



Cleveland City Schools Emergency Communications Public Plan

“The midst of a crisis is not the time to let students, staff, and families know what to do in an emergency. That needs to occur before it happens.”

— Margaret Spelling

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Executive Summary

While school emergencies evoke thoughts of high-profile incidents (Columbine, Sandy Hook, and Virginia Tech), we are more likely to experience untimely deaths or other non-lethal incidents. The events we experience are broad in severity and their impact on our stakeholders. Each incident creates disruption and triggers emotional and psychological responses that have short and long-term consequences (Rick Kaufman, APR, NSPRA e-Network Newsletter, 2018).

As Dr. Nora Carr explained in a blog post for TrustED, “feeling safe at school is as important to a child’s well-being and learning as being safe. Children learn more and perform at higher levels when they feel emotionally safe. The same holds true for educators and parents, whose faith in school safety is fragile after a horrific year of school shootings.”

According to Melissa Agnes in a blog for the Institute of PR, the longer we take to respond to inquiries and correct misinformation, the more trust and credibility we risk losing with our stakeholders. Being crisis ready means we are trained and empowered to quickly detect, assess, and respond to issues that threaten our long-term negative impact on our reputation in real-time.

The first step in responding is to understand the difference between a crisis and an issue.

- Crisis: A negative event or situation that will: stop business as usual, require immediate attention and decision-making from leadership, and threaten long-term negative impact on:
 - a. People (stakeholders),
 - b. environment,
 - c. business operations,
 - d. organization’s reputation, and/or
 - e. Organization’s bottom line.
- Issue: A negative event or situation that either does not stop business as usual and/or does not threaten long-term negative impact on any of the five attributes listed above.

Keep in mind:

- As Kaufman notes, when we build a rapport and understanding with families, we build credibility and enhance their reputation. Not communicating and keeping our families in the dark is a recipe for disaster when a crisis event strikes.
- Crises can create an information void, and an absence of communication or undue delays have consequences. Stakeholders will want to reduce uncertainty, and this will lead to increased information-seeking. That information may come from those who are ill-informed, misinformed, or from individuals with less than desirable motivations.
- Mismanaged issues chip away at the trust your stakeholders have in your organization over time.
- Well-managed issues build trust, credibility and goodwill.

How do we move forward?

- Understanding the impact of emotion and relatability is a key component in quickly and effectively evaluating the impact of a situation.
- Assess the potential scope and impact of an issue or crisis on social media. Use the knowledge of virality; when something is emotionally compelling and highly relatable its likelihood of going viral is heightened.
- Remember that emotion almost always overpowers reason. In order to regain control of a highly emotional negative situation, match that emotion with emotion in order for your facts and logic to effectively reach your stakeholders in an impactful manner. Reaching their hearts in order to reach their logical reasoning, much like we do with Capturing Kids Hearts.
- Developing holding statements that can be conveyed and repeated by key stakeholders will help address questions and alleviate concerns about the pressure to answer still yet unanswerable questions.
- In the aftermath of a crisis, stakeholders will ask whether more can be done to prevent this from ever happening again. In addition, parents are also inquiring how they will be contacted should a crisis of any magnitude occur in the future at their school.

Emergency Response Guide

Statistics consistently show that schools are among the safest places to be on a day-to-day basis due to the strong commitment of educators, parents, and our community to our students. We strive to be proactive rather than reactive.

This guide outlines some of the key components of the Cleveland City Schools state of preparedness. Much more of our safety plan is not accessible to the public per state law. We hope you will find the information in this guide useful.

To be consistent across all Cleveland City Schools, we have developed the following list of terms to use in emergency situations:

- **Soft Lockdown:** Is a short-term measure implemented to isolate students and staff from the non-threatening situation at the school or in the community. Students continue to hold a fairly regular school experience. Outside doors are locked, students are not allowed to go outside, students may remain in their same class for an extended period, situational awareness is increased, etc. This may happen due to a medical emergency at the school or due to an event in the immediate area.
- **Lockdown:** Is implemented when an imminent threat is identified on the campus, or the school is directed by law enforcement to implement Lockdown. Students move away from sight, maintain silence, and do not open the door. Teachers ensure inside doors are closed and locked, turn out the lights, and take attendance. This may happen due to an intruder in the school or

other school emergency.

- **Evacuate:** Students bring their personal phones, but leave other items behind. Teachers lead students to evacuation locations, take attendance, and report back to administrators. This may happen due to orders from administrators or law enforcement due to emergency situations.
- **Weather Alerts:** Students move to a shelter area and prepare as trained and practiced. This may happen due to a tornado warning, etc.
- **Drill:** Covers a specific safety circumstance and is designed to prepare students and staff to act quickly and minimize questions and fears should an emergency take place.
- **SRO:** School Resource Officers are credentialed police assigned and employed by the Cleveland Police Department
- ***Visitors are not allowed into the school during a lockdown and children may not be checked out.***

How can our families help before and in an emergency?

BEFORE an Emergency:

- Ensure emergency contact information in PowerSchool is accurate and current, including who is authorized to pick up your child.
- Explain to your child that cell phones ***should not*** be used during an emergency unless directed by a teacher, administrator, or emergency personnel.
 - Sound, vibration, or conversation could put your child in danger
- Refer to our communication systems for updates. We will use the following media sources to provide you with accurate and timely information:
 - District website (clevelandschools.org)
 - Social Media: Twitter (@clevecityschools) and Facebook (Cleveland City Schools)
 - Email
 - Text Messages
 - App Push Out Messages
 - Local Media Sources (TV, Radio, Newspaper)
 - The phone callout system **WILL NOT** be used; to keep phone lines open

DURING an Emergency:

- Trust that emergency personnel and the school system are doing everything possible to keep your child safe and we will communicate out to families and the community as soon as is feasible.
- It is very important to know that in a crisis situation, school phones are needed to manage the situation and lines must stay open. School personnel must concentrate on the emergency and may not answer the phone.
- You will not be allowed on campus during an emergency. Emergency personnel responding to the school need the area to be clear to do their job.

AFTER an Emergency:

- After emergency responders determine that a safe student release is possible, arrangements will be announced for reuniting students with families. You will be directed to a reunification site and you will need photo identification.
- Students will only be released to a parent/guardian or other adults listed on PowerSchool as an authorized individual to pick up your child. A Student Release Form will be completed on site for documentation.
- Please be aware that reunification can be time consuming and we appreciate your patience.
- It is important that we all remain calm to help reassure our students. Once home, please take time to listen to your child. The district and community resources will be made available to assist your child and family as well.

Safety and Security Measures

A sampling of the safety and security measures currently in place in our schools include:

- We follow and put into practice all school safety measures outlined by local, state, and federal laws
- We have a well-developed and frequently updated District and School Safety Plan that is reviewed and must be approved annually by the Tennessee Department of Education Office of Safe and Supportive Schools
- School safety plans and emergency response procedures that are drilled frequently
- Emergency communications plan
- School Emergency Response Team at each school and for the district
- District Safety Committee
- Partnerships with emergency responders at the local, state, and federal levels
- Visitor sign-in procedures
- Cameras located both inside and outside of school and district properties
- Locked entry holding areas for visitors to schools
- Keyless entry to all school and district properties
- First aid kits, fire extinguishers, and AED machines at each school and district properties
- Staff trainings held frequently to train on emergency procedures
- Threat assessment process/training
- Social workers, school counselors and other mental health assistance available system-wide
- Capturing Kids Hearts initiative system-wide - "To capture a kids' mind, you first have to capture their hearts."
- Schools have personnel trained in CPR and first aid
- For security reasons, components of our emergency plans are not publicly available

What you can expect if a situation should occur:

- The school emergency response plan will be implemented and the emergency response team will respond.
- Emergency officials and the district office will be informed of the incident and respond quickly and effectively to ensure the safety of all students and staff.
- Depending on the situation, students and staff will be secured within the school or evacuated to

another location. Law enforcement will make the determination in an emergency situation.

- Families will be kept informed on the situation with as much detail as feasible to ensure the safety of all students and response personnel. The Communications Department for Cleveland City Schools will establish, coordinate and direct public information in concert with emergency responders to disseminate information. This department will also coordinate all information shared with the public and media. **Please only rely on CCS official communications.**

All CCS staff, students, families, and community members are encouraged to report anything you see, hear, or are made aware of that could impact our students and/or staff. If you see or hear something, please say something!

Call 911 if this is an immediate emergency. You may also contact the Cleveland Police Department at 423-476-1121, school SRO, administration or staff.

- When providing information, please be as detailed as possible - include the name of the school(s), person(s) involved, type of alleged activities, when they occurred/may occur.
- All threats are taken seriously. When notified, the Police, SRO officers and school administration work together to thoroughly investigate any threat, whether it is made verbally, in writing, email, text message, or online. The earlier we know about a potential threat, the earlier an investigation can begin.
- Anyone who makes a threat against a school, students, or staff could face criminal charges. If a student is involved in making a threat, the school/district will respond as outlined in school board policy.
- All communications and searches on our school issued technology devices are monitored and anything related to violence, threats, or obscenity is flagged for immediate investigation regardless if the device is at school, home or another location.

Emergency Communications

Incidents at School:

- Non-Threatening Incident:
 - Parents will be notified as soon as possible via email about the incident.
- Emergency Incident:
 - Our first priority is to protect students and staff. Families will be notified by text, email and other communications.
 - Families should not call or go to the school.
 - Families should avoid contacting students during an emergency.
 - Please do not rely on unofficial reports for information.
 - Be patient and wait for information.
 - If an off-site reunification is necessary, please bring your photo ID.

Weather-Related School Delays and Closures:

- In the event schools are closed or delayed due to weather conditions, families will be notified via

text, email, and social media by 6:00 am.

- If no message is received regarding a school closure due to weather, school remains open and will start on time.
- Families with students in after-school programs or evening activities will be notified by the schools as soon as possible regarding those events.