

Morris County Sheriff's Office

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OCTOBER 10, 2019

In advance of National School Safety Week, the Morris County Sheriff's Office and the Morris County Police Chiefs Association on October 10 unveiled a mobile app called RSVP-3 Morris County, NJ, through which students can anonymously report threats to school safety and behavior that could disrupt classroom security.

The free RSVP-3 app – which stands for Responsible School Violence Prevention, Preparation, Protection – is one component of a multi-faceted RSVP-3 program that Morris County Sheriff James M. Gannon immediately began developing with the Morris County Chiefs of Police Association in response to the February 14, 2018, school shootings at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, that killed 17 people and wounded 17 others.

The creation and activation of the app was announced at a press conference hosted Thursday by Sheriff Gannon, and attended by Morris

County Police Chiefs, School Superintendents, Morris County Freeholders, Morris County First Assistant Prosecutor Thomas Zelante, and other stakeholders.

The app can be downloaded as follows:

- Go to the Google Play Store or Apple iTunes Store on your mobile device.
- Search for RSVP-3 Morris County, NJ.
- Click Install.
- Open the application.
- Enter a unique 4-digit passcode that you will remember and use as a log-in.

Once the user has entered the passcode, do the following:

- Select your location
- Select the Town
- Select the Affected School

To then report an incident or threat:

- Select the action/tip you would like to report. There is a list.
- You can add screenshots and attach documents.
- Fill out tip report with all available information.
- Click submit.

Tips to the app are monitored in real time, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year by law enforcement professionals working cooperatively with school officials.

The app was developed by Anderson Software's P3 Campus, a tip reporting solution designed for the educational community. The Morris County Sheriff's Office received \$16,500 in start-up funding for the RSVP-3 application from the Sheriff's Office CrimeStoppers program. Unlike CrimeStoppers, there are no rewards attached to making tips through RSVP-3.

“The app is a practical tool to help prevent school violence and allow for the sharing of critical information between police, school leaders and mental health providers,” Sheriff Gannon said.

So far, two public school districts in Morris County have committed to forming teams that will help law enforcement agencies investigate the tips. The app is available for anyone – students, parents, teachers and staff – to report a tip about school safety or a troubling school environment. All 36 municipal police departments in Morris County have signed on to the program.

“Sheriff Gannon and the Chief’s Association have again successfully collaborated on the RSVP-3 program in congruence with the recommendation of the United States Secret Service “Operational Guide for Preventing Targeted Violence.” In particular, this app addresses step 3 of their 8-step platform, which recommends the creation of a central reporting mechanism,” said Butler Police Chief Ciro Chimento, president of the Morris County Police Chief’s Association.

Morris County Deputy Freeholder Director Heather Darling expressed support for the entire RSVP-3 program.

“I, as a freeholder who is committed to keeping Morris County as safe and appealing as possible, support a proactive measure like this app. We want to be ahead of any violence and we want to reach the person who is making threats, or behaving erratically, or whose grades are plummeting, and get them the help they may need,” said Freeholder Darling.

The app is one element in the overall RSVP-3 initiative that brings together police, educators and mental health professionals in a multidisciplinary approach to stopping violence before it erupts in the classroom.

The Morris County Board of Freeholders and the federal Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI) have each contributed funds used to pay for behavioral threat assessment curriculum and the costs of training school leaders and mental health professionals who work with schools.

The curriculum, authored by Sigma Threat Management Associates, guides school leaders, mental health experts and police on how to evaluate and respond to threats to school safety in a scientifically reliable manner.

“We are training people to distinguish between the child who shouts in a moment of anger that he will kill someone and the student whose grades are dropping, who is socially isolating himself or making disturbing comments. We need to be ‘left of bang.’ We want to reach that student – before the bell rings – and get him or her the professional help they may need,” Sheriff Gannon said.

An author of the curriculum, Dr. Marisa Randazzo, in November 2018 trained 75 Morris County police, school and mental health professionals on how to develop assessment and evaluation tools.

Dr. Randazzo is CEO of SIGMA and an international expert on threat assessment, targeted violence and violence prevention. She served for 10 years with the U.S. Secret Service and most recently was its Chief Research Psychologist.

In May 2019, Dr. Randazzo and Dr. Melissa Reeves, the past president of the National Association of School Psychologists and former Chairman of the NASP National School Safety and Crisis Response Committee, trained another 40 teachers and school staff in May 2019 on how to scientifically assess troubling behavior to determine whether school safety is at risk.

Additional training of educators and police on behavioral threat assessment is planned in Morris County this November.

Former Denville Police Chief Christopher Wagner, now the Director of Public Affairs for the New Jersey State Association of Chiefs of Police, spoke at the event. Chief Wagner and Steve Forte, Denville’s Superintendent of Schools, said they are longtime proponents of the overall RSVP-3 program.

“I don’t want to send a kid to school with a cell phone because they need to get hold of their mother because there’s been a violent encounter at school,” Chief Wagner said. “I don’t ever want a kid to

have to send a note to their parents that ‘I’m scared because there’s a bad person in our school.’”

State Assemblyman Anthony Bucco, also present at the event, noted that he continues to push in the New Jersey Legislature for support for A-5242, a bill that would fund a pilot RSVP-3 program specifically in the counties of Bergen, Essex, Hudson, Middlesex, Morris, Passaic and Union and the first class cities of Newark and Jersey City – all part of the UASI zone.

Of the app, Assemblyman Bucco said: “This is about our children. This is about our future. This is about the safety of our schools.”

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