







# Acknowledgements

## **Project SAVE School Safety Plans Workgroup Members**

Evelyn Bernstein, *New York State Education Department*  
Deedrick Bertholf, *Delaware-Chenango BOCES*  
Fong Chan, *New York City Board of Education*  
David Clapp, *New York State Education Department*  
David DeMatteo, *New York State Emergency Management Office*  
Jeanne Eckdahl, *New York State Center for School Safety*  
Brian diLorenzo, *New York State Police*  
Renise Holohan, *New York State Police*  
Mary Grenz Jalloh, *New York State Center for School Safety*  
Art Lange, *Orange-Ulster BOCES*  
Sharon Lansing, *New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services*  
Joakim Lartey, *New York State Center for School Safety*  
Joseph LeViness, *New York State Office Mental Health*  
Mike Lynch, *New York State Police*  
David McBath, *New York State Police*  
Debra Fuchs Nadeau, *New York State Center for School Safety/Satellite/Sullivan BOCES*  
Laura Sahr, *New York State Education Department*  
Bill Shea, *New York State Emergency Management Office*  
John Soja, *New York State Education Department*  
Michael Smith, *Chemung County Emergency Management*  
Suzanne Smith, *New York State Office of Mental Health*  
Gregory Thomas, *New York City Board of Education*  
Felicia Watson, *New York State Center for School Safety*

## **Project SAVE School Safety Plans Coordination**

New York State Center for School Safety

## **School Safety Plans Workgroup Facilitators**

Sullivan Educational Associates

## **Publication Design**

Barbara Conboy

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# Introduction

Creating and maintaining safe learning environments is everybody's business. While schools remain among the safest places for our students, one incident of violence or disruption of learning is one too many. Teachers, school administrators and members of the general school community are becoming increasingly concerned about school safety and the potential for violence that exists in every community. Elementary, middle, junior high schools, and high schools in urban, suburban and rural communities throughout the State are seeking ways to ensure the safety of students in school. While media attention has focused on the most traumatic incidents of school violence, the impact of other violent acts that impair education also need to be given attention. These acts include bullying, threats or intimidation, disruptive behavior in class, carrying of weapons, fighting, physical assaults and other behaviors that impede learning.

The New York State Education Department is committed to promoting safe and healthy learning environments where students are secure in their pursuit of educational success. A growing body of research indicates that positive, skills-based approaches focusing on strengths may increase the safety of students and teachers in schools and promote an improved instructional climate for learning. While schools can play a vital role in the prevention of violence through preparedness, education and training, they need help from the entire community in this effort.

Today, our schools and the students served by them face great challenges. In the past decade, we have seen horrific acts of violence against individuals and groups of individuals for unfathomable reasons. Each time one of these events occurs, parents in cities and towns across America wonder: "Could this happen here, in my child's school, to my child?" Recent events in our own state in Elmira indicate that no school should assume that "It can't happen here."

To address issues of school safety and violence prevention, the Safe Schools Against Violence in Education Act (SAVE) was passed by the New York State Legislature and signed into law by Governor George E. Pataki on July 24, 2000. Project SAVE culminates the work of the Task Force on School Violence chaired by Lieutenant Governor Mary O. Donohue. The Task Force consisted of a broad range of qualified people from all parts of the State including students, parents, teachers, school administrators, law enforcement experts, business leaders, mental health professionals and local elected officials. From its inception in January 1999, the Task Force sought information concerning the best school violence prevention and intervention practices in the State and the nation. Ten public hearings were held throughout the State, providing a rich array of recommendations from local communities about ways to ensure the safety of New York's students. The Task Force's final report, *Safer Schools for the 21st Century* (October, 1999), contained a series of recommendations intended to reduce incidents of violence in schools and strengthen schools' capacities for responding to emergencies that could affect the health and safety of children.

The New York State Board of Regents approved amendments to the Regulations of the Commissioner of Education as emergency measures in November 2000 to ensure compliance with the new legislation. The revised regulations in Section 155.17 of the Commissioner's Regulations contain the requirements for schools concerning school safety plans. A major component of SAVE is the develop-

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Introduction, continued

The Task Force concludes that while nationwide, the percentage of students reporting injuries and threats of injury have declined noticeably during the nineties, the current level of violence in our schools still remains unacceptable. It interferes with the rights of all children to a sound education. Students who want to learn should have every opportunity to pursue their educational goals free from violence and disruption.

## **Promoting Student Academic Achievement**

Recognizing that all children will need knowledge and skills to be successful in a rapidly changing and complex society, New York State has initiated a comprehensive education reform strategy to ensure high achievement for all students. Key steps to strengthen teaching and learning include new higher learning standards across seven education content areas; new statewide exams and student assessments to ensure that students attain the knowledge and skills they need for success; and new teacher training and certification requirements that address the need for a competent and highly-qualified teaching force.

A growing body of research and evaluative studies is developing the critical link between achievement and safe, healthy, orderly and supportive school environments where learning can take place. Students need a safe and secure environment that is free of drugs and crime in order to learn. The State's Task Force on School Violence repeatedly heard from individuals throughout the State that all facets of the community must engage in meaningful dialogue to use all available resources to ensure safe schools for students. In particular, the influences that lead to violence must be addressed in a very direct way by school leaders and staff, students and parents, and community agencies and leaders. Students must be involved as partners because we cannot eliminate school violence without them.

## **Planning for Success**

The increasing focus on violence prevention and the creation of safe schools where children can learn has generated strong support and concerted actions on the part of caring individuals in communities throughout the State and the nation. Many schools have realized the wealth of resources available in their community, and the time and effort that people will offer for the benefit of children. Model school safety strategies and exemplary planning processes and procedures have emerged in schools in New York and throughout the nation. The level of information and resources available for assisting schools and communities in school safety planning has risen dramatically over the past several years, and is readily accessible for use.

Project SAVE draws upon the considerable expertise and insight of knowledgeable individuals in formulating strategies for addressing school safety. The comprehensive approach to school safety and violence prevention, and the focus on broad-based community participation and involvement in school safety planning, incorporate best practices and program models that have proven effective for many schools. The creation and organization of school safety teams at the district and school building levels provides a proven model for drawing upon both school and community resources for enhancing the safety of students in school.

# Information about School Safety Plans

The SAVE law and implementing regulations require the development of a school safety plan at the district level, and individual emergency response plans for each building in the district. The Task Force report recognizes that “In the quest to take a pro-active approach regarding school safety issues, the local school district must find a way to personalize that approach to fit its own individual needs.” (1999, p. 24) The development of the school safety plans can be the framework for the district in managing its initiatives in creating a safe and orderly school environment in which learning can take place. Planning teams should begin their work with a thorough review of the law and regulations. To assist districts and school buildings with the process for school safety planning and the formation of school safety teams, the following information provides important details concerning the SAVE planning requirements.

## Who Must Adopt School Safety Plans?

Every Board of Education, every Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) and County Vocational Education and Extension Board and the Chancellor of the New York City School District must adopt:

- A District-wide School Safety Plan, and
- A Building-level Emergency Response Plan for each building in the district.

## When Do Plans Have to Be Developed?

Plans need to be developed and adopted by the Board of Education or the Chancellor in New York City by July 1, 2001, and reviewed and updated annually by July 1 of each succeeding year.

## Who Develops the Plans?

The District-wide School Safety Plan is to be developed by a District-wide School Safety Team, and the Building-level plan is to be developed by a Building-level School Safety Team.

## Who Are On the Planning Teams?

Legislation specifies the composition of school safety planning teams. While there are requirements of who must be on the planning teams, districts are encouraged to consider the inclusion of individuals beyond the minimum required who can contribute to ensuring continuity between the district and the building-level plans.

- **The District-wide School Safety Team** is appointed by the Board of Education or the Chancellor in New York City and shall include, but is not limited to, representatives of the School Board, student, teacher, administrator, and parent organizations, school safety personnel and other school personnel.

- **The Building-level School Safety Team** is appointed by the building principal and shall include, but is not limited to, representatives of teacher, administrator and parent organizations, school safety per-

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Information about School Safety Plans, continued

sonnel, other school personnel, community members, local law enforcement officials, local ambulance or other emergency response agencies, and any other representatives the School Board, Chancellor or other governing body deems appropriate.

## **Are there any differences in requirements for cities with over 1,000,000 inhabitants?**

Amendments have been made to Commissioner's Regulations, Section 155.17 governing School Safety Plans that apply exclusively to New York City.

- Subdivision (c) – Definitions – has been amended to modify the definitions of Emergency Response Team and Post-Incident Response Team. Rather than requiring all schools in New York City to have unique teams in each of its schools, the amended regulation now allows such teams to be created on the district level with building-level participation.
- Subdivision (e) (1) – District-wide School Safety Plans – has been amended in relation to the components required for District-wide School Safety Plans in New York City. The following subparagraphs of subdivision (e) (1) will not be required in New York City District-wide School Safety Plans: (ii), (vii), (viii), (ix), (x), (xix) and (xx).
- It should be noted that subdivision (g) – Communication Liaisons – does not identify a chief communication liaison in New York City for local or State emergencies.

## **Are the Plans Subject to Public Comment?**

Both District-wide School Safety Plans and Building-level Emergency Response Plans must be made available for public comment at least thirty days prior to adoption by the School Board. Only a summary of each of the Building-level plans must be available for public comment. The School Board may adopt the plans only after at least one public hearing has been held which provides for the participation of school personnel, parents, students and other interested parties.

## **Where Should Plans Be Submitted?**

A copy of each District-wide School Safety Plan and any amendments to the plan must be submitted to the Commissioner of Education no later than thirty days after adoption. A copy of each Building-level Emergency Response Plan and any amendments must be filed with appropriate local law enforcement officials and with the State Police within thirty days of adoption. (See Resources Section for State Police addresses.)

# Guidelines For Developing School Safety Plans

## Introduction

The District-wide School Safety Plan provides the framework for a school district to identify and implement appropriate strategies for creating and maintaining a safe and secure learning environment for all its students. Developed by the District-wide School Safety Team, the district's plan provides the overall guidance and direction for development of the Building-level Emergency Response Plan for each of the school buildings in the district. While the district-wide plan covers a broad scope of activities, including violence prevention, intervention and response, the building plans focus more directly on critical actions that must be taken to protect the safety of students and adults in the event of an emergency. Taken together, the district and building plans provide a comprehensive approach to addressing school safety and violence prevention, and provide the structure where all individuals can fully understand their roles and responsibilities for ensuring the safety of the entire school community.

The Task Force recognized that ensuring that schools remain safe places of learning requires a major strategic commitment. The effectiveness of any safety plan hinges on the ability of school administrators and their safety teams to assess the district's unique concerns and security needs, and to identify and implement appropriate strategies for creating and maintaining a safe school environment.

The intent of the legislation emphasizes that effective school safety planning works best when school administrators, school staff, students, parents and community members undertake an honest and critical appraisal of a school's safety program and security needs. Developing a school safety plan requires the conduct of a systematic assessment of school safety and security, followed by the development or modification of a school safety plan that addresses the problems and needs identified by the assessment. Only then can a school safety plan truly meet the needs of its school community.

Recognizing the critical need of data in decision-making, the New York State Center for School Safety (NYSCSS) offers the following outline to consider in development of school safety plans for districts and schools that has been used successfully as a guide in many schools:

- **Data Collection:** What information does the school already have available? What else does the school need (internal and external sources)?
- **Data Analysis:** How can the school use this information to identify its needs?
- **Problem-Solving:** Based on the data, can the school identify what it needs to do?
- **Implementation:** Based on the research, what strategies are available that would be useful to the school community and address the identified needs?
- **Evaluation:** How does the school know its strategies have made a difference?

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## Guidelines For Developing School Safety Plans, continued

The Task Force also recognized that the key to success is a community's ability to build a mechanism for true collaboration through involving law enforcement, schools, human services agencies, grass roots and faith-based community organizations, and parents and business people. Many districts across the State have established collaborative relationships in order to promote safer schools.

### **Guiding Principles**

A school safety planning workgroup of key State agencies with expertise in school safety, violence prevention, and risk management developed a set of guiding principles for school safety planning. The principles are as follows.

- Schools should build on what is already in place. Many school districts and school buildings have already developed school safety and violence prevention plans. These should be used as the foundation for meeting the new requirements.
- Plans should be developed through an open process with broad community participation. Students, parents, teachers, school leaders, public safety agencies and other key partners should be involved in plan development in a meaningful way. Broad participation by community members will gain their acceptance and support of school plans.
- Planning should be comprehensive, encompassing activities from early prevention through crisis response. In addressing the intent of the law, schools should focus on a process-driven approach to planning rather than on a checklist of activities that must be done.
- Planning should be based on an assessment of data. School safety plans will be more responsive to particular school needs when data related to the school is used as a basis for planning.
- Plans should be user-friendly, easy to read, and understandable. The plans should be widely disseminated within the community to foster broad acceptance and participation.
- Plans should clearly define roles and responsibilities. It is crucial that all key people know their roles and responsibilities, as well as the roles and responsibilities of others in the event of a crisis situation. Plans should also include contingency provisions to enable implementation when key individuals are unavailable or not in a position to perform their roles.
- Staff development should be included in the planning process. For plans to be effective, staff and other involved individuals need to develop their knowledge and skills about the components in the plans and actions to be taken for implementing the components in appropriate situations.
- Plans should be coordinated with nonpublic schools and recognize the needs of special school populations. Students and staff with disabilities, limited English speaking students and other special student populations should be addressed in all plans.
- Plans should be continually reviewed and updated to remain current. Changes in personnel, local conditions and other factors necessitate periodic review and updating of plans to ensure their applicability to current conditions.

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## Guidelines For Developing School Safety Plans, continued

**Second:** A series of resources have been developed to assist in developing school safety plans. Those resources are contained in the appendices of this document and will be helpful in the planning process.

- The first resource is a chart that provides an easy reference guide for districts and schools to identify the requirements in Commissioner’s Regulations, Section 155.17. This chart represents only the minimal requirements required in the regulations. Many schools may wish to add additional components to meet their individual needs.
- The second resource represents a series of guiding questions that have been developed by the school safety planning workgroup for each of the four categories in the District-wide School Safety Plan and in the Building-level Emergency Response Plan. These guiding questions have been developed to serve as a tool to identify the key requirements and other considerations to be addressed in the plans. School districts or individual buildings may wish to add additional questions for consideration to meet their individual needs.
- The third resource is a Project SAVE School Safety Plan Worksheet that has been developed as a planning tool. The worksheet allows for the organizing of all the key information about policies and procedures in a convenient and easy-to-use format. This tool may be useful to districts and schools as a tool for the school safety teams to use in the planning process. This tool contains the following sections to identify:
  - whether the District-wide or Building-level School Safety Team is using the format;
  - which component of the plan is being considered;
  - which specific requirement is to be addressed;
  - guiding questions to stimulate discussion;
  - external and internal resources that could be used;
  - the tasks and activities that could assist the planning team in the planning process; and
  - a summary of the decisions or options selected by the district or school building.
- The fourth resource is a listing of all relevant State agencies and appropriate local contacts to assist in the planning process.
- The fifth resource is a series of websites which can be useful to school districts and to individual buildings to answer questions or provide information regarding general or specific issues about school safety planning.
- The sixth resource is a listing of print documents that school districts or individual school buildings have found useful in the planning process.



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Guidelines For Developing School Safety Plans, continued

members better understand early warning signs of potentially violent behaviors. Similarly, the school district's current school emergency management plan may be a key internal resource used to meet certain new requirements.

- Determine the tasks and activities that need to be completed in order to develop all the required components in the school safety plan. For example, a policy for reducing potential acts of violence may call for a new system for the registration of all visitors and the wearing of a visitor pass when an individual visits any school. The task could be to establish visitor protocols for school visitors, with activities including: developing sign in sheets, identifying the roles and responsibilities of school staff when a visitor arrives, and specifying rules for school visitations. The planning worksheets can be used to document the person(s) or group who will complete the activities, and the timeframe for their completion.
- Prepare a concise summary of the key strategies and activities included in each category as a way of summarizing for all individuals the important elements in the school safety plan.
- Review and consider the Sample Outlines for the District-wide and Building-level School Safety Plans as a potential format for developing the school safety plans. Sample outlines are provided as one way of organizing the information for presentation in the plan. These sample plans provide the structure for the information to be entered for each plan at the district and building levels. For the School Building-level Emergency Response Plan, a sample summary outline is also provided since the plan itself is confidential and legislation requires that only a summary be provided for public comment. Some districts may have already developed their plans in another format or are considering organizing their plan differently. While no single format is required, all legislative and regulatory components must be included in the plans.

In conclusion, the New York State Education Department understands that school districts across the state are in varying phases of planning. Some districts have comprehensive school safety plans in place that have been tested over a period of time, and will have few adjustments to make in order to comply with the Commissioner's Regulations, Section 155.17. Other districts may need further assistance to meet all of the requirements in the regulations. The sample outlines and resources made available in this guide are designed to assist all districts in their planning process.

PROJECT SAVE  
(Safe Schools Against Violence in Education)

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# SAMPLE OUTLINE

## For District-wide School Safety Plan

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Commissioner's Regulation 155.17

### Introduction

*Discussion:* The Introduction is used to provide information about the background of the plan. Since the district-wide plan is subject to public comment prior to its adoption, the introductory section offers an opportunity for a district to provide important background information, describe its philosophy that guided the planning process, and include any other information that may aid people who will be reviewing the plan. The district may state its intent to invite the greater school community to assist in providing a safe school environment, and discuss the collaboration that is critical to the plan. The district may also want to discuss its process of needs assessment and the data sources used to develop the plan, including any data specific to the need for the plan and any information that is relevant to violence prevention and school safety. The sample introduction provided below is one potential format for consideration to initiate this section. District specific information should be added to reflect the individual characteristics of the school district.

Emergencies and violent incidents in school districts are critical issues that must be addressed in an expeditious and effective manner. Districts are required to develop a District-wide School Safety Plan designed to prevent or minimize the effects of serious violent incidents and emergencies and to facilitate the coordination of the district with local and county resources in the event of such incidents or emergencies. The district-wide plan is responsive to the needs of all schools within the district and is consistent with the more detailed emergency response plans required at the school building level. Districts are at risk of a wide variety of acts of violence, natural, and technological disasters. To address these threats, the State of New York has enacted the Safe Schools Against Violence in Education (SAVE) law. This component of Project SAVE is a comprehensive planning effort that addresses risk reduction/prevention, response, and recovery with respect to a variety of emergencies in the school district and its schools.

Describe the process used by the district in developing this school safety plan, including any strategies such as community or student involvement and collaboration. The district may describe the data or process used for needs assessment and implementation of the plan to meet the individualized needs of the district in keeping with the intent of Project SAVE.

The \_\_\_\_\_ School District supports the SAVE Legislation, and intends to engage in a planning process. The Superintendent of Schools encourages and advocates on-going district-wide cooperation and support of Project SAVE.

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## Sample Outline for District-Wide School Safety Plan, continued

***Responses to Acts of Violence: Implied or Direct Threats***

Describe the district's policies and procedures for responding to implied or direct threats of violence by students, teachers, other school personnel and visitors to the school. The following types of procedure(s) could be used by the district:

- Use of staff trained in de-escalation or other strategies to diffuse the situation.
- Inform Building Principal of implied or direct threat.
- Determine level of threat with Superintendent/Designee.
- Contact appropriate law enforcement agency, if necessary.
- Monitor situation, adjust response as appropriate, include the possible use of the Emergency Response Team.

The district may also describe the training and professional development that is available to assist personnel, such as training in de-escalation or identification of early warning signs of potentially violent behavior.

***Acts of Violence***

Describe the district's policies and procedures for responding to acts of violence by students, teachers, other school personnel and visitors to the school, including consideration of zero-tolerance policies for school violence. The following types of procedure(s) could be used by the district:

- Determine level of threat with Superintendent/Designee.
- If the situation warrants, isolate the immediate area and evacuate if appropriate.
- Inform Building Principal/Superintendent.
- If necessary, initiate lockdown procedure, and contact appropriate law enforcement agency.
- Monitor situation; adjust response as appropriate; if necessary, initiate early dismissal, sheltering or evacuation procedures.

***Response Protocols***

Identify the district's selection of appropriate responses to emergencies, including protocols for responding to bomb threats, hostage takings, intrusions and kidnappings. The following protocols are provided as examples:

- Identification of decision makers.
- Plans to safeguard students and staff.
- Procedures to provide transportation, if necessary.
- Procedures to notify parents.
- Procedures to notify media.
- Debriefing procedures.



## Sample Outline for District-Wide School Safety Plan, continued

- Contact local media to inform parents of early dismissal – *Incident Reporting Form*.
- Set up an information center so that parents may make inquiries as to the situation.
- Retain appropriate district personnel until all students have been returned home.
  
- Evacuation (before, during and after school hours, including security during evacuation and evacuation routes)
  - Determine the level of threat – *Superintendent/Designee*.
  - Contact Transportation Supervisor to arrange transportation – *Designee*.
  - Clear all evacuation routes and sites prior to evacuation.
  - Evacuate all staff and students to pre-arranged evacuation sites.
  - Account for all student and staff population. Report any missing staff or students to Building Principal.
  - Make determination regarding early dismissal – *Designee*.
  - If determination was made to dismiss early, contact local media to inform parents of early dismissal – *Incident Reporting Form*.
  - Ensure adult supervision or continued school supervision/security.
  - Set up an information center so that parents may make inquiries as to the situation.
  - Retain appropriate district personnel until all students have been returned home.
  
- Sheltering sites (internal and external)
  - Determine the level of threat – *Superintendent/Incident Commander/Designee*.
  - Determine location of sheltering depending on nature of incident.
  - Account for all students and staff. Report any missing staff or students to designee.
  - Determine other occupants in the building.
  - Make appropriate arrangements for human needs.
  - Take appropriate safety precautions.
  - Establish a public information officer to provide information and current status of the situation to parents and other inquiring parties.
  - Retain appropriate district personnel until all students have been returned home.





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# SAMPLE OUTLINE For Building-level Emergency Response Plan

Commissioner's Regulation 155.17

## Introduction

*Discussion:* The Introduction is used to provide information about the background of the Building-level Emergency Response Plan, including how the plan is coordinated with the District-wide School Safety Plan. Since a summary of the Building-level Emergency Response Plan is subject to public comment prior to its adoption, the introductory section offers the opportunity for a building to provide important background information, describe its philosophy that guided the planning process, and include any other information that may aid people who will be reviewing a summary of the plan. The sample introduction provided below is one potential format for consideration and building-specific information should be included.

Emergencies in schools must be addressed in an expeditious and effective manner. Schools are at risk of acts of violence, natural, and manmade disasters. To address these threats, the State of New York has enacted the Safe Schools Against Violence in Education (SAVE) law. Project SAVE is a comprehensive planning effort that addresses prevention, response, and recovery with respect to a variety of emergencies in schools.

Describe the process used by the building in developing this Building-level Emergency Response Plan, including any strategies such as community or student involvement and collaboration. The school may describe the data or process used for needs assessment and implementation of the plan to meet the individualized needs of the school in keeping with the intent of Project SAVE.

The \_\_\_\_\_ School District supports the SAVE Legislation, and intends to facilitate the planning process. The Superintendent of Schools encourages and advocates on-going district-wide cooperation and support of Project SAVE.

## Section I: General Considerations and Planning Guidelines

*Discussion:* Section I is used to provide information about key considerations and planning guidelines that were used in developing the building-level plan. The sample format shown below, for example, includes the purpose of the plan; an identification of the building-level teams including the School Safety Team, the School Emergency Response Team, and the Post-incident Response Team; an identification of the overall concepts of operation included in the plan; and a description of the plan review and public comment process that will be used for the building's plan. As the school building develops this section of its plan, specific information should be provided, such as the names and positions/affiliations of individuals on the school's teams; procedures for public review and comment on the plan; date(s) for review and adoption of the plan by the Board of Education and any other information deemed pertinent for inclusion in this section.

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# **SAMPLE SUMMARY**

## **Building-Level Emergency Response Plan**

### **For Public Hearing**

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*Commissioner's Regulation 155.17*

### **Introduction**

*Discussion:* The Introduction is used to provide information about the background of the Building-level Emergency Response Plan, including how the plan is coordinated with the District-wide School Safety Plan. Since a summary of the Building-level Emergency Response Plan is subject to public comment prior to its adoption, the introductory section offers the opportunity for a building to provide important background information, describe its philosophy that guided the planning process, and include any other information that may aid people who will be reviewing a summary of the plan. The sample introduction provided below is one potential format for consideration and building-specific information should be included. The entire introductory section of the building's plan could be used in the plan summary that will be made available for public review.

Legislation requires that Building-level Emergency Response Plans shall be confidential and shall not be subject to disclosure under Article 6 of the Public Officers Law or any other provision of law, in accordance with Education Law Section 2801-a. Pursuant to Commissioner's Regulation 155.17 (e)(3), a summary of this plan is being provided for public comment 30 days prior to its adoption. The district-wide and building-level plans may be adopted by the School Board only after at least one public hearing that provides for the participation of school personnel, parents, students and any other interested parties. The plans must be formally adopted by the Board of Education.

Describe the process used by the building in developing this Building-level Emergency Response Plan, including any strategies such as community or student involvement and collaboration. The school may describe the data or process used for needs assessment and implementation of the plan to meet the individualized needs of the school in keeping with the intent of Project SAVE.

Emergencies in schools must be addressed in an expeditious and effective manner. Schools are at risk of acts of violence, natural, and manmade disasters. To address these threats, the State of New York has enacted the Safe Schools Against Violence in Education (SAVE) law. Project SAVE is a comprehensive planning effort that addresses prevention, response, and recovery with respect to a variety of emergencies in schools.

The \_\_\_\_\_ School District supports the SAVE Legislation and intends to facilitate the planning process. The Superintendent of Schools encourages and advocates on-going district-wide cooperation and support of Project SAVE.

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