

## School Safety

By Scott Prescott and Officer John Smith

School safety is one of the many factors that impact student learning. Research shows that students learn better in an environment where they feel safe and comfortable. With the recent school shootings in Bailey, Colorado, Cazenovia, Wisconsin, and Nickel Mines, Pennsylvania, the topic of school safety is in the forefront of all of our minds and we thought it would be helpful to share with you what Souhegan has done and is doing to make this a safe learning environment for students and staff.

One of the most important components of school safety is personalization. Souhegan has always emphasized personalization through structures such as advisory, teams, class size and student services. The school's emphasis on personalized education creates the greatest chance that a situation will be prevented, as students are encouraged to share any information which concerns them about another student or a situation. We take all reports seriously and act on them as soon as feasible.

Over the last two years, the school has taken several steps to make this a safe learning environment. We have added an SRO to our staff. Our campus monitor keeps track of the traffic coming and going from Souhegan. Administrators and certain staff have gone through two separate trainings on the Incident Command System, one of which included a training exercise. Creating a strong understanding and knowledge of the Incident Command System will allow us to handle a situation with the utmost efficiency and effectiveness. Along with this training, John Young (Assistant Dean of Students) and Officer John Smith attended the National School Resource Officers National Conference in July, and attended several workshops on safety related issues.

Through our trainings and evaluations of the school, we have solicited the input from several experts and key town personnel. We have received feed back from Gregg Champlain from the New Hampshire Office of Emergency Management. Ron Peimer from the National Infrastructure Institute has assisted us in evaluating different safety components of the school. We have also reached out locally to the Amherst Chief of Police, Peter Lyon and the Amherst Fire Department's Deputy Fire Chief/Fire Inspector Matt Conley.

Throughout the school year, we conduct several trainings and review emergency procedures with all staff. We utilize staff meeting times to train staff on issues of safety and emergency procedures. During the school day, we practice different types of drills (fire, lockdown, and extended evacuations) with students and staff. Staff also discuss these situations with students in their advisories, along with the assistance of John Young and Officer John Smith

At the request of the Souhegan High School school board, a committee has been created to evaluate the safety of the school as a whole. The committee is comprised of ourselves, other administration, a staff member, a student, and members of the community. This committee will be looking at recommendations on how to enhance the safety at Souhegan to ensure that we create an environment where the highest level of education can take place.

This work is an ongoing process and will never stop. As more situations present themselves around the country and in our own community, we will be as prepared as possible to handle any incident as safely and quickly as possible. There will always be

more training and more drills to practice so that if the need ever arises, we will be prepared.

If you have any questions please feel free to contact either one of us at [sprescott@sprise.com](mailto:sprescott@sprise.com) (673-9940x304) or [jsmith@sprise.com](mailto:jsmith@sprise.com) (673-9940x337).