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Dear Parents/Guardians:

Part of the mission of Decatur City Schools is to prepare students for success. In the event of a crisis, natural disaster, or inclement weather situation, our school system has one goal - - to keep our students and staff safe. This letter details just a few of the things Decatur City Schools does to ensure a safe learning environment.

Decatur City Schools annually updates our emergency response procedures. These procedures include how to respond to situations that might occur in and around our schools, including severe weather, natural disasters, and possible intruders. In addition, we frequently conduct emergency response drills to practice and to improve the effectiveness of how to handle various situations.

We have a joint agreement with the City of Decatur that provides our school system with eight School Resource Officers (SRO's). Members of local law enforcement agencies regularly train in our schools and have access that enables them to respond without delay in any situation. We meet regularly with state, city and county officials, as well as a multitude of other agencies that are always available to assist our school system in a time of need.

Our crisis response includes individuals both inside and outside the school system (such as administrators, licensed professional counselors, law enforcement, fire and medical emergency responders, and community leaders), that are ready to respond, if needed.

Receiving information is important in the identification and prevention of potential safety issues. We encourage you to call or text our Safe Schools Decatur Tip Line at 256-227-8514 or by email at Safe.Schools@dcs.edu with any safety concerns.

Providing you with communication is vitally important. Decatur City Schools has implemented a telephone messaging service that will allow us to make calls very quickly to provide important information to parents. We ask for your assistance in keeping your child's school informed of any updates or changes within your family's telephone/cell numbers, email, and home address. Our messaging system may also be used by school groups and athletic teams to send out important information such as approximate arrival time back to school while away on a trip. Should you miss a call from this service, you can call 1-855-269-0502 to replay the last message sent to you.

The following are some of the terms and descriptions that we use with our students and staff during drills and emergency situations. Decatur City Schools feels that it is important for you to know and understand these terms and the impact of each upon our schools.

Heightened Awareness:

This means a potential may exist for an unusual situation. It is most often used to bring awareness to a potential weather situation. It may also be used when there is an event in the community or on the state or national level. Classroom instruction will continue but the students/staff are instructed to report any suspicious or unusual activity.

Shelter In Place:

This phrase might be encountered during inclement weather or a hazardous material release. A tornado warning will require schools to take students to an inner hallway or a room with few or no windows and stay there until it is safe to release students. These areas have been reviewed and approved by the Morgan County Emergency Management Agency. Please note that we cease operations such as checkout during an active warning. If you are at the school during a warning, we invite you to join us as we “shelter.” Should we ever encounter a hazardous material release we have made precautions to limit the amount of exposure students have to the outside environment. Additionally, students at schools within the Browns Ferry evacuation area might need to be relocated.

Secured Perimeter:

This term is used when we are notified of a concern or when a potential threat/hazard is identified in the vicinity of the school. If you are notified of a Secured Perimeter, do not go to the school as classroom instruction will continue with restricted entry and limited supervised movement within the building. These situations are often very short-lived. If the situation allows and/or is of a lengthy period of time, the school will make notification to parents via their normal communication methods. Entries and exits are monitored during this situation; students will not be released outside the building until we receive an all clear or a controlled/supervised release is being conducted.

Lockdown:

A lockdown takes place if a threat or possible life-impacting event is identified on the campus or inside the school. Instruction and all movement will be halted. Students are generally secured in their classrooms. DCS works with our students and staff to have plans to barricade for concealment, to have a building escape plan, and to use countermeasures to aid in protection. No visitors will be allowed to enter the building to avoid hindering emergency response teams arriving or the investigating at the school. We ask that you monitor our notifications for information and updates. Please note that we conduct an annual lockdown audit and conduct drills of lockdown procedures at each school. All school operations are halted during such events.

Controlled Release:

A Controlled Release may occur if there is a situation in the community, often around a school, that requires students to be released under controlled conditions. If an announcement is made that a controlled release is necessary, we ask that all students be picked up via the car line. Parents should remain in their vehicles and follow the directions of the school staff. This will allow us to monitor students as they enter the vehicles. If your student typically walks or rides a bicycle to school, they will be held at the school until the situation is deemed safe for their release or they are picked up by a parent or other individual via the carpool line.

What is Parent Staging for Reunification?

When students have been removed from the school or when an emergency has occurred that affects the ability to have a normal dismissal from the school, a parent staging area may be established. At this location, parents will be updated concerning the situation and the plans for reunification with their child. Remember, a student can only be released to an adult who is listed as an emergency contact on school records, so be sure to keep that list updated. Anyone attempting to pick up a student should be prepared to show proper photo identification. In cases where students will be released from the school, students that have obtained a parking permit will be able to sign themselves out at the time of the release.

What you can do now?

Be sure your school office always has updated phone numbers for your family. Read this letter and become familiar with the procedures listed above. Talk with your child about taking our drills seriously and remaining calm in a crisis situation. As always, speak with your building administration should you have any safety concerns.

Dwight Satterfield
Deputy Superintendent
Student Operations