



SWATTING INCIDENTS

What Schools Need to Know

Communication gaps, threat credibility, and the lessons of an after-action review

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Today's Roadmap



What swatting is and why schools are the target



The communication gap between dispatch, police, and schools



Is this threat credible? Indicators that matter



Two superintendents, three incidents, hard-won lessons



Building better communication with your first responders



Why the after-action review is non-negotiable

Your Presenters

Jason R. Russell, CPP

SEC SHIELD; 10 years U.S. Secret Service; original member of Michigan's School Safety & Mental Health Commission

Dori Leyko — Superintendent, East Lansing Public Schools

Two swatting calls on back-to-back days; two very different police responses

Sandra Beal — Superintendent, Ronan School District

Recent swatting incident in a rural, multi-jurisdiction environment

What Is Swatting?

A hoax call or report to emergency services, a public location, or a private residence that falsely reports an immediate threat to life — an active shooter, bomb, or hostage situation — at a specific location, intended to draw a large law enforcement response.

FBI / IC3 Public Service Announcement, August 4, 2026

The target has shifted

- Traditional swatting aimed at individuals the caller had a grudge against
- The FBI now sees coordinated campaigns against schools, government buildings, houses of worship, hospitals, and transit hubs
- Goal: disruption, fear, and chaos across many locations at once, not a single victim
- Hoax threats are federal crimes and are investigated as such

What it costs a school



Lockdowns, evacuations, closures



Trauma for students and staff



Misinformation spreading on social media



Officer and public risk during a lights-and-siren response



Emergency resources pulled away from real calls



Copycat calls after media coverage

This Is Not a Rare Event

850+

swatting incidents targeting U.S. schools
in one 18-month period (2023–24)

K-12 School Shooting Database

220

New York schools hit by swatting calls in a
single day — March 30, 2023

Office of Sen. Schumer

1,000+

institutions in 42 states threatened over
one month in late 2023

DHS / FBI / NCTC bulletin, Jan. 2024

Waves cluster around the start of the school year, in the aftermath of high-profile shootings, and during trending social media challenges. Callers increasingly use VoIP services, spoofed numbers, and computer-generated voices to hit many schools in one session.

Anatomy of a Swatting Incident



1

The call

Caller claims an active shooter or bomb, often via VoIP, sometimes to a non-emergency line or directly to the school



2

Dispatch

Call-taker enters the incident; it is broadcast to units as a priority call — usually before anyone at the school knows



3

Response

Multiple agencies converge; officers may enter the building looking for a shooter



4

The school

Learns of the incident from arriving officers, a parent, or social media — and must decide lockdown, secure, or evacuate



5

Clearance

Building is swept and declared safe; reunification, parent communication, and media follow

The critical problem: in most incidents the school is the last to know and the least informed while the response unfolds around it.

The Communication Gap: Dispatch, Police, and Schools



How dispatchers actually communicate

- The call-taker's job is to get units moving — the school is not usually on the notification list
- Incident is typed into CAD and broadcast by radio in codes and shorthand the school never hears
- Multiple agencies (city, county, state, tribal) may be dispatched from different centers with different information
- Call details (caller ID, line used, what was said) stay inside dispatch unless someone asks
- A "possible swatting" flag may or may not be passed to responding units



What the school experiences

- Officers arrive with no advance call — or a call comes from an unknown number nobody answers
- No one can tell the principal what was reported, by whom, or how credible it is
- Nobody knows who the incident commander is or where the command post is
- Parents learn from students' phones and social media before the district sends anything
- The response looks different from what the school's plan assumed — and nobody explains why

Why Two Calls Can Get Two Very Different Responses

The same school, the same week, the same type of call — and a dramatically different police response. Here is what usually explains it:



Which line the call came in on

911 vs. non-emergency vs. the school itself changes how it is prioritized



What dispatch relayed

Was it broadcast as an active shooter, a suspicious call, or a possible hoax?



Whether an alert was already out

FBI, fusion center, or regional warnings about a wave change everything



Who was working that day

Staffing levels, shift, supervisors, and mutual aid availability



Where units were

Proximity, other active calls, and how many agencies got the dispatch



Agency policy and judgment

Some departments treat every call as real until cleared; others triage by indicators



CASE STUDY

East Lansing Public Schools

East Lansing, Michigan

**Two swatting calls
Back-to-back days
Two very different responses**

Presented by Dori Leyko, Superintendent

What happened, and what it felt like from inside the district

● Day one

How the first call came in, how the district learned of it, and what the police response looked like

● Day two

The second call — and the moment it became clear the response was different

● In the moment

What the district did not know, what it assumed, and the stress that created for staff, students, and families

● The after-action review

What the AAR revealed about why the responses differed — and why that explanation never reached the school in real time

● What changed

Concrete steps the district and its police partners took afterward



CASE STUDY

Ronan School District

Ronan, Montana

A recent incident
A rural district
Multiple responding agencies

Presented by Sandra Beal, Superintendent

Swatting far from the big city: same tactic, different challenges

● The call

How it arrived, what was claimed, and how the district first became aware

● The response

Which agencies responded, how long it took, and how the district communicated with them on scene

● Rural realities

Distance, limited staffing, overlapping jurisdictions, and a community where everyone knows everyone

● Families and community

How parents reacted, what spread on social media, and what the district sent out

● Lessons

What the district would do differently — and what it is asking of its first-responder partners now

Is This Threat Credible? Indicators of a Swatting Call

From the FBI's August 2026 public service announcement. Consider these in context and together, never on any single one alone. The last indicator is added from field practice.



VoIP or blocked number

Caller ID shows all zeros or nines, blocked, or unavailable — VoIP services often cannot dial 911 directly



Non-emergency line

A call to the department's business line, or directly to the school, rather than to 911 is a strong signal



Only one call

Real emergencies generate multiple calls from witnesses; a swatting call is usually the only report



Originates outside the U.S.

Many recent campaigns are run from overseas



Vague or shifting details

Caller cannot give a name, callback number, or location, and answers change when asked again



Mispronounces local names

Streets, buildings, or the town itself — a sign the caller has never been there



Calm or scripted voice

Demeanor does not match a life-or-death situation; sounds like reading a script or a synthetic voice



No corroboration

Nothing on cameras, no alarms, no staff reports, no student texts — nothing on the ground matches the claim

Where Did the Threat Come In? A Quick Triage Frame

Channel	What the school should do	Initial posture
911 / PSAP	Dispatch owns the call. Ask dispatch: one call or many? Caller ID? Any swatting flag? Expect a full response regardless.	HIGH — until cleared
Police non-emergency line	FBI flags this as a swatting indicator (VoIP often cannot reach 911). Still a police response, but ask whether the call was triaged.	ELEVATED
Directly to the school	Front office is the only witness. Use the caller checklist, note caller ID and exact words, call 911 immediately, and tell dispatch it came to the school.	ELEVATED
Social media / email / text	Anonymized threat. Preserve screenshots, report to law enforcement, and run your threat assessment protocol (CISA K-12 toolkit).	ASSESS

Indicators help law enforcement scale the response and help you communicate — they never justify skipping lockdown or secure procedures before the building is cleared.

During the Incident: What the School Controls



Follow your protocol

Lockdown or secure per your EOP until law enforcement clears the building — even when you suspect a hoax



One point of contact

Designate a single school liaison to the incident commander; everyone else stays out of the radio traffic



Find the command post

Know who is in charge and where they are; bring keys, floor plans, cameras, and rosters to them



Get ahead of the rumor

A short, factual message to families within minutes beats a perfect one in an hour — and tell parents not to come to the school



Plan reunification early

If evacuation happens, controlled reunification prevents the parent-swarm that has overwhelmed schools elsewhere



Start the record now

Log times, who called whom, what was said — you will need it for the after-action review

Better Communication With First Responders Starts Before the Call

Know your dispatch center

- Visit the PSAP that serves your buildings; meet the supervisors
- Ask how they would notify you of a threat call — then write it down
- Give them a 24/7 district contact and a verified callback number
- Ask to be told: one call or many, which line, any swatting flag

Agree on the playbook

- Joint written protocol for hoax and swatting calls, signed by police and district
- Who is incident commander, where the command post is, who the school liaison is
- Shared floor plans, camera access, keys, and a common site map
- A response-scaling agreement: what changes when indicators point to a hoax

Practice it

- Tabletop a swatting call at least once a year with police, fire, EMS, and dispatch
- Include the 'we do not know why the response is different' scenario
- Test radio and phone interoperability, not just the plan on paper
- Brief new principals and new officers every year — turnover kills institutional memory

Communicating With Families and the Community



Pre-write it. You will not have time later.

- Template 1 (first 10 minutes): "Police are responding to a reported threat at [school]. Students and staff are secure. Do not come to the school. Updates to follow."
- Template 2 (all clear): what was reported, that it was determined to be a hoax, what happens next, and where to get support
- Template 3 (next day): what an after-action review is and that you are doing one
- Push through every channel at once: text, email, app, website, social media
- Coordinate the message with law enforcement's public information officer so the two stories match



What the FBI asks parents to do

- Expect a heavy law enforcement presence and let officers work
- Follow official school and police channels for updates
- Do not share unverified information or rumors on social media
- Do not go to the school unless directed
- Talk with children now about staying calm and following instructions
- Report anything they hear about a planned swatting or hoax threat

Put this list in your back-to-school communications now, before an incident, so families already know the rules.

The After-Action Review Is Where the Learning Happens

East Lansing only understood why the two responses differed because an after-action review was conducted. Without it, the district would have been left with stress, distrust, and no fix.



Schedule it within 2 weeks

1

While memories are fresh and before the next incident



Get everyone in the room

2

District leadership, principals, police command, dispatch, fire/EMS, SROs, communications staff



Build one shared timeline

3

Minute by minute: the call, dispatch, arrival, school actions, notifications, all-clear



Blameless, not toothless

4

Ask what happened and why — not who to blame — but name the gaps plainly



Assign corrective actions

5

Owner, deadline, and a date to verify each one is done



Share the results

6

Board, staff, families, and neighboring districts — your lesson can save someone else

Questions Every Swatting AAR Should Answer

1

How did the call come in, and what exactly did dispatch broadcast?

Line, caller ID, wording, and any hoax flag

2

When and how was the school notified — and by whom?

If the answer is 'when officers arrived,' that is your first finding

3

Who was the incident commander, and did the school know?

Was there a command post, and did a school liaison get to it?

4

Why was the response sized the way it was?

The East Lansing question — and the one that must be answered to the school, not just internally

5

What did families hear, from whom, and when?

Compare the district's first message to the first social media post

6

What did students and staff need afterward?

Counseling, debriefs, and how the next day was handled

7

What will be different next time — and who owns that change?

Corrective actions with names and dates

Ten Things to Do Before Your Next Swatting Call

1

Meet your dispatch center and agree on how you get notified

2

Sign a joint hoax/swatting protocol with every responding agency

3

Name a school liaison and know where the command post will be

4

Share floor plans, keys, and camera access in advance

5

Train front-office staff on the phone-threat checklist and caller ID capture

6

Pre-write three family messages and load them in every channel

7

Put the FBI parent guidance in your back-to-school communications

8

Tabletop a swatting scenario with police, fire, EMS, and dispatch annually

9

Add a scaled-response discussion: what changes when it looks like a hoax

10

Commit in writing to an after-action review within two weeks of any incident

Reporting and Federal Resources



If you are swatted

- Preserve everything: caller ID, recordings, screenshots, usernames, platforms, emails, timestamps
- Report immediately to local law enforcement; 911 for any immediate threat
- Submit a tip to the FBI at tips.fbi.gov or 1-800-CALL-FBI
- File with the Internet Crime Complaint Center at ic3.gov
- Notify your state fusion center and school safety office — your incident may be part of a wave



Guidance worth reading

FBI / IC3 PSA I-080426 (Aug. 2026)

Ongoing Threats of Swatting and Indicators for Community Members — ic3.gov/PSA/2026/PSA260804

CISA: K-12 Anonymized Threat Response Guidance (2024)

Toolkit and reference guide for assessing and responding to anonymous threats, including swatting — cisa.gov

DHS: Swatting Calls and Hoax Threats guide (2024)

Preparedness and response checklist for institutions — dhs.gov

FBI field office parent and school guidance (Aug. 2026)

Talking points for families on what to expect and how to help



Questions

Ask us about the incidents, the dispatch relationship, the after-action process, or anything you are facing in your own district.

On the panel

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Thank you

The call will be a hoax. The stress, the confusion, and the response will be real. Prepare for the real part.

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