



SAFETY DIRECTOR BULLETIN

JUVENILE GATHERINGS & FLASH MOBS: CRITICAL PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS FOR EDUCATORS

Community events and public venues have become locations targeted by juveniles and young adults. Such events can be spontaneous or planned events fueled by social media, which can overwhelm communities and burden public safety resources. Recent events in New Jersey have resulted in injuries to officers and others, necessitated mass arrests, and forced the cancellation of events.¹⁻³ Educators should prepare for such gatherings on or near school property or at school events. Furthermore, educators might learn of planned events from students, faculty, or even parents, and all school employees should be aware of the challenges these events pose and understand appropriate reporting procedures.

Fully preventing these incidents is likely not entirely possible. However, educators should strive to mitigate the risks associated with these events through collaboration with their local police department, developing specific staff training programs addressing the unique risks of these incidents, identifying potential high-risk or known locations at or near the school campus, developing contingency plans in the event of a disturbance, and as appropriate, consider integrating into the school's parent messaging campaigns the dangers associated with mass juvenile "flash mobs" or unauthorized juvenile gatherings.

Educators should also review the many resources in this bulletin, as some school events often have rides, such as bounce houses or other amusements that might require specific insurance indemnification. Ensuring all appropriate insurance requirements are met will likely not prevent or help quell disturbances; however, meeting all requirements will likely assist in any potential criticism of the event planning process. Although insurance coverage for events might not be the responsibility of some educators, it is likely in the best interest of their staff, students, and communities to ensure that appropriate discussions and actions have occurred with the relevant stakeholders.

A. Some Considerations for educators in developing a plan concerning the risk of juveniles and young adults purposely congregating at school and community events:

1. Develop a plan for events, especially those, regardless of expected attendance, that might be at risk of a juvenile or young adult flash mob or unauthorized gathering. These incidents might even occur during the regular school day.
2. Discuss the potential risks associated with events at or near the school with local government officials or event organizers. Consider involving representatives from other essential organizations such as Fire, Emergency Management, Emergency Medical Services, and more.
3. During the planning process, consider:
 - Possible staging areas for media, staff members, school medical staff, and custodians whose services might be valuable when a significant incident occurs. Discuss any findings with local law enforcement officials.
 - Conduct a pre-event site visit of the event location, adjacent areas, and areas where others might congregate. Evaluate possible threats and items that can be used as weapons, such as rocks, decorations, or other materials, and consider any options to mitigate such threats.

- Discuss school staffing needs and security considerations with local law enforcement.
 - As appropriate, include maps, diagrams, communication methods, and other critical needs and resources in the plan.
4. In collaboration with the Board of Education Solicitor, review the school's code of conduct and discuss the possibility of any necessary modifications or additions. Ensure that the school code of conduct supports any rules expected to be enforced by staff. Consult with local government officials concerning local ordinances to determine if modifications should be considered. Some communities have enacted local ordinances prohibiting juveniles from having backpacks during certain times or at certain locations. ⁴
 5. Ensure there is an established process for receiving reports of concerning behavior:
 - Staff members might hear or learn of information that might indicate the possibility of a flash mob or unauthorized gathering. Parents might be the source of information in addition to students.
 - Establish and maintain contact with neighboring schools and school districts to share and learn about school or community events that have been disrupted or are at risk of such.
 - Local law enforcement likely has an intelligence-gathering policy or process, and sharing information with local law enforcement can be essential; however, law enforcement and school officials should review the [New Jersey Uniform State Memorandum of Agreement Between Education and Law Enforcement Officials](#).
 - Educators should discuss the considerations outlined in this bulletin with their School Safety Specialist.
 - Provide clear direction for staff members concerning the documentation of incidents so that data can be collected to help support future legislative initiatives and response planning.
 - Data collection concerning incidents should include a method to track offenses and other incidents that occurred at the event, such as assaults, thefts, trespassing, criminal mischief, and more.
 6. Engage with the community as a united effort to raise awareness about the dangers of unsupervised youth at community events, during school hours, or locations where juveniles might gather. Encourage reporting of suspicious activity and any information concerning the possibility of an unsanctioned event occurring.
 7. Collaborate with local law enforcement to develop a strategic message campaign for school-police programs.
 8. Evaluate the school's current staffing capabilities for events and equipment, such as portable PA systems and barricades. Speak with educators of similarly sized schools or districts that have managed similar events or incidents to determine gaps in capabilities, staffing, and equipment. Develop a short and long-term budgeting plan and request needed resources and staffing. Appropriately document such requests.

B. Planning considerations for a school or community event near the school where there is any concern of a possible juvenile or young adult gathering or flash mob:

1. When the event will occur on school property, establish communication with event organizers to facilitate cooperation and address any concerns or issues during the event, and consult with local law enforcement.
2. When the event will occur near school property, consult with local law enforcement.
3. Identify specific locations on or adjacent to the school campus where it's likely that juveniles or young adults will flee to or congregate from the primary event location.

- As appropriate, discuss with local law enforcement officials the benefits of contacting businesses adjacent to the school before a concerning event to establish clear lines of communication, which might be highly valuable to help contain the situation.
4. Coordinate with local law enforcement to inform the community in advance of established rules, laws, local ordinances, and specific event details to help promote responsible behavior among attendees while also ensuring they understand the consequences of unlawful behavior.
 5. Coordinate, as appropriate, with local law enforcement to provide information to the community and media to communicate possible road closures and any prohibited activities, including information prohibiting vehicles or persons on their premises.
 6. Review the Municipal Excess Liability Joint Insurance Fund [Special Events Resource Page](#), which has important information concerning:
 - [MEL Community & Safety Leadership Guide to Special Events](#) (Includes pre-planning considerations, insurance indemnification requirements, special events checklists, and more.)
 - [Video: Best Practices for Safe & Successful Events](#)
 - [MSI Bulletin: Parade Risk Management Best Practices](#) (Even when the event might not include a parade, this resource contains many considerations that are highly valuable for any event, especially incidents where there is any concern for violence. Incident command structure and training requirements, hold harmless agreements, weather issues, mass violence considerations, suspicious activity reporting, and more are provided.)
 - *Special Events Best Practices*, available on the [MSI Bulletin webpage](#), includes information concerning insurance coverage for fireworks, rides, and other amusements.
 7. Discuss any specific insurance or liability considerations with your Solicitor or Risk Management Consultant.
 8. Provide an adequate staff presence to deter prohibited conduct. Contact other schools that handled similar incidents or events to learn about their staffing levels and whether such resource commitments were appropriate.
 9. Ensure event staff, volunteers, and chaperones are informed of the plan as appropriate. Ensure they are encouraged to report any concerning behavior and establish clear lines of communication to initiate critical notifications.

C. Ensure the plan includes post-incident procedures:

1. Work closely with local law enforcement concerning any violations of the law.
2. Conduct debriefing sessions following all significant events, even those that have not resulted in acts of prohibited behavior or unlawful conduct. Document lessons learned and share best practices with relevant personnel and other agencies.
3. Preserve any evidence, including video, and consult with law enforcement before discarding any material that might be pertinent to the incident.

D. Develop a School Staff Training Program:

1. Ensure the school staff training program includes consistent messaging from the principal or superintendent about how the school has prepared for such events and a clear direction concerning how such events are to be managed by staff.
2. Encourage local law enforcement to help educate staff members about law enforcement's resources concerning enforcement options involving juveniles. Some staff members or parents might believe that local law enforcement has no authority to address any unlawful juvenile behavior, as many media outlets have reported that police have no options in dealing with youth who violate the law in New Jersey.⁵ However, the enforcement options available for local law enforcement in New Jersey are detailed in New Jersey General Directive 2020-12, [Establishing Policies, Practices, and Procedures to Promote Juvenile Justice Reform](#). The [New Jersey Uniform State Memorandum of Agreement Between Education and Law Enforcement Officials](#) also provides significant guidance.
3. Discuss with local law enforcement how staff and law enforcement can communicate effectively, including when there is a sizeable police mutual aid response from other county or state law enforcement agencies.
4. Discuss best practices for managing traffic flow and parking to prevent congestion and ensure the safety of participants and pedestrians. Discuss that it's likely that masses of young people might flee the area or move from one location to the next, and staff members operating any vehicles should be informed to be alert for this risk.
5. Discuss staff safety considerations, including wearing and utilizing specialized equipment such as staff identification or reflective vests so students, parents, and first responders can quickly identify staff members.
6. It might be helpful for school staff to know that law enforcement officers are bound to the use of force procedures regulated by the New Jersey Attorney General, and officers have been trained to handle events per the [New Jersey General Use of Force Policy](#) that provides direction concerning the use of force during civil disturbances.

¹Cohen, L. (2024, May 26). *Teen Stabbed, Chaos Breaks Out On Ocean City Boardwalk*. Retrieved from Breaking AC: <https://breakingac.com/news/2024/may/26/teen-stabbed-chaos-breaks-out-on-ocean-city-boardwalk/>

²Katro, K., & Hartman, T. (2024, June 4). *New Video Shows Maybe by Unruly Teens; 12 Arrested After Multiple Fights at Gloucester Township Day*. Retrieved from 6ABC: <https://6abc.com/post/gloucester-township-day-annual-event-disrupted-unruly-teens/14903112/>

³Rickman, R. (2024, June 9). *6 Arrests Made as Unruly Teens Ruin Another NJ Family Event*. Retrieved from NJ 101.5: <https://nj1015.com/6-arrests-unruly-teens-ruin-pennsauken-nj-summer-kick-off/>

⁴6ABC Digital Staff. (2024, May 31). *Ocean City Crack Down on Rowdy Teens With New Curfew, Backpack Ban, and More*. Retrieved from 6ABC: <https://6abc.com/ocean-city-new-jersey-rules-beach-curfew-backpack-ban-underage-drinking-teens-boardwalk/13321459/>

⁵Roman, J. (2024, May 31). *We Need Real Consequences for Unruly Teens on Jersey Shore Boardwalk, Local Officials Say*. Retrieved from NJ.COM: <https://www.nj.com/politics/2024/05/we-need-real-consequences-for-unruly-teens-on-jersey-shore-boardwalks-local-officials-say.html>