



Commonwealth of Massachusetts Executive Office of Public Safety and Security



Office of the Statewide Interoperability Coordinator Guidance Bulletin #26-1

Massachusetts Technical Considerations for School and Public Safety Interoperability

This document is intended to provide a minimum Best Practices technical consideration for public safety and school radio interoperability. Compliance can be obtained in many ways, on many differing radio platforms using existing or new communications systems. A communications plan must be developed between the School Administration and their Public Safety partners. There is no "one size fits all" solution.

Purchase

- Prior to radios being purchased, whether by the Central Office or at the school, consultation should occur with Public Safety in terms of functions, compatibility, etc.
- It is recommended that the Public Safety Agencies in your community/district are included early on when planning equipment specifications and purchasing. Consultations should include members of the School Department Administration, Public Safety Agencies, and Subject Matter Expert (SME) from the Office of the SWIC or a qualified member of the MA COMU
- There should also be familiarity with MGL Ch. 71, § 37R (b):
 - *“Every school shall, subject to appropriation, possess and have access to a two-way communication device to be used solely for communicating with police and fire departments of the city or town where the school is located during an emergency situation.”*

Set-Up/Usage

- Stay away from encrypted channels. It is recommended that encryption be avoided for School Interoperability use as it will only be available to those with encryption feature capability and the encryption keys installed in the proper key slot.
- During consultation, consideration should be given to the radio systems in use by both the Public Safety Agencies and the School Department, whether digital or analog. It is possible and recommended that communities that are operating disparate digital systems (**P25 vs DMR – these do not talk to each other**) consider dedicating an analog channel to allow interoperability
- School personnel should receive training, prior to radio use, on radio etiquette and how to communicate during an emergency situation (i.e. release button after taking). Crisis communications (who, what, when, where, why)

Maintenance

- Radio management (ex: batteries, etc.) is vitally important. Schools need to make sure that their radios are always charged with plans in place to replace batteries every 2-3 years
- Radios can't stay on the charger forever as they have to be exercised – This exercise should be a monthly procedure
- School Administration and Public Safety must meet periodically to discuss communications and continue ongoing collaboration as needs and as safety plans evolve or change.

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Contact the Statewide Interoperability Coordinator at MA.SWIC@Mass.gov regarding this bulletin or for further guidance.