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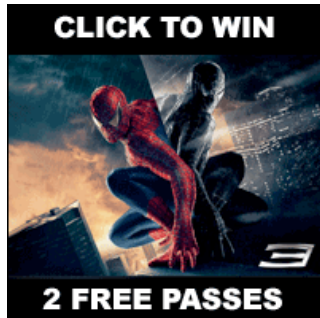
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NEWS

Blanco orders action on student safety

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By [JORDAN BLUM](#)

Advocate Capitol News Bureau

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LSU, Southern University and the rest of the state's colleges are fast-tracking plans for text messaging to students' and employees' cell phones during emergencies.

In the wake of the Virginia Tech tragedy, Gov. Kathleen Blanco on Tuesday ordered Louisiana State Police to work with Joseph Savoie, the state's commissioner of higher education, to reinforce campus safety plans statewide.

"I want to ensure campuses have the capacity to issue immediate warnings to the student body, faculty and staff in

times of emergency,” Blanco said in a statement.

The death of 33 people Monday at Virginia Tech represents the most deadly killing spree in U.S. history.

Savoie said most campuses should have text message systems ready for the fall, if not sooner. Some schools with fewer resources may take more time.

Text messages are written alerts automatically sent to cell phones.

“She (Blanco) wants it done quickly,” Savoie said, “so we’re going to get it done.”

LSU Police Chief Ricky Adams said LSU could purchase its text message-alert software as early as this week and set it up right away.

But it will take time to get all the student and employee cell phone numbers, Adams said.

LSU, which has increased police visibility, sends out e-mails and campus voicemails in emergencies, but text messages reach more people faster, he said.

Statewide plans also include ensuring that every school has at least one person with certified emergency response training, Savoie said, and to conduct safety and security audits on every campus.

The details are being worked out and Savoie and university officials are meeting today with State Police.

State Police Lt. Lawrence McLeary said police officials are meeting Monday with Mayor-President Kip Holden to discuss beefing up security on Baton Rouge-area campuses.

Gerard Braud of Mandeville, a crisis management communications specialist, said Virginia Tech and most universities, including LSU, have “inadequate” crisis management plans.

Braud, a former Baton Rouge and New Orleans TV reporter, said Virginia Tech took far too long to notify people of what was happening.

“It floors me how inadequate all of these plans are,” Braud said.

Colleges must have more detailed written plans, the necessary technology resources and rapid response to get information out quickly, Braud said.

It is not difficult to have a standard news release already written for emergencies, Braud said, and then quickly plug in the “who, what, when, where, why and how.”

Text messages are the best way to alert students and employees quickly, Braud said. The technology is available and very few people on college campuses do not have cell phones, he said.

“Technology makes it easier and harder,” he said.

The best way to fight rumors is by getting the truth out early,

Braud said.

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