

Schools ready to put emergency procedures in place

Walkie-talkies, CPR and tip lines are all part of readiness strategy

BY SEAN CORCORAN
ADVOCATE STAFF

In reaction to the April 20 Littleton, Colo. shootings, the School Department has taken several steps, including the purchase of \$11,000 worth of walkie-talkies and communication devices, that will be used during power losses, or any other critical situation, said Superintendent of Schools Dr. Harry Harutunian.

The School Department is taking seriously the possibility that a Reading school could be faced with an emergency where quick administration and outside services would be needed. Reading Police Department Lt. Robert Silva is currently working on an emergency plan that would have

approximately 30 towns respond to an emergency at a Reading school, Harutunian said.

Before Oct. 1, all school employees will have a closed-door meeting with members of Reading's SWAT team to go over emergency procedures. Those procedures will include a code system of three levels that would be used during emergencies, Harutunian said.

In addition, the School Department has applied for a grant from the federal government that would enable school principals to be trained in bomb identification.

Harutunian previously told the School Committee that written emergency procedures would be completed by Sept. 1, but that date has been pushed back indefinitely

Reading Public School Safety Line

1-888-3-HOT TIP

24 Hours a day Confidential and Anonymous

**Call if you know something we should know,
want to let someone know about something
that is going to happen or has happened**

This fall students and parents will have access to a toll-free phone number to use to tip off school officials to any emergencies or illegal activities. Cards with the number are ready to distribute.

because the process has taken longer than anticipated, he said. However, Silva is planning to meet with each principal prior to the opening of school to discuss

safety issues, Harutunian said.

As one of the last purchase orders for fiscal year '99, Harutunian purchased approximately \$11,000 in communications

devices that would be used during emergencies.

"As part of our continued effort to bring higher levels of security to our schools for Reading employees and Reading children, we have purchased a walkie-talkie system with a repeater that will allow each building principal to have a walkie-talkie that is powerful enough to communicate with the central office and other principals," Harutunian wrote to the School Committee on Aug. 13.

"The main reason for putting this in is, as we learned last year several times, once we lose electricity, out phones don't work," Harutunian said.

When the phone system is down, the only alternative available to administrators is pulling the fire alarm, Harutunian said. The new system will allow the principal to call the central office or another principal.

"The system will also be used

during the summer when there may be only one secretary and administrator in the building by themselves. If that individual leaves the office area, they will be able to take the walkie-talkie with them to maintain communications with the other schools or central office if there is an emergency," Harutunian said.

The administration also is responding to the possibility of a medical emergency. Last year a student at one of the elementary schools who did not have a history of health problems suddenly had a seizure and stopped breathing, Harutunian said. In the event that a similar situation should arise in the future, all school principals, Harutunian and Associate Superintendent Dennis Richards will be certified annually in Cardio Pulmonary Resuscitation.

This fall also will be the first time the administration will have a special, toll-free phone number.

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