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Bridging the Gap between National and Local Safety through a Comprehensive Review of Emergency Preparedness Plans in a Large, Urban High School located in Delray Beach, Florida within The Palm Beach County School District

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Bridging the Gap between National and Local Safety
through a Comprehensive Review of Emergency
Preparedness Plans in a Large, Urban High School
located in Delray Beach, Florida within The Palm Beach
County School District.

by

Retha R. Prescod

A THESIS

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University of Nebraska, 2017

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Abstract

Each year almost 60 million elementary, middle and high school children attend school across the United States. Each day on campus holds the possibility that these students may suffer from an encounter that causes them long-term physical, emotional, psychological impact. Unfortunately, hundreds of victims from this vulnerable population have suffered each time a school was unprepared for an emergency event that occurred on campus. Currently, there are no mandatory specifications in place for school preparedness plans. The government has mandated that schools develop a framework to address hazards that affect schools, but have not made any of these requirements mandatory. To date, there has been no true guidance offered to individual states; leaving school districts to manage on their own. As a result, many administrators, staff members and children face the possibility of catastrophic events once a major event occurs; leading to serious injury and death.

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Introduction

Background

For decades, schools around the world have experienced countless emergencies while students are on campus. Prior to the early 2000's, several events ranging from fires to school shootings occurred across the nation. Not until the Columbine shooting, however, did it become apparent that schools in America were not as safe as people had originally imagined and prompted a change in the way schools view preparedness. Fearing the worst, the public called for action and emergency preparedness plans in schools became a hot topic. At the behest of the United States Department of Education, school districts developed response plans that would prepare administrators to handle fire, water, and minor weather-related emergencies while school is in session. Despite this move, experts still believe that there is a limited emphasis placed on preparing for large disasters; especially those involving students. (Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality [AHRQ], 2009). Since 1999, a number of accidents, including environmental issues, public health scares and natural disasters have occurred in schools around the country. While some of these incidents allowed administrators to employ tactics that quickly stabilized the campus, many others did not (Health et al, 2007).

Unsurprisingly, the overarching theme highlighted amongst those schools that performed inadequately indicates that their plans ignored a crucial component that drives school safety: preparedness. Elementary, middle, and high school children are at risk for being heavily impacted by numerous emergencies during the school day, yet an unsettling number of school officials remain untrained to handle these incidents. Based on research conducted by the Center for Biopreparedness at Children's Hospital Boston, many school districts within the states of Massachusetts, Florida, Wisconsin, Colorado and California implement protocols that reflect minimal standards as required by law; resulting in fragmented plans that seriously neglect the safety of children (AHRQ, 2009). Save the Children, a nongovernmental disaster relief agency also found that at least 21 states in the United States lack the type

of comprehensive protocols required to prepare schools for an attack or natural disaster (Philanthropy News Digest, 2014).

Long-term planning is essential to the creation and maintenance of effective emergency response plans because it minimizes the destruction of property, injuries and most importantly, the loss of life. Considered to be a crucial component to the provision of children's safety, schools are unique because they house students during the majority of the day (American Association of Pediatrics,[AAP]2008). As a result, an inordinate amount of responsibility is placed on school administrators to maintain their well-being. This responsibility, however, may prove detrimental to students if crisis team members lack the ability to navigate the intricacies of a disaster. Additionally, inexperienced staff members may not understand the challenges that school-aged children face due to their varying ages and maturity levels; leaving them completely vulnerable in an already stressful situation. Finally, instructional and non-instructional staff or community-based members that are unfamiliar with methods used to address the long-term physical, emotional and psychological trauma associated with an emergency situation place both administrators and students at an even greater disadvantage once the initial incident is over (United States Department of Justice, 2006).

Moving forward with the development of comprehensive school preparedness guidelines is paramount to protecting students. As technology becomes more advanced and the threat of terrorism and other disasters loom, an expansion of emergency plans becomes essential to both ensuring student safety and bolstering national security in a common yet vulnerable setting. Although some government and state guidelines are provided, no uniform or mandatory inclusions for an "all-hazards approach" exist among them; meaning that these decisions have essentially been left up to individual districts (United States Department of Education, 2013). Considering the fact that most of the drills practiced within schools today include compulsory fire and tornado drills, bomb threat evacuations, and basic mock lockdowns, the self-determination approach could significantly diminish both plan implementation and effectiveness. For example, most school plans neglect crucial elements such as:

- a.) safe zone designations for campus-wide evacuations,
- b.) complete relocations due to structural damage or mechanical failure and
- c.) effective communication methods between administration, staff, parents and the surrounding community.

These components allow for smoother and safer transitions for students and minimize the need for and waste of valuable resources during an emergency. Furthermore, compulsory drills can create an environment in which faculty, staff and students are prepared should they encounter an actual incident on campus. Finally, administrators and their crisis team rarely reflect on previous events; creating a gap in administrators' ability to respond to potential emergencies that leaves children vulnerable. While plan variability is expected, it is important for school leaders to acknowledge that quality emergency protocols require specific components and continuous planning in order to make them truly effective.

Although preparedness professionals may experience conflicts during discourse, the one consistent argument amongst these experts is that "true" preparedness involves school and district administrators, parents, community members and students. The American Academy of Pediatrics highlights the fact that, despite their importance, preparedness plans designed by administrators in schools to protect children are often inadequate. The organization also notes that a large number of barriers prevent schools from gaining traction on preparedness planning. Many of the deficits include but are not limited to: geographic and physical facility conditions, staffing issues, staff education and training, and financial resources (AAP, 2008). As we move towards the goal of increased school safety, crisis teams should ensure that appropriate provisions are in place to support these outcomes. Structural, communication and financial restraints can diminish the efficiency and effectiveness of even the best laid emergency preparedness plans. Therefore, stakeholders need to be cognizant of these issues when developing such plans to ensure maximum protections for students with whom they have been entrusted.

Statement of Problem

An increasing number of intentional and unintentional emergencies occur in schools today yet many administrators lack the training necessary to craft plans that will help them respond adequately to ensure student safety. Despite cursory drills and written emergency plans, almost half of the states across the country have failed to prepare adequately for disasters. A number of issues including but not limited to: funding, apathy, loosely-defined mandates and lack of training prevent school-based personnel from responding to emergencies on campus (National Association of School Based Resource Officers [NASRO], 2005).

Significance of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine school emergency operations within a large, urban high school within the Palm Beach County School District. In order to achieve this goal, the researcher:

1. Surveyed the school leadership, crisis team members, and instructional personnel about the content of the emergency operations plans and perceived level of preparedness on large school district campus.
2. Discussed the level of preparedness with school officials based on the information garnered from the survey.

Experts believe that the lack of preparedness planning amongst school administrators prevent them from activating effective response mechanisms in times of disasters; causing more vulnerability amongst those involved in both response and mitigation efforts. This study will have a significant impact on the individual school being surveyed as well as the surrounding communities that it serves. As stakeholders, students, school employees, and community members will benefit from this study because the research allows school officials to reflect, identify and revise practices which could have a negative impact on the students that utilize their facilities daily. Students are housed within school buildings more than a quarter of the day; yet gaps remain within the emergency plans within these facilities. Unfortunately, the evolving

nature of schools and their inherent vulnerabilities make them a target for both intentional and unintentional emergencies. School preparedness is linked to various components of national safety; therefore, it is imperative that the well-being of students' be seen as primary importance when designing emergency plans. For this reason, officials must approach disaster-based incidents carefully yet preemptively during the 21st century in order to create a safer environment for students.

Literature Review

Over the past twenty years the protection of children's safety in schools has held a significant importance in preparedness studies. Still, many states have failed to address preparedness actions instituted by school administrators across the country; oftentimes neglecting critical components that threaten their students' well-being. During the literature review search, several sources were used to determine the type of information available on school based preparedness. Many of the primary resources identified for this study consist of online case studies, journal articles, a preparedness thesis and government documents. A primary literature search in the Google search engine using the key phrase "school preparedness before the 1990's and history of emergency preparedness in schools" provided very minimal substantial information on the topic in question. A secondary key phrase search of "incidents involving children in school before 1990" focused mainly on school shootings which covers only a portion of the threats that schools face today. A key phrase search of "timelines of disasters and tragedies involving children in the United States" uncovered a very helpful document which included a timeline which outlined school preparedness from a unique vantage point (Heath et al, 2007).

Another search "Natural disasters in schools before 1990 (United States)" mainly yielded sources that spoke about response measures and not preparedness. A search for "Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools (REMS) in the 1990's" was used with the intent to find an organization comparable to the current REMS model used today, however, the search yielded that there was not an organization of its kind formed until the early 2000's. In order to hone in on more specific information a search for "emergency preparedness in schools since the 2000's" yielded two especially helpful resources

entitled “Preventing, Preparing for Critical Incidents in Schools” from the 2009 National Institute of Justice publication and 2009 “School-Based Emergency Preparedness: A National Analysis and Recommended Protocol” from the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality. These resources provided insight into important studies that lends itself to the lack of preparedness within schools across the country, including Florida. Finally, excerpts from Stanford University Journal (Heath et al) highlights the importance of reviewing lessons learned during international tragedies to enhance school preparedness in the United States. Based on the information gleaned from these resources, this review will provide a brief overview of the evolution of preparedness in schools and provide insight into the gaps that exist despite repeated experiences with emergency situations within vulnerable school settings.

Historical Perspective

During the early stages of preparedness planning, the extent of school crises in the United States was mainly fire-related. These incidents often led to dire consequences; particularly for school-aged children. The 1851 False Alarm tragedy in New York City (NYC) was amongst the first incidents that caused 40 students to lose their lives and many others to be injured. The governor quickly sprang into action, encouraging fire safety and even introduced a “Fire Week” in a 1901 campaign for schools. Still, the tragedies continued. Students were still at risk of dying or getting injured because school-based employees, including teachers, had not fully prepared for the task of exiting school buildings during a fire. Sadly, nearly 50 years after the initial development of rudimentary fire drills in NYC; this lack of preparation resulted in a catastrophe for administrators, teachers, and students during the Lake View Elementary School Fire in 1908. One hundred seventy five people died that day: 172 of them children. Despite making national news headlines, another fire occurred in Chicago at Our Lady of Angels School in 1958, killing 92 students and 3 nuns. Driven by multiple fire-related incidents around the country; New York State Board of Education led the nation and encouraged the development of the fire safety drills that we are accustomed to in schools around the United States today (Heath et al, 2007). Unfortunately, two major landmark cases serve as a reminder that this move, although progressive, did nothing to quell the

suffering caused by injuries from non-fire related incidents. During this time period, The Bath, Michigan bombing disaster in 1927 resulted in 45 deaths and 58 injuries. Thirty-eight of the victims were children. In 1937, another incident occurred in Rusk County, Texas when an explosion from a gas leak claimed almost 300 lives of students and teachers. Both images highlighted the need for schools to develop better protection for students during various emergencies (Heath et al, 2007).

Relief seemed to come in the form of a joint venture between the United States Federal Civil Defense Administration (FCDA) along with the United States Department of Education (DOE) in the early 1950's. These organizations worked together to promote the use of fallout shelters and developed the first recognizable Emergency Broadcast System to prepare students for the possibility of a nuclear attack; a move that pushed school preparedness beyond its infancy (Heath et al, 2007).

National preparedness studies conducted in the past twenty years have highlighted the importance of protecting children's safety in schools. Shortly after the incidents in the 1950's, intermittent strides were made to prepare school officials and teachers for emergencies. It was not until the late 1990's, however, that the public's perception of school preparedness was challenged. Without a doubt, the Columbine High School shooting marked the most notable beginning responsible for focusing government officials' attention on student safety. Almost immediately, serious consideration was given to the importance of fully implemented emergency response in schools. Key aspects of emergency preparedness viewed after that fateful day focused on immediate response, mitigation, and long-term impact of emergency situations in settings involving children (Austin, 2003). Lessons learned from the incident prompted states and school districts around the country to begin planning for the implementation of school safety measures. At least 13 states "passed legislation establishing school safety councils, committees, and/or studies" claiming to address these concerns; many of them adopting emergency response plans directly into their statutes (Council of State Governments, 2014). However, with no specific mandates in place for schools and day care centers, preparedness plan formation and implementation were less than stellar (AHRQ, 2009).

Nearly a quarter of a students' day is spent in school. Extensive building damage, active shooters, terrorist attacks and medical emergencies are realities in modern society. Emergency plans which neglect these critical preparedness components place children in grave danger. (AAP, 2008) A prime example of the effects of a lack of preparedness is the Beslan, Russia national celebration at a school site in 2004 which turned into a hostage situation. The incident left 344 people dead; where half of the victims were children (Heath et al, 2007).

Historically, schools report that barriers such as geographic location, facility conditions, staffing, education and financial resources prevent school officials from administering plans that keep students safe (AAP, 2008). School-based resource officers' echoed this sentiment through their participation in a 2004 survey declaring that preparedness funding from the Federal government is insufficient; either disappearing or remaining the same despite increased demands on their already limited resources. (NASRO, 2005) The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) rebuts this notion by calling attention to resources available from homeland security and public health agencies; decidedly stating that the physical, mental, psychological and emotional needs of children remain unmet unnecessarily during emergencies. Furthermore, the agency highlights a trend discovered through a preparedness analysis that indicates that at least 5 states: Massachusetts, Florida, Wisconsin, Colorado and California lack a comprehensive "all hazards" approach to emergency incidents in school settings (ARHQ, 2009).

The wake of Hurricane Katrina unveiled serious weaknesses in the nation's ability to protect children. A study through a nongovernmental organization, Save the Children, found that although they constitute 25 percent of America's population, the needs of children have been largely overlooked during Federal and state disaster preparedness planning (Save the Children, 2015). Furthermore, the study argues that despite recommendations from the National Commission on Children in Disasters, at least twenty-one states and the District of Columbia neglected to create effective school-based emergency plans. Of the twenty-nine states that did comply, they did so by addressing only the minimum requirements; leaving a significant amount of America's children vulnerable (Philanthropy News Digest, 2014). Still, results

from a survey taken by school-based police officers revealed that emergency plans in schools were not adequate. Additionally, more than 66 percent of the officers surveyed indicated that their emergency plans were not practiced regularly by the school's faculty and staff (National Institute of Justice, 2010). All of these findings come on the heels of a national survey conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in 2006 that stated that ninety-five percent of school districts had "comprehensive plan[s] to address crisis preparedness, response and recovery". The survey also revealed that 82 percent of the emergency plans in those districts were appropriately funded and that 87 percent of faculty and staff had received training to prepare them for emergency incidents (National Institute of Justice, 2010).

More than 55 million children reside in America's schools each school year: both public and private. Consequently, school district preparedness plays an important role in the protection of children and their physical, mental and emotional well-being. Although most school districts around the country may have preparedness plans in place; their lack of attention in important areas can cause significant gaps in protection for students. A number of resources are available through the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools, including planning frameworks and best practices measures that lead to effective response measures during emergency situations. Additionally, a variety of funding resources are available to assist school districts in the development of long-term comprehensive preparedness planning. Experts caution, however, that "despite the availability of funds...many school districts struggle to balance priorities relating to educating students and other administrative responsibilities that pertain to emergency and incident management" (AAP, 2008).

Understandably, officials may struggle between attending to the immediate and long-term needs of students; however, it is important to understand that school preparedness invariably boosts both local and national preparedness. Various studies from the ARHQ, Department of Justice, American Association of Pediatrics and the Department of Education that have taken place within the last decade highlight the fact that most schools are unprepared for multiple tragedies. Therefore, school officials need to be diligent

about adopting and utilizing strategies which can potentially achieve and increase maximum protections for students on campus.

New and improved requirements are necessary in order help children during disasters. For states to meet minimal standards they must address 4 issues: evacuation and relocation, family reunification, children with special needs such as those with disabilities, infants, and toddlers, and multiple hazards in schools (Philanthropy News Digest, 2014). Nongovernmental organizations such as The Red Cross, Save the Children and The International Association for Disaster Preparedness and Response have resources to educate the public about preparedness, but many schools still lack the components necessary to ensure parents, teachers, administrators and the community at large feel confident about the safety measures in place to protect students. Experts believe that the lack of preparedness amongst administrators prevent them from activating effective response mechanisms in times of disasters. These issues can be minimized by creating and implementing district-wide plans. Minor revisions can be done in order to accommodate various settings, such as daycares and summer camp programs to ensure that all children are safe when with their caregivers. Additionally, the use of district-wide training and drill efforts would lead to enhanced responses amongst staff that may have otherwise ill-prepared during an emergency. These efforts coupled with adequate funding can significantly reduce loss of life, injury and ineffective management of resources; effectively bridging the gap between preparedness in schools and national preparedness.

The themes highlighted above indicate that gaps still exist in school emergency preparedness plans all across the country. However, my study will focus specifically on one large, urban high school in the Palm Beach County School District, the only high school in Delray Beach, Florida. Based on the review, the literature lacks important information that is necessary to determine the specific levels of preparedness within particular schools and school districts within Florida. Although the ARHQ study resulted in the development of a template for the town of Brookline, Massachusetts school system, this district's characteristics are very different from other states and may not take into consideration factors

such as district size and support, geographic limitations, staff availability and training, and funding sources, all of which may necessitate changes to school preparedness plans nationwide.

Methods/Research Design

This preparedness study surveyed a sample population of one of the largest high schools within the Palm Beach County School District. Although Palm Beach County has 187 schools with varying challenges, Atlantic Community High School's unique characteristics include but are not limited to: low socioeconomic status, reduced academic achievement, diversity in racial and ethnic origin, language acquisition barriers and other unique complexities.

This research project's method of design used a multiple choice survey. The study population was comprised of instructional employees from Atlantic Community High School located in Delray Beach, Florida. The targeted convenience study sample included between 75 and 105 individuals employed within the school building. The individuals surveyed came from varying educational backgrounds, teaching experience and grade levels. They were classified as teachers, instructional coaches, guidance counselors or administrative employees. The survey garnered information from individuals from each grade level within to the school which totaled 75 complete survey responses.

Utilizing this approach ensured that there was a cross-sectional representation of the entire instructional staff at Atlantic Community High School. Additionally, it allowed for a comparative analysis of emergency preparedness between some components for long-term and newer employees of Atlantic Community High School. All employees listed include the principal, assistant principals, school-based crisis team members and teachers that were easily accessible through district email. This promoted quick distribution and completion of the survey. Demographic information was collected from each participant; however, all identifiable information was kept private as each subject was assigned a participant number. The researcher is the only individual who has access to the information. Participants ranged from twenty-two to seventy years of age. Inclusion criteria included employees of Atlantic Community High School that may or may not be active members of the school-based or district-based

emergency response teams but may have assisted in the development of emergency plans, and in some capacity are responsible for being involved in the execution of those plans. Exclusion criteria included those employees that are on campus but might have nonspecific or indirect roles in the execution of emergency plans (i.e. janitor, cafeteria workers). Initial demographic information was limited to number of years served in the school district, years served at Atlantic Community High School, position and/or titles, gender, age and education level.

Data collection measures involved participants being asked a series of predetermined questions concerning school preparedness in a multiple-choice based format. The survey was distributed via district email, therefore, participants needed to have a computer with Internet access available. Additionally, an email notice prompted subjects to complete the survey by providing a link to a popular platform known as [surveymonkey.com](https://www.surveymonkey.com). Participants spent no more than 5-10 minutes completing the questionnaire. All respondents were asked to complete the survey questions within a one-week period from the receipt of the email. A reminder email was sent to allow participants that have not completed the survey an opportunity to do so before the deadline.

Data gathered from the completed surveys provided both general and specific aspects of emergency preparedness plans at Atlantic Community High School. Data analysis was achieved through the use of [SurveyMonkey.com](https://www.surveymonkey.com)'s Filter, Compare and Show mechanism to assist the researcher explore the school's emergency plans and determine the level of preparedness on campus.

Materials

Participants needed a computer with Internet access, [surveymonkey.com](https://www.surveymonkey.com) application platform and consent forms. All surveys were conducted on a computer with the responses recorded on the [surveymonkey.com](https://www.surveymonkey.com) website. Each participant received "virtual" consent forms that were attached to the beginning of the survey. The consent form outlined the purpose of the study, study and participant expectations, instructions on how to complete the survey and information explaining how the data gathered from the research study would be used.

The Survey- Background

The survey was compiled after literature searches suggested that several critical pieces of information were missing from emergency plans in schools. Recent events, including the Belsan, Russia incident reminds us of how vulnerable children are in the school environment. Of particular importance was the ability to deal with hostage situations, active shooter events, and other emergency incidents which are heightened if the faculty, staff, students lack preparedness in this area. Seemingly, America's reflections on international incidents are inconsequential. Due to their familiarity with modern day terrorist attacks; however, other countries' failures lend a unique insight into the world of preparedness and provides an opportunity to enhance protective measures that would keep students safe during school hours (Sparrentak, 2008).

Results

Background Information and Overall Trends

Atlantic Community High School is the only large, urban high school servicing the greater community of Delray Beach, Florida. There are almost 2300 students on campus, and it is considered one of the largest high schools in the Palm Beach County School District. Currently, the school employs more than 200 non-instructional and instructional staff members to care for the massive crowd at the school. The instructional individuals can be subdivided into 2 distinct roles: classroom-based educators and administrative employees. There are approximately 134 teachers and 9 administrative employees on campus for a total of 143 instructional personnel. Therefore, it was determined that these individuals would represent the number of possible respondents used for the purpose of data collection in this study. The research proposal aimed for survey responses from a target population of 75 to 105 instructional staff members including but not limited to: classroom teachers and instructional coaches, guidance counselors, crisis team members, assistant principals, and the school principal. Data was collected over a two-week time period after the emergency preparedness survey was distributed to instructional staff members via school district email. A total of 75 survey responses were collected as a result of the research and the

majority of the data reflected the opinions of classroom teachers. Survey distribution yielded a final response rate of eighty two percent. Based on the results of the demographic information, however, it was uncertain whether or not the people in each group who received the survey actually responded. Additionally, it was unclear whether some of the responses were miscoded in an effort to achieve greater anonymity. The overall trends reflected in the survey show that while staff members, particularly teachers, have a general understanding of cursory fire, tornado and evacuation drills they are unaware of or unsure of how to navigate other preparedness components which make up student and employee safety on their individual campus.

Table 1: Responses to Question 1

Not Prepared	Somewhat Prepared	Moderately Prepared	Very Prepared	Not Sure
2.6%	13.3%	50.6%	29.3%	4.0%

Responses from this question garnered a great deal of confidence from instructional staff about general preparedness at Atlantic Community High School with the majority of respondents (80%) choosing the option of “Very prepared” or “moderately prepared”. Fifty-one percent of the respondents answered that their campus was moderately prepared while 29% percent answered that they felt the campus was very prepared to handle general emergencies. The final responses were distributed amongst the other three categories “somewhat prepared” (13.33%), “not prepared” (2.67%) and not sure (4%), respectively.

Table 2: Responses to Question 2

0-2 members	3-4 members	5-6 members	7-8 members	9-10 members	Not Sure
0%	1.3%	9.3%	9.3%	13.3%	66.6%

The data for this section showed that the majority of the instructional personnel surveyed (67%) were unaware of the number of members on the crisis team. The rest of the responses were scattered amongst the other categories. The rest of the responses were scattered amongst the other categories with the following: No respondents answered that there were between 0 and 2 members, 1 percent answered that there were between 3 and 4 members, in each category 9 percent of the people answered that there

either 5 or 6 members or between 7 and 8 members on the response team. Finally, 13 percent answered that there were between 9 and 10 members on their respective emergency response teams. Further investigation of the data points revealed that of the 75 teachers that responded to the survey, approximately 31 of them were new teachers. When the data was analyzed further, it was discovered that 84 percent of the teachers new to Atlantic High School chose the option of “not sure”. Additionally, a number of veteran teachers were included in the numbers designated “not sure”.

Table 3 – Responses to Questions 3 and 4

Question Number	None of the staff (between 0 and 10%) is aware of the procedural expectations	Some (at least 25%) of the staff is aware of procedural expectations	Most (between 50-75%) of the staff is aware of procedural expectations	All staff members (100%) are aware of procedural expectations	Skipped
Question 3	0%	4.0%	63.5%	32.4%	1
Question 4	0%	14.6%	72.0%	13.3%	0

Based on the responses to question 3, most of the staff members felt that their colleagues had at least a basic understanding and awareness of procedural expectations during a campus lockdown. Ninety-six percent of the respondents chose either “Most staff members are aware of procedural expectations”(64%) or ‘All staff members are aware of procedural expectations’ (32.43%). Only 4 percent of the respondents felt that only 25% of their campus was aware of procedural expectations. None of the respondents felt as if instructional personnel on campus lacked the knowledge necessary to appropriately navigate code red drills in case of an emergency.

Most of the respondents (72%) for question 4 felt that between half and three-fourths of their students were aware of the procedural expectations during critical time periods. Almost 14 percent of the respondents felt as though all of their students were aware of the procedural expectations. Fifteen percent of the respondents felt that only some of the students on campus were aware of procedural expectations. None of the respondents felt that students were completely unaware of procedural expectations.

Table 4 – Responses to Questions 5, 8, 9, 10, 12 and 13

Question Number	Yes	No	Not Sure	Skipped
Question 5	65.3%	9.3%	25.3%	0
Question 8	30.6%	10.6%	58.6%	0
Question 9	29.3%	9.3%	61.3%	0
Question 10	63.0%	4.1%	32.8%	2
Question 12	55.4%	2.7%	42.0%	1
Question 13	30.6%	6.6%	62.6%	0

Most of the respondents (65%) for question 5 stated that there were emergency procedures posted in multiple areas around campus. The other 34% of respondents answered that the procedures were either not posted in multiple places (9.33%) or they were not sure if the procedures were posted in other parts of the campus (25.33%), respectively.

The majority of respondents (59%) for question 8 answered that they were unsure if alternate sites had been designated for instruction should building damage occur. Thirty one percent of the respondents stated that designated sites were available while 11% of the respondents stated that designated sites were not available in case of extensive building damage.

The majority of the respondents (61%) for question 9 revealed that they were not sure if plans were in place in case of water or electrical outage. Twenty-nine percent of respondents stated that there are plans in place in case of a prolonged water or electrical outage. Nine percent stated that there were no plans in place in case of a water or electrical outage.

The majority of the respondents (63%) for question 10 stated that there are plans in place for a mandatory campus evacuation. Four percent stated that there were no plans in place in case of a mandatory campus-wide evacuation. Thirty-three percent of the respondents stated they were not sure if plans were in place for campus-wide evacuation.

The majority of responses (55.41%) for question 12 indicated that “Yes, there are mental health services available” while 42% chose the option “Not sure, if there are mental health services available”. The final 3 percent of respondents stated that there were “No mental health components available” for survivors. One respondent skipped the question.

The majority of the respondents (63%) for question 13 stated that they were unsure if parents and community members were incorporated into emergency procedures. Thirty-one percent reported that parents and community members were incorporated into emergency procedures. Seven percent stated that parents and community members had not been incorporated into current emergency response procedures.

Table 5: Responses to Question 6

Not Confident - None (between 0 and 10%) of faculty members are aware of evacuation procedures	Somewhat Confident (at least 25%) of the faculty members are aware of evacuation procedures	Very Confident- Most (between 50-75%) of the of the faculty members are aware of evacuation procedures	Extremely Confident All staff members (100%) are aware of evacuation procedures
2.6%	22.6%	65.3%	9.3%

Most of the respondents (74%) conferred an enormous amount of confidence in their colleagues' awareness of procedural expectations during weather-related emergencies. The majority of the responses (65.3%) fell into the category of "very confident that the staff were aware of evacuation expectations" while the other 9.3% felt "extremely confident" about their colleagues' awareness of evacuation procedures. Twenty-three percent of the respondents felt like only 25 percent of their staff were aware of the expectations. Only 3 percent of the respondents felt that none of their colleagues would be able to respond appropriately should a weather-related event occur.

Table 6: Responses to Question 7

0-2 incidents	3-4 incidents	5-6 incidents	7-8 incidents	9-10 incidents	Not Sure
33.3%	25.3%	5.3%	4.0%	1.3%	30.6%

Most of the respondents (33%) answered that there were between 0 and 2 incidents on their campus in the last 5 years. The second highest category had 31% percent of respondents stated that they were unsure of how many incidents occurred on campus followed by 25% in the category that stated that between 3-4 incidents occurred on campus in the past 5 years. Finally, less than 2% of the respondents said that they had between 8 and 9 incidents.

Table 7: Responses to Question 11

Once a Month	Once Every 6 Months	Once a Year	After an Incident Has Occurred	Rarely does the team receive any formal training	Not Sure
0%	5.3%	8.0%	0%	2.6%	84.0%

The majority of the respondents stated that 84% of respondents were unsure of the frequency of crisis team members receive training. Five percent reported that they received training every 6 months. Eight percent of the respondents replied that crisis team members received training once a year. Three percent stated that they rarely received any training. None of the respondents chose “crisis team members receive training after an incident has occurred” or they “received training once a month” as an option.

Table 8 : Responses to Question 14

0-5 years	6-10 years	11-15 years	16-20 years	21-25 years	26+ years	Skipped
41.8%	22.9%	20.2%	6.7%	5.4%	2.7%	1

The majority of the teachers were beginning to mid-level career teachers. Forty-two percent of the teachers had been working at Atlantic Community High School between 0-5 years. Twenty-three percent (23%) have been in the system between 6 and 10 years. Twenty-one percent of the respondents have been in the system between 11 and 15 years. The range of respondents in the consecutive age ranges rapidly declined as the age range increased. Seven percent of the respondents have been in the system between 16 and 20 years. Five percent of the respondents have worked in the school system between 21 and 25 years. Finally, only 3% percent of the respondents have worked in the system for more than 26 years. One respondent skipped the question.

Table 9: Responses to Question 15

Elementary School	Middle School	High School	District or Area Office	Skipped
15.9%	33.3%	75.3%	4.3%	6

Three-quarters of the instructional staff stated selected that they had worked in another high school setting before being employed at Atlantic Community High School. These results indicated that the next highest numbers fell into the category of middle school (33.3%) and elementary school (16%), respectively. Further extraction of data revealed that the majority of teachers that work at Atlantic Community High School have worked in other environments. Six respondents skipped the question completely and only six teachers stated that they had not worked at another school prior to coming to Atlantic High School. Of the 63 teachers that replied, fifty-six of them reported that they had worked in only one other environment prior to working at Atlantic. The demographic information is as follows: Five percent worked in an elementary school, 19 percent worked in middle school and 48 percent reported that they worked in other high schools. The remaining teachers reported working in multiple settings prior to working at Atlantic. The demographic information is as follows: 2 percent (1 person) worked in both an elementary school and high school, 6.3 percent (4 people) worked in both a middle school and a high school, 6.3 percent (4 people) worked in elementary, middle and high school, 2 percent (1 person) in an elementary school, middle school and the district office, 2 percent (1 person) in a middle school, high school and the district office and finally 2 percent (1 person) worked in all four of the listed environments.

Table 10: Responses to Question 16

0-5 years	6-10 years	11-15 years	16-20 years	21-25 years	26+ years	I have never been a part of the official response team.
5.3%	2.6%	4.0%	2.6%	0%	0%	85.3%

The majority of the respondents (85%) stated that they had never been a part of the official response team on Atlantic High School's campus. Five percent of the teachers had been working on the formal response team between 0-5 years. Responses were tied for those that had been on the formal response team for 6 and 10 years and between 16 and 20 years at three percent. Four percent of the

respondents had been a part of the formal response team between 11 and 15 years. None of the respondents had been on the response team for more than 20 years. Finally, seventy percent of the respondents stated that they had never been a part of the official response team.

Table 11: Responses to Question 17

Principal	Assistant Principal	Teacher	Guidance Counselor	Skipped
0%	1.3%	95.9%	2.7%	1

Ninety-five percent of the responses came from classroom teachers. Based on the data, the school principal did not complete the survey. There was, however, one person that skipped this question, which could mean that they were most likely seeking further anonymity in this process. Only one assistant principal answered the question. Three percent of the respondents were guidance counselors. Two percent of the respondents were guidance counselors. The person on campus which would be most concerned with their anonymity would most likely be the principal which could mean that they selected an alternative demographic option in an attempt to maintain or preservation of their identity.

Table 12: Responses to Question 18

Male	Female
49.3%	50.6%

The majority of the respondents (51%) were female. Forty-nine percent of the respondents were male.

Table 13: Responses to Question 19

20- 24 years	25-29 years	30-34 years	35-39 years	40-44 years	45-49 years	50-54 years	55-59 years	60-64 years	65 +
1.3%	12.0%	8.0%	10.6%	12.0%	14.6%	21.3%	8.0%	8.0%	4.0%

Several categories were tied in relation to respondent's ages. One of the respondents was between 20 and 24 years of age. Twelve percent of the respondents are between 25 and 29 percent years of age. Eight percent of the respondents are between 30 and 34 percent years of age. Ten percent of the respondents were between 35 and 39 years of age. Twelve percent of the respondents are between 40 and 44 years of age. Fifteen percent of the respondents are between 45-49 years of age. Twenty-one percent of the respondents are between 50-54 years of age. There were two categories that tied: Eight percent

represented respondents in both the 55-59 years age group as well as the 60-64 years age group. Four percent of the respondents are 65 years of age or older.

Discussion

This research study discussion is based on an emergency preparedness survey distributed at Atlantic Community High School in Delray Beach, Florida. The school is part of the Palm Beach County School District, which is considered a part of the “Big 8” when comparing county size in Florida. The goal of the survey was to determine the level of preparedness on campus by gathering information from the instructional staff about key components of the school’s emergency plans. These components included but were not limited to: incidents related to school lockdowns, evacuations, inclement weather, physical damage to the school’s infrastructure, bomb threats, active shooters, and community-based events which pose an immediate threat to the campus.

Results from research conducted by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality in 2009 highlighted that several counties in Florida along with four other states lacked comprehensive emergency preparedness plans. Like most schools in the United States, Atlantic Community High School, was predicted to have an emergency framework in place. Plans within this framework, however; were not expected to meet the criteria for being comprehensive enough to address multiple incidents. Therefore, the outcomes at Atlantic High School were projected to reveal possible vulnerabilities in areas such as weather-related events, complete campus-wide evacuations, extensive building damage, active shooters and other incidents, no matter how frequently or infrequently they may occur in schools across the nation.

As a result of the survey, however, there were several components that met both studies’ expectations, while others did not. General trends for the study revealed that most of Atlantic Community High School staff members feel safe on campus. Additionally, most of them feel prepared when it comes to emergencies such as fire drills, code red lockdowns and certain weather-related drills. However, they appear to be less certain about incidents which may involve major interruptions to the academic climate such as water and power outages, extensive building damage, active shooters and anything other than the

drills that are practiced routinely. Additionally, the data suggests that there may be some confusion about the methods used for communication between administration, staff members and the community at large in case of an emergency versus those used during normal operating periods. The survey format does not allow for in-depth discussion of communication which prevents further analysis between the two areas.

There are many ways in which a campus can be compromised. In times of emergency, seemingly minor uncertainties can lead to an inappropriate response by staff on campus by contributing to the following: increased wait time from appropriate authorities and emergency personnel, serious injury, and the potential loss of life. Given the resources available, however, there are also various approaches to mend safety-related shortcomings in order to minimize the intensity of a negative outcome. To create comprehensive plans and offer recommendations, baseline data must be gathered and assessed against information from best practices. Therefore, specific information pertaining to Atlantic Community High School's preparedness survey is provided below.

Question 1: What is your perception of the overall preparedness of your school campus for any general emergency?

Expectations: Due to the history and evolution of emergency preparedness planning in schools in the United States, the results yielded from this question is considered the standard expectation as most employees on a school campus understand general operating procedures.

Explanation: Oftentimes, general workplace procedures include compulsory emergency procedures such as basic fire and weather-related drills which warrants employees feeling particularly comfortable about their level of preparedness. This sentiment is also representative of schools, which most likely led to the outcomes experienced in the data from Atlantic Community High School. The data suggests that training in this area has been extremely successful and has earned the school high marks in the area of general emergency procedures. Additionally, several respondents held their colleagues to extremely high expectations; stating that they were "very prepared", and as a result, should be able to respond

appropriately if an incident occurs. Based on this secondary response, the data suggests that these respondents are more intimately connected with formal operations of the school or may be a part of the administrative staff. As a result, they would have more knowledge of the formal workings of the school; thereby increasing their expectations of the staff.

Despite this confidence amongst most employees, however, there were a few individuals that served as outliers in the other direction. The differences in the data shown here could be based on each individual's own unique vantage point. For example, instructional staff that is new to the campus could have a skewed view of how safe they are on campus. This is of particular importance especially if they have encountered an incident which made them feel as if their safety had been threatened; thereby increasing an already heightened sense of vulnerability. Conversely, these numbers may very well represent individuals who have more intimate knowledge about incidents that have occurred that may not be readily available to the general population of instructional employees on campus.

Recommendations: Ensure all personnel (new and veteran) on campus have the opportunity to receive and understand pertinent information related to campus safety.

Question 2: How many people are on the crisis response team?

Expectations: The data represents information that did not completely meet the study's expectations because veteran teachers were expected to be able to identify key personnel that are associated with the response team. Having this knowledge would allow veterans to assist the administrative staff in the orientation efforts of the teachers that are new to the campus. However, the one possibility not considered during the study was that there could be veteran teachers that are not new to the profession; however, they are new to Atlantic's campus.

Explanations: The standard trend is that people generally feel safe on campus despite their inability to accurately identify the specific individuals that are responsible for their safety during an emergency. This may be due in part because these individuals are located in completely different departments, buildings or both. This is particularly true in school-based settings where there are such stark delineations between job

responsibilities of administration and instructional staff. Coupled with information from number 1, the data suggests that confidence displayed amongst the staff pertaining to campus safety did not necessarily coincide with their ability to locate or identify those that are expected to lead them in an emergency.

Finally, the possibility exists that this outcome could be loosely correlated to the fact that the knowledge of these individuals' identities does not fall within the purview of their typical instructional duties, and is therefore considered inconsequential.

Contrarily, there were respondents whose answers were consistent across the board which may indirectly indicate that they are members of the campus response team. For other respondents, however, the data could mean that individuals' can only partially identify members of the response team, which would explain why the numbers are split across the board.

Recommendations: Implementation of a yearly school-based safety symposium or in-service to brief staff members about in-depth emergency and safety protocols. This could serve as an introduction to key players or an opportunity to develop a staff handbook.

Question 3: Based on drills that have been conducted on Atlantic High School's campus, are staff members aware of procedural expectations during a code red or lockdown emergency?

Expectations: This question met the study's expectations in that there is an indirect correlation between this and question number 1, therefore the question should have yielded similar results.

Explanations: Since the 1950's, states have required that schools conduct a predetermined number of code red drills and fire drills each year. These drills serve as an opportunity for both staff members and students to familiarize themselves with the safety expectations in case an incident occurs while school is in session. Therefore, the data reasonably suggests that these drills fall under normal day-to-day operations, which could be the reason why staff members feel that most, if not all, of their colleagues understand and can adhere to general safety expectations. Finally, the responses suggest that instructional personnel believe that the administrative staff has effectively incorporated opportunities into their current

plans to ensure that the majority of the teachers are aware of the emergency response plan should the need arise.

Recommendations: Administrators should utilize new teacher and substitute orientation as an opportunity to familiarize teachers with emergency plans.

Question 4: Based on drills that have been conducted on your campus, are students and visitors aware of procedural expectations during a code red or lockdown emergency?

Expectations: These results met the study's expectations because the question falls into a similar category as question numbers one and three. Opposite results would be limited to those students that are new to the school, speak a different language or have mental, emotional, physical or psychological deficiencies.

Explanations: The reporting of these results likely represents the fact that students, like instructional staff, undergo similar code red and weather-related drills with their teachers since they are in their care during the school day. Therefore, a student's ability to respond could be directly correlated to their teacher's ability to respond appropriately during one of those incidents. Secondly, these figures highlight the fact that students, like teachers, may not be aware of all of the expectations during certain emergencies; despite repeated trainings.

Recommendations: Ensure that emergency plans are in place to address expectations with all students. Incorporate unannounced drills and building sweeps into these plans and continue to review expectations with faculty and students. Use modifications as necessary.

Question 5: Are the emergency procedures posted in multiple places on your school campus?

Expectations: This data did not meet the study's expectations because more people were projected to choose "not sure" as an answer, rather than "yes". These outcomes are inconsistent with the assumptions previously mentioned in the study.

Explanation: The data reflects that the majority of the teachers appear to be aware that there are multiple postings of emergency procedures around campus. These responses seem to be the result of schools that have been constructed within the last 15 years. Most newly constructed school buildings in Palm Beach County are designed with the fire codes and exit plans displayed in multiple, high traffic areas on campus. Atlantic Community High School's new campus was opened in 2005; therefore, it would be one of the schools that fall into this category. One caveat is that these signs do not include weather-related or other hazard-based emergency procedures. Therefore, the high number of responses from individuals selecting "yes" as an option was completely unexpected. Instead, the expectation was that more individuals would have chosen "not sure" due to the limitations of these safety signs. Finally, the data does not indicate whether the teachers that chose "yes" as an answer can specifically state the locations of these signs on campus nor does it allow an opportunity for the researcher to address the system by which instructional personnel receive this information before an incident occurs.

Recommendations: More than twenty-five percent of the staff is unaware of the location of the posted signs on campus; increasing the probability that serious injury or loss of life can occur. Although most of the staff members are aware of the signs and where they are posted, an in-service training would help assist *all* staff in being able to locate these signs during an emergency.

Question 6: How confident are you that teachers and other staff members on your campus are aware of procedural expectations during weather-related emergencies?

Expectations: This data met the study's expectations because discrepancies in understanding often occur amongst staff members during weather-related emergencies. This is especially true when the individuals have no direct experience with the incident or when significant time between events has elapsed between incidents.

Explanations: The data represented reflects the amount of cursory weather-related preparatory drills completed in schools today to ensure that individuals who utilize these facilities remain safe. As a result, faculty and staff feel safer in an institution which provides both continuous and regimented practice drills

that include simulated post-incident debriefing sessions. Additionally, Palm Beach County School District officials closely monitor weather and move quickly to avoid making decisions that may negatively impact staff and students in the midst of an impending storm. Therefore, most schools are usually evacuated before staff and students are heavily impacted; minimizing the need to shelter in place. Finally, Atlantic Community High School serves as a designated county-approved storm shelter. Therefore, if teachers are on campus, they are usually not responsible for acting in an educator capacity due to early evacuations. As a result, respondents for this question likely feel as though they are indeed prepared to handle minor responsibilities before being released from their duties. Those individuals that state they are somewhat confident that their colleagues could handle weather-related emergencies probably represent new teachers or those teachers that have noticed the influx of newer faculty members on Atlantic's campus.

Recommendations: Ensure that all staff members are updated and understand how to handle weather-related emergencies by creating preparedness based in-service opportunities. Possibilities for training include the development of a school-based preparedness website, simulations or table top trainings to orient and update staff.

Question 7: How many active emergency incidents have you had on campus in the past 5 years? An incident can be defined as those occurrences which cause the school to be locked down or evacuated, inclement weather, damage to school structure, bomb threats, active shooter, community-based event surrounding a school site (i.e. burglary in a neighborhood with a school in the near vicinity.)

Expectations: These results met the study's expectations because there are a number of new teachers on campus which may lead to a skewed view of the actual number of events that have occurred on campus.

Explanations: Responses for this question were reflected across the board. The information reported relies on the respondent's ability to recall major events that have happened on campus. Therefore, these answers vary and are dependent upon the time spent working at the school. Instructional personnel that are new to the campus may have an altered view of how many incidents actually occurred. Contrarily,

higher numbers could be an indicator of those individuals that have been employed at the school long-term, are members of the crisis response team or those that have greater access to knowledge about incidents that did not have had an extreme adverse effect on instructional staff yet posed a viable threat to the campus. Furthermore, the data displayed here may be the result of teachers' inability to accurately classify incidents appropriately. Finally, there may be incidents that affect only 1 or 2 individuals which may or may not be included in the number of incidents reported by respondents

Recommendations: Provide a semi-annual or annual report to all staff members and brainstorm ways to make school safer during an in-service presentation.

Question 8: During an emergency it is important to maintain the continuity of the educational process. Have alternate sites for instruction been designated for use in case of extensive building damage after an incident?

Expectations: The data met the study's expectations due to the nature of this question as designated roles and responsibilities of classroom personnel.

Explanations: Classroom-based instructional personnel have very specific roles and responsibilities, therefore, information pertaining to the designation of alternate sites would not likely fall within their professional scope. Thus, the likelihood that teachers would be involved in this decision-making process of securing alternate sites is almost nonexistent because they would be operating on a "need-to-know" basis. Due to the nature of the situation, crisis team members may be potentially operating under the same premise since they may not have the designated authority to determine any actions until they receive specific directives from district officials. Even if crisis team members have an idea of alternative placements, many factors may govern the use of the designated site. For example, weather related damage may also destroy alternate sites which necessitates a change in plans whereas a biological or chemical attack may allow the school to maintain their ability to use a predetermined site. Both approaches constitute differences in planning, therefore, this factor probably lead to a higher than normal number of

respondents stating that they are unsure of alternate accommodations should an event occur on campus. Finally, district officials are ultimately responsible for developing relationships with community partners that allow schools to secure and lease buildings in case of extensive damage. Therefore, should an issue occur, district officials, would ultimately decide whether the school is safe enough to shelter-in-place or if other accommodations are necessary. Most schools, however, are usually evacuated before the opportunity for staff and students to be heavily impacted or the need to prepare in place arises.

Recommendations: Establish community partnerships that make transitions easier for staff and students, if necessary. This approach helps organizations facilitate and cut through “red tape” during times of emergency. Administrative staff should request a list of possible alternative sites from district officials beforehand, if applicable.

Question 9: Are there plans in place in case of a water or electrical outage that may last for a few days?

Expectations: These results met the study’s expectations because these are emergency incidents that schools face rather infrequently.

Explanations: The large amount of “unsure” responses may reflect the fact that teachers and other staff members are informed and updated on a need to know basis about alternate plans caused by issues that interrupt normal daily building operations. Respondents that selected “yes” or “no” as a definitive answer indicate that these are members of the administrative staff, crisis team or a combination of both. Another realistic possibility that exists is displaced certainty or uncertainty amongst those that believe Atlantic Community High School’s organizational classification automatically mandates that emergency plans include these elements while those that chose “no” as an option probably expressed in the earlier data sets that they feel unsafe on campus.

Recommendations: Create opportunities (workshops, inservice, etc) to explain general procedures at the beginning of the school year to help personnel classify incidents into district-based vs. school based

preparedness. Revisit these throughout the school year. Encourage the school district to distribute school-based safety information throughout the county annually via a district-sponsored safety symposium.

Question 10: Are there plans in place for a mandatory campus-wide evacuation?

Expectations: The data does not meet the study's expectation because although not directly expressed in the question the intent was to address mandatory evacuations that were not related to fires. Therefore, the high number of individuals that chose 'yes' as a response was inconsistent with the study's previous predictions.

Explanations: This question was actually not related to fires, however, since there were no disclaimers or specifications attached to the question the response was essentially left up to respondent's interpretation. This occurrence probably altered the results. The confidence expressed amongst respondents as it pertains to mandatory campus-wide evacuations may be directly or indirectly related to question number one. This result was unexpected and may be due to the fact that respondents are required to complete monthly cursory fire and weather-related drills mandated by the state. Therefore, the responses indicate that the educators directly relate their ability to complete these drills successfully as proof that Atlantic High School has developed plans that allow for effective evacuation of the campus. This is true for most emergencies despite the fact that each incident presents its own unique and significant challenges.

Recommendations: Have county officials or police department brief staff on emergencies which may pose unique challenges to complete evacuations of the campus.

Question 11: How often do crisis members at your school or receive training?

Expectations: The results for this question provided mixed results when compared to the study's expectations. On one hand, the results were completely unexpected because teachers that stated they felt safe on campus also expressed that they are unaware of how often crisis team members participate in

training. The second result was also unexpected because crisis team members were expected to explicitly state the number of times they receive training consistently, which also did not happen.

Explanations: This closely relates to question number two. Instructional staff cannot identify the number of crisis team members on campus, therefore, it can be reasonably expected that they would not be aware of the intricate details of their training schedule. The 17 percent that chose a specific answer most likely belong to the administrative team, crisis team or both. Therefore, the outliers could be an attempt to highlight the level of preparedness amongst the crisis response team itself; creating an image that the response team takes a proactive rather than reactive approach to campus preparedness.

Furthermore, the data sheds light on the fact that crisis team members have no consistent training requirements per the district; suggesting that in some instances school-based crisis teams are expected to handle minor emergencies internally. It also paints the picture that the district addresses issues that occur continuously throughout the district. For example, workplace accidents related to falls or electrocution associated with faulty wiring. Finally, the data suggests that there is no universal membership intake process or minimum qualifications requirements for members to join the campus emergency response team.

Recommendations: Ensure that crisis team and other school employees receive relevant and continuous training throughout the year. Training can be district-based or can occur via relationships with outside agencies.

Question 12: Does the emergency plan on your school campus contain a mental health component for survivors of an incident? For example, do survivors have access to mental health counseling services (free or referral-based) after an incident?

Expectations: This question met the study's expectation in a mixed capacity.

Explanations: The majority of respondents determined that there are people available after an incident. However, it is unclear whether or not these incidents include preparedness related events. Schools

normally offer grief counseling when a faculty member or student passes away, therefore, the staff may have been referring to these incidents. Despite the lack of question specificity, this step is critical.

Independent of the event, mental health assistance can help minimize, eliminate, or even prevent the long-term effects survivors may face after an incident.

Recommendations: Continue to prepare and utilize mental health services for both major and minor incidents as the benefits outweigh any cost savings from not utilizing this service. Ensure that survivors of all events are aware that this service is available.

Question 13: Are parents and community members incorporated into the emergency response procedures (in case of emergency evacuation, alternate pick-up sites, etc)?

Expectations: The expectations somewhat met the study's expectations because the prediction was that more people would choose the "not sure" option, however, that did not happen. Most schools communicate with parents on a regular basis; however, during emergencies, there are times when even the faculty and students are not aware of the details of an incident. Therefore, it is reasonable to believe that in these situations the parents have not been informed appropriately.

Explanations: The data suggests that instructional staff may not be aware of or understand the avenues which administrative officials utilize to communicate safety procedures with parents. Additionally, the school staff may not have had experiences with the type of incidents that would necessitate whole school evacuations; thereby minimizing or eliminating the need for communications to parents about alternate pick-up sites after an emergency evacuation. This would alter the answers to the survey.

Recommendations: Update faculty on how parents and community member are connected with the school. Explain how the transferability of those communication methods will work in case of an emergency. Form a community-based preparedness coalition.

Question 14: How long have you been working at Atlantic High School?

Expectations: These results met my expectations because there is a large amount of newcomers to the instructional staff.

Explanations: The years that most of the instructional staff worked at Atlantic High School ran the gamut. The average employee has worked at the school between 11 and 15 years and can be classified as a mid-career professional. This means that the school has a high number of newcomers that are new to Atlantic High School, new to the teaching profession or a combination of both. This may be contributing to the high incidence of the staff's lack of knowledge in certain areas of emergency preparedness on campus.

Recommendations: Ensure that those personnel that are new to the school are incorporated into all emergency-related plans.

Question 15: What type of setting have you worked in prior to working at Atlantic Community High School? (Choose all that apply)

Expectations: The data did not meet the study's expectations; however, it provided insight into other areas of possible future research opportunities. The data offered multiple sets of valuable information; however, it was limited due to the survey format. Knowing the staff's level of diversity prior to the commencement of the research study would have helped the researcher take the appropriate steps to include the information; thereby increasing the study benefits due to an expanded research direction.

Explanations: Most of the respondents to the survey were high school teachers and had previously worked in other high schools before coming to Atlantic Community High School.

This means that they have experienced different preparedness protocols in other areas of the county which could be useful on Atlantic's campus. The other teachers worked in an elementary school, middle school or district office while a few individuals worked in all of the specified environments. This creates a huge advantage for the campus if those teachers joined the crisis team because having access to alternate school

designs necessitates different approaches to emergency plans which indirectly sheds light on district-wide preparedness.

Recommendations: Distribute a survey to new teachers which includes demographic information.

Provide an opportunity to discuss emergency preparedness roles and responsibilities on campus with new teachers. Examine previous information vs Atlantic's information and maybe implement a preparedness fair on campus.

Question 16: How long have you been on the formal emergency response team at Atlantic High School?

Expectations: These results met my expectations despite the wide range of individuals working at the school.

Explanations: When this question is compared to question number 14, it should be noted that 85% of the faculty has never been on the formal response team at Atlantic High School. The respondents that were on the team had been at the school between 0 and 15 years and composed of teachers and administrators that had been working at the school between six and twenty years and were between twenty-five and fifty-nine years of age. Anticipation of this demographic information would have allowed for cross-referencing or comparative analysis of schools through the use of additional questions. Subjects could have been asked to compare the level of preparedness of Atlantic High School to the school in which they had previously worked. For example, a possible question could be as follows: Based on your experience: is Atlantic High School more prepared, less prepared or about the same in terms of preparedness than your previous job? This could have outlined trends throughout the district, especially if schools were named. This approach, however, would be at the expense of anonymity.

Recommendations: Announce membership intake process, discuss necessary qualifications to join the team and introduce current members for crisis response team to faculty.

Question 17: What is your current role at Atlantic High School?

Expectations: These results met my expectations because most of the instructional staff at Atlantic High School falls into the category of classroom teachers.

Explanations: The majority of the staff at Atlantic High School consists of classroom teachers; therefore, the majority of the information garnered in the survey would be a representation of their perceptions of safety on campus. These perceptions may or may not be fully represent the level of safety on campus but does provide a unique vantage point for the research study.

Recommendations: Expand survey to other employee groups on campus and track responses.

Question 18: What is your gender?

Expectations: Met the study's expectations in that there was an almost equal number of respondents who received and answered the survey.

Explanations: Gender may correlate and contribute to the feeling of safety within the group; particularly if the team is male-dominated.

Recommendations: Increase diversity groups on emergency response team to ensure that all groups are represented.

Question 19: What is your age range?

Expectations: These results did not meet the study's expectations. There was no indication prior to the study that individuals on campus were so young.

Explanations: As veteran teachers retire they are being replaced with newer, younger teachers that are coming from other professions or are just graduating from college.

Recommendations: Actively recruit members across the spectrum.

Based on the information represented in the survey, Atlantic Community High School has maintained a pretty good grasp on practicing school safety. Many teachers are confident in areas where they have continuous practice yet they also seem to be aware of areas in which they lack expertise. The safety areas which the staff seemed confident include but are not limited to: code red lockdown drills, fire drill evacuations, weather-related emergencies, and the provision of mental health counseling after incidents. This recognition is the first sign of teachers that are encouraged to be expressive on campus as well as a sign that teachers are open to receive assistance in areas which they may be uncomfortable with during an emergency.

Despite this acknowledgement, however, there are still areas in which the school can improve. While the school seems to have a solid training core in place to train current teachers, it is unclear whether there are methods in place to help new teachers become acclimated to the campus. It is a critical component not only to teachers that are newcomers to the profession, but also to those who are new to the campus to feel safe. Creating an environment where teachers are effectively mentored and oriented on safety expectations produces the “carryover effect” to students, because they are armed with tools that effectively orient and correct students that may not understand expectations in emergency situations. Developing such an approach also helps educators prepare students for challenges that they might face beforehand; an extremely important concept when dealing with students that may present with language barriers or cognitive and physical deficiencies. While the carryover effect can be positive, it also has the potential to be negative; particularly if employees just have an overall bad feeling about campus safety. Therefore, it is extremely important for crisis team members, especially administration to ensure that everyone feels that they work in a safe environment.

Additionally, there needs to be more of an emphasis placed on staff members being able to identify key emergency personnel on campus. During an emergency, knowing *who* to contact can be as important as knowing *how* to get to safety. This approach also helps when parents are interested in contacting the school to find out more information about an incident which has occurred on campus.

Another area where the information was unclear was the district's level of involvement in developing preparedness plans for the school. Based on the answers in the survey, one could not ascertain whether the school had failed to plan for uncommon emergency events or if they are mandated to follow directives issued by county officials during unusual circumstances. When it comes to concerns about securing facility contracts for alternative sites in case of emergency; however, preparedness is key. It was unclear whether the district required training for crisis response team members throughout the school year or whether those decisions were completely school-based. Continuous training helps to maintain understanding of new and upcoming threats, allow team members to receive clarification about appropriate responses to certain incidents and present follow-up questions about recent events on school campuses. This sort of district-wide debriefing session also creates an environment where members of the response team will be supported in their efforts to keep the campus safe. At any rate, all of these expectations should be clear to faculty, staff and students to ensure that there is a minimum loss of property, serious injury and loss of life.

Finally, the incorporation of community members and parents into emergency preparedness plans are an invaluable component to the maintenance of safety on campus. Well-equipped parents can assist in creating a bridge between the administration and faculty and community leaders. They can help in areas that involve the coordination of resources by building a reliable volunteer base, securing monetary donations, building key relationships, and the formation of strong community partnerships.

As an employee of the academic climate at Atlantic Community High School, the researcher can shed insight on some of the areas related to emergency preparedness. Since the researcher is a part of the school staff, there is a potential for bias to be introduced into the study. Contrarily, having direct access to some of the same information as the respondents provide the opportunity for the researcher to vet the authenticity of the information serves as a positive for the research study. Additionally, based on this knowledge the researcher is able to make recommendations in areas which can likely improve the safety

on campus by encouraging staff members to become more proactive when it comes to safety measures on campus.

The first area of mention is the general safety procedures on campus which include a check-in process for all visitors. The check-in process works because the front desk secretary serves as the first point of contact who checks the registration and identification of those persons wishing to enter the campus for academic or personal reasons. According to school district policy, all visitors must report to the main office to sign in and all volunteers must be registered with the school district volunteer office before being allowed access to the campus and students. The one main barrier to this simple yet effective emergency procedure, however, is the school design. The school is equipped with multiple entrances and exits. While this construction design works for exiting the campus during an emergency it can also serve as an unfavorable nuisance for everyday security on campus. Individually screening visitors before they enter to the main corridors of the campus helps maintain safety. However, students or temporary employees may circumvent those procedures by admitting someone into one of the various entrances; possibly exposing the campus to harm. As adults, there may need to be more steadfast planning to ensure that students, substitute teachers and other visitors do not provide access to people through alternate entrances.

One of the most important components of Atlantic's emergency preparedness plan is the infusion of the mental health services component after the occurrence of an incident. To accurately assess the mental health component of emergency preparedness, there must be a discussion about the services that take place independently of these events. Atlantic has a vast array of services available to students that other students may not have. There are grief counseling sessions, caregiver relief discussions, motivational support groups and other coalitions that address various mental, emotional and psychological issues that teenage students may encounter. Some of these groups are gender-specific and others are gender-neutral. These support groups work to assist students in providing a balance in order to

effectively navigate high school and their young adult years. Additionally, there have been a number of encounters on campus where students or colleagues have lost their lives and almost immediately, grief counselors were available to assist individuals that may be affected. Since the school has not faced any major incidents on campus, it is unclear if grief counseling would be available days after an incident occurred. However, if one were to judge the future on past practices, then the expectation is that mental health counselors would be available to assist both staff and students after an emergency. Although the use of these sessions seem to be limited to illness and death after an incident, the availability of other services throughout the school year for targeted mental health issues that affect students and staff is commendable. This was an area where Atlantic Community High School shined in their execution.

The next area of emergency procedures on campus involves methods of communication. The experiences at school which warranted parental contact encompass many different areas. They include but are not limited to: sporting events, testing dates, schools vacations, vaccinations, fundraisers, community service events, and emergency events. Parents and staff members are often notified via an automated dialer system or “robo-call”, whenever events are set to occur on campus. In addition to communication via the automated dialer system, parents receive updates via the school newsletter, community-led meetings and the campus PTSA organization that exists at the school. There is also a very active Twitter site in which all scholarship opportunities, pictures and additional announcements are posted. Therefore, Atlantic Community High School has all but exceeded expectations in this area.

One final area that needs to be addressed is how newcomers become acclimated to the campus. There are a lot of new teachers at the school; therefore, it makes it hard to ensure that everyone is updated on the emergency procedures. Implementation of teacher cadre to orient teachers that are new to the campus and new to the profession may help minimize some of the stress on the administration and may help teachers gain some professional development knowledge.

Conclusion

At the conclusion of this research study, it has been determined that the results generally support the current literature as it related to emergency preparedness in the school settings. There were areas in which Atlantic Community High School excelled and areas that need more attention. Although the researcher is an employee on the campus, there are components of emergency preparedness that remain unclear. Due to the nature of the study, the researcher could not ascertain the amount of latitude and discretion administrative employees are permitted when dealing with emergency situations on campus. Question about areas of uncertainty include but are not limited to: extensive building damage, active shooters, prolonged electrical and water outages, selection criteria and continuous training for crisis team members. Moreover, information pertaining to pandemics, active shooters, chemical or biological attacks, or medical emergencies were not discovered in this particular survey nor was it clear whether the gaps found on Atlantic's campus was due to structure or financial restraints. These are areas in which the federal government can provide guidance and funding in order for schools around the United States to achieve the highest level of safety. The value of school preparedness cannot be denied when discussing the safety of faculty, staff, and most importantly, children which utilize these school buildings each day.

Study Limitations

The study encompassed a number of limitations which impacted the strength of some of the findings throughout the study. The general limitations of the study include the following: The email survey approach is often selected for its ease of distribution. Its use, however, significantly limits the ability for researchers to gain access to detailed information which can impact the scope of the research study. Although the current data offers multiple sets of valuable information; due to the survey format extensive analysis of the information is limited. For example, there were a number of teachers that worked in different school settings before coming to Atlantic Community High School. These schools are located within one of the county's four designated areas – South, North, West, and Central; each of which has its own unique characteristics. Open-ended questions or a comment section in this instance could help the

researcher conduct both a vertical and horizontal comparative analysis; allowing them to carefully examine important safety components and make connections between school-based trends. Additionally, this approach would provide the opportunity to gain valuable insight about the nuances and idiosyncrasies of different schools and their respective areas; creating a snapshot of the district's preparedness as a whole. Despite the enormous amount of valuable information garnered from the survey, the inclusion of these critical pieces could eliminate the loss of other pertinent information during the research study.

An additional limitation lies within the number of instructional staff people on the campus versus the number of staff *actually* surveyed; an action which limited the amount of data that could be used for analysis. Research data was collected from only about fifty percent of the campus which means that the potential to gain access to more information exists. Another important limitation includes the fact that the survey was distributed to instructional personnel only. Using this approach skews the interpretation of the data because there are other groups such as non-instructional employees and substitute teachers which could offer a unique perspective on campus safety.

Another limitation possibly affecting outcomes was that the researcher could not get a sense of the real time frames in which people worked at the school. The choices were in five year spans which eliminated the opportunity to determine whether the teacher was at the beginning, middle or the very end of the spectrum. This information creates a huge difference in the analysis of the data because it can shed more insight into the knowledge, comfort levels, and expectations of the teacher based on where they are in their career as well as their time on campus.

Moreover, the manner in which some of the questions were posed to the respondents could have led to the possibility of skewed data. The question format, in some instances, lacked specificity which allowed the question to be left up to the respondent's own interpretation. Therefore, some of the answers may indicate a lack of understanding of the research question itself rather than a reflection of the level of campus preparedness. Additionally, the time period in which the survey was distributed may have

impacted survey completion. The survey was emailed to respondents between February 28th and March 13th. One concern with the time period is that January through May of each year marks the height of the statewide testing period. As a result, planning time is reduced; significantly impacting the amount of time teachers have to honor extracurricular requests. Therefore, depending on the recipient, the possibility that survey answers were randomly selected increase due to time constraints. Finally, one huge limitation is the number of responses garnered and its indirect correlation to anonymity, there is a possibility that not every group of respondents is fully represented as the study had been initially predicted. There were no checks and balances available to determine whether or not respondents selected the appropriate demographic information. Respondents' suspicious of the study's level of anonymity, may have chosen pseudo-categories to preserve their identity. Since these individuals could not be tracked without collecting more specific information; there is a slightly increased chance of skewed data within certain categories.

Potential for Future Research Considerations

Future research considerations include the development of relationships with school officials and conducting the emergency preparedness survey throughout the county in order to determine district-wide preparedness. An additional consideration is the development of the school district's relationship with community organizations such as law enforcement and emergency response corporations in order to further solidify school preparedness. Furthermore, with careful planning, certain safety components could be monitored and each school would be assigned a "safety score" which provides feedback that helps officials prepare effective emergency preparedness plans. Finally, the development of specific school-based curriculum which can serve as a link between school and global preparedness may be of interest.

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Appendix A

Emergency Preparedness Survey- Palm Beach County School District

Instructions: Please select the answer that appropriately describes your demographic information.

Interview Questions and Interview Guide

1. What is your perception of the overall preparedness of Atlantic Community High School's campus for any general emergency?
 - 1 – Not Prepared
 - 2 – Somewhat Prepared
 - 3- Moderately Prepared
 - 4- Very Prepared
 - 5 – Not Sure

2. How many people are on the crisis response team at Atlantic Community High School?
 - 0 – 2 members
 - 3 - 4 members
 - 5 -6 members
 - 7- 8 members
 - 9-10 members
 - Not Sure

3. Based on drills that have been conducted on Atlantic Community High School's campus, what percentage of staff members are aware of procedural expectations during a code red or lockdown emergency?
 - None (between 0 and 10%) of the staff is aware of procedural expectations
 - Some (at least 25%) of the staff is aware of procedural expectations
 - Most (50-75%) of the staff is aware of procedural expectations
 - All staff members (100%) are aware of procedural expectations

4. Based on drills that have been conducted on Atlantic Community High School's campus, what percentage of students and visitors are aware of procedural expectations during a code red or lockdown emergency?
 - None (between 0 and 10%) of the students are aware of procedural expectations
 - Some (at least 25%) of the students are aware of procedural expectations
 - Most (50-75%) of the staff is aware of procedural expectations
 - All staff members (100%) are aware of procedural expectations

5. Are the emergency procedures posted in multiple places on Atlantic Community High School's campus (or in the district offices)?
 - Yes
 - No
 - Not Sure

6. How confident are you that teachers and other staff members at Atlantic Community High School are aware of procedural expectations during weather-related emergencies?

Not Confident - None (between 0 and 10%) of faculty members are aware of evacuation procedures

Somewhat Confident (at least 25%) of the faculty members are aware of evacuation procedures

Very Confident Most (50-75%) of the faculty members are aware of evacuation procedures

Extremely Confident - All staff members (100%) are aware of evacuation procedures

7. How many active emergency incidents have occurred on Atlantic Community High School's campus within the past 5 years?

An incident can be defined as those occurrences that cause the school to be locked down or evacuated, inclement weather, damage to school structure, bomb threats, active shooter, community-based event surrounding a school site (i.e. burglary in a neighborhood with a school in the near vicinity.)

0 - 2 incidents

3 - 4 incidents

5 - 6 incidents

7 - 8 incidents

9 - 10 incidents

Not Sure

8. During an emergency it is important to maintain the continuity of the educational process. Have alternate sites for instruction been designated for use in case of extensive building damage after an incident at Atlantic Community High School?

Yes

No

Not Sure

9. Are there plans in place in case of a water outage that may last for a few days?

Yes

No

Not Sure

10. Are there plans in place for a mandatory campus-wide evacuation?

Yes

No

Not Sure

11. How often do crisis members at Atlantic Community High School receive training?

Once a Month

Once Every 6 months

Once a Year

After an Incident Has Occurred

Rarely does the team receive any formal training

Not Sure

12. Does the emergency plan at Atlantic Community High School contain a mental health component for survivors of an incident? For example, do survivors have access to mental health counseling services (free or referral-based) after an incident?
- Yes
 - No
 - Not Sure
13. Are parents and community members incorporated into the emergency response procedures at Atlantic Community High School (in case of emergency evacuation, alternate pick-up sites, etc)?
- Yes
 - No
 - Not Sure
14. How long have you been working at Atlantic Community High School?
- 0-5 years
 - 6-10 years
 - 11-15 years
 - 16-20 years
 - 21-25
 - 26+
15. What type of setting did you work in prior to coming to Atlantic Community High School? (Choose all that apply)
- Elementary High School
 - Middle School
 - High School
 - District or Area Office
16. How long have you been on the formal emergency response team at Atlantic Community High School?
- 0-5 years
 - 6-10 years
 - 11-15 years
 - 16-20 years
 - 21-25
 - 26+
 - I have never been a part of the official response team
17. What is your current role at Atlantic Community High School?
- Principal
 - Assistant Principal
 - Teacher
 - Guidance Counselor
18. What is your gender?
- Male
 - Female

19. What is your age range?

20- 24 years

25-29 years

30-34 years

35-39 years

40-44 years

45-49 years

50-54 years

55-59 years

60-64 years

65 +