



School Administrators Association of New York State

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Anonymous Threat, Violence, and Self-Harm Reporting in 2023: An Administrator's Perspective

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With the tragic Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting having occurred a little more than a decade ago and an ever-evolving need for threat, violence, and self-harm protections in our school systems, school administrators state-wide have become the designated 24/7/365 fielding source for the anonymous reporting of safety threats, bullying, alcohol, drug use, depression, self-harm, and conflicts, posing a risk to the safety of students, teachers, and staff within their respective building.

By a press release dated June 4, 2022, the New York State Assembly announced the passage of *Alyssa's Law*, which was subsequently signed into law by Governor Kathy Hochul on June 23, 2023. *Alyssa's Law* requires school districts and district-wide safety teams to consider, as part of their review of the comprehensive district-wide safety plan, the installation of a panic alarm system to silently alert law enforcement in the event of a life threatening or emergency situation. The law is named after Alyssa Ahadef, who was shot and killed at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School on February 14, 2018.

Paralleling the awareness and evolving need for threat and violence protection in schools has arisen the continued efforts in the prevention of bullying and self-harm among students. This was most recently demonstrated in February 8, 2021, during the New York State Assembly Regular Session, with the introduction of Assembly Bill A4763. Although stricken in September 2021, the proposed legislation sought to enact the student suicide prevention act, requiring local educational agencies to produce policies, procedures, and guidelines that direct teachers and school administrators on how to respond to students who have demonstrated suicidal thoughts or intentions.

In the advent and passage of laws such as *Alyssa's Law* and proposed legislation such as Assembly Bill A4763, school districts have begun employing third-party reporting applications and software technologies that allow for individuals, namely students, and parents, to 24/7/365 anonymously report real-time safety threats, bullying, alcohol or drug use, depression, self-harm and conflicts posing a risk occurring within the district to building administrators. These applications further allow for secure direct two-way communications with building administrators about any incident report submitted by a student or parent. Notably, some of these reporting applications and software technologies currently employed by various districts state-wide include GoGuardian, Anonymous Alerts and Sandy Hook Promise.

While these applications have led to significant developments in the prevention of credible threats, violence, self-harm, and bullying, the burden has shifted to namely school administrators to monitor, assess, react, and communicate with parents and students in a 24/7/365 capacity. The impact has had a tremendous effect on administrators in New York. Administrators no longer have down time. Monitoring these software applications has consequently expanded the work hours, work days, work weeks and work years of administrators, which constitutes a mandatory topic to bargaining. Thus, before a school district can institute such applications the district must first negotiate with administrative units about (1) undertaking this additional work, (2) who will be assigned, (3) is there a rotation of district level and building level administrators, (4) compensation, (5) defense and indemnification to name but a few considerations. SAANYS is not hearing from some units and their members that they want no part of monitoring these applications anymore.

While administrators remain the utmost committed to ensuring student safety and the fostering of a safe learning environment within their respective districts, immediate discussions must be had to resolve the issues related to administrative burnout. The current level of monitoring these applications is unsustainable.

In addition, this type of triage level, call-center reporting system poses a significant risk of misapplication in the absence of individuals properly trained and equipped to handle the assessment and immediate reaction to any reports require, including, but not limited to in the instance of reported self-harm, the dispatch of skilled crisis counselors as well as other public safety officials and first responders. These additional duties, including the fielding of 24/7/365 incident reports with the possibility for immediate and severe danger to individual students and the school community as a whole, in no way lends itself to the task of one individual, let alone an administrator who is also tasked with the daily on-site oversight and safety of individuals within the school building. While threat, violence, and self-harm preventative measures remain of the utmost importance to superintendents, administrators, and teachers alike, districts must work together in order to ensure the establishment of policies and procedures that allow for the proper assessment of these real-time threats and dangers by trained crisis professionals and first-responders.

SAANYS remains committed to its members to address the ever-evolving needs of threat, violence, and self-harm protections in our school systems and stands read alongside members to ensure that these preventative measures are collectively negotiated first and foremost. Then we can discuss the proper training and supervision of administrators to act using these applications if the administrators choose to do so.

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