

Each time a tragedy impacts a school somewhere in the U.S., there is a reaction felt across every other school community. These events also serve as a reminder that we have to remain vigilant on our own campuses. Sound partnerships with local law enforcement/fire agencies are vital to making sure we can maintain a safe and effective learning environment for students and staff. Trust built through years of work between TUSD and local authorities pays off when sites face events like the wild fire evacuations earlier this year. Great SRO relationships also continue to pay dividends in other more routine ways each day. Even with these resources and experiences, the best way to be prepared for an incident of any kind is to be proactive.

TUSD has protocols in place for many different emergency situations ranging from natural disasters to active shooters. The most vital of these is our “PSA” or “Prepare, Survey, Act” protocol. It applies to every emergency scenario we may face and has been endorsed by all of our policing agencies.

Prepare:

A proper response to any emergency scenario begins by being knowledgeable, trained in possible responses, and equipped with the supplies to handle the situation.

The following steps are some of the actions taken in TUSD to prepare for a variety of emergency scenarios:

- Student Services and Administrative Services meet with local law enforcement multiple times per year to assure alignment and effective communication.
- Administrative and teacher training is provided each year on emergency response. Policing agencies have also provided trainings to sites upon request.
- Student Services staff attends the Safe Schools Conference each year to hear the latest advice from experts including leaders from the Department of Homeland Security.
- TUSD drills for many emergency scenarios on every campus, multiple times per year. These drills are reported to and tracked by Student Services. A good example of a coordinated drill effort is the “Great California Shake Out” that happens each October.
- Student Services staff, Administrators, M&O staff, and school resource officers perform school safety walks each year on every campus in TUSD.
- Visitors to school campuses must sign in and enter campus through the main office once the school day begins. Fences and locked pedestrian gates at all campuses help to maintain security.
- School safety plans are updated each year at every campus.
- Lock Blocks (or similar devices) are installed on every classroom in TUSD, allowing rooms to be secured from the inside.
- Emergency radios are in place at each site.
- Titan HST (an instant-message-based app) allows for real-time communication between TUSD staff.
- New emergency equipment and supplies have been sent to all TUSD sites. This includes new storage bins, solar chargers, food and water, and search/rescue equipment.
- Special iPads for use in emergency scenarios have also been distributed to all sites. These iPads contain all site-level emergency plans, student emergency card data, and campus/utilities maps for each site.
- Table-Top simulations of emergency scenarios are conducted by Cabinet and Student Services staff each year.
- Gas-powered generators have been distributed to each site with medically fragile students to prevent medical issues as a result of lost power. These generators are started and maintained in conjunction with AED battery testing at each site multiple times each year.
- FIRST members, teachers, administrators, and staff consistently work to build positive relationships with students, to prevent bullying, to enhance school connectedness, to “capture kids’ hearts,” and to identify/intervene with students approaching crisis.

Survey:

The “Prepare, Survey, Act” protocol in place in TUSD differs from other “Run, Hide, Fight” or strict “Shelter in Place” protocols because it allows professionals the freedom to make appropriate decisions based on situational awareness. Therefore, teachers and administrators are asked to survey the situation and to maintain situational awareness throughout an ordeal. While it may be appropriate to “lock down” or “shelter in place” as a general first step in a given situation, a teacher feeling their students are in imminent danger by doing so may make the decision to evacuate students to an area they find safer. This permission to make the right decision based on first-hand information is vital to saving lives in active shooter situations. Examples of where this permission could have potentially saved lives was in Columbine/Sandy

Hook where shelter in place was maintained for all classes even when it was known that the shooters were systematically coming down hallways from room to room. Escape out a back door/window may have been an option, but wasn't allowed. Further, the recent Florida ordeal was initiated with a fire alarm pull. Understanding that there is nothing "automatic" about an evacuation, and that teachers need to maintain situational awareness may have resulted in getting students back into classrooms more quickly. This is said in hind-sight, but shows the importance of being aware of a scenario before acting.

Act:

Another essential element of the PSA protocol is the ability for staff and students to act swiftly based on their training and first-hand situational awareness. The "why" has already been explained, but the permission to act accordingly is the key piece of the puzzle. The default action may be to lock down when the campus becomes unsafe due to an intruder or police activity in an area, but knowing you have permission to run/fight/barricade your class within the room/evacuate out a window or off campus gives a professional many more options that could be more appropriate in a given circumstance. The default action of "Run or Hide" as utilized in other protocols may not be best due to the size of today's schools. Those were intended mainly for adults encountering a scenario in their workplace or other public venue. Picture all 3,000 plus students at Beckman "running" as an initial reaction to a crisis, and you will understand why it isn't an ideal protocol on a high school campus. Knowing, however, that you have permission to run/hide/fight once you have situational awareness or when you have no other option could save lives.

TUSD will continue to train, learn, and improve safety for students and staff wherever we can. While it would not be wise to disclose all elements of school safety planning to the general public, it should be known that all of our sites take preparation for a variety of anomalies very seriously.