

**THE BILL BLACKWOOD  
LAW ENFORCEMENT MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE OF TEXAS**

The Justification for the Development of a First Response  
Emergency Team for a Public School Police Agency

A Policy Research Project  
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by  
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## **ABSTRACT**

The Pasadena Independent School District Police Department is prepared to look into the future and be prepared for an emergency situation which may arise at one of its many facilities. A growing number of concerns meets us head on when campus security is discussed.

Research has been conducted using other agency policies, relevant books, and professional journals. Several personal interviews were conducted and outcomes favorable for the implementation of a tactical response team in the Pasadena Independent School District Police Department. The conclusion can be reached that this decision will be looked upon favorably by other local jurisdictions, and a total cooperative effort between agencies will be formed.

## **Introduction**

The purpose of this paper is to justify the implementation of a emergency first response team for the Pasadena Independent School District Police Department. The response team can be defined as "a unit who is immediately dispatched to a crisis scene and becomes responsible for the scene until relieved by a competent authority or the need diminishes" (Latent 84). The mission of the response team will be to provide the department and school district with the confidence and capability to secure a major crime scene, isolate any suspect(s), and evacuate any person(s) who could be in further danger.

The fundamental mission of the Pasadena Independent School District Police Department is to uphold the Constitution of the United States of America. Our goal is to insure a positive learning environment which is free of crime and the threat of violence for all students and employees of our district.

The intended purpose of this research paper is to determine if the need for an emergency first response team can be justified in a public school district police department. The problem, as it is today, relates to the ongoing increase not only in juvenile crime but also in violent juvenile crime on campus' nationwide. In each instance of violence, the constant questions asked throughout were in reference to law enforcement's readiness leading up to the incident. Also, the ability to counsel with any individual who threatens violence on a campus before it becomes reality. This may well be the most important step in any process in which possible violence is an issue. Parents have failed, schools have failed, public organizations have failed and communities have failed

(Terzian 2, Ellis 1). Therefore, society demands that law enforcement be prepared to deal with any crisis when the need arises (Greenwood 4).

The intended audience for this research paper will be a police chief, school district administrators and possibly a school board. The audience could be expanded to include police training coordinators, and any other school district police department contemplating the organization of an emergency response team.

This research will be conducted using several available resources. Books, professional journals, other agency standard operating procedures and internet articles will be utilized. Surveys were conducted to enable school faculty members to have input into the possibility of an emergency response team.

The intended outcome of this project will be to justify a first response emergency response team in a school district police department. Finally, the information received can be used to lobby school district officials in support of the addition which possibly will be the first of its kind in Texas for a school district police department.

### **Historical, Legal or Theoretical Context**

In the past several months, school violence has presented itself at the forefront of almost every police department nationwide (Crouch 1). The large number of deaths and injuries due to this increase has been surprising to even the most seasoned officers'. None the less, school violence continues to be reported daily in our nation's most prominent media services.

Of all the reported school violence, the question that rises to the top of most lists' is "was law enforcement prepared" for this type of incident. As I observe each of these questions being asked, I find myself answering "probably not". Due to the nature of a school district, the primary focus must be on education. This does not offer an excuse for failure to acknowledge that serious school violence appears to be fast becoming a real threat to any school district. In reading newspaper articles, quote after quote can be found stating "I never thought it could happen here" (Grace 1) and "I would have never thought he was capable of carrying out the threat" (Grace 1). It seems that no school district is out of the danger zone, as violence has erupted in elementary, intermediate and high schools in all parts of the country and in varying school district sizes.

Throughout the recent trend of school violence, steps have been taken on a local level to implement procedures to deal with the situation. In a site based organization which has over fifty (50) educational facilities, several good plans can be located. One problem that can be found immediately is the variance of plans can become somewhat confusing at just the moment that they are needed to be second nature. In several instances, a disaster policy can not be located to refer to for a quick response by school district staff members.

The Pasadena Independent School District Police Department receives many phone calls from concerned faculty, staff, students, parents, and media persons requesting information in regards to an emergency incident. All can be told with confidence that the school district does in fact have an intensive plan in effect which should be referred to in case of an emergency. Fortunately, the plan

has never had to be used for school violence. The unfortunate part is that the plan that is never tested can not be put into action with confidence. It is because of this that the Pasadena Independent School District Police Department must be prepared to deal with an emergency with our own set of policies and standard operating procedures in place.

Even though I have stated that the society in which we have chosen to reside demands that law enforcement be prepared to deal with any crisis when the need arises, I find no specific legal direction that instructs us in a direction to take in order to carry it out. I do find that it is suggested by the Federal Emergency Management Agency that a coordinated effort be established that allows a jurisdiction to respond effectively (FEMA TB 235, V3) It is known that suing police has become a popular item in a wide array of reasoning, therefore, steps must be taken to minimize any chance of a lawsuit attacking a police department's response to an incident (del Carmen 1). It is also widely interpreted that "you can be sued for anything" (Rozanski, 11). Liability should be a factor not only in the writing of a emergency response policy, but also in the training of officers who may be placed on a first response team.

In the case of school violence, all steps in a coordinated effort should be prepared in written policy. The size of the Pasadena Independent School District Police Department will not allow for the school district alone to be able to effectively respond to and complete a serious violent crime. In previous times, when needed, the other police departments in which we share jurisdictional boundaries have responded to and assisted the Pasadena Independent School

District Police Department with the effective handling of cases. We have never been tested in a serious, violent incident.

The need for a first response team can be argued due to the above information. With a serious incident, police officers from our department will immediately be dispatched in order to secure the scene and initiate proper responses as the situation dictates. Upon arrival of the other police and emergency personnel, a grasp of the situation could be initiated and maintained by our department and given to other responding units.

### **Review of Literature or Practice**

To initiate the review of literature or practice one can begin with the most extensive planners in the field, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). FEMA classifies crime and other acts of terrorism as manmade hazards. Risks must be evaluated by each agency in regards to what is likely to present itself to that agency. FEMA defines risk as a predicted impact that a hazard would have on specific facilities, structures, or aspects of the jurisdiction (TB 235, 1)

At this point, no previous research has been located that addresses' the formation of an emergency response team in a school district police department. What may well benefit a project of this nature is the fact that several local agencies have S.W.A.T. (Special Weapon's And Tactics) Teams that are formatted around emergency responses to violent situations. S.W.A.T. personnel are normally trained in special weapons and tactics which are beyond patrols normal functions. These incidents include but are certainly not limited to hostage



situations, barricaded suspects and evacuations (Virata, 3) The goal of a S.W.A.T. team can be considered to be the safe resolve of such incidents without loss of life or serious bodily injury. Primary safety consideration should always be given to the hostage or victim, innocent by-standers and other members of the general public.

The Standard Operating Procedure from the Pasadena Police Department and the Sugarland Police Department was researched in preparation for this research assignment. Both policies were somewhat consistent in the deployment of their units. Both departments put emphasis on the safety of all involved.

The Sugarland model presented itself to be user friendly. The objective was reasonable and placed importance on minimal risk. It also incites a mental attack on a suspect by a trained negotiator. Negotiators develop an art in profiling a hostage taker. Their purpose is to establish viable alternatives for the hostage takers and coordinate with the S.W.A.T. team members for a successful conclusion of a high risk incident (Kraus, 1)

The policy continues on and explains several key components of a tactical plan. It includes training requirements as set forth by the Sugarland Police Department. Training is certainly an issue in any law enforcement endeavor, especially in any specialized operations (Kuboviak, 2)

The Pasadena Police Department Standard Operating Procedure does not differ in contrast. This set of departmental procedures will be very important to the Pasadena Independent School District Police Department due to the vast

majority of schools located within the city limits of Pasadena, Texas. Several Pasadena Independent School Districts schools are also located in the cities of Houston and South Houston, Texas.

In search of policies to compare, many departments were willing to share their special operating procedures. Even though these special operations teams were all basically the same, there is a wide variety of acronyms describing the teams. The Sugarland Police Department has S.I.R.T. or the Special Investigation Response Team, while the Darien, Illinois Police Department advertises its team as H.E.A.T. or Hazardous Entry and Arrest Team. The Pasadena Police Department has kept the traditional S.W.A.T. team name.

While each set of procedures varied, a portion of valuable information can be extracted from various workable policies. As an educational government entity, we must be careful not to portray a "commando" image. The formation of a special operations team for a small school district police department should be built around working with the area municipalities or other emergency responders. With that in mind, one must organize a policy which can work easily with other agencies.

### **Discussion of Relevant Issues**

In discussions related to the implementation of any special operations or tactical team in a school district, many questions are likely to arise. The idea of school districts forming school district police departments is relatively new (Massey 1). However, in light of the recent tragedies ranging from suburban to rural areas across the United States in school settings, the justification has

certainly been easier to make. In the past several months, a newscast can hardly be found that does not mention school violence ranging from riots to shootings in school districts of varying sizes. This trend comes on the heels of reports that juvenile crime is in fact declining. Unfortunately, violent crime appears to be on the increase.

It is doubtful that anyone could argue that school districts and police departments must be prepared for any emergency situation. In a case of school violence, there may be no warning. Unlike natural disasters like weather, the problem may present itself at any moment, in a classroom, school bus, athletic complex on school district property or off campus event.

The Pasadena School District Police Department is tasked with the responsibility of protecting over 45,000 persons who may attend or visit one of its many schools and facilities. An emergency response team must be developed in order to quickly restore peace to an emergency situation. This team will have several responsibilities, much as any tactical team. The ultimate goal will be the protection of lives of any hostages involved and the successful conclusion of any emergency situation ( Browder 1).

Responsibilities placed on this team will include responding to a crime scene, analyzing all available information, contacting proper authorities including any other agencies needed and initial actions as the situation dictates. These actions may include the quick evacuation of innocent persons and initiating contact with any suspect. At least one person, preferably Spanish speaking, should be trained as a hostage negotiator.

A personal interview was conducted with Lieutenant Jack Fry, S.W.A.T. Commander for the Pasadena Police Department. Lieutenant Fry was told of the intention of the Pasadena Independent School District Police Department forming an emergency response team. His response was very positive and several ideas were gained from the conversation. In an emergency, the response time for the S.W.A.T. team in Pasadena could be many minutes. Lieutenant Fry felt as if there are several things that could be accomplished before arrival of a S.W.A.T. team. Building blue prints could be located, and the situation could be analyzed with accurate information awaiting the S.W.A.T. team. If possible, communications with the suspect could be initiated. Furthermore, the suspect could be contained to a small area if he has remained on the scene (Fry 1998).

The emergency response team should be made up of at least four officers and a supervisor to serve as a commander. A senior officer will be chosen as a team leader to assist the commander. Special training will be needed to supplement the training received in the classroom (Pierson 4). Special training emphasis should be placed on all aspects of building searches, officer safety and survival, and a more rigorous weapons qualification. An additional set of standard operating procedures should be in place to direct the operation of the team. These precedes should develop tactics to save lives and provide the greatest amount protection to the community and school district in exigent circumstances (City of Sugarland Policies and Procedures 1998). They must also mesh with all other current Pasadena Independent School District Police Department Standard Operating Procedures.

The cost analysis for the development of this emergency response team will be determined by the amount of equipment given to the team. Initially, the team will need ammunition to train with, in service training, and initial response gear. Training should be updated on a regular basis and documented to ensure that as changes affect our profession, the officers are updated (Armstrong 105). Equipment can be minimum in the first stages, to include riot shields and helmets. After organization and training, a more in depth list will have to be developed. Possibilities include a higher threat level ballistic vest, sniper rifle, and other miscellaneous equipment. Each officer may be allowed to purchase equipment on his own with the approval of the Chief of Police.

With the development of this tactical response team, the proper training and equipment issue, and the good working relationship with the outside agencies, this operation should more than benefit the community and school district. There is a sense of security within the Pasadena Independent School District. With the formation of our emergency response team, all district administrators, faculty, and parents of our children should feel confident knowing that officers are specially trained in case of an emergency situation.

### **Conclusions/Recommendations**

The purposes of this research project was to study the possibility of the implementation of a tactical, first response team for the Pasadena Independent School District Police Department.

Leaders across our country struggle to find the answer to the increase of violent crimes committed by juveniles. Recently, increased numbers of these crimes have occurred on school campus' across this nation. No one is immune, no matter how large or small their district is.

The largest challenge for our communities is to absolutely prevent crime on our school campus'. Given our success the past several months, we have to prepare for the worst. Students are attacking teachers, principals, and other students. Many deaths have occurred recently due to these students. A law enforcement entity must place themselves in a position to respond to violence of this nature at a moments notice. The crimes can occur at anytime, and we must be prepared.

After researching on a local level, I find there are no other school district police departments with a tactical response team. These school districts have to depend on other agencies to support them in an emergency. The Pasadena Independent School District Police Department should be prepared to respond to an emergency scene with the knowledge and confidence to control the situation until either the need for them diminishes or they are relieved by a competent authority. This team will not be a S.W.A.T. team, but simply a first response team to assist in the situation and minimize the amount of wasted time after an

incident. This team will possibly be on scene within a few minutes of the dispatch notification.

Once implemented, the tactical response team will arrive on a scene and analyze the situation. If needed, other agencies will be contacted and requested, and while awaiting their arrival, there will be no time wasted. Options will be addressed, solutions analyzed, and possible scenarios presented to other agencies upon their arrival.

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