

Most schools file safety plans

By Emily Wilkins

The Columbus Dispatch Wednesday July 25, 2012 5:36 AM



After another push last month, nearly all Franklin County schools have complied with the Ohio attorney general's request to submit floor plans for school buildings and safety plans outlining their responses to an emergency such as a shooting.

Still, schools attended by more than 73,000 students and 4,800 teachers statewide have not turned in the material, which Ohio Attorney General Mike DeWine said can become crucial during an emergency.

"It's not that the attorney general wants a list, it's not for us," DeWine said. "It's for law enforcement, for first responders — it's to protect our kids and the safety of our kids."

He brought up the issue yesterday at the 2012 Ohio Safe Schools Summit in Columbus, noting his office had sent a letter about a month ago to all schools from which they had not received plans. The submission is voluntary.

The summit, attended by more than 260 educators, law-enforcement officials and others throughout Ohio, was held in part because of the February school shooting in Chardon.

DeWine said his office also is working to develop a set of standards to ensure the plans are both useful and able to be scanned into a computer system.

"We've had some that were literally floor plans that were handwritten out with no exits and just not very helpful," DeWine said. In March, 383 of Ohio's 4,356 school buildings had yet to file the plans. The list DeWine held up yesterday had 151 schools buildings' names on it. Six of the schools are in Franklin County — all in Columbus and all charter schools.

Two of the schools are run online.

The other buildings are part of the Columbus Bilingual Academy, Premier Academy of Ohio, Columbus Collegiate Academy Middle and KIPP Journey Academy.

Officials at three schools said they had already sent in or were preparing to send the plans; Premier Academy could not be reached to comment yesterday. The three schools contacted stressed that student safety was a top priority and they have had safety plans in place for years.

The attorney general's office began asking for the plans in 2007, said Kimberly Hall, deputy chief counsel in the attorney general's office. Hall said the plans have helped schools focus on safety.

"It helps hone their attention a little bit," she said.

The attorney general's office was unable to comment on the quality of the plans submitted by Columbus City Schools. District spokeswoman Jacqueline Bryant said plans are updated every October and staff members are given annual training on what their responsibilities are in various emergencies.