To: Superintendents and Principals

From: Stephen Balko, Director of School Building Security

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Subject: Health, Safety, and Security Considerations for Schools Utilized as Polling Locations

When schools serve as public polling places, schools face numerous safety challenges including public health, access control, potential for public demonstrations, and parking issues. Schools have the option to implement their continuous learning plans for an Election Day, or they can choose to remain open as normal. In preparation for the upcoming November 2020 General Election, the Indiana Department of Education has created a list of considerations that may assist schools in efforts to keep staff and students safe if they are to be utilized as a polling location, and remain open.

Schools as Polling Locations
- Schools serve as polling places because Indiana Code (IC) 3-11-8-4 states public buildings, including schools, be made available for holding elections.

- As part of preparing to host a polling place, school officials may want to reevaluate locations and policies regarding voting in the school building. If one particular location within the school has been used historically, it does not mean it is the absolute best location.

- School officials at the district level need to work with the county election board. The county election board oversees the election process and abides by the county and local ordinances for any given jurisdiction or discipline.

- On Election Day, a representative of the school building should meet with the polling inspector to discuss school safety procedures in the event of an emergency.

- The public does not have access to all areas of the school when entering the school building to vote. Public has access only to the portion of the school serving as the polling place.

- Schools have the authority to restrict possession of firearms on school property as per IC 35-47-9.

Public Health and COVID-19 Considerations
- School officials whose schools have been selected to serve as a polling location should work with their local health department to review plans and procedures ahead of Election Day.

- Schools serving as a polling location should be familiar with the COVID-19 Guidance for Elections Personnel which was compiled the Indiana Election Division with information from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and other government agencies.

- The Indiana State Department of Health (ISDH) developed COVID-19 Guidance Election Polling Station Locations for the June 2, 2020 Primary Election, which schools may find helpful as they plan for hosting a polling location in the General Election.

- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have issued Considerations for Election Polling Locations and Voters as polling centers to help mitigate the COVID-19 threat.

Access Control
- Establish a location for the polling place which can be secured away from areas occupied by students. Consider a location that allows voters to enter and exit via separate entrance, so voters will not have to sign in to your facility to vote.

- Request election workers to display credentials or identifiable clothing to assist in recognizing those authorized to be within other areas of the school.

- According to the 2020 Election Day Handbook: "Proper credentials act as a means to identify other election workers on Election Day. These tags must include the individual's name, position (watcher, challenger or poll book holder), the name and position of the appointing authority (county chairman, state chairman, or county election board), and the party affiliation of the appointing authority if the appointing authority is a political party."

- Review school protocol for election workers, so they understand to restrict access to unauthorized areas of the school and to report suspicious activity on school grounds.

- Use appropriate signs to assist voters in accessing the election areas, and use signage and barriers (when appropriate) to prevent voters from entering unauthorized areas of the school.

- Select restrooms may be closed or inaccessible to students on Election Day and ensure these closures are communicated to the student body.

- Visitors to the school for typical school business such as meeting with staff or a student (not voting) should follow the established protocols that your school follows on a daily basis. These visitors should still enter through the appropriate door, sign in, and wear visitor identification until they leave your facility.

Staffing
- Assign staff or volunteers to help maintain secured areas of the school. Review school protocol to report suspicious behavior, or attempts to access unauthorized areas.

- Request additional support from law enforcement to increase presence in the area, when possible.

- School staff should consider displaying identification or identifiable clothing.

- Remind staff that elections should bring a heightened sense of awareness due to the increased access to the building. Staff should be empowered to approach visitors who are in unauthorized areas of the building to ask "How may I help you?" or to report these visitors to the office.

This document contains considerations for school leaders to examine local practices and procedures in an attempt to better serve their student population. It is therefore incumbent upon school corporation officials to determine what issues are critical to address when considering emergency preparedness issues. Collaboration with the county election board and first responders is always recommended.

If you have any questions, please contact Stephen Balko at 317-232-4914 or e-mail at sbalko@doe.in.gov.