

# **Comprehensive School Safety Audit Process**

## *Henrico County, Virginia*

### **1. The Problem/Need for the Program**

Henrico County has 71 schools and additional learning centers. Without a comprehensive safety audit program there would be no way to ensure that every school and center administrator is providing its staff and students with the maximum level of safety, security and emergency readiness. We were well aware that there was inequity from one school to another in the focus on safety and attention to the security of the learning environment. The comprehensive safety audit program was developed to ensure that:

- a. The standards established by the leadership team for the school system, as set forth in the HCPS Safety and Crisis Manual are being consistently and equitably followed across the division.
- b. Emergency readiness drills are carried out regularly and effectively
- c. School buildings are safe and secure during the school day.
- d. Building codes are being followed and fire prevention best practices and regulations are in effect.
- e. All students and staff across the division are at the same high level of emergency readiness.
- f. Safety deficiencies can be identified and mitigated in a timely manner.
- g. By using the same team of auditors at each school, and following a written audit protocol, the audits are fair to all parties involved.

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### **2. Fulfilling Program Criteria**

The Comprehensive Safety Audit Process is not mandated by local, state or federal law, but rather is an initiative instituted by HCPS in an effort to maximize the safety and emergency readiness of every school and learning center in the division. By first writing the Safety & Crisis Manual the division gave each school clear guidelines and a clear expectation for safety and security at each school. To monitor the progress of each school, the comprehensive safety audit process checks over 1000 points of safety, security and emergency readiness outlined in the Safety & Crisis Manual, and thus ensures compliance. The end result is that all of the public schools in Henrico County meet or exceed the safety and security expectations established by the school division administration. This should prove to be a model for other school districts and shows that HCPS is proactive and innovative when it comes to ensuring student safety.

### **3. How the Program Was Carried Out**

Many individuals participated in the development of this process, including Henrico County Public School principals, school safety chairs, school security staff, safety audit team members and central office staff, as well as, Henrico County law enforcement and fire department staff. The audit process we currently use was first implemented during the 2010-2011 school year. The 2012-2013 school year will complete the first three-year cycle of the audit process.

The audit process takes place on a three-year audit cycle with one third of schools participating in a comprehensive safety audit and an interim safety audit for the two

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remaining years. During the first year of the cycle, the audit team, as described further in this segment, visits a school to conduct a thorough, comprehensive evaluation of the school's safety practices and emergency plans. During the comprehensive safety audit visit, audit team members interview school administrators, staff, and students, conduct a walk-through of the school, observe an emergency drill, and review safety-related documentation. The tool used for the audit process is the HCPS Safety and Security Audit Protocol. This HCPS-specific evaluation tool provides a standardized document used to assess a school's safety practices and procedures, and the audit report, which results from a comprehensive audit, is used as an internal division document to assist schools in enhancing their safety culture. After each comprehensive safety audit, an overall rating rubric is completed by the audit team, and schools that demonstrate their commitment and dedication to school safety by exceeding the expectations outlined below will be recognized through the Henrico County Public Schools Safety Recognition Program, and an award is presented to the principal on behalf of their school. During each of the subsequent two years of the cycle, audit team representatives conduct a follow-up or interim safety audit. During an interim safety audit, audit team members interview appropriate staff members, conduct a walk-through of the school, and seek information that demonstrates progress on the recommendations noted in the comprehensive audit report. In the fourth year, the cycle begins anew.

During the first year of the three-year cycle, the comprehensive safety audit involves a one-day site visit with approximately seven to nine members of the audit team. During the audit visit, at a minimum, the following activities occur to allow the audit team

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members to collect information and develop a written report based on observations, documentations, and safety-related data:

- Interviews with the administration
- Walk-through and visual assessment of the school building and grounds
- Emergency drill
- Interview with key safety personnel, including the Maintenance Supervisor, School Counselor, School Safety Chairperson, School Resource Officer, School Security Officer, Nurse/Clinic Attendant, and Cafeteria Manager
- Interview with the faculty
- Interview with students
- Review of the documentation

During the visit, the audit team members will use the checklists contained in the audit protocol to ensure that all components of the audit are assessed.

At the end of each comprehensive safety audit, the audit team will complete a rubric. Based on the evidence collected and analyzed during the audit visit, team members holistically rate each of the fifteen components of the audit process to determine areas where a school may have met and/or exceeded safety and security audit expectations and areas needing improvement. After audit team members have rated each section of the audit protocol, the audit team coordinator will tally the number of “meets expectations” and/or “exceeds expectations” ratings received by the school, thus determining the school’s overall rating.

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If the school receives a “needs improvement” rating on one or more components of the audit, the school will develop and submit a School Safety Improvement Plan addressing the component(s) needing improvement to the HCPS Safety and Security Coordinator, who will then meet with the school’s director to discuss the next step. The school’s principal/administrator must submit the School Safety Improvement Plan within 60 days of the comprehensive audit, or the last day of the school year, whichever comes first. If the school’s director and HCPS Safety and Security Coordinator are in agreement that the school has sufficiently implemented a feasible plan to satisfy areas needing improvement, then the school’s rating on those components will be changed to a “meets expectations.”

During the two years following a school’s comprehensive safety audit, the school will participate in an interim safety audit. The interim safety audit will involve a half-day visit by one to two members of the safety audit team. At a minimum, the interim safety audit visit will consist of the following activities:

- Interview with the administration
- Walk-through and visual assessment of the school building and grounds
- Interviews with key safety personnel, including the Maintenance Supervisor, School Counselor, School Safety Chairperson, School Resource Officer, School Security Officer, Nurse/Clinic Attendant, and Cafeteria Manager, as needed.
- Review of documentation, including the Safety and Crisis Manual, Crisis Kits, and the Training/Drill List

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During the interim safety audit visit, audit team members look for data and information that demonstrates growth and improvement on the recommendations made during the most recent comprehensive safety audit. The auditor will prepare a report detailing the findings from the interim audit visit, which will be shared with the school principal or administrator and appropriate division level staff.

The Safety Audit Team is comprised of internal and external stakeholders of the division, including school system staff and public safety officials. The team members bring diverse experiences and expertise, which serves to ensure a comprehensive and objective process. The team representatives include:

- Retired staff from HCPS Department of Construction and Maintenance,
- Retired HCPS school administrators,
- HCPS Safety and Security Coordinator,
- HCPS School Safety Coordinator,
- Staff from HCPS Department of Pupil Transportation,
- Deputy Fire Marshals from the Henrico County Division of Fire, and
- School Resource Officer Supervisors from the Henrico County Division of Police.

### **The Cost of the Program:**

- Binders – The first year, each principal was given a 3-ring binder containing the safety audit protocol. One hundred were printed at an approximate cost of \$5.00 each for a total of \$500.00.
- Salaries for team members - These costs can vary greatly. The police and fire departments cover the cost of their representatives. There are approximately

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25 full workdays used by police, and the same by fire. Other representatives, such as the Construction & Maintenance team member, might be a retired member who is paid a supplementary salary for each day worked, or it could be a current employee. The former principals on the team are retired and their salary is supplemental to their retirement.

The program has been extremely successful as is evidenced by three areas in safety and security at each school:

- Emergency readiness – Prior to the comprehensive audit process, schools completed fire drills only (no other drills consistently) and only teachers participated in lockdown drills, when they were held. Office staff was not included in training and teachers were notified of drills in advance. Crisis plans were not turned in completely or consistently. Now, in every school in Henrico County, thorough and complete crisis plans are turned in before the first day a student ever steps foot on campus each year. A multitude of drills are now carried out with staff AND students and include pre-training and then the drill. All staff, including custodians, cafeteria staff and front office staff are included in all training and drills. We have moved from a county where drills were completed just to “check the box” to show the drill was done. Our county now fully engages all school staff and uses drills to truly prepare students and employees in emergency readiness.

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- Building security – Prior to the implementation of the comprehensive safety audits process; all of our school buildings were open. Doors were not locked and movement in and out was unfettered. Now, with the standards set in the Safety & Crisis Manual and consistently audited, all self-contained elementary schools and middle schools are secured and most high schools are secured. We are still working on securing the campus-style schools. In addition to locking doors, video surveillance camera systems have been installed at two thirds of our schools with the other third scheduled for future installations. Our goal is to have 100 of schools fully covered by video surveillance.
- Consistency of safety procedures used – Prior to the development of the Safety & Crisis Manual and the implementation of the companion comprehensive safety audit process, how a drill was conducted and how safety procedures were carried out was up to the principal in each building. Safety procedures are now clearly outlined and how they are implemented is thoroughly audited. We have worked with police and fire to ensure that a school's response to emergencies is consistent from one school to the next.