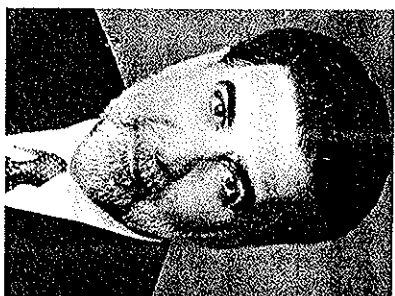


## Lessons from NYC

In the wake of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center, Area 13 Director Jerry Cammarata, a member of the New York City Board of Education, offers suggestions for school boards on dealing with disasters. The information is tailored to urban districts but may be of interest to all districts:



**Jerry Cammarata**  
*Area 13 Director*

- Schools that are built around important "political or strategic targets" should have design features that protect students and staff, as well as clear evacuation plans. Students should be able to be transferred to other schools at a moment's notice.
- Schools should be able to immediately mobilize grief counselors for schools and communities, and professional educators to work with staff, kids, families and communities to help them understand the tragedy and its circumstances.
- Disaster plans should include special arrangements for food and bus-ing services. The New York City board activated its emergency plans and fed not only schoolchildren, but workers at the World Trade Center as well.
- Schools should be prepared to help the community in time of disaster. For example, local authorities should have the names and telephone numbers of school officials who can open a school building in a time of need.

## After terrorism strikes, schools mourn and recover

By Barbara Bennett  
*Senior Writer*

As much as everyone tried to return to business as usual, it was impossible. After the Sept. 11 terrorist attack on the United States, teachers and other school officials were faced with a daunting task — staying strong and in control while trying to make sense of acts that were beyond everyone's experience.

As the country still reels, schools are looking with new interest at their character education programs and their potential for giving children what they need most in times of threat: a strong sense of community and shared values.

"We share the sorrow of those who lost someone in this tragic occurrence," said NYSSBA President Edward L. McCormick. "Our strength as a society comes from being good, caring citizens. Public schools have been and will continue working toward building civic virtue among our youth."

Many students actually witnessed the crash of two jets into the Twin Towers. At that hour of the morning, many city children were walking to school, lining up in school yards and looking out classroom windows mere blocks from the site.

A group of middle school students

from the Capital region were aboard the Half Moon, a replica of Henry Hudson's 17th century ship, which was anchored in New York Harbor. Images showing the serene beauty of the Manhattan skyline at sunrise were posted on the Half Moon's website at 6:39 a.m. Two hours later the students watched in horror as the attack took place above them.

The Half Moon quickly sailed to Yonkers where the students were put on a bus and sent back to Albany. All returned safely, according to school officials.

A member of the New York City Board of Education, Jerry Cammarata, was among those forced to run for their lives. Cammarata, NYSSBA's Area 13 Director, was in Building 7 of the World Trade Center, where he was helping answer the board of education's tele-phones. "Dozens of us ran down 22 flights of stairs and upon reaching the street, ran with the greatest of speed away from the towers," he told *On Board*.

Cammarata ducked into a store about eight blocks from the towers to use the phone. When he returned, "the biggest fear of my life was before my eyes. The first tower collapsed with a thunder and flash of rolling dust. It took eight more blocks of intense running,

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## TERROR

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never looking back, to escape being engulfed in ash and suffocating."

Countless people associated with public education lost loved ones as the towers collapsed. One was former NYSSBA Executive Director Stanley Raub, who served from 1977 to 1983. He reportedly lost his 38-year-old son, a stockbroker for Cantor Fitzgerald, whose offices were on the top floors of the south tower.

As the reality of the attack sunk in, parents everywhere descended on schools to get their children. Adding to the confusion in city schools, officials there had to deal with voters who were arriving to cast primary election ballots in cafeterias and auditoriums that were doubling as polling centers.

### What do we tell the children?

Even before the dust settled, school officials prepared to face the emotional needs of their school communities. School counselors sprung into action helping students, staff and families cope with their fears and anxieties.

Schools differed in how they disseminated news of the attack to students. Many elementary school leaders chose not to tell younger students what was

going on, preferring to have parents explain as they saw fit.

Officials in the Greenville school district in Greene County let older students watch the news on television on Sept. 11 but kept all televisions off the next day, according to librarian Donna Ruot. "They wanted to return to business as usual," she told *On Board*.

In Erie County's Springville-Griffith Institute school district, administrators pulled the plug on television coverage when they realized it contained unground rumors and what they felt was too much graphic content for their students.

Educators knew, however, that the students would be loaded with questions when they returned to school. Many teachers wove discussions of the attacks into their subject areas. A middle school English teacher in the Pine Bush school district in Orange County built a lesson around the phrase, "Consolation is a gift we give each other." Sixth-graders condensed their feelings into one sentence then pasted them all over the walls.

As speculation that the attacks were committed by Arab terrorists hit the news, school officials had another worry — the possibility of hateful behavior being directed at students of Middle Eastern extraction. Levy visited schools with

large numbers of Arab-American and Muslim students in the days following the attacks to ensure that teachers and principals knew he expected them to be particularly protective of those children.

### Crisis plans put into play

With the exception of those nearest the World Trade Center, most New York schools remained open. In advisories to district superintendents across the state, education commissioner Richard P. Mills said that it was unwise to send students to empty homes. That concern was particularly strong on Long Island and districts in Orange County, where many parents are police officers, firefighters and commuters who work in Manhattan. In Nassau County's Locust Valley school district, administrators placed teachers on every school bus to see that each student had adult supervision at home. Those who didn't were returned to school to wait for someone to pick them up.

President George W. Bush congratulated New York City Schools Chancellor Harold Levy on keeping the schools open during the disaster. He said Levy proved that America's "most important domestic priority" — education — could not be halted.

### SAVE plans used

Schools were well-prepared to deal with a crisis situation because New York's Safe Schools Against Violence in Education (SAVE) law went into effect July 1. Under SAVE, districts were required to create comprehensive school safety plans, emergency response teams, and crisis plans. Also included in the law was a directive that schools teach character education and community service.

Students everywhere have been getting lessons in patriotism, community service and empathy. For example, students in Poughkeepsie city schools raised their voices and hundreds of small flags to the sky as they sang "America the Beautiful" and other songs. "In all my years, I've never seen such a display of patriotism," the commander of the local VFW Post told a news reporter.

National Honor Society students in the small rural Greenville district held an impromptu collection during their lunch periods and raised more than \$500 to help disaster victims. Librarian Ruot explained that the students are doing what they are able. "First we pray, then we hug each other, then they give blood or money, that's what they do," she said.