

'What if' questions drive safety discussion



Scott Forster, Bucks County's Director of Emergency Services, facilitated much of the 90-minute discussion on school safety.

Several scenarios involving physical threats were explored by QCSD employees.

By Gary Weckselblatt

What if ... you're a teacher in the hallway and you hear something that sounds like glass breaking.? What do you do?

What if ... you're a school nurse and you hear students running down a hallway shouting? What do you do?

What if ... you're a cafeteria worker and you hear what could be gunshots, but the sound is

similar to the kitchen appliances you hear everyday? What do you do?

These are the types of scenarios given to those who attended an ALICE tabletop exercise Thursday afternoon at Quakertown Community High School. Bucks County Emergency Management officials teamed up with QCSD leaders in drills designed to help high school employees react to

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an aggressive intruder or active shooter.

ALICE stands for Alert, Lockdown, Inform, Counter, and Evacuate. It is designed to help individuals handle a physical threat. It's one of several forms of training staff has undergone as the district seeks to be proactive in finding ways to improve the safety of students and employees.

The ALICE philosophy, which the district adopted and began implementing in the summer of 2015, is to use technology and information in a way that staff and students can make informed decisions in a crisis, remove as many people as possible from the danger zone, and provide realistic training so those involved in a crisis have a better chance of surviving. Students in each grade receive some form of training.

High school Assistant Principal Jason Magditch, School Resource Officer Bob Lee and Social Studies teacher Sean Burke spent four months helping design the drill. It was facilitated by Mr. Magditch, Scott Forster, Bucks County's Director of Emergency Services, and Richard Vona, the county's director of law enforcement training.

Ten school employees, most of them teachers, volunteered for the after-school event. Also attending were Assistant Superintendent Nancianne Edwards, the district's Safety Coordinator, and Amy Harwick, a member of the Parent-Community School Safety Committee.

The Committee, which has been meeting for several months, is scheduled to present its recommendations to enhance school safety to the Quakertown Community School Board on March 28.

During Thursday's 90-minute exercise, which included a video created by Lincoln Kaar's video production students, the attendees were asked a series of questions about



how they would react to different types of threats. After they responded, no one said "right" or "wrong." Because, as the facilitators said, there are no right or wrong answers.

"We greatly appreciate the willingness of our staff members to participate in this kind of table top scenario," Ms. Edwards said. "Part of the value of these exercises is in increasing our staff's confidence and sense of empowerment to act if they see or hear something happening that is suspicious. We would much rather have a dozen alerts that end up being nothing than one real situation that we fail to react to quickly enough."

"There's no plan that's got to be etched in stone," Mr. Vona said. "Plan before you need it. Think about these things. Plan before it

happens. The idea is to have options and ideas. We call it the what-if game? If this happens, what would I do? Play that game. Plan before you need it."

Following the program, Mr. Magditch said he heard several things will help the school continue to become safer.

SRO Lee and Mr. Burke, for example, have been meeting with students who sign up for their ALICE counter training course during their Pride periods. "We want to help students reduce their own fears and build confidence," SRO Lee said.

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