

# VIPER

VIOLENT INTRUDER: POLICE & EDUCATORS RESPONSE



ONTARIO POLICE DEPARTMENT  
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May 1, 2001

Herman Goldstein Award Selection Committee  
Police Executive Research Forum  
1120 Connecticut Avenue NW Suite 930  
Washington, DC 20036-3023

Dear Selection Committee:

The Ontario Police Department is proud to submit "VIPER: Violent Intruder Police and Educators' Response" for the Herman Goldstein Award.

VIPER: Violent Intruder Police and Educators' Response was created to provide local police and educators a comprehensive plan to follow in the event a school encounters an armed intruder. Also, there are step-by-step instructions available for the students and teachers to simplify the training. These instruction manuals and videotapes help create a better understanding of expectation roles of the police, educators and students.

The Ontario C.O.P.S. Unit has implemented the S.A.R.A. model for purposes of project application. Working in collaboration with school administration, teachers, student and community, VIPER is a model program that creates readiness in the event of an armed-intruder incident on our school campuses. VIPER was devised by the Ontario Police Department and is currently being used in over sixty school districts across twenty-four states.

Thank you for your consideration of this project for the Herman Goldstein Award.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lloyd Scharf".

Lloyd Scharf  
Chief of Police

# ONTARIO POLICE DEPARTMENT: VIPER

## I. SUMMARY

School violence is on the rise in our country. In the aftermath of recent school shootings, and how they were handled, Ontario Police Department and local school officials have concluded that they are unprepared to effectively deal with an armed intruder on campus.

This problem was identified by an Ontario Police Department D.A.R.E. Officer who had an opportunity to communicate with school staff on a daily basis. After several meetings, it was determined that the school district and Police Department needed to formulate a plan to effectively deal with an armed intruder on campus. The officer then formulated the idea for a universal response plan.

Meetings were held between the Police Department, Fire Department, local school districts, surrounding police departments, and counseling services. It was agreed that a multi-agency response plan was needed.

The Ontario Police Department orchestrated a multi-agency training exercise involving an armed intruder at a local high school. At the conclusion of this training, all participants, including a panel of VIPs from various agencies, met in an effort to gather constructive criticism, recommendations, and possible solutions. The primary recommendations noted were: better communications, increased multi-agency training sessions, and the use of a multi-agency organizational chart.

After analyzing the concerns of all agencies and participants involved in the scenario, the "VIOLENT INTRUDER POLICE AND EDUCATORS' RESPONSE (VIPER) Program was created. The program provides police departments and schools with a comprehensive plan to

follow should a school encounter an armed intruder. Step by step instructions are available for the students and teachers (videotapes and manuals) to simplify the training. These tapes and manuals help create a better understanding of both the roles of emergency responders and school staff.

Although we have not experienced a violent intruder on campus in Ontario, the VIPER program has created a sense of readiness and confidence among the students, teachers, and agencies who have implemented the program. This program is currently being utilized in sixty school districts across twenty-four states.

## **II. DESCRIPTION**

### **A. SCANNING**

School violence is on the rise in this country. While the City of Ontario has not experienced a violent intruder on any school campus thus far, the following have been reported: gang fights, stabbings, assaults with deadly weapons, students possessing firearms, and terrorist threats.

In 1996, California passed Senate Bill 187 (Chapter 736, Hughes, Comprehensive School Safety Plan). This bill required all California schools to implement a comprehensive school safety plan by September 1, 1998.

In 1998, the Ontario Police Department met with school officials to discuss the Senate Bill and strategies in the event an armed intruder entered one of our campuses. It was discovered that out of thirty-six schools in the Ontario-Montclair School District, four had a plan in place and the rest had no plan at all. It was evident that there was an urgent need to devise a universal plan as well as implement multi-agency training between both the school district and

emergency responders to confront this problem.

Ontario Police Department S.W.A.T. Team supervisors met to discuss their primary concerns. Their suggestions were: acquiring maps of each school, familiarizing police personnel with campus public address/communications systems, installing master keys in pre-determined locations, and designating off campus evacuation sites for students and faculty.

Officers interviewed principals, teachers, campus security, and students and found most people did not know what to do if confronted with a stranger on campus. Campus security lacked the manpower to cover all school entrances and exits. School staff did not confront strangers on campus, and students did not report suspicious activity.

The Ontario Police Department then organized a training session for school staff members. They were invited to train with a hostage negotiator. The following scenario was presented: a shooting had just occurred on campus, there were student casualties, and the suspect just entered their classroom. Each asked what they would do. The staff responses ranged from screaming to jumping over the desk and biting the suspect. Some had no idea what they would do.

The Ontario Police Department processed all the concerns and suggestions from the training session and began to devise a universal plan to ensure the safety of our school children. This plan would later be called VIPER (Violent Intruder Police and Educators' Response).

## B. ANALYSIS

In January 1999, the Ontario Police Department approached the Ontario-Montclair School District to develop a training program for both staff and student in the event of an armed intruder or crisis on campus. The school district welcomed the idea and agreed to assist in any

way possible.

The Ontario Police Department S.W.A.T. team and hostage negotiations team established basic procedures for the project. These procedures included crisis response procedures, basic hostage negotiation techniques and a role playing exercise which utilized the S.W.A.T. team at the Euclid Elementary School in Ontario. Sixty school staff members, adults, and students acted as role players. The scenario involved two armed intruders who took the role players hostage. The suspects barricaded the windows and doors to thwart the S.W.A.T. snipers. Negotiators attempted to contact the suspects using the school's phone system however, no one knew how to operate it. In addition, there were no updated maps of the newly renovated building available to assist S.W.A.T.

Inside the classroom, students and staff were at a loss as to what to do. None of the staff felt confident enough to attempt negotiating with the suspects even though they were given numerous opportunities. The role players recall that the most significant thing they can remember was the barrel of the guns fixated on them.

At the end of the exercise, the staff and students were given training in "lock down" procedures, negotiating techniques, and lessons in maintaining control in a stressful situation. The staff and students were all pleased with the training and said they would have reacted differently during the scenario if they had this prior knowledge.

A debriefing took place and three major concerns were addressed. The S.W.A.T. team learned that it took an extended amount of time to receive crucial information that could have been readily available. Better communication was needed between the team, school officials, and other agencies. All law enforcement agencies involved were confused as to who was in charge. School staff and students (taken hostage) were in a panic causing chaos among each other. This in turn, aggravated the suspects.

A meeting was held to address these areas and share possible solutions. This was the first rough draft of the VIPER program. The initial rough draft included crisis response procedures and confidential hostage negotiation techniques. Workbooks were created for both students and

staff members, and later, a videotape was produced. The VIPER program also created a list of logistical information the S.W.A.T. team needed before being deployed to the crisis location e.g. (school maps, list and pictures of school employees, and instructions on the use of school communication systems).

In April 1999, tragedy struck Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado. Armed intruders (students) entered the school grounds massacring students and staff. It was apparent that there was no prior plan in place for emergency responders to handle this situation.

This unfortunate incident prompted the Ontario Police Department to take the VIPER program one step further by organizing a massive training exercise at Chaffey High School in Ontario. Many local law enforcement S.W.A.T. teams, hostage negotiation teams, fire departments, bomb squads, psychological counselors, C.O.P.S. officers, school officials, teachers, and students were involved. Over 250 school staff and students volunteered to be role players.

After months of preparation, the scenario was in motion. Twelve armed suspects infiltrated the school campus firing indiscriminately at the school. An entire class was held hostage in the auditorium. One of the suspects, an Ontario Fire Department explosive expert, placed inert explosive charges on two doors leading into the auditorium. A second group of suspects created a second incident when they took another class hostage. A car was set on fire adding to the confusion and make-up artists were on hand to enhance the magnitude of the victims injuries. Although this was only a training exercise, there was a definite sense of urgency in the air.

Initial responders realized the magnitude of the crisis and called for the S.W.A.T. team and mutual aid. Along with Ontario Police S.W.A.T. and negotiation teams, Fontana, Chino, and Upland S.W.A.T./negotiation teams also responded. In addition, Ontario Fire Department, the bomb squad, paramedics and ambulance teams were on hand.

There were twelve crisis counselors on scene. Six were role-playing as victims and six were available to counsel victims.

Within the first four minutes for the scenario, seven S.W.A.T. team members were killed as they attempted to enter the auditorium. Communication between the multi-agencies was chaotic and ineffective. School staff and students provided minimal information as to what had taken place, preventing medical rescuers from entering the "hot zone" until cleared by law enforcement. At the end of the crisis, seven officers, one staff member, and four students were dead. Seven suspects were taken into custody and five suspects were dead.

Sometime during the incident, two student victims were able to escape. They ran toward the S.W.A.T. armored vehicle seeking help. The S.W.A.T. officers were so engrossed in the situation, they paid little attention to them and yelled at the victims to get away. The officers did not realize the students had just escaped from the hostage takers. The two victims had valuable intelligence information that could have been helpful to both the S.W.A.T. and negotiation teams, however it was never addressed.

One again, concerns were voiced and ideas shared. The Chaffey High School training exercise reaffirmed that the first responder training needs to focus on: Locating the threat, containing the area and calling in the S.W.A.T. team.

- Law enforcement should have a file containing maps, names and photographs of school employees before the incident occurs.
- Mutual aid should be automatically called when a crisis occurs on a school campus. An organized command structure should be in place prior to a crisis.
- There should be a preset plan to enable all law enforcement agencies to communicate with each other during the crisis.
- Air surveillance is necessary to gain an aerial view and maintain the integrity of the perimeter.
- School staff should be trained and confident in negotiation and crisis response techniques.
- Students and teachers should perform practice drills until the crisis response techniques are second nature.
- Evacuation sites should be pre-determined, along with transportation capabilities to relocate

staff and students safely to the evacuation site.

The unfortunate lessons learned by law enforcement during the Columbine High School tragedy were also taken into consideration. The need for many public information officers at the scene was evident. Parents were in a "frenzy" because they were unable to get any information about their children and special sites should have been designated for parents to go to receive factual information regarding their children and the crisis.

Students voiced their opinion that they are afraid to offer authorities information that might indicate a fellow student is high risk due to fear of retaliation. The Ontario Police Department enlisted "We-Tip" organization to provide students an anonymous means of reporting information on fellow students they feel have the potential for violence. This type of reporting allows the student to report the information with no fear of retaliation.

### C. RESPONSE

The Violent Intruder: Police & Educators' Response Program is a proactive, collaborative school safety program. It establishes an integrated, multi-agency response plan and provides both school staff and students with basic training and procedures in the event of an armed intruder, shooting or other extreme act of violence. Everything needed by law enforcement and schools to implement and maintain the VIPER Program are included in the VIPER Program Materials Kit. C.O.P.S., D.A.R.E., S.W.A.T. and school resource officers share the responsibility of presenting the program to the schools.

#### The VIPER Program Implementation Guide

The VIPER Program Implementation Guide provides local police departments, schools and districts a comprehensive plan and step-by-step instructions for both implementation and long term maintenance of the program. It also provides both school personnel and police

personnel a consistent set of guidelines and clear understanding of what to expect from each other.

The primary focus of Stage 1 Implementation is the development of VIPER Program Master Reference Binders and Crisis Response Procedures, and the installation of "Knox Boxes" (boxes containing master keys) on school site. These initial implementation steps lay the foundation for preparedness and reference if a crisis occurs.

The school site's Master Reference Binders provide the vital information police and tactical units will need to effectively respond including: detailed maps, staff photos, communication abilities, phone directories and instructions, district personnel contacts, evacuation, transportation and other resources.

The VIPER Program Crisis Response Procedures provide step-by-step instructions for school staff and students, and detailed responsibilities for involved personnel. Implementation of these procedures also includes the development of a VIPER alarm code, all-clear code and confidential transportation abort code, and the determination of an off-site evacuation location.

Stage 2 Implementation includes a School Staff Training Session by a qualified police department facilitator. The facilitator may be a C.O.P.S. officer, D.A.R.E. officer, school resource officer, or S.W.A.T. officer. Thereafter, it includes student training, advising parents and guardians of the VIPER Program, and staging the school sites' Initial VIPER Program Staff and Student Drill. This drill reinforces staff and student training by actual participation.

Stage 3 is long term maintenance of the VIPER Program, the orientation of newly hired staff and new students. It calls for the staging of VIPER Program drills two times per year and updating of the VIPER Program Master Reference Binders annually.

## The VIPER Program Staff Training.

The VIPER Program Staff Training Facilitator's Guide prepares the local police department representative to facilitate the most effective training session possible. It details the need for familiarization with the specific school site and provides comprehensive VIPER Program implementation information. The guide outlines the sequence of training and clearly states the objectives of the training session, which are to provide school staff with a clear understanding of :

- How to act decisively to ensure the safety of students and themselves, and to secure their school site.
- What to teach students in their VIPER Program Training session.
- What information parents and guardians will receive about the VIPER Program.

The Staff Training Session is divided into three parts with an opportunity for questions and answers at the conclusion of each. Part 1 gives school staff a solid understanding of how the VIPER Program is being implemented at their school site.

Part 2 includes viewing the VIPER Program Video and a step-by-step review of the Crisis Response Procedures. The VIPER Program Confidential Staff Training Video is shown and core concepts and strategies are emphasized.

In Part 3 school staff is oriented to grade-appropriate VIPER Program Student Training which is outlined for elementary school students, middle school students and high school students, followed by a review of the information parents and guardians of all students will receive. In conclusion and in an interactive exercise, the Crisis Response Procedures for the VIPER Program Staff and Student Drill are reemphasized.

### The VIPER Program School Staff Workbook

The VIPER Program School Staff Workbook is distributed to all staff in the VIPER Program Staff Training Session. All school staff will have universal knowledge of the VIPER Program and procedures e.g. (this includes all administrators, teachers, teaching and noon duty aids, security personnel, office and support staff, food service workers, custodial staff, transportation staff, drivers, etc.).

The workbook follows the outline for the Staff Training Session and details the VIPER Program Crisis Response Procedures, confidential concepts and strategies for dealing with a violent intruder, student training for all grades K-12, parent and guardian information, and the VIPER Program Staff and Student Drill. This workbook is also used to orient newly hired staff to the VIPER Program after its initial implementation.

### The VIPER Program Video

The VIPER Program Video is an enactment of what staff and students might experience if there is a violent intruder on campus. It portrays step by step instructions for the VIPER Program Crisis Response Procedures and responsible actions to be taken by school staff and students. The VIPER `alarm code,' `all clear code,' and `off-site evacuation location' is highlighted. This video is shown in the School Staff Training Session and in High School Student Training Sessions. It is also used for orientation of newly hired staff and new students to the VIPER Program after its initial implementation.

### The VIPER Program Confidential Staff Training Video

The VIPER Program Confidential Staff Training Video is presented only in the School Staff Training Session and to orient newly hired staff to the VIPER Program after its initial implementation. Some of the material in the video is confidential in nature and is intended for

use under law enforcement control only.

In dealing with a violent intruder, the school staffs' main objective is the safety of students and themselves. Because human behavior is not an exact science, flexibility, rational thinking and common sense are keys to survival. This video presents core concepts and strategies as specific suggestions to assist school staff in dealing with a violent intruder on campus.

#### The VIPER Program Student Handouts

The VIPER Program Student Handouts, for elementary grades 5 and 6, middle school grades 6-8, and high school grades 9-12, reinforce Viper Program Student Training and includes grade-appropriate Viper Program Crisis Response Procedures (there is no handout for elementary school students grades K - 4.). Student training and the VIPER Program Drill that follows training, help to insure that students are as well prepared as possible should an incident occur.

#### The Viper Program Parent & Guardian Handout

The VIPER Program Parent & Guardian Handout (All Grades K — 12) advises parents and guardians of the following:

- The school's effort to promote a safe learning environment.
- Their child's participation in the VIPER Program.
- An Off-Site Evacuation Location.
- It also prepares and instructs parents and guardians to deal with such an incident responsibly.

#### The VIPER Program: Confidential for Law Enforcement

The VIPER Program: Confidential for Law Enforcement is a multi-agency S.W.A.T. plan and organizational response structure developed by the Ontario Police Department S.W.A.T. team for singular, large-scale incidents. A multi-agency chain of command is outlined to work in

conjunction with the local fire department's emergency/medical response plan to major incidents.

Multi-agency operational assignments and responsibilities are presented in detail.

#### VIPER Program Crisis Response Procedures

- 1) Recognize a threat. Move away from the threat.
- 2) Report the situation to the main office.
- 3) Main office sounds the VIPER alarm.
- 4) Staff locks door and secures the site. Doors are not to be opened for anyone until the 'all clear' alarm is sounded or law enforcement or district personnel gain access with a key.
- 5) Staff directs students to duck, cover and hold in the safest place possible. Students listen and obey staff.
- 6) Call 911 and provide any and all information possible.
- 7) Master Reference Binders made available to local law enforcement. Site representative meets officers and briefs. A command post is established.
- 8) Master keys obtained from "Knox Boxes."
- 9) If possible, staff evacuates students to Off-Site Evacuation Location. Staff brings earthquake preparedness/first aid kit.
- 10) Once evacuated, staff takes roll call and a Student/Staff Tracking Station is established.
- 11) All staff and students remain at the Off-Site Evacuation Location until departure is authorized by local law enforcement through designated school officials. Provide police with as much detailed information as possible.
- 12) Local media are used to communicate important information and provide updates of the situation in a timely manner.

### VIPER Program Core Concepts/Hostage Negotiation Techniques

- 1) Remain calm. You are the authority figure for both students and the armed intruder.
- 2) Ask the violent intruder, "How can I help you?" This open question may give you some insight into their motivation.
- 3) Respond to the violent intruder. Give the impression they are important and everything *else* is secondary.
- 4) Cooperate over minor issues you control.
- 5) Establish a record of success by following simple instructions.
- 6) Do not give yourself or the hostages value. Young or old, male or female. Treat everybody the same.
- 7) Do not bring attention to the suspects' weapon. Try to avoid looking at it when you are talking to him or her.
- 8) Ask open-ended questions, which may start a dialogue with you and the intruder. This will give you more insight into the intruder's motivation.
- 9) Keep your responses to the violent intruder's questions simple. Try not to appear evasive. Do not volunteer too much information or "problem solve" for the intruder.
- 10) Soft or sympathetic eye contact is important. Look the violent intruder in the eye when appropriate. Your gaze must reinforce their dignity as a human being, yet not appear threatening.
- 11) Speak softly and in a non-confrontational voice. Avoid sarcastic remarks. Restrain any fear in your voice. Try to remain in control of your emotions. If you lose control, the intruder could use it against you.
- 12) You must be a good listener during the crisis. Do not interrupt the violent intruder when they

are speaking. By listening, you may be able to gather information about the intruder's plan.

## D. ASSESMENT

The VIPER Program was developed as the result of actual Ontario Police Department S.W.A.T. training done on school campuses, in conjunction with school districts, paramedics, fire and bomb squads, role-play volunteers and crisis counselors. While no school shooting has taken place at a school which has implemented the VIPER Program, prepared schools may fare better than those that are not.

The VIPER Program has been presented at:

- . The Law Enforcement Executive Development Association Conference in Quantico, Virginia.
- The Annual Crime Prevention Officers' Conference in Sacramento, California.
- The California Association of School Business Officers conference in Santa Clara, California.
- School districts around Southern California.

Ontario C.O.P.S. officers D.A.R.E. officers, S.W.A.T. officers and school resource officers have been trained as staff training facilitators and are working toward implementing VIPER in all the schools in Ontario.

"In the wake of senseless shootings on school campuses in recent years, we decided to take action to ensure our schools have the safest learning environment possible" explains Chief Lloyd Scharf of the Ontario Police Department. "It is our goal to establish the VIPER Program on campuses throughout our nation, thereby improving our children's safety at school."

### III. AGENCY AND OFFICER INFORMATION

1. The C.O.P.S. unit (Community Oriented Problem Solving) is involved in this problem solving effort. They have been asked to act as staff trainers for VIPER because of the magnitude of the number of schools and students. The C.O.P.S. unit is supported by the Chief of Police, command staff, school district administrators, and staff.
2. The C.O.P.S. unit has been in existence since 1995, when the Ontario Police Department received grant funding from the Department of Justice. C.O.P.S. officers regularly attend all C.O.P.S./POP conferences to continue training in community oriented policing. Attendees include management personnel as well as officers.
3. No specific incentives are given to officers who apply for the C.O.P.S. unit. The popularity of the unit and the support from the command staff encourages participation. Also, the department encourages all staff members to develop "C.O.P.S./POP" programs to address repetitive crime problems.
4. Officers from D.A.R.E. and S.W.A.T. researched initiated the program. The C.O.P.S. officers train the faculty and students.
5. The problem encountered was in the assessment phase. Law enforcement can not prevent armed intruders on school campuses. The VIPER program has created a sense of readiness and confidence among the students, teachers, and emergency responders who have implemented the program.
6. Because of the commitment of the city council, including all levels city administration, the

effort has received full support and the availability of every needed resource. The only limitation has been without the use of a multi-agency task force.

7. PROJECT CONTACT PERSON:

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