



## Episode 19: Tip Lines to Prevent Potential Emergencies

**#REMSontheAir Podcast Intro (Recorded):** [00:00:00] Welcome to the #REMSontheAir Podcast, hosted by your partners at the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Safe and Supportive Schools and its Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools Technical Assistance Center. If you're an old friend, you know us as the REMS TA Center, your national school safety center.

Join us as we chat about key topics in school and campus safety, security, and emergency management with experts and partners from the field.

**Janelle Hughes:** Hello and welcome back. We are excited to host another #REMSontheAir Podcast. My name is Janelle Hughes, Project Director for the REMS TA Center. Today, I will be having a conversation with Derek Casper and Janelle Ozmun from the Ohio School Safety Center within the state's Department of Public Safety [00:01:00] about the creation and management of their state-based tip line, which is called the Safer Ohio School Tip Line.

The U.S. Department of Justice produced a publication, called *Tip Lines for School Safety: A National Portrait of Tip Line Use*, and it really defines school tip lines as structured systems that allow students, parents, school staff, or community members to report information about potential threats. And it also describes tip lines as a promising approach to school safety.

In the context of types of hazards and threats, including biological, technological, natural, as well as adversarial and human caused, U.S. Department of Justice research shows that most school tip lines have historically focused on collecting information on adversarial and human-caused threats. Research has [00:02:00] shown that, in the case of many of those adversarial and human-caused threats, such as active shooter situations, warning signs existed, or threats were made before violent acts were carried out.

And today, during our conversation with Janelle and Derek, we'll speak a little bit more about how tip lines can support education agencies with the prevention, protection, and mitigation efforts around other types of hazards and threats as well beyond just adversarial and human caused.

Education agencies can leverage insight gained via tip lines to support information sharing across community partners, including school officials, law enforcement officers, and mental and behavioral health professionals to help prevent, protect, and mitigate the impacts of potential threats and incidents.

We are so excited to have two of our partners [00:03:00] here today from the Ohio School Safety Center, Derek Casper and Janelle Ozmun. Derek, would you mind just sharing a little bit about what you do to support the Ohio School Safety Center?

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**Derek Casper:** Hello, yes. My name is Derek Casper. I am the Safer Ohio School Tip Line Coordinator within the Ohio School Safety Center. I work with all of the entities involved, which includes the analyst who answers the call, the Ohio Department of Education, and everyone within the Ohio School Safety Center to coordinate the outreach and response to tips that are received with local schools to make sure that all the students and staff are supported as they need to be.

**Janelle Hughes:** Thanks, Derek. We are so excited to have you here for this really important discussion about managing tip lines. Janelle, lovely to have you here as well.

**Janelle Ozmun:** Well, thank you. Pleasure to be here. [00:04:00] My name is Janelle Ozmun, and I am the Outreach and Information Sharing Manager at the Ohio School Safety Center, and one of the main programs under me is the tip line, the Safer Ohio School Tip Line. And this is one of the main focuses of my position as well as the entire Ohio School Safety Center.

**Janelle Hughes:** Thank you both for joining us today. Let's get into the conversation. Can you talk a little bit about what prompted the creation of your state-based tip line?

**Derek Casper:** Yes. In 2012, six students were shot at Chardon High School. While this was not the first incident involving schools in Ohio or across the nation, this incident, along with many other incidents across the nation, did continue to spur the conversation about school safety and the resources that are dedicated to it. [00:05:00]

In December 2014, over 200 buildings across the state registered with the Safer Ohio School Tip Line. The Safer Ohio School Tip Line began as a way for law enforcement officials to be notified of school safety issues. In that now over the years, in the past 8 years, has evolved into a much more collaborative effort between the analysts who answered the calls, the Ohio School Safety Center, the Ohio Department of Education, and the local schools that are involved in the response to the tips received.

**Janelle Hughes:** Thank you so much for sharing those details. And I know we've had some previous conversations about House Bill 123. Can you talk a little bit about the requirements specific to tip lines that are outlined within that bill?

**Derek Casper:** Yes, I can. House Bill 123 has requirements that every public school in Ohio registers with the Safer Ohio [00:06:00] School Tip Line or any anonymous reporting system that meets a specific set of requirements. Those requirements include that there must be 24/7 operation for the system. The system must also forward the information to law enforcement, public safety agencies, and appropriate school threat assessment teams. The reporting system must also be promoted by the district, whether it's on their Web page, on social media, within

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the schools. They must follow the guidelines of FERPA, and they must be compliant with any of the information confidentiality requirements that are contained in the Ohio Revised Code.

There's also a requirement that at the end of the school year, which the date that's there is July 1st, there must be a specific set of data that's reported about the tips that are received. This includes any type of tips that are made and the type of tip that was made, if there was [00:07:00] disciplinary action involved in relation to the tip, if there was a mental wellness referral involved with the tip that was made, any other comments or requirements that are required by the Ohio Department of Public Safety, and the race and gender of the student or students involved in the disciplinary action or the mental wellness referral.

**Janelle Ozmun:** One thing I would like to point out also is, while Ohio has a requirement that all public schools have to have a tip line, they do not have to use our tip line. Our tip line for—the Safer Ohio School Tip Line—it is a free resource to every school in Ohio, but some schools prefer not to use it.

They have third-party vendors, or they've developed their own tip line. And that's [00:08:00] perfectly acceptable [as] long as they follow the guidelines that Derek has just outlined. Also, while it's a requirement that public schools use a tip line, we also welcome any private schools to use the tip line as well. It is not limited to strictly public use.

**Janelle Hughes:** Thank you so much for sharing those details. And in thinking about the requirements that you shared, Derek, you know, looking at disciplinary actions, mental health, race and gender, Department of Public Safety compliance, I can only imagine the number of partners that you all collaborate with at the state and local level to ensure that compliance.

Can you speak a little bit to how you manage local education agency reporting and compliance back to the school safety center? [00:09:00]

**Derek Casper:** Yeah. While the—you know, there are many schools in Ohio that fall under the reporting requirements, you know, by that July 1st deadline, one way that we encourage schools to make sure that they are able to remain in compliance with the reporting requirement is to use a worksheet in—an Excel worksheet. Some schools use it on Google Drive. Some use it just direct through Excel that we have shared throughout the state to make sure that the same information is being shared, and the information is maintained and recorded as accurately as possible. You know, if there is an issue with compliance to that requirement, we do reach out to the school directly to speak with whether it's the safety director, the superintendent, the principal, to report that data.

Now their requirement—one thing I did not mention is that it's required to be reported by the district and not the individual buildings necessarily. The buildings report it through the district.

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It just must be disaggregated by the school. So most [00:10:00] often times we will reach out to the administrative staff at the district level to make sure that that information is reported timely and accurately.

But the biggest hurdle is making sure that the schools are aware that they should more often than not be tracking that information through the year to make sure that they aren't trying to come up with that information, you know, during the month of June once school is out, and they can just easily report it at the end of the school year.

**Janelle Hughes:** Thanks for sharing those additional details specific to the role of the district versus the role of the individual school. And, Janelle, you also mentioned something about, you know, private school use of the tip line. I'm just curious how you manage training and promotion of the tool to, you know, local education agencies across the state, so thinking about both public and private schools,

**Janelle Ozmun:** It—our promotion—we have promotion materials, and they are available [00:11:00] to any school that requests totally free of charge, including the shipping is totally free. We also have an animated video—tip line video—that we can send to the schools, and they—it's for the kids, for the students.

So, and we will help them in any way that they request, whether that be like a virtual training. We also have regional liaisons that work in the specific areas throughout Ohio, and they can—they're kind of our boots on the ground. And so, they are able to go into the schools, take them the promotional materials, answer their questions. They will get them—the administrators or educators—hooked up with Derek so that there can be, you know, specific questions answered. So, we do a lot to continually [00:12:00] promote and train.

We realize that there's a natural turnover with students. You know, as they graduate or as they move to a new school, there's students that have not heard of the tip line. So, we're continually having to do that. And of course, the same is true with teachers and administrators. So, our job of promoting and training is never done. And actually, I'll let Derek tell you about a new promotional activity that we're doing and actually was Derek's idea.

**Derek Casper:** Yeah, we will be looking at creating what we're calling the tip line talk. So, what we're looking at doing with the tip line talk is a quarterly conversation with schools, students, administrative staff, any other entities that would like to join. And it will be an open conversation about the tip line, about any other [00:13:00] tip lines that schools may be using across the state. Because we do realize, as Janelle has mentioned before, that not everyone uses the Safer Ohio School Tip Line. So, anything we can do to ensure the success, use, promotion of the tip lines to make sure that that conversation is continually happening, we would like to do. So, this tip line talk will be marketed, and it will be a virtual meeting that can

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be shared across the state for anyone to use and participate in. So, we encourage the open conversation piece of it, as well as a slight guided conversation about any resources that we have available.

**Janelle Hughes:** And so, I do have a quick follow-up question in thinking about the fact that education agencies do not have to use the state-based tip line and create their own and thinking about those tip line talks that you will be hosting. Are there any kind of compliance requirements that you share with those education agencies that opt to not use the [00:14:00] Ohio tip line just to ensure that you're again capturing that data that's required: the discipline, the mental health, the, you know, race and gender, etc.

**Derek Casper:** So, we give the same worksheet that all the public schools use with that and schools that are registered with the Safer Ohio School Tip Line. We use the same worksheet for the schools that do not use the Safer Ohio School Tip Line to make sure that the same data is being recorded and the same data is being given to the Ohio School Safety Center at the end of the school year.

We do also have a requirement that the vendors report the data to us as well as the schools that are registered with those third parties, so we can also compare the data against what those vendors have to what the school reports. And now the vendors are only required to report numbers as opposed to the school who's required to report the specific set of data that's mentioned in House Bill 123.

But we do encourage the use of [00:15:00] that worksheet to continually track that information through the year, whether they're using the Safer Ohio School Tip Line or whether they're using a third-party vendor for their tip line.

**Janelle Hughes:** Wow. Sounds like you have some really awesome strategies in place and some success stories I'm sure that you'd like to share as well thinking about how the tip line has perhaps supported prevention, mitigation, protection, or any other emergency management function.

**Derek Casper:** Yeah, absolutely. There was one instance, specifically, where there were multiple tips we received expressing concerns about a student in the social media posts that were made. Now, this was a previous student from the school. They were expressing the desire to possibly commit a violent act against students that attend the school.

This student was previously expelled from the school, as well, due to previous threats of violence that they made. We received multiple tips on our tip line about the posts [00:16:00] that were made, and we were able to work with local law enforcement who also were made aware of the social media posts, and they were able to apprehend the individual.

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Now, I'd like to point out that this is one of many instances we see where peers are reporting information about their peers, which is one major component that we see to the success of a school safety tip line is that peer-to-peer reporting and not just adults and other parents that are reporting that information.

Another incident that I would like to discuss as a success story is a student was upstairs in her bedroom at her house and the—a tip came in from one of their friends stating that their friend was expressing suicidal ideation, and they were upstairs in their room, and they weren't sure how to help their friend to make sure that the worst thing that can happen did not happen.

And they were able to work with our tip line, and we [00:17:00] involved local law enforcement to perform a wellness check at the individual's house. Now, this student's parents were downstairs, and they were not aware that, you know, their child was upstairs expressing these thoughts to their friends. And they were able to get their child the help that they needed and were able to provide them with continuous counseling and work with the school to provide any other mental wellness resources that were out there and available to them.

**Janelle Hughes:** Wow, thank you. I think that's such a powerful story. And I'm sure that many of our listeners, particularly those who work at the school district and school level, really appreciated you sharing that as they think about strategies that they can use and how they can potentially use their tip line to help manage some of those threats.

Janelle, would you like to share any success stories as well?

**Janelle Ozmun:** Well, I would just like to point out that, you know, a lot of times people think of a tip [00:18:00] line as a way to stop school shootings. And yes, it can absolutely do that, but it's so much more than that. We get so many tips in regards to self-harm and just like Derek was sharing the story about the student with the suicidal ideations. To me, this is one of those things that people may not immediately think about when you think about a tip line. But this is where we have seen really a lot of our success stories come from.

And this is, while Derek gave the story of one specific case, we've had several cases like this. And to me, this is one of the most valuable things about a tip line because the peers will know. The students know what's going on. And while they are not sure [00:19:00] how to deal with it, if we give them an avenue, especially where it's 24/7, they can text it, they can remain anonymous, they will reach out for their friends.

And, you know, to me, that is a *huge* component of this and why we do this. You know, if we save one child through this, then it's well worth it. And I just think that is certainly a—something that we have to think about with a tip line is the fact that, while, yes, you can

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certainly stop, and that is our goal to always stop, a school shooting, but it's so much more than that.

**Janelle Hughes:** Thank you for mentioning that, Janelle. Here at the REMS TA Center, we always like to focus on all hazards and all threats. And I think during a lot of our conversations with you all about your tip line, you know, it's very refreshing to hear how, [00:20:00] you know, not only looking at active shooter incidents but other threat and hazard types that schools need to be aware of and to assess their risk and vulnerability for. You know, it's such an important part of the process.

We've spoken a lot today about the different entities that you partner with to manage the tip line. Has management required development of memoranda of understanding between your agency and any other entities at the local, state, or Federal level?

**Derek Casper:** There hasn't been any kind of memorandums of understanding that have been required to be developed or signed by any of the entities that are involved with the tip line. There is a general agreement and understanding between all the parties that the information that's being shared, you know, is to ensure the safety of the students, school, and staff. And that information, [00:21:00] you know, is being shared for that purpose. There's also the Ohio Revised Code has the requirement that the information is considered a security record and not subject to public record requests as well. So, that requirement is laid out, you know, in the statute, which further benefits that conversation between the entities.

**Janelle Hughes:** Well, thank you so very much for all that you've shared today. We really enjoy our conversations with our state education agency partners and all of their community partners around efforts to help ensure safe and supportive learning environments for our nation's students. We really appreciate you joining this episode.

**Derek Casper:** Yeah, thank you so much for having us.

**Janelle Hughes:** Thank you so much for tuning in today. Tweet us using the *#REMSontheAir* hashtag if you are addressing similar topics. If you have any questions related to our discussion today or just want to learn more, send your questions [00:22:00] via email to [info@remstacenter.org](mailto:info@remstacenter.org) or give us a call at 1-855-781-7367.

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