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College Campus Safety Initiative Moving Forward

Louisiana's colleges and universities are making steady progress and are on schedule to meet a June 30, 2008, full implementation target date for a statewide campus security program. The Board of Regents' Technology Committee today received an update on the progress of the initiative, which was put into motion in May by Governor Blanco and the Board of Regents in response to the deadly shooting spree that devastated Virginia Tech University this past spring. According to today's report, significant progress has been achieved in all four phases of the initiative: 1) electronic alert/notification system; 2) training for law enforcement, as well as faculty, staff and students; 3) campus physical security assessment; and 4) policy. The Louisiana Legislature appropriated \$2.5 million for the initiative this past session.

"The Board of Regents is pleased with the speed and thoroughness with which the safety and security initiative team has put its plan into action," said Commissioner of Higher Education Joseph Savoie. "Whether we're faced with another natural disaster or an emergency like the one in Virginia, the safety of our students is our first concern. This initiative is addressing that concern from a variety of perspectives."

The selection and implementation of a common campus emergency alerting system, perhaps the component of the initiative that has received the most interest, is in its final stages. According to today's report, a contract has been awarded and a protocol is being developed for the distribution of funding to assist individual campuses in availing themselves of the contractor's services. The system will provide for broadcast e-mail, "reverse 911," and cellular phone text message notification on every campus statewide.

"While the emergency alerting component is certainly critical to the initiative, we need to do more," said Mike Abbiatti, Regents' Associate Commissioner for Information and Learning Technology, who presented today's update. "That's why this initiative is multi-faceted. The key to a successful 'culture of preparedness' is continuous human-to-human communication at all levels."

Efforts in personnel training, the second facet of the Postsecondary Education Physical Security Initiative, have also yielded significant results. So far, 75% of the police officers on public college campuses statewide have received training from the Louisiana State Police in "active shooter response."

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Training for civilian campus personnel and students is also progressing well. To date, 42 Community/Campus Emergency Training (CERT) teams have been formed across the state to train faculty, staff and students in emergency response and, even more importantly, in “situational awareness,” aimed at preventing emergencies by recognizing potential problems before they escalate.

The initiative has also made notable progress in the area of campus physical security assessment. An on-line campus safety self assessment template has been completed. Once the tool has been validated, individual campuses will be able to access the template and use it to guide actual physical security assessments on the ground.

In the area of physical security policy, Abbiatti reported that a two-phased approach, beginning with the on-line assessment tool and moving forward into campus-by-campus on-site assessments, will provide campuses with a toolkit that will help ensure the best possible safety and security for Louisiana’s public colleges and universities. The legislative funding will assist campuses in prioritizing and strengthening areas in need of immediate and long-term attention.