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Campus Security Initiative Making Steady Progress

Louisiana's Postsecondary Education Campus Physical Security Initiative has accomplished many of its primary objectives aimed at ensuring that students and faculty at the state's public college and university campuses are as safe as possible from the sorts of tragedies that devastated Virginia Tech last year and, more recently, Southern Illinois University. The initiative was put into motion last May by Governor Kathleen Blanco and the Board of Regents in response to the deadly shooting spree at Virginia Tech. The Louisiana Legislature appropriated \$2.5 million for the initiative during its 2007 regular session.

According to a report given to the Board of Regents by Mike Abbiatti, Regents Associate Commissioner for Information and Learning Technology, all of Louisiana's public college and universities now (or will soon) have in place emergency alerting capabilities for cellular phone text messaging, reverse 911, and e-mail alerts to inform students and faculty of campus emergencies.

"Now we're focusing on old-fashioned, tried-and-true audible methods like emergency sirens," said Abbiatti. "Sirens are just as effective as they ever were, and we want to make sure our students and faculty are alerted to campus emergencies through every reasonable means."

Abbiatti said that active shooter training continues across the state, with the joint participation of campus police and local and state law enforcement. This training teaches officers how to coordinate efforts in dealing with an ongoing emergency involving an armed perpetrator.

In addition, faculty and administrators are undergoing nationally-sanctioned Community Emergency Response Training, or CERT, to help them understand how to handle campus emergencies.

Notably, many institutions have now completed physical security assessments. The results of those assessments will guide the distribution of funds for improving campus physical security, from the installation of lights and surveillance cameras to building fences and installing more secure locks.

"We're also making good progress on *policy* issues associated with physical security" Abbiatti said, "right down to who locks what door and when. A significant part of the physical security challenge is not hardware or software; it's people, and our systems and campuses are

going to great lengths to ensure that their people have not only the equipment they need, but also the policies in place to ensure success.”

Abbiatti added that it’s important to keep in mind that the Campus Physical Security Initiative is actually an extension of Louisiana’s overall “Culture of Preparedness” initiative, which grew out of the state’s experience in responding to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

“One of the most significant outcomes of our experience with the hurricanes was the spirit of cooperation that developed among our campuses and the communities where they operate,” Abbiatti said. “That spirit of cooperation has been vital to the Campus Physical Security Initiative. Natural and man-made disasters are always a potential, and we must be prepared in every way possible to respond effectively should an emergency arise.”

“The Security Initiative team has made impressive progress in a relatively short period of time,” said Commissioner of Higher Education. “I’m very pleased with our success thus far in this vitally-important effort. Just a quick glance at the headlines each day will tell you that we can not afford to leave any stone unturned as we prepare our campuses for events we pray will never take place.”