

Statement of Clarence E. Cox, III
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“Proactively Protecting Our Schools”
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As a former Chief of a School District Police Department where I organized the agency from the ground up, I had several considerations as I assembled my team. One of the most important aspects was to develop the policies and procedures around the industries best practices. Most of these were put together from already established procedures recorded by both the National Association of School Resource Officers (NASRO) and the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP). It was because of my previous experience as an undercover drug agent as well as a drug task force commander and a proud father and grandfather that I became so passionate about the wellbeing of our youth. Over several decades I have arrested mothers and fathers who in many cases turned their minor children over to the Department of Child Protective Services when immediate family members were unavailable to care for the unfortunate child, thus often creating a negative view of law enforcement. In many instances, this negative heart-breaking experience is the very first encounter with law enforcement, therefore the role of the School Resource Officer (SRO) is essentially the first step to building the trust and legitimacy when they are used to protect the students, staff and visitors instead of a component to the disciplinary process.

SRO’s & Discipline Process

To avoid using SRO’s as a part of the discipline process, policies and procedures should be written as a part of the Standard Operating Procedures of both the School District and the partner Law Enforcement agency. This should also be communicated to the educators and administrators of the School System through the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and Operational Objectives of the Law Enforcement partner. This should also be communicated to other agencies within that jurisdiction who might also provide support in a formal/informal mutual aide agreement. The objectives can clearly be defined and communicated when the Law Enforcement administrator(s) collaborate in joint staff meetings, integrating Safety/Security with the Teaching/Learning.

Challenges with FERPA and Information Sharing (Examples)

Even as Director of the School System’s Safety and Security, I faced challenges when seeking vital intelligence regarding members of the student body because many educators are concerned with the “Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)”. For law enforcement, this is one of the greatest hindrance facing intelligence gathering when conducting investigations on students which makes threat assessments and predictive analysis difficult if not impossible.

Examples of Challenges:

On Tuesday June 9, 2015, the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD), Washington, DC, received a call from an unidentified male, calling himself "Elijah Graham" who claimed there was a bomb in the White House press briefing room set to detonate in approximately one hour. The White House press briefing room was evacuated and searched. No device was discovered. On Wednesday June 17, 2015 shortly after 9:00 PM a lone gunman 21-year-old Dylaan Roof walked into the historic Emmanuel African Methodist Church during the weekly bible study an open fire ultimately killing nine unsuspecting parishioners. While the first responders were collecting evidence at this crime scene, a bomb threat was called in to the local 911 center therefore causing an evacuation to an already horrific crime scene. Between June 9, 2015 and June 20, 2015, a male caller, later identified as Nathan Helton made numerous additional hoax bomb threats to airports, government facilities, secured sites, and USSS headquarters. This young male was a student in the Clayton County, GA. school system and only after obtaining a Federal Subpoena for this young man's records we determined that he has been documented since the age of eight (8) with mental illness. He was a known aggressor of "Bullying". He was documented to display physical, verbal and sexual aggressive behavior towards adults and peers. Although this young man had several assessment behavior intervention plans as he matriculated through his primary education, those plans did not decrease his continued assaults and threats on others students and teachers. These assessments were not shared with the School District Police or any other law enforcement entity until the issuance of a Federal Subpoena was served by the U.S. Secret Service shortly after the hoax bomb threat tied to Helton caused the evacuation of the White House Press briefing room. We agents entered Helton's residence to serve a search warrant he was actively calling in another hoax bomb threat using software that would scramble his I.P. address and disguise his voice. On December 12, 2015, at his arraignment in Clayton County (GA) Juvenile Court, Nathan Jackson Helton entered a guilty plea and admitted to a total of 22 felony counts of Terrorist Acts, O.C.G.A. 16-11-37 (a) and 22 felony counts of Transmitting A False Public Alarm, O.C.G.A. 16-10-28. The subject also entered a guilty plea and admitted to a total of five (5) misdemeanor counts of Using Telephone Communications for Obscene, Threatening, or Harassing Purposes, O.C.G.A. 16-11-39.1. On January 15, 2016, Clayton County (GA) Juvenile Court Judge Bobby D. Simmons determined that it would be in the best interest of the subject if he continues to remain in the custody of his legal guardian, his grandmother, Tra Helton. The subject would continue to be monitored bi-monthly by Georgia's Department of Juvenile Justice (GA-DJJ) for a period of 2 years. Countless numbers of resources have been deployed as a result of this young man's actions wasting tax payer dollars and putting many lives across this county in danger.

Training Students and Teachers

In many school districts, Active Shooter Drills are still optional, however these drills should become a mandatory requirement much like the required Fire Drills and Weather-Related Drills. If the Active Shooter Drills become a National Standard this will also help to change the culture therefore the integration of law enforcement into the academic setting will be much easier. For those who have entertained the idea of Arming Teachers, this idea is not nearly a solution to a continuous problem of armed confrontations on our school campuses. Teachers are already over tasked with teaching and learning so to now ask them to become proficient with a weapon and learn to properly secure this

weapon is ridiculous. Early this year a social studies teacher in Dalton, GA. barricaded himself in a classroom and fired a shot days after President Trump suggested that arming teachers would help these continued tragedies. The cost of providing teachers basic firearms training is around \$71.8 million and this doesn't include the price for providing the guns themselves.

Securing Infrastructures

With emerging technologies geared to safer schools, I encourage this administration to provide funding for school districts to provide secure infrastructures. The Department of Education should mandate that new campus construction funds meet certain requirements that would ensure that the latest technology for security be integrated into the project. If we are serious about the safety of our future, we will take the necessary acts to secure our campuses immediately. Securing facilities can start with instituting single points of entry and consistent monitoring by faculty and staff members especially during the beginning of the school day. Utilizing technology such as Audio Enhancement a product that will assist with the learning platform as well as security. This system has the capability of mass notification with integrated bell, paging and intercom systems both internally as well as externally. It provides first responders real time video within 80ft of the structure outside while providing full coverage inside the facility with 4k cameras. A great example of this technology can be seen in the Bibb County Macon, Georgia school system. The Concept of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design(CPTED) has to be incorporated into Federal, State and Local funding mechanisms as new campuses are constructed and old facilities are renovated. There should be a list of certified contractors who meet the required standards for CPTED, an example of that would be the Parsons Corporation, Pasadena California.

Coordination Between Schools and Local Law Enforcement

Even if a school district cannot afford to have School Resource Officers (SRO), it is imperative that the district and all local public safety (first responders) develop a comprehensive plan for each campus within that jurisdiction. These plans should include evacuation plans, maps, emergency contact numbers, relocation and reunification designations, and transportation resources. These plans should define areas of responsibility and be rehearsed regularly through table top exercises and mock drills. The revisions and updates should be communicated to all members of the team as well. The plans should also include nontraditional partners as well, like service providers, utility providers, as well as nonprofit providers keeping in mind that sensitive documents blue prints, student information will be confidential.