Berkeley USD
Administrative Regulation
AR 1112.1
Community Relations

Crisis Communications

The District's Emergency Operations Procedures have been developed in accordance with applicable codes and regulations, and every school also has a Comprehensive School Safety Plan, updated annually.

> (cf. 0450 - Comprehensive Safety Plan)
> (cf. 3516 - Emergency and Disaster Preparedness Plan)

In addition to the essential Emergency and Safety Plan procedures, the Board also recognizes the need for procedures for Crisis Communications in order to provide timely and accurate information for students, families, staff, and community members. The Board further recognizes the importance of a partnership with media representatives, local law enforcement and other agencies to ensure that appropriate information is shared with all those affected by the crisis.

> (cf. 1112 – Media Relations)

Crisis Communications protocols fall into two broad categories: 1) "Emergency" communications protocols for an immediate safety risk to students and/or school personnel, and "Threat" communications protocols for incidents which pose a potential but non-immediate risk to safety or well-being.

Criteria for Emergency Communications Protocols
Emergencies that warrant urgent notification to the school community are incidents that could require a lock-down, evacuation, or other immediate response to a threat to safety, including, but not limited to:

- Fire on or off school grounds which endangers students and staff
- Earthquake or other natural disasters
- Environmental hazards that pose an immediate safety risk to students and staff, including gas leaks, toxic chemical spills, etc.
- Attack or disturbance by an armed intruder
- Bomb threat or detonation
- Significant law enforcement activity or civil disturbance in the vicinity of the school

Criteria for "Threat" Communications
Many situations may not pose an immediate risk to student safety, but have the potential for eventual physical or psychological harm. These may require a brief but thorough investigation of an incident and/or rumors regarding a threat, and may also require consultation with government agencies or law enforcement before communicating to the community as promptly as possible. Such incidents may include, but are not limited to:

- Public health warnings, including epidemics and quarantines
- Extreme weather hazards (storms, potential floods)
- Reports of kidnapping or attempted abduction of students
- Threats or rumors of intent to inflict harm on groups
- Hate-motivated behaviors and hate crimes
- Bullying or harassment on social media
- Discovery of a firearm on or near campus
- Altercation or arrest on or near campus involving students or youth
- Plans for campus walk-outs or other mass activity
- Disruption to the school day (power outage, fire alarms)
- Medical emergencies or injuries involving students or staff
- Death of staff or student

Protocols for Emergency Communications:
For district-wide disasters and emergencies such as an earthquake, the Crisis Communications Team is part of the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) and will follow procedures in support of the district team.

If the emergency affects only one site, the Principal or designee shall:
1. implement the school Safety Plan, including contact law enforcement or emergency services, and
2. inform the District Office of the emergency as soon as possible after ensuring the safety of students and staff.

The Superintendent or designee shall convene the Crisis Communications Team to assist the affected site with:
1. notification of parents/guardians and
2. support for media inquiries, and
3. support for follow-up communications to provide updates and resources for the affected community.

Protocols for "Threat" Communications
For incidents which pose a potential, but less immediate threat of significant harm, trauma or distress for students, a Crisis Communication Team may be involved in obtaining relevant and accurate information, and will provide prompt notification to the community regarding the steps being taken to address the situation once actionable information has been obtained.

The investigation prior to community notification might include such resources as:
- Consultation with government agencies regarding area-wide threats
- Consultation with law enforcement as to the credibility of a threat
- Investigation of the source of a rumor or threat and search for additional information
- Consultation with Student Services or Mental Health Specialists

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Some potential threats or incidents may escalate to "Emergency" status if rumors spread (for example, over social media). In that case, it may be necessary to send out a "further information to follow" message if students, staff, parents/guardians and/or media are expressing concerns while investigations are in process.

District-Wide Threats
For threats or incidents which could affect more than one school, such as such as a public health threat, an impending storm, or other crisis for which preparations are necessary, the Superintendent or designee shall determine whether an incident or a potential threat warrants notification of the community.

Site-Specific Threats
For threats or incidents affecting a specific school, the Principal shall immediately notify the Superintendent's Office. If the information about a potential threat to a school site comes in the District Office first, the Superintendent or designee shall immediately notify the Principal of the school(s) targeted or affected by the threats.

The Superintendent's Office will notify Student Services, law enforcement or other agencies as necessary, and provide Crisis Communications support to the Principal.

Crisis Communications Team Support for District-Wide or Site-Specific Threats
The Crisis Communications Team and PIO shall assist the Superintendent with:
1. initial notification to the school community, and .
2. support with media inquiries, and
3. follow-up communications to the community, including information about relevant resources/

Message Timing
Notification to the community shall be made as soon as possible – preferably within two hours, and before the end of the school day. If the incident occurs on a weekend or over the summer, community notification shall take into account whether students or families may be affected by the occurrence and need the information in order to respond. In some circumstances it may be impossible or inadvisable to notify the community during pending investigations, or while information about the event is unclear, unconfirmed, or incomplete, but prompt notification should always be a consideration once accurate information has been ascertained.

Messaging Procedures
Initial notification regarding the threat or incident may include:
• phone messaging,
• text messaging,
• e-mail,
• social media, and/or
• technology-based safety messaging systems such as Nixle.

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The Superintendent or designee shall obtain emergency access to all PTA email lists to be used to assist in implementing this AR. Supervisors should ensure that staff receive key messages.

Message Templates and Spanish Translation
The Communications Team may create message templates, based upon the nature of the threat or incident, to facilitate prompt notification to the school or district community. For schools with 15% or greater populations of Spanish-speakers, the information shall be provided in Spanish. District-wide communications shall also be provided in Spanish. If translation will significantly delay the sending of a message, the message may include a mention that further information in Spanish will be sent as soon as possible.

Follow-up Communications
Following the initial notification regarding the threat or incident, the Superintendent or designee shall provide periodic follow-up information, with updates whenever feasible, until the incident has been resolved, and shall also provide resources for support for those who are affected by the incident or threat.

Follow-up Information about incidents may be provided through the above-mentioned channels, as well as:
- posting to the district or school website,
- dissemination to news media
- provision of a district call-in number for further pre-recorded information

The Public Information Officer shall provide appropriate information for the media while keeping student and staff privacy and well-being paramount. The Superintendent or designee shall also inform the Board of any threat or incident affecting the safety or well-being of groups as soon as practicable.

Crisis Communications Team
The Superintendent may assemble a Crisis Communications Team. Depending on the circumstances, the Team may include the Public Information Officer, the Director of Community Relations, the Director of Student Services, Assistant Superintendent for Educational Services, and the Director of Technology. It may also be necessary to involve or consult with others leaders, including the Director of K-8 Schools, the District Translator, Counseling, Human Resources, Business Services, Facilities, and the Superintendent's Administrative staff, and have a liaison with local law enforcement, health services, mental health services, and other service providers or sources of information.

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E XXXX   Sample Phone Message

Good afternoon, this is [name], the Principal of [name] School, calling at [time, date].
I wanted to let you know about an unusual situation at school today.
[Describe incident briefly, providing time and location and essential facts]

Your students may or may not have heard about or been affected by this incident, but we wanted you to be aware that this took place.
[Has situation been resolved? Is there follow-up? Is everyone safe?]

There is further information coming via our school etree, but I wanted to get the word to you by phone so that you were aware of the incident as soon as possible.

If you have any specific concerns about your individual student related to this incident, please call: _____

Thank you.

E XXXX   Sample Email

Dear [name] School Community,

I hope you received my phone message about an incident that occurred at school today. If you did not, please be sure that the school office has your phone contact information.

I wanted to let you know about an incident at school today.
[Describe incident briefly, providing time and location and essential facts]

Your students may or may not have heard about or been affected by this incident, but we wanted you to be aware that this took place.
[Has situation been resolved? Is there follow-up? Is everyone safe?]

I also wanted you to have some resources related to this incident in case you want to discuss this with your student.
[Crisis Team and Student Services can provide resources on bullying, hate crimes, grief, violence, drugs and alcohol, safe driving, internet rumors, etc.]

If you have any specific concerns about your student related to this incident, please contact _____

Sincerely,
[Name]

The Crisis Communications Team shall provide support for notification to the school community.