



Lexington Public Schools

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Our Schools

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Patrick Goddard, Director of Public Facilities

When I accepted the position of Director of Public Facilities in August of 2007, I knew I was accepting a tremendous challenge. The Lexington Minuteman's front page headline read "Big Job Ahead." The challenge was to combine the Schools' Building & Grounds Department with the Town's Building Maintenance Department into an integrated, effective and efficient Department of Public Facilities. The task required establishing an appropriate organization, developing processes to manage the combined town-wide responsibilities, and learning how to function as the only department reporting to both the Town Manager and the Superintendent of Schools.

With all of these challenges before me, there was one particular duty on my position description that caused me the most concern and anxiety. When I first received my position description, I added an asterisk next to only one bullet, "reviews on a regular basis all security precautions and procedures, and recommends additions, changes, and or reductions in service as appropriate." Responsibility for security of over 6,000 Lexington school children was a responsibility that years of facility management in private industry left me unprepared.

After I began working in the schools, I quickly discovered that a security culture existed throughout the school district. From individual actions, it appeared to me that all school safety was strongly embedded in the school culture. Whenever I approached an elementary school playground I was greeted by an attendant and asked to explain my presence. Staff members were vigilant in managing the access control process at their schools. The Lexington Police Department clearly partnered with the schools to create and maintain a secure environment.

Last winter, the Superintendent asked me to facilitate a team to apply for a Department of Education, Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools, Fiscal Year 2009 Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools (REMS) grant. The competitive grant application required partner commitments between the schools, local government, fire, police, health, and human services to jointly develop, implement, and maintain the readiness and emergency management plan. The Town Manager and his senior staff readily made this commitment.

The Superintendent was notified in early July that Lexington Public Schools was awarded a \$99,709 FY2009 REMS grant! Lexington is one of the six Massachusetts school districts to receive a REMS grant and one of the 111 districts nationwide. The grant will fund three categories of spending: 1) a safety consultant to provide technical expertise and develop a sustainable program, 2) training for staff and administrators in the program and practice in tabletop exercises, and 3) materials that communicate the program.

A new REMS advisory committee has been established that includes a wide range of school and municipal employees, and three parent representatives. The advisory committee will meet monthly to guide this 18- to 24-month program. Our schedule anticipates completing the development of the program plan by the end of the coming summer.

The plan will include:

- 1) Establishing an emergency management plan that addresses the four phases of emergency management – Prevention and Mitigation, Preparedness, Response, and Recovery.
- 2) Establishing an emergency management plan that takes an "all-hazards" approach. The plan needs to be scalable from a low impact, high incident rate (i.e., bullying) to a high impact, low incident rate (i.e., assaults).
- 3) Developing the plan collaboratively with community partners, which is based upon sound data, information, and assessment (risk, vulnerability, consequence).
- 4) Establishing regular practice procedures.
- 5) Establishing an Incident Command System (ICS) structure coordinated with first responders, which aligns with the National Incident Management System (NIMS).
- 6) Addressing students and staff with disabilities.
- 7) Tailoring the plan to conditions of individual schools and offices.
- 8) Addressing "Emerging Issues" such as H1N1, Staph Infections (or MRSA).
- 9) Including a plan for extended school closures and continuity of operations.
- 10) Describing the process for continually reviewing and updating the plan.

An important element of this program is training on school vulnerability assessments. Vulnerability assessment is the ongoing process that the district and schools use to identify and evaluate potential risks and areas of weakness that could have adverse consequences for schools and school systems.

Implementation of the REMS grant for the Lexington Public Schools will result in establishing a comprehensive emergency plan for a wide range of hazards, clarifying roles in an emergency, and improving community preparation and communication. Once the details of the program plan are established this summer, we look forward to sharing with you the implementation steps next school year.

Pat Goddard is the Director of Public Facilities for the Town of Lexington.