public library patrons have been known to be found eating, sleeping and taking refuge from the outdoors in the library. It has also been reported that homeless shelters send their clients to the public library for free access to resources including internet access.
- iv. The public commented often on the public library being located within the school and concerns related to the security of students.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 29. The district should consider the installation of a barrier between the Fraser Valley Regional Library and the Abbotsford Senior Secondary Library to ensure the policies designed to control and manage access to schools can be maintained.
- 30. The district should improve external signage at Abbotsford Senior Secondary to better direct the general public to the appropriate services and corresponding building entrances.
- 31. The district should revise rental agreements (License to Occupy/Leases) with third parties to ensure incidents are reported to school principals on a timely basis.

9. Conclusion

It should be noted that policies, procedures and practices that were put into action on November 1st and throughout the following days and weeks have been developed over time to address four areas related to emergency management, they include; i) Prevention/Mitigation, ii) Preparedness and Planning, iii) Response and iv) Recovery.

Over time these emergency procedures have evolved and been improved based on best practices for schools, all in collaboration with CYMH and the Abbotsford Police Department. Each time there is a serious or other critical incident, the CIRT debriefs and discusses positive outcomes as well as areas requiring improvement. Neighbouring districts throughout the Fraser Valley have shared their critical incident procedures in order to share best practices throughout the lower mainland. The Ministry of Education hosts at least 2 provincial meetings a year, which Abbotsford personnel attend, where best practices are discussed and tough cases are debriefed. Training through the Ministry of Education on the topic of trauma response is offered in various capacities ongoing.

This report outlines 31 recommendations related to both the management of crisis and emergency situations in our schools and general safety and security issues. It would be appropriate that by June 30, 2018, the district review the progress made on the recommendations contained in this report.

The writers of this report would like to extend appreciation to everyone involved in responding to or managing this incident and working to make schools safe learning environments for students. Throughout development of this report, the dedication, commitment and expertise of staff in the district was evident. In addition, the level of community support was overwhelming and heartwarming.

Finally, while the intention of this review was to examine school district policies, procedures and processes related to school safety, no amount of written direction guarantees how people will react in an actual emergency. It should be noted that the staff of Abbotsford Senior Secondary School responded magnificently, in the face of an extremely traumatic situation. No one could have anticipated, nor prepared themselves, for such a tragic event to happen in a school in our community. Without regard for their own personal safety, staff acted quickly brought a violent attack to a stop, and immediately provided medical care to the wounded students. These staff members, along with some students are to be commended for their exemplary actions, and serve as an inspiration to everyone in the Abbotsford School District.