

## **Crisis Communications**

The District has policies and procedures in place for Emergencies and Disaster Preparedness. 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 a Crisis Communications plan 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 and 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:

1. Fire on or off school grounds which endangers students and staff
2. Earthquake or other natural disasters
3. Environmental hazards that pose an immediate safety risk to students and staff, including gas leaks, toxic chemical spills, etc.
4. Attack or disturbance by an armed intruder
5. Bomb threat or detonation
6. Lock-down due to law enforcement activity or civil disturbance

### **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 incidents 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.

7. Public health warnings, including epidemics and quarantines
8. Extreme weather hazards (storms, potential floods)
9. Reports of kidnapping or attempted abduction of students
10. Threats or rumors of intent to inflict harm on groups
11. Hate-motivated behaviors and hate crimes
12. Bullying or harassment on social media
13. Discovery of a firearm on or near campus
14. Altercation or arrest on or near campus involving students or youth
15. Plans for campus walk-outs or other mass activity
16. Disruption to the school day (power outage, fire alarms)
17. Medical emergencies or injuries involving students or staff
18. 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 implement the school Safety Plan and inform the District Office of the emergency as soon as possible after ensuring the safety of students and staff,

The Superintendent will determine whether to set up a full or partial EOC, but at a minimum shall convene a Crisis Communications Team to assist the Superintendent and Cabinet in supporting the affected site with notification of parents/guardians and with support for media inquiries. The Team shall also provide 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 supporting a brief but thorough investigation, followed by 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

- Consultation with Student Services or Mental Health Specialists

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 Crisis Communications Team will advise the Superintendent on the message for the community.

For threats or incidents affecting a specific school, the Principal shall notify the District Office and will obtain Crisis Communications support. If the information about a potential threat to a school site comes in the District Office or other source first, the Superintendent shall immediately notify the Principal of the school(s) targeted by the threats and may notify law enforcement or other agencies as appropriate.

Upon determination by the Superintendent or designee that an incident or a potential threat warrants notification of the community, the Crisis Communications Team shall provide support to the Principal and/or Superintendent for notification to the school community.

The Team shall provide a communication template, based upon the nature of the threat or incident, for immediate distribution to the school community, including staff, students, and parents/guardians. 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 within the hour.

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. The Superintendent or designee shall obtain emergency access to all PTA email lists to be used to assist in implementing this AR.

Notification to the community shall be made as soon as possible – preferably within two hours, and before the end of the school day (or before school opens, if the threat is received or incident occurs on a weekend), unless circumstances render it impossible or inadvisable to do so. 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.

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.

Information about incidents may be posted to the District or School website, and a district call-in number may be necessary for community members to obtain further information, as school and district phone-lines can become flooded in case of high interest. The Public Information Officer shall provide appropriate information for the media while keeping student and staff privacy and

well-being paramount.

Following the initial notification regarding the threat or incident, the Superintendent or designee shall provide periodic follow-up information, with updates provided by noon each day, 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.

### **Crisis Communications Team**

The Superintendent may assemble a Crisis Communications Team. Depending on the circumstances, the Team may include the 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 staff, 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.

E XXXX Sample Template for Threats to Groups

Dear XX School Community,

Your child is safe.

The following incident occurred at school today.

[answer each to the best of your ability]:

WHEN: date & time

WHAT: describe incident in brief

WHO: describe perpetrator or victim (if any) and respondent (school employee, if any) IF this seems like a good idea.

{For instance if this happened in a particular classroom, naming the teacher tells parents that their child was or was not in that classroom}

WHERE: which classroom or area of school?

CURRENT STATUS: fill in some details if possible

Responding to the incident was our primary priority.

Communicating with you was our next priority, and we hope that now you feel both more informed and more secure that your BUSD student is safe.

Now we must finish all follow up connected to this event, and as soon as that is finished we will check back in with you.

With serious concerns about your individual student that we may not know about, please call:

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Thank you for your patience as we work through the rest of today's incident.

Sincerely,

The final update shall state "FINAL UPDATE" in the subject line, and shall additionally state "this is the last update".