

## **Crisis Communications**

The District's Emergency Operations Procedures, including the establishment of an Emergency Operations Center (EOC) 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 Crisis Communications protocols in order to provide timely and accurate information for students, families, staff, and community members. Crisis Communications protocols fall into two broad categories: "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.

### **Crisis Communications Team**

The Superintendent may establish a Crisis Communications Team to support the District communications needs in both "Emergency" and "Threat" situations. The team will usually include the Public Information Officer, the Director of Community Relations, the Director of Student Services, the Assistant Superintendent for Educational Services, and the Director of Technology, as well as district or site leaders with specific expertise relevant to the situation.

It is important that the District partner with media representatives, local law enforcement, and other agencies to ensure that appropriate information is shared with all those affected by the crisis. The Superintendent shall direct the Public Information Officer or other designee to act as liaison with local law enforcement, local media, health services, mental health services, and other service providers or sources of information.

(cf. 1112 – Media Relations)

### **Criteria for Emergency Communications**

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 disaster
- 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

### **Emergency Communications Protocols**

Once it is determined that an "Emergency" exists, District personnel shall follow the protocols detailed below.

### **District-Wide Emergencies**

The Crisis Communications Team is part of the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) and will follow EOC procedures in support of the District team.

### **Site-Specific Emergencies**

If the emergency affects only one site, the Principal or designee shall:

1. Implement the school Safety Plan, including contacting 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 with updates and resources for the affected community.

### **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. 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 that lead to many students leaving campus
- Disruption to the school day (power outage, fire alarms)
- Medical emergencies or injuries involving students or staff
- Death of BUSD staff or student, if it may affect psychological well-being

### **“Threat” Communications Protocols**

Once it is determined that a “Threat” exists, District personnel shall follow the protocols detailed below.

#### **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 and if so, convene the Crisis Communications Team.

#### **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.

### **Message Timing**

Notifications in case of a site or district emergency shall take place as soon as possible after securing the safety of students and staff. In the case of threat communications, prompt notification to the community is a priority. Such notification shall occur within two hours, and before the end of the school day, whenever possible. 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 while information about the event is unclear, unconfirmed, or incomplete, but prompt notification should always be a consideration once accurate information has been ascertained.

Prior to communications with the community, the 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

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.

### **Messaging Procedures**

Initial notification regarding the threat or incident shall take into account the best way to promptly reach affected individuals, and may include:

- phone messaging,
- text messaging,
- e-mail,
- social media, and/or
- technology-based safety messaging systems such as Nixle.

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

### **Message Templates and Spanish Translation**

The Communications Team shall create message templates, based upon the nature of the threat or incident, to facilitate prompt notification to the school or district community. The templates shall be made available online for ease of adaptation to specific circumstances.

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.

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.

When appropriate, follow-up Information about incidents may be provided through the above-mentioned channels, as well as:

- posting to the district or school website, and
- mailed letters to home
- dissemination to news media, and/or
- provision of a district call-in number for further pre-recorded information

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