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LESSON LEARNED

School Safety: Sharing Student Criminal Records with School Administrators

SUMMARY

Law enforcement officials should consider implementing procedures for sharing all criminal records of students with the school districts in which the students are enrolled. This may assist school personnel in identifying potentially dangerous students.

DESCRIPTION

On April 20, 1999, two students at Columbine High School in Jefferson County, Colorado, began an armed assault that resulted in 15 deaths and 24 injuries. The incident lasted for approximately 47 minutes, during which the 2 heavily armed seniors fired on their teachers and fellow students, scattered homemade explosives throughout the school, and exchanged gunfire with law enforcement personnel before committing suicide.

Both shooters had previously been arrested for breaking into and stealing contents from a van. However, the Jefferson County Sheriff's Office (JCSO) did not report the arrests to school administrators. At that time, JCSO's policy was to provide school administrators with information on student criminal activities only relating to serious crimes such as drug dealing, assault, and other crimes that would carry felony charges if committed by an adult. Because it was not a serious crime, this arrest was not reported to the school district. School and law enforcement personnel might have investigated the perpetrators and prevented the attack if the shooters' criminal citations had been reported to school administrators.

For additional information on recommendations for information sharing between school districts and law enforcement officials, please see the *Lessons Learned Information Sharing* Lesson Learned document: [School Safety: Improving Information Sharing between School District and Law Enforcement Officials](#).

The Columbine Review Commission recommended that school administrators and law enforcement officials establish protocols for exchanging the criminal and disciplinary records of students to the extent permitted by state and federal law. Timely information sharing may assist school and law enforcement personnel with identifying potentially dangerous individuals and with preventing attacks.

Implementation

In 2000, Colorado enacted legislation to clarify what information can be shared between the state's school administrators and law enforcement officials. One of the statute's provisions allows law enforcement personnel to notify the school district when its students engage in criminal behavior resulting in either a juvenile delinquency report or a juvenile criminal report.

As a result of the statute, JCSO alerts Jefferson County Public Schools of any criminal charges related to any student enrolled in the school district, regardless of the severity of the crime. JCSO uses the following two procedures to share this information. JCSO maintains a liaison in the Jefferson County Juvenile Assessment Center (JAC), which provides services to at-risk youth in contact with the criminal justice system. The JCSO liaison notifies the JAC of all student convictions in Jefferson County, and the JAC in turn sends this information on to the schools once a month. Jefferson County school resource officers also give information on pending court appearances directly to school principals.

State Restrictions

Some states may have restrictions regarding the types of information that may be shared between school administrators and law enforcement officials. For additional information on legal issues relating to information sharing, please contact the office of your state attorney general.

School district administrators and law enforcement officials should consider implementing similar processes to ensure that all schools receive timely information on all criminal activities carried out by their students.

CITATIONS

Colorado Attorney General's Office. *Colorado Juvenile Information Exchange Laws: A Model for Implementation*. May 2001.

https://www.llis.dhs.gov/member/secure/detail.cfm?content_id=19078

Columbine Review Commission. *The Report of Governor Bill Owens' Columbine Review Commission*. May 2001.

https://www.llis.dhs.gov/member/secure/detail.cfm?content_id=739

DeAngelis, Frank. Principal, Columbine High School. Interview with *Lessons Learned Information Sharing*, 31 May 2007.

Muse, Gary. Sergeant, Jefferson County Sheriff's Office. Interview with *Lessons Learned Information Sharing*, 02 Jun 2007.

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