

# **Drilling in safety Hampshire Regional test crisis readiness**

*By CATHERINE BAUM Staff Writer*

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WESTHAMPTON – Hampshire Regional math teacher Dale Nicodemi says when she started teaching in 1979, the biggest issue in American schools was students taking LSD on candy dots. Today, the biggest issue in American schools, she believes, is the harm that can befall students through acts of violence.

In an effort to keep students safe in instances like a toxic spill, shooting or explosion, school administrators, the bus company and the Westhampton Fire and Police departments carried out Hampshire Regional's first evacuation and relocation drill Wednesday.

Principal James Connolly used the intercom to signal the drill, which the students had learned about in assemblies. Assistant Principal Maureen Porter Ecclestone said the students took the drill seriously during the assemblies.

"You could have heard a pin drop in the auditorium," Porter Ecclestone said.

Hampshire Regional held the drill because the Department of Education mandates that all schools create what is known as a multi-hazard evacuation plan, said Mary Phelan, health education coordinator.

A similar drill was held at the William E. Norris, New Hingham Regional and Williamsburg elementary schools this year, Phelan said.

Following Connolly's signal, nearly 1,000 students, faculty and staff walked to either the Westhampton Congregational Church or the Fire Department on Stage Road, where they were dismissed and picked up by their buses.

"Even though we're in a rural area you never know what could happen," sophomore Timothy Murphy, 16, of Westhampton, said in the Fire Department parking lot. "It's nice to know that they have a plan just in case."

Jonathan Whitely-Lederman, 16, of Florence, said he believes the drill would be helpful if a chemistry experiment went wrong or a "kid went crazy shooting people."

"I think it's always possible, but I don't think it's probable," said Whitely-Lederman, a junior.

Assistant Principal Mark Folta, who was helping to organize students leaving the Fire Department, said this was an extreme drill that will likely happen once a year.

Every few months, the school holds fire, lockdown and shelter-in-place drills. Lockdown occurs when classes are locked if, for example, an intruder were to come into the building.

Shelter-in-place is when students and staff stay where they are if, for example, police dogs were to enter the building, according to Folta.

The drill started around 1:20 p.m. and was expected to be finished at 2:30 p.m., but it ended earlier than that at around 2 p.m.

"We've got more than enough time," Folta said. "I haven't seen any kinks at all - I think it's been pretty orderly."

Later in the day, Phelan said the only drill adjustment to be made that she knew was more clarity in bus numbers.

Not every number was posted in each bus window and not every student remembered his or her bus number. Some students were confused because they are used to their buses being located in the same spot in line every day after school, she said.

### **Technological help**

Kimberly Florek, information technology director at Hampshire Regional High School, said student attendance was updated up until 10 minutes before the drill Wednesday via PowerSchool, software that includes attendance, medical data and emergency notification information for each student.

"If for some reason we have to evacuate the building, I'd be able to get access to this anywhere that has Internet," Florek said.

She noted that she had her laptop Wednesday, but cell phones with Internet or Internet in the homes of neighbors would be equally sufficient for getting the data, as she knows how to access it and is authorized to do so. Administrators stationed at the command post, church and fire station can account for each student with this information using their walkie-talkies, she added.

"Having access to this information is a great asset and will give us the most accurate picture during a drill or an actual emergency," Florek said. "We'll be able to have up-to-date information at our fingertips."

Many colleges and universities are subscribing to a service that puts emergency messages out to a large number of students in text messages on their cell phones, Florek said.

She is looking to see if mass text messages would fit with Hampshire Regional's goals for emergency planning.

"I think most students have cell phones, whether they're in their backpacks or lockers during the day," Florek said. "We're trying to see if it may be an option for us."

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