

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

**DO PUBLIC SCHOOL POLICE DEPARTMENTS NEED
CRITICAL RESPONSE TEAMS?**

**An Administrative Research Paper
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for Graduation from
the Leadership Command College**

**By
Victor Mitchell**

**Houston Independent School District Police Department
Houston, Texas
October 2000**

ABSTRACT

In recent years public schools have witnessed a rash of violent crimes that are being played out on school campuses across the country. Many school districts and law enforcement agencies are helpless and are faced with the question of how to address this issue? There are a number of programs in public schools that address violent student behavior, but there are none available that address the violent episodes that we have experienced in recent years.

This question is posed to you; "Can public school districts with law enforcement agencies afford not to take the necessary measures to prepare its law enforcement personnel for an incident of the magnitude of a Columbine High School crisis?" During the Columbine crisis law enforcement from area municipal police agencies with SWAT teams were brought to a standstill and they didn't quite know how to address the many issues they were faced with. The responding SWAT teams followed standard procedures for the deployment but quickly found out they didn't have a plan. Is history repeating itself? August 1, 1966, in Austin, Texas, the public and the nation witnessed the unthinkable and law enforcement found out they didn't have a plan to address the crisis they were facing. We are faced with the same dilemma today that society was faced with some thirty-five years ago. The Columbine High School episode has sparked a scare in public schools across the nation. In an effort to evaluate the necessity of presenting this proposal, a survey of other school district police departments and law enforcement officers was conducted. As a result of this research it is being proposed to implement a Critical Response Team for the HISD police department. Other public school district police chiefs and police officers support the fact that some form of a CRT team should be implemented so that school district police departments are prepared to respond to a crisis.

Table of Contents

	Page
Abstract	
Introduction-----	1
Historical, Legal or Theoretical Context-----	2
Review of Literature or Practice -----	4
Discussion of Relevant Issues-----	11
Conclusion/Recommendations-----	13
Bibliography-----	15
Appendix	

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this document is to establish policies, procedures, responsibilities, a selection process, guidelines for training, necessary equipment, and to clearly define the use of a Critical Response Team (CRT) in the HISD Police Department.

The implementation of a Critical Response Team in a large metropolitan public school district is a must in today's society based on the expectations that are placed on public schools to provide a safe and secure learning environment for students.

This proposal will follow the National Tactical Officers Association suggested guidelines for establishing an Emergency Response Team. In order to accomplish this, a set of standard plans, policies, procedures and other guidelines will be identified through research of SWAT team publications, tactical publications, and books, as well as the results from a survey. The CRT will be trained to respond to critical situations as defined:

- Hostage Situations involve the holding of any person(s) against his or her will by a suspect whether armed or unarmed.
- Barricade Situations, are a standoff created by an armed or potentially armed suspect in any location, whether fortified or not, who is refusing to comply with police demands for surrender.
- Sniper Situations involve the firing upon citizens and/or police by an armed suspect, usually from concealment.
- Special Assignments include any assignment involving a high level of threat that is not covered by any of the above definitions or approved by the CRT Commander.

It is being proposed to implement a CRT for the HISD Police Department. A CRT will enable the police department and police officers to be better prepared and

respond to critical situations of the magnitude of a Columbine crisis. The CRT will be trained to respond to hostage situations, barricaded situations, sniper situations, and special assignments. Presently, no mechanism exists in which highly trained officers and supervisors can be quickly identified and drawn from in the event of a critical situation.

HISTORICAL VIEWS

During the 1997-98 school year, extensive media coverage riveted the public with coverage of school shootings in Jonesboro, AR, West Paducah, KY, Pearl, MS, Springfield, OR and Edinboro, PA. This spat of multiple shootings increased parental concerns about school safety. However, the 40 school shooting deaths in the 1997-98 school year falls within the midrange of total annual incidents since 1992. The high profile multiple shootings have also fueled public perceptions that children are in danger while attending school (Donohue, Schiraldi, and Ziedenberg, 1998).

The Houston Independent School District (HISD) is the largest public school system in Texas and the seventh largest in the United States. HISD encompasses 312 square miles within greater Houston. HISD schools serve a diversified student enrollment of more than 200,000 students and over 30,000 full-and part-time employees. The HISD Police Department is responsible for assisting in maintaining and providing students and employees with an opportunity to attend school or work in an environment that is free from threat, intimidation, and assault. In order to meet this task, it requires the police department to be innovative, progressive, proactive, and forward thinking in order to stay ahead of challenges of tomorrow.

HISD established a Security Service Department in 1971, to assist in assuring that

the district's mission and commitment to the community was being met. The Security Service Department slowly evolved in to a police department in 1985, as a result of changes in state laws and the growing concerns relating to safety and security on school campuses. The HISD Police Department has grown to become the largest of its kind in Texas. The establishment of a Critical Response Team recognizes that the presence of highly trained officers can reduce the risk of injury or loss of life to students, staff, police officers, and suspects.

A man named Charles Joseph Whitman, an honor student, used a high powered rifle to randomly kill over a dozen people and wounded over thirty more from the University of Texas Clock Tower Building in Austin, Texas in 1966. This incident is best known as the Texas Tower Sniper and is credited as being the sparking event for "The Birth of SWAT" (Snow 1996). Shortly after this incident LAPD formed a SWAT team. The Los Angeles Police Department pioneered the development and training of Special Weapons and Tactical (SWAT) teams in the early 1970's and other agencies across the country followed suit (Snow, 1996). School District Police Departments across the country find themselves in the same predicament that law enforcement found itself in at the University of Texas. School District Police Departments are not prepared as was proven on April 20, 1999, in Columbine. Many law enforcement SWAT Teams have changed their planning after this episode (Egan, 1999).

It is being proposed to implement a Critical Response Team which will share many of the same characteristics of a SWAT team. It is critical that school district police departments project a totally different image than the image presented by most municipal SWAT teams. Image is important, because of the sensitive

environment school district police officers are required to work in. The image should be one that projects professionalism, maturity, and a high level of skill and training..

The mission of the Critical Response Team is to provide the school district with the presence of a select group of officers and provide them with specialized training as first responders to critical situations. This response team will train to respond to special situations, make an assessment of the situation, secure a perimeter, provide the necessary protection to life, and provide the district administrator with pertinent information regarding the situation. These individuals will be prepared, both mentally and physically, to meet the challenges that the HISD police department may inevitably have to face. The initial response of law enforcement during the early minutes of a serious situation can be critical in determining 'the eventual outcome.

It is the intent of the HISD Police Department's Critical Response Team to work as an adjunct to the Houston Police Department's SWAT Team and the Houston Fire Department. While the Critical Response Team is not intended to operate as a SWAT team it will be activated for special situations that may occur in the HISD Police Department's jurisdiction. The activation of the CRT will take precedence over all other assignments within the department. The CRT members will become subordinate to the CRT Unit Commander for the duration of the activation.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND PRACTICE

Appropriate training can increase the officer's probability of success (Noesner and Dolan, 1992). There is an old saying, "practice makes perfect," which is in error. Training is one of the most important processes for insuring organizational effectiveness is training. A more accurate statement is, "perfect practice makes perfect" (Holden,

1994). It has been documented very well that there is a necessity for training - without training, the best officer is inadequate at best, incompetent at worst (Holden, 1954). Also the courts have been increasingly willing to extend liability to police officials for improper training (Swanson and Territo, 1983). The research conducted for this proposal was in the area of Special Weapons and Tactical Teams (SWAT). However, the information and format of a SWAT team can be tailored for a Critical Response Team (CRT) to meet the needs of a school district police department. A survey of other school district police departments and police officers was also conducted.

Police teams operating as specialized or highly trained units fall into the category that is referred to as MOUT (Military Operations in Urban Terrain). In the last 20 years police departments have adopted many of these military tactics and modified them to suit the needs of their own special weapons and tactics units (Cascio and McSweeney, 1996). At Columbine, SWAT teams followed standard procedure by moving very deliberately (Egan, 1999). As a result, the media criticized law enforcement for how they handled this crisis. In August of 1966, while incidents like the Texas Tower sniper were not completely unheard of, they hadn't yet begun occurring with such frequency that police felt the need to make specific plans on how to deal with them. That is not the case today and public school systems need to develop the means for responding to critical incidents. Emergency response teams (CRT or SWAT) need to be created using reasonable guidelines.

The National Tactical Officers Association provides guidelines for establishing Emergency Response Teams. These guidelines cover SWAT battle tactics and how to organize, train, and equip a SWAT team for law enforcement. Based on these

guidelines it is recommended that the HISD CRT be developed using the following format.

Critical Response Team Structure

- Team members
- Field Supervisors
- Commander
- Media Relations

The CRT will consist of officers that are highly trained and skilled in the areas of hostage, barricade situations, anti-sniper operations, and special assignments. The selected members will receive training regularly to develop and maintain the skills necessary to handle a variety of circumstances. These individuals will be prepared both mentally and physically to meet the challenges that the police department may eventually have to face. The CRT will consist of ten officers, two sergeants, and one lieutenant.

Team Members Responsibilities

The first officer on the scene will assume control of the crime scene and report the incident directly to the HISD Police Department dispatcher with detailed information. After an assessment of the situation has been made and a determination has been made that a critical situation is in progress, the CRT will be activated. Request for additional assistance from the Houston Police department or the Houston Fire Department will be made as needed. All CRT members will be notified immediately and will proceed directly to the scene or designated command post. The first responding officer will be responsible for providing first aid, determining a safe distance for an inner perimeter and assist in the placement of responding CRT members.

Field Supervisor

Upon arriving on the scene, the CRT Field Supervisor will ensure that an inner-perimeter has been established. The CRT Field Supervisor will take control of the inner-perimeter, make an assessment of the scene, establish an outer-perimeter in a secure location and develop a plan for the deployment of the CRT. The CRT Field Supervisor is responsible for compiling intelligence, entering it on the CRT Command Post Briefing Sheet and disseminating intelligence to the commander, as needed. The CRT Field Supervisor will:

- Gather and access all intelligence available regarding the situation.
- Assemble and brief the CRT about the critical situation

The CRT Field Supervisor is also responsible for the following:

- Maintaining less than lethal weapons and equipment
- Ensuring that special equipment is properly maintained and inventoried on a regular basis

Commander

The Commander of the CRT, or the Field Commander when the Commander is absent, will report directly to the Chief of Police or his designee. The CRT Commander has overall responsibility for deployment of the CRT, tactical decision making, and the tactical resolution of the critical situation.

Selection Process

There are five steps in the selection process: 1) Announcement of an opening on the 2) A thorough review of applicants; 3) Psychological testing; 4) Personal interviews; and 5) Completion of training (Cascio and McSweeney, 1996).

- Applicants must have one year of continuous service within their division.

- . Applicants must not have had any unsatisfactory evaluations or disciplinary action within the previous year of employment in the HISD Police Department
- . Applicants must successfully pass all phases of the CRT entry level testing which includes: 1) reviewing the applicants; 2) testing the applicants; 3) interviewing the applicants; 4) completing the training.

Training

The HISD Police Department's CRT will train a minimum of three hours per month. No Team member will be eligible for deployment if they have not participated in a minimum of six hours of scheduled training during a three-month period. The CRT will train on subjects related to the mission of the CRT. All training will be performance oriented and CRT specific. The CRT will maintain a current task manual that lists the standards of performance for each task at both the individual and team level. Individual team members will be re-certified at least once per year on all individual skills. Failure to re-certify, after appropriate remedial training, will disqualify the officer from participating in the CRT. The HISD Police Department Training Division will include copies of all training in each member's individual training folder. Training will include updates on legal issues such as deadly force, firearms, non-lethal weapons, and building entry and searches.

Equipment

Equipment is necessary for CRT teams to operate effectively and efficiently and to minimize the risk of injury or loss of life. CRT equipment should include:

1. Ballistic Helmet
2. Safety glasses and Night vision goggles
3. Hearing protection
4. Complete coverage ballistic entry vest with Threat level N insert
5. Long barrel and short barrel weapons

6. Pager
7. Less lethal weapons
8. Duty belt for tactical equipment
9. Gas mask

The HISD CRT response will utilize only equipment issued or approved by the CRT Commander. Each CRT member is responsible for the care and maintenance of any equipment issued. Failure to appropriately care for or maintain the equipment in full mission readiness will be grounds for removal from the team. It shall be the intent of the CRT to utilize special equipment in an attempt to lessen the risk of injury or death to all involved during the performance of a CRT operation. The CRT also recognizes that the use of special equipment in no way implies or guarantees that injury or death will not occur during a CRT operation. Any special equipment will be stored in a weapon storage vault in order to control access to this equipment.

Additional Equipment requirements:

1. Primary Weapons: Each CRT member will carry a sidearm of the same make, caliber, and magazine capacity as that carried by the other members. Interchangeability of magazines and ammunition during a critical situation are essential.
2. Less than lethal weapons or Ammunition: Devices or weapons that are not normally lethal in nature. Designed to offer an alternative to the use of deadly force when appropriate.
3. Weapons Storage Vault: To maintain control and custody of equipment.
4. Cellular Telephones: To allow CRT members to have direct communication.

The CRT Commander will ensure that only those CRT members properly trained and certified in the use of the special equipment will utilize the equipment. The CRT Commander will be responsible for establishing standards and criteria for the CRT.

After Action Critique

At the completion of all operations and significant training events the CRT Commander will conduct an after action review. The purpose of this review will be to create a forum for CRT members to offer information or criticism for improvement of the team. The after action review will be evaluated to develop changes in the CRT policy, if necessary. Any changes will be based on the following information: positive factors, negative factors and any offered solutions.

Periodic Policy Review

The CRT Commander will review policies and update them when necessary. The CRT Commander will then present any updated policies to the Chief of Police or his designee for approval.

Survey of Current Practice

To validate this proposal a survey of other school district Chiefs of Police, Security Directors and police officers from departments across the state was conducted. The results are as follows:

The questions that were asked are:

1. Does your school district have a police department? Six Chiefs' of Police answered yes, and one Security Director answered no. Thirteen officers answered no and four answered yes
2. Does your school have a SWAT Team, Critical Response Team, or an Emergency Response Team? Chiefs and Security Director-there were five no's, one plan to implement a Critical Response Team, and one (yes) a district Crisis Management Team.
3. Do you think that a school district police department should have a modified SWAT Team? One yes, one no with the exception of HISD, three agree there is a need for a

response team, one not yet, and two believe that municipal SWAT Teams should handle critical situations.

4. Should a school district have a police department? Sixteen answered yes and one no.
5. Should a school district police department have specially trained police officers to address critical issues that occur on school campus? Fourteen answered yes and three no's.

DISCUSSION OF RELEVANT ISSUES

Most municipal police departments have some form of a SWAT Team to address the many critical issues that can occur on a daily basis. These teams were established in order to ensure police departments that they were prepared to respond to critical situations with properly trained and equipped officers.

Robert L. Snow posed this question, "Where is SWAT today in the 2000's?" Many SWAT Teams and other specially trained units are being used outside of their traditional roles today in law enforcement. Much of what SWAT does now is not hostage-barricaded incidents but those of high risk warrant services. Opposition to SWAT teams is coming from the academic arena where they claim these specialty units could wear away the perception of the public as the police being public servants and more like an army (Snow 1996). SWAT Teams or specially trained units are here to stay and they are now moving into our public school district police departments. Seven School District Police Chiefs or Security Directors returned surveys; however, only five were in favor of a school district police department having some form of a response team with specialized trained officers to address critical issues that occur on school campuses. Seventeen police officers returned surveys and fourteen officers were in favor of a school district police department having some form of a response team with specialized trained

officers to address critical issues that occur on school campuses.

There is a growing controversy within law enforcement circles about the increasing use of police Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) teams and how they should be employed. Police researcher Peter Kraska, a professor of police studies at Western Kentucky University, said that a new study has documented an explosive growth in SWAT teams. In a nationwide survey of 690 law enforcement agencies serving cities with populations of 50,000 or more, it was found that 90 percent of the departments now have an active SWAT team or some form of one. This is compared to 60 percent in the 1980's. As mentioned before, the increased use of these teams are drawing some fire from law enforcement experts. Police officials defend the SWAT teams use as being necessary to help fight crime (Macko, 1996).

Lets refer back to the siege at Columbine High School, it represents a new kind of domestic terror--and one that tests the limits of current police training and tactics. Shooters spraying students indiscriminately and setting off bombs in a school are not what most SWAT teams are trained for (Egan, 1999). Can public school districts with law enforcement agencies afford to not take the necessary measures to prepare for incidents of the magnitude of the Columbine crisis? It appears that the answer is "no." School district officers are required to work in school settings and they become familiar with the schools, the layout of the schools, they learn the high-risk areas on campus and the vantagepoints. This provides for a faster response during a critical situation.

The cost of implementing a CRT Team for a school district police department can be kept to a minimum after the initial start-up cost of equipment and training. Staffing

a CRT will require maintaining a pool of highly trained officers and supervisors that can be drawn upon as needed for a critical situation. Each officer and supervisor will remain on their assigned duties until summoned to respond to a critical situation. Conducting scheduled training on duty hours will minimize overtime.

Conclusion/Recommendations

The purpose of this research was to establish policies, procedures, and responsibilities for the use of a Critical Response Team in the Houston Independent School District Police Department. It has been shown that there is an essential need for a CRT in a school district police department the size of HISD. This topic is relevant and it presents a critical issue for school districts across the country today.

School districts are faced with the responsibility of educating students. It is recognized that effective learning can only be achieved in an environment that is free from threat, assault, and intimidation. School districts across the country have taken measures to ensure a safe and secure learning environment for students. Many school districts have established police departments or security departments to assist in providing safety on school campuses. But in the aftermath of a rash of violent episodes that have been played out on school campuses across the country today, is it enough to simply establish a school district police department?

Some municipal police departments have had to reevaluate and revamp how they respond to incidents that have occurred on school campuses. The Columbine High crisis presented municipal police SWAT teams with a major dilemma.

Not only is there a need for a way to quickly assemble officers and supervisors for critical situations, it is important that these individuals have specialized training and equipment.

A CRT within the school district police department would address this need.

Bibliography

Cascio, P., & McSweeney, J. (1996). SWAT battle tactics: How to organize, train, and equip a SWAT team for law enforcement or self-defense. Boulder, Colorado: Paladin Press.

Donohue, E., Schiraldi V., & Ziedenberg, I. (1999). Gun violence in school. San Francisco, CA: Justice Policy Institute, National School Safety Center.

Egan, T. (1999). The police response: School attack may bring changes in police tactics. [On-line]. <http://www.emergency.com/polcpage.htm>.

Holden R. (1994): Modern police Management (2nd ed.). Paramus, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Mackro, S. (1997, July 15). SWAT: Is it being used too much. [On-line] <http://ememet.emergency.com> ENN Emergency Service Reports-Emergency Net News Service, p. 1.

Noesner, G., & Dolan, J. (1992). First responders negotiation training. FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin, 61, (8), 1.

Olin, R., (1980). Tactical crisis management: The challenge of the 80's. FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin 49, (11), 6.

Snow, R. (1996). SWAT team: Explosive face-offs with America's deadliest criminals. New York: Plenum Press.

Swanson, C & Territo, L. (1983). Police Administration processes and behavior structure. New York: Macmillan Publishing.