

## *Key Principles for School Security in Planning For Reductions in Force (RIFs)*

Conducting large-scale reductions in force (RIFs), or lay-offs, is never a pleasant endeavor, particularly when those positions being eliminated are close friends and colleagues. However, during difficult economic times, school districts and institutions of higher education (IHEs) are increasingly facing the possibility of RIFs in an effort to preserve funds for education. As school districts and IHEs prepare to conduct RIFs there are some key planning considerations for school safety, security and emergency management officials to ensure that the process is conducted safely and with compassion.

The following checklist is designed to help school safety, security, and emergency management officials guide school district and IHE safety efforts during RIF initiatives to:

- Facilitate collaboration between the school district and campus human resources staff and security staff in planning for RIFs.
- Help identify key considerations, as well as roles and responsibilities, throughout the process.
- Highlight key principles to be integrated by school security and emergency managers throughout the planning process.
- Reduce the potential for dangerous events.

\_\_\_ 1. **Utilizing a fair and humane approach to lay-offs.** The Reduction-In-Force (RIF) process is critical and sensitive. Officials need to be respectful and compassionate towards those individuals being RIF'd. Furthermore, consider allowing the individuals privacy and time to control and share their status with others first.

\_\_\_ 2. **Initiating open, honest, transparent, and timely communications.** Inform employees in advance of the RIF process and provide early notice of possible RIFs. Efforts should work to prepare the whole workforce so that there are no surprises which can lead to additional stress and possible mis-information. Communication can take many forms and can include meetings; publishing a timeline of milestones and key dates; and keeping the community apprised of budget issues, decisions, and next steps. At the same time, communication is key for stopping the spread of rumors; RIF teams can publish online Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs), establish a hotline or email account to respond to questions, or use social media tools to continually reinforce the appropriate message.

\_\_\_ 3. **Identifying and engaging partners and stakeholders in the RIF planning process.** In addition to Human Resource representatives, school security, and school emergency managers, the RIF planning team should consider including others such as local law enforcement, employee assistance program personnel, local mental health professionals, general counsel, information technology department personnel, labor union representatives, local businesses, and local school board members. In addition to identifying their roles and responsibilities throughout the RIF process, the team should 1.) discuss a range viable options for employees (e.g., possible reassignment, alternative employment opportunities, and supports for after

a lay-off, 2.) issues or signs of risk, and 3.) efforts to support the individuals, and protect the school community.

4. **Reviewing and updating Emergency Management and Continuity of Operation Plans (COOP).** Reviewing these plans alongside the RIF plan will help ensure there are no gaps, the team is prepared, and the district or campus has the capacity to protect the school community. The RIF team can work with general counsel to review and update the school's related policies, (e.g., workplace violence, weapons, and cybersecurity). At the same time, the team can review state and local laws since these will offer guidance for implementation as well as possible supports (e.g., legislation addressing protests, violent crime, intimidation, stalking). Likewise, the plan can include site assessments and initiatives to "harden" administrative buildings and key offices, as well as implement additional safety and security initiatives to protect key staff and provide extra security. When reviewing the COOP, efforts should ensure it reflects the anticipated change in personnel as well as includes protective measures for key personnel (e.g., Board President, Director of Human Resources). And, for both, the emergency management team should ensure all roles and responsibilities, including all partners, are clearly defined.
5. **Establishing and formalizing an employee threat assessment process.** Using a multidisciplinary team and protocols, the threat assessment team Should follow-up on any employees, or family members, identified as potential threats to one's self or others. The RIF team can consider formal and informal methods for staying connected to employees after the separation has taken place. The threat assessment team should receive training and likewise, training can be given to key staff and supervisors as to what behaviors and communications should be identified.
6. **Safeguarding district and school assets.** Identify essential personnel subject to lay-offs and develop a plan to ensure security is maintained. Collaborate with the IT Department to establish a system for limiting access to files and databases, resetting phone and computer system passwords, and detecting system intrusions. Institute a "checkout" process for turning in keys, identification badges, and other assets.
7. **Designing an effective lay-offs implementation plan.** The RIF team can consider a neutral location, off district or school property and perhaps one that offers, or is amenable to, additional security both inside and outside the building, if needed. When scheduling the RIF announcement, the team should consider the time or day and day of week, selecting one that creates a balance. In choosing the date and time for the RIF announcement, districts and IHEs may want to consider incorporating a "cooling off period" to give employees time to process the news. If including a "cooling off period", districts and IHEs may also want to take into consideration the length of the period so that employees are not left on their own for long periods of time, such as over a long weekend. During the lay-off, those affected should be given an opportunity to voice their opinion. And, throughout the effort, the appropriate partners should be present (e.g., HR, EAP or mental health, security, law enforcement, general counsel) to respond to questions or provide support.

- \_\_\_ 8. **Developing a script and implement training** for managers and others conducting lay-offs. A script ensures one consistent and respectful message be used. The district or IHE can offer sensitivity training and offer coaching sessions, taking managers through actual separation process and teaching them how to stay on script. There should be a script for each of the managers involved in relaying the news. And, if possible, more than one person should be present to relay the news.
- \_\_\_ 9. **Offering resources for employees.** The RIF plan should include supports and resources, including information on human resources, health benefits, mental health resources, and community services, for both those displaced as well as the “survivors.” Consider triage for calls received by Employee Assistance Program (EAP) to ensure inquiries are transferred to the appropriate persons, qualified assistance is provided, and the callers receive assistance.
- \_\_\_ 10. **Conduct a hot-wash and prepare an after-action report** to document what worked and what could be improved upon. Keep notes in a secure but accessible place for confidential staff.