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Making the Most of the School Mapping System

FIND OUT HOW ONE SCHOOL DISTRICT IS USING THIS NEW SYSTEM TO ENHANCE SECURITY—AND SAVE MONEY.

IT'S THE TYPE OF INCIDENT THAT COULD HAPPEN AT ANY SCHOOL, ON ANY DAY. A broken pipe in a storage closet sounds like a minor event, but when it saves a district tens of thousands of dollars, it's the type of incident that makes any district superintendent take notice.

In October 2005, I was visiting Rogers High School in Spokane and was alerted that water was flooding a new refinished floor in the gymnasium. Apparently a group of boys had been engaged in horseplay, and one decided to do some pull-ups on an overhead pipe in a storage room adjacent to the gym. The one-quarter inch pipe, part of the school's high pressure fire suppression system, sheered off sending the startled boy crashing to the floor and hundreds of gallons of water gushing onto the gym floor.

The fire department was immediately notified and en route. Normally, it would take a substantial amount of time to track down the maintenance staff, find the mechanical plans, identify the location of the shut-off valve, and gain access to the location through locked doors. Luckily, Spokane Public Schools had installed a crisis management system called Rapid Responder about two years earlier, the same system that was used to successfully mitigate a shooting incident at Lewis and Clark High School just two weeks after its installation.

Since then, Rapid Responder has been installed in every public high school in the state and is now being installed in many of the state's public middle and elementary schools.

During emergencies, every second counts. I quickly pulled up Rapid Responder on a laptop computer, clicked on the high school's name, and then clicked on the Fire Protection button. That brought up a detailed, full color photo of the Sprinkler Riser Shut Off, showing both the valve's location and design. Using Rapid Responder, I had all the information I needed within 20 seconds. I told the fire department about the shut-off valve and also radioed its location to the school's on site district resource officer (DRO), who quickly closed the valve stopping the torrent of water. District maintenance arrived five to 10 minutes later, but with the pipe shut-off, we were already mopping up the residual water on the gym floor.

While several hundred gallons of water on a gym floor may not sound like a major disaster, it can be a budget calamity for a school principal. According to the Washington Schools Risk Management Pool, which self-insures many Washington schools, it can cost between \$85,000 to \$100,000 to refinish a damaged gym floor.

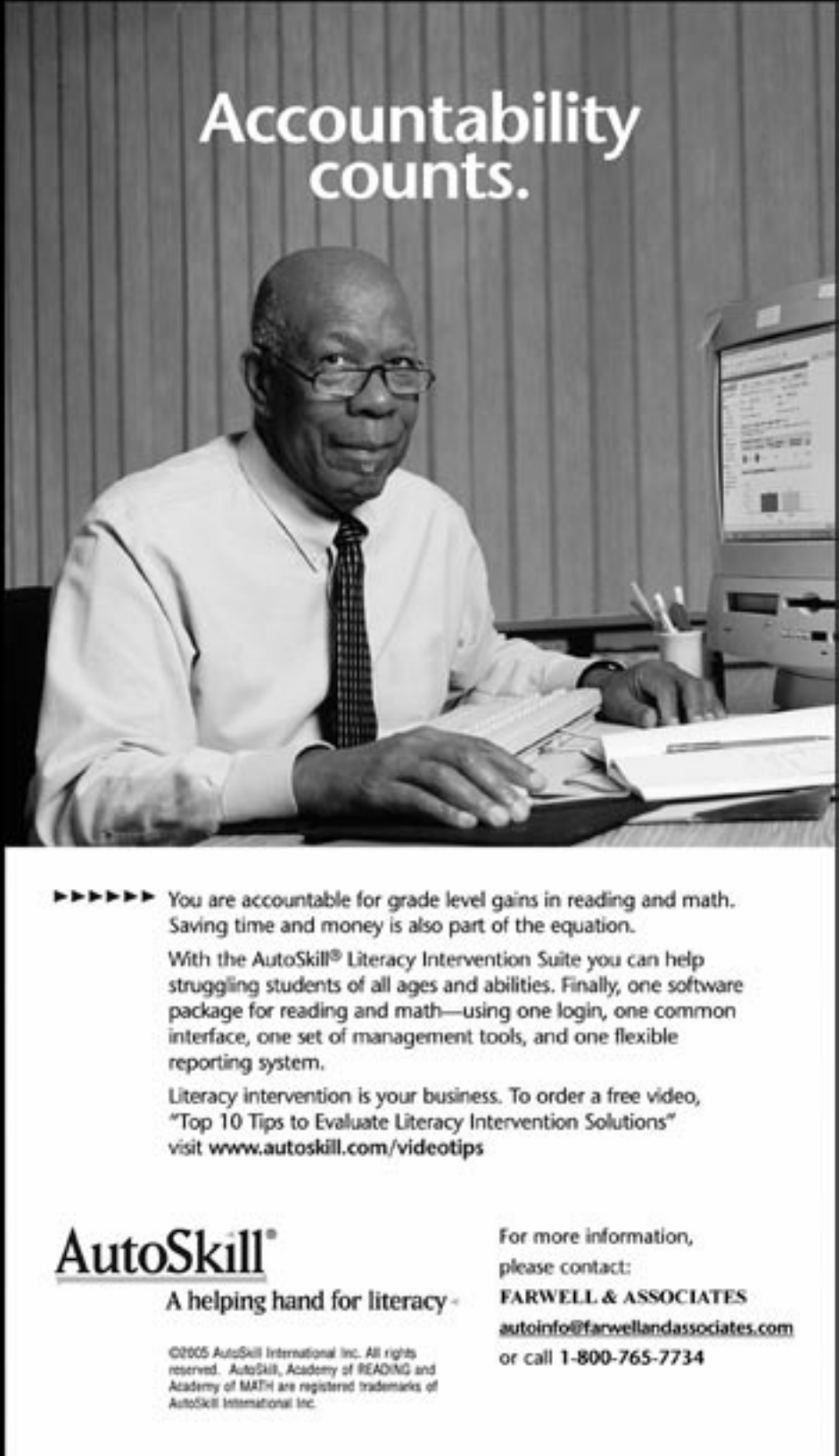
Making the Most of the School Mapping System *(continued)*

Based on our experience over the last few years, we've learned that to successfully mitigate emergency situations, you need four things:

- 1) a realization that "it can happen here;"
- 2) pre-planning sessions with local first responders to prepare for a wide variety of emergencies;
- 3) an understanding that "every second counts" when responding to emergencies; and
- 4) a crisis management system like Rapid Responder that contains all the critical information you'll need to manage the crisis.

We definitely learned "it can happen here." In the current school year, we have had four schools go into lock-down as a result of police action in the community, but we're now much better prepared. Pre-plans, tactical maps, site security information and evacuation plans located in Rapid Responder have proven crucial in securing schools and planning for the safety of staff and students.

We are now believers. Spokane Public Schools has already installed the Rapid Responder system in every elementary, middle and high school in the district. Because of my first hand experience with Rapid Responder, I would encourage other districts to do what they can to complete the pre-plan tactical meetings with their local first responders. By having the Rapid Responder system up and running in your district, you may be able to save lives and reduce the damage to a building during an emergency. ☹



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