



Serving Learners, Families, and the Community

CRISIS COMMUNICATION GUIDE

AUGUST 2019

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For additional information, questions, or feedback, contact:

Office of Student & School Safety
410-996-5490

Public Information Office
410-996-5474

Overview

The CCPS Crisis Communication Plan provides information and procedures for the coordination of communications internally, between the system and the stakeholders, and between the system and the media. While each situation is different, the main goal of this document is to provide a standard operating procedure and basic framework for communicating during a crisis.

The guiding principle in any type of situation is to communicate facts as quickly as possible while retaining accuracy and updating information regularly as more information becomes available to ensure the safety of students and staff.

We will use multiple means of communication during an event in order to reach as many people as possible including coordinating these efforts with our partnering agencies such as law enforcement and the Department of Emergency Services. Our goal is to be open, accountable, and accessible to our audiences while also being mindful of legal and privacy concerns.

Whenever possible, the first groups that should be informed about a crisis are the internal audiences who are directly affected, such as students and staff. The next groups should include other schools not directly affected (as necessary), parents, Board members, and other stakeholders.

IMPORTANT COMMUNICATION BEST PRACTICES

Messages should be clear, direct and simple:

- No more than 3 key points
- Use clear, direct language
- Avoid jargon
- Refute negative allegations without repeating them
- Use positive or neutral terms, when possible
- Discuss what you know, not what you think
- Don't express personal opinions

Communication experts recommend the 27/9/3 principle: 27 words, nine seconds, three messages. If you don't keep it short and simple, someone else will make it short and simple for you and you may lose your key message.

Important points to be made are: student safety is the top priority, preparedness of the school, access to information for parents, responsible immediate action taken by school representatives, support provided for students at the school, and coordination of efforts with community agencies.

Useful phrases:

- We are still gathering information.
- All of our students and staff are accounted for and safe.
- Our emergency procedures worked exactly as we intended and practiced.
- Student safety is our top priority. We will continue to update our safety plans and security measures to protect our students and staff.

Monitoring

During an event, it's not enough to disseminate messages. We also need to monitor what is being reported and what is being said or asked for by target audiences. This gives the opportunity to correct misinformation or to clarify and expand messages.

Post Event Evaluation

When the event is over, evaluate:

- Did all audiences receive the message in a timely manner?
- Were the messages received and interpreted in the way we intended?
- Did the channels of communication work as we expected?
- Did we effectively monitor the situation and were we able to adapt our response as needed?

USE OF MICROSOFT TEAMS

Microsoft Teams will be the application that we utilize within Cecil County Public Schools as a system-wide solution to communicate during drills and emergencies. MS Teams enables local and remote staff to collaborate on content in real-time across different devices, including laptops and mobile devices. The MS Teams app works more effectively if your mobile device is connected to the CCPS Wifi. MS Teams is linked to our current active directory to add groups and members to your school teams, instead of having to enter them one by one.

When working on a drill or an actual crisis situation, team members have to be on the same page. If one person is aware of an update or needs to share important information, he or she has the ability to inform everyone else through use of the MS Teams app. MS Teams makes this communication possible in the simplest way, and was tested during ALICE drills in the spring of 2019.

Beginning with the 2019-2020 school year, we will officially implement MS Teams as part of our standard operating procedure for communicating during emergency situations.

Launch MS Teams:

1. In Windows, click Start > Microsoft Corporation > Microsoft Teams.
2. Open a web browser and enter, teams.microsoft.com
3. On mobile, download Microsoft Teams app, then tap the Teams icon.

Invite people to MS Teams:

1. Click Chat or Teams on the left side of the app, and then click Invite people.
2. Type the emails and names of people you'd like to add to your org. ...
3. Click Send invites to send each person an email invitation to join the org. ...
4. Use the (⋮) beside the Team name for additional options for the Team. This will allow you to manage the membership in the Team.

To Use Microsoft Teams:

1. Select the Team and Channel under the Team that you wish to use for the communication. The whole Team will see the conversation.
2. Always select “New conversation” for each post/response. Avoid using “Reply” so that all posts in the thread will remain visible. Using “Reply” nests posts and is more difficult to track within the conversation thread, especially when using a mobile device.
3. For a private conversation, select the Chat icon at the bottom of the screen. You will need to set up which contacts to include in a private chat.

CENTRAL OFFICE RESPONSE

1. When initially notified of a situation, the Director of Student and School Safety will notify the Leadership Team and Public Information Office and decide if activation of the command center is necessary.
2. The Director of Student and School Safety will assess the magnitude of the situation and work the Public Information Office to formulate a communication strategy to fit the situation. It is critical to do a quick assessment to help predict the level of public information and media response that will be required. Reference the Communication Matrix on page # to determine stand communication by incident.
3. Identify audiences that need information:
 - a. Those that are most affected: school administration, school staff, students
 - i. Other considerations: Transportation Office, Food & Nutrition, Itinerant staff
 - b. Those that are not immediately affected but need information about safety and facts of the event (e.g. parents, other schools, Board of Education members, etc.)
 - c. Those that are not affected by the event but still need information (e.g., community leaders/members, media)
4. Develop or identify messages to be communicated to each audience and determine who is responsible for delivering those messages.
 - a. Draft Message Templates (pg. 11)
 - b. Message Planning Worksheet (pg. 10)

Communication Responsibilities

1. Spokesperson/Media Liaison: Kelly Keeton
 - a. Backup #1: Dr. Joseph Buckley
 - b. Backup #2: Dr. Carolyn Teigland
2. Social Media: Kelly Keeton
 - a. Backup #1: Kyle Rickansrud
 - b. Backup #2: Wesley Zimmerman
3. Website: Derick Brown
 - a. Backup #1: Wesley Zimmerman
 - b. Backup #2: Rick Ortiz
4. Mass Notification System: Kelly Keeton
 - a. Backup #1: Wesley Zimmerman
 - b. Backup #2: Rick Ortiz

COMMUNICATION MATRIX

This chart provides a basic overview of communication responsibilities in basic subgroups. Always refer to the Emergency Procedures Guide (flipchart) for more detailed procedures on the management of specific emergency situations.

**In an active emergency situation or when there is an imminent threat, 911 should always be the first contact made.

Type of Event	Audiences to Contact	Communication Platform	Communicator
<p>Bomb Threat</p> <p><i>**Follow call trace procedures**</i></p>	<p>Office of Student & School Safety</p> <p>Parents</p> <p>Leadership Team & BOE</p>	<p>Phone call</p> <p>Calling system</p> <p>Social Media</p> <p>Email</p>	<p>School</p> <p>School in collaboration with Public Information Office</p> <p>Office of Student & School Safety</p>
<p>Bus Accident</p> <p><i>Transportation Office will establish Google Teams thread between Office of Student & School Safety, Public Information Office, Transportation staff, and school administrator on scene.</i></p>	<p>Office of Student & School Safety</p> <p>Parents</p> <p>Leadership Team & BOE</p>	<p>Phone call</p> <p>Calling system</p> <p>Follow-up letter</p> <p>Email</p>	<p>Transportation Office</p> <p>School</p> <p>School</p> <p>Office of Student & School Safety</p>

<p>Code Yellow</p>	<p>Office of Student & School Safety</p> <p>Parents</p> <p>Leadership Team & BOE</p> <p>Nearby schools (depending on the situation)</p> <p>Itinerant staff/Maintenance/ Central Office (depending on the situation)</p>	<p>Phone call</p> <p>Calling system- call, email, or text</p> <p>Email</p> <p>Phone call</p> <p>Google Teams message</p>	<p>School</p> <p>School</p> <p>Office of Student & School Safety</p> <p>School or Office of Student & School Safety</p> <p>Office of Student & School Safety or Public Information Office</p>
<p>Death</p> <p><i>**Refer to Crisis Counseling Team Resource Manual**</i></p>			
<p>Evacuation/Relocation (General)</p> <p><i>Examples: As a result of fire, gas leak, hazardous material</i></p> <p><i>For evacuation/ relocation relating to Secure Status: Lockdown (ALICE) procedures, see page ##.</i></p>	<p>Parents</p> <p>Leadership Team & BOE</p> <p>Other Schools</p> <p>Itinerant staff/ Maintenance/ Central Office</p>	<p>Calling system- call, email, & text</p> <p>Social media (CCPS)</p> <p>Email</p> <p>Email to administrators</p> <p>Google Teams message</p>	<p>Public Information Office</p> <p>Public Information Office</p> <p>Office of Student & School Safety or Public Information Office</p> <p>Office of Student & School Safety or Public Information Office</p> <p>Office of Student & School Safety or Public Information Office</p>

<p>Fire/Hazardous Materials/Gas Leak (Minor or only temporary evacuation)</p> <p><i>**If relocation is necessary, refer to Evacuation/Relocation.**</i></p>	<p>Office of Student & School Safety</p> <p>Parents</p> <p>Leadership Team & BOE</p>	<p>Phone call</p> <p>Calling system- call, email, or text</p> <p>Social Media</p> <p>Email</p>	<p>School</p> <p>School</p> <p>Office of Student & School Safety</p>
<p>Medical Emergency</p>	<p>Office of Student & School Safety</p> <p>Parents (if Code Yellow is used)</p> <p>Leadership Team</p>	<p>Phone call</p> <p>Calling system- call, email, or text</p> <p>Email</p>	<p>School</p> <p>School</p> <p>Office of Student & School Safety</p>
<p>Radiological Emergencies</p> <p><i>**Refer to Peach Bottom Emergency Plan**</i></p>			
<p>Secure Status: Lockdown (ALICE)</p>	<p>Parents</p> <p>Nearby Schools</p> <p>All CCPS</p> <p>Itinerant staff/ Maintenance/ Central Office</p>	<p>Calling system- call, text, & email</p> <p>Social Media</p> <p>Radio and/or phone call</p> <p>Calling system- call, text, or email</p> <p>Google Teams message</p>	<p>Office of Student & School Safety/Public Information Office</p> <p>Public Information Office</p> <p>Office of Student & School Safety</p> <p>Office of Student & School Safety/Public Information Office (per direction of leadership team)</p> <p>Office of Student & School Safety or Public Information Office</p>

Threats	Office of Student & School Safety Law Enforcement Associate Superintendent of Admin Services Parents (depending on situation) Leadership Team & BOE	Phone Call Phone Call Phone Call Calling system- phone, email, text Social media (school page) Social media (CCPS)- if necessary Email	School Office of Student & School Safety or School Office of Student & School Safety School School Public Information Office Office of Student & School Safety
Weapon	Office of Student & School Safety Law enforcement Parents (depending on the situation) Leadership Team & BOE	Phone Call Phone Call Calling system- phone and email Email	School Office of Student & School Safety or School School Office of Student & School Safety

The worksheet below is useful in helping to identify audiences, key messages, and appropriate communication channels.

Message Planning Worksheet

Event: _____

Audience	Key Message	Supporting Facts	Communication Channel

EMERGENCY COMMUNICATION TEMPLATES

These templates are provided in an advisory capacity. It is critical that you first refer to the processes outlined in the Crisis Communications plan which will provide you with a general standard operating procedure and expectations for communicating during emergency situations.

BOMB THREAT

No Evacuation

This morning we received several calls in the main office that were bomb threats. We immediately contacted law enforcement and began our procedures for investigating this type of situation. We determined that it was safest for students to remain in the building while this occurred. During this time we remained in a Code Yellow secure status and restricted hallway movement. Both the Elkton Police Department and the State Fire Marshal assisted us in this investigation.

Evacuation/Relocation

Due to a bomb threat at (SCHOOL NAME), all students and staff are being relocated to (LOCATION) as advised by law enforcement as a precautionary measure. Parents should report to (LOCATION) where they will be directed to the proper entrance and will follow sign out procedures. Individuals authorized to pick up students should have their photo identification. Students who are not able to be picked up at (LOCATION) will be transported home directly from (RELOCATION SITE) at the regular dismissal time. Should you have any additional questions, please contact (RELOCATION SITE) at (PHONE NUMBER).

Dismissal

Due to a bomb threat at (SCHOOL NAME), students are being dismissed from the school as advised by law enforcement as a precautionary measure. Walkers and students who drive will be dismissed immediately. Bus riders are being dismissed as buses arrive at the school. Parents who wish to sign their children out will be directed to the proper entrance and will follow sign out procedures. Individuals authorized to pick up students should have their photo identification. Law enforcement is present at the school to assist in the dismissal.

Building Cleared for Re-entry

Our building has been cleared by law enforcement for re-entry following today's bomb threat. As you may be aware, students may not have been able to take personal belongings with them when we dismissed, so we will have the school open until (TIME) this afternoon if you would like to come to the school to pick up your child's belongings, otherwise, your child will be able to get them when they come to school tomorrow. Thank you for your cooperation and patience as we worked through today's situation. It was determined by law enforcement that the threat was not credible. We are continuing to investigate and anyone with information concerning today's event is asked to contact the school. School safety is an issue that we take very seriously and those found to be involved in today's incident will face both disciplinary and legal consequences.

Resolved

Law enforcement officers investigating the incident at (SCHOOL NAME) today were able determine that the threat was false. Situations such as this are taken very seriously by both the school system and law enforcement. Our students are to be commended for the mature manner in which they handled today's evacuation and relocation. Thank you to the (SCHOOL NAME) parents for their patience during the sign-out process at the high school, the staffs of both (NAME OF AFFECTED SCHOOL AND RELOCATION SCHOOL) for their excellent work in handling today's events, and to law enforcement for their efforts in conducting the investigation.

BUS ACCIDENT

Minor Accident

Dear Parents/Guardians:

This morning Bus ## was involved in a minor accident on (ROAD NAME) which required it to stop briefly. There was no damage to either vehicle and the bus continued on to the school.

I spoke to each of the students this morning and we made sure to touch base with them throughout the day. We called each family this morning that had a student on the bus but wanted to send this (CALL OR LETTER) as an additional communication. As always, please feel free to contact me with any further questions.

Accident with Emergency Transport

We have been notified that bus ## has been involved in an accident and several students will be transported to the hospital for injuries. Another bus is being sent to complete the route. School staff is in the process of contacting individual families directly. Please contact the school at (PHONE NUMBER) to talk to a staff member.

CODE YELLOW

Police Activity in Area

This morning we were notified of law enforcement activity in our area. As is our practice when we are informed of a situation in our community, and because the activity was near our property, our school entered into a Code Yellow status until we were advised by law enforcement that we could resume our regular activities.

The safety of our students and staff is our top priority. Even though this particular situation did not directly involve our school, it is important for us to take every precaution. Please feel free to contact me should you have any further questions.

Ambulance

This morning we had a situation occur that required us to call an ambulance for an individual in the building. We initiated a CODE YELLOW secure status in order to limit hallway traffic until emergency personnel had left the building.

Students may have seen the ambulance and emergency personnel, so I wanted to make you aware of the situation. Please contact the school should you have any questions.

Situation Involving Law Enforcement

This afternoon we initiated a secure status as a precautionary measure in order to limit hallway traffic due to a meeting in the office that involved law enforcement. We kept this status for approximately 20 minutes. During this time, all students were safe and secure. Please contact the school should you have any questions.

Suspicious Person on School Property

This afternoon we received a report of a suspicious person on school property between the elementary and middle school. We entered into a Code Yellow secure status and contacted law enforcement. Law enforcement continued to have a presence in the area for the remainder of the day and at dismissal. The safety of our students and staff is our top priority. Please feel free to contact me should you have any further questions.

DEATH

Refer to the Crisis Counseling Team Resource Manual

EVACUATION/RELOCATION (GENERAL)

Due to (REASON) at (SCHOOL), students and staff are being relocated to (LOCATION). Parents should report to (LOCATION) where they will be directed to the proper entrance and will follow sign out procedures. Individuals authorized to pick up students should have their photo identification. Students who are not able to be picked up at (LOCATION) will be transported home directly from (RELOCATION SITE) at the regular dismissal time. Should you have any additional questions, please contact (RELOCATION SITE) at (PHONE NUMBER).

FIRE

Temporarily Evacuated

This message is to notify you that (SCHOOL NAME) was temporarily evacuated due to (a smell of smoke in the building/ a smoke alarm activation). The cause was identified as (EX. a malfunctioning light fixture) and the emergency responders have allowed students and staff to re-enter the building.

Relocation

Due to a fire at (SCHOOL), students and staff are being relocated to (LOCATION). Parents should report to (LOCATION) where they will be directed to the proper entrance and will follow sign out procedures. Individuals authorized to pick up students should have their photo identification. Students who are not able to be picked up at (LOCATION) will be transported home directly from (RELOCATION SITE) at the regular dismissal time. Should you have any additional questions, please contact (RELOCATION SITE) at (PHONE NUMBER).

HAZARDOUS MATERIALS/GAS LEAK

****Refer to FIRE and modify language**

RADIOLOGICAL EMERGENCIES

****Refer to Peach Bottom Emergency Plan**

SECURE STATUS: LOCKDOWN (ALICE)

At the Report of an Event

We have received reports that there is an active threat situation at (SCHOOL NAME). Law enforcement is responding to the school and the campus has been blocked to outside access. Parents should report to (LOCATION) where they will be directed to the proper entrance and reunification procedures will proceed once students are evacuated to that location.

SUICIDE ATTEMPT/THREAT

****Refer to Crisis Counseling Team Manual**

THREATS

Online Rumors/Threats- Follow-Up

Dear Parents:

I wanted to take this opportunity to update you regarding last night's rumors on social media and their effect on the school day. As I stated in my call this morning, we have been working with the Elkton Police Department since late yesterday evening when they were made aware of the post. They worked diligently to thoroughly investigate and resolve this situation. As a precaution, we did have additional law enforcement presence at the school today.

Fortunately, law enforcement has determined that this was not a credible threat. However, situations of this nature are taken very seriously by both the school system and law enforcement. This situation serves as a reminder that information such as this should always be reported immediately to school officials or law enforcement. In this case, the open lines of communication that exist between students, parents, school administrators, and law enforcement allowed us to swiftly and thoroughly investigate this particular matter with the (LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCY).

Thank you for your support as we work to provide a safe, secure learning environment for our students. As I said in this morning's call, safety is our top priority. Please feel free to contact me with any further questions.

Weapon Photo on Social Media Posted By Student

This afternoon it was brought to our attention that a student had shared a photo on social media of another person holding a weapon. We immediately notified law enforcement to assist us in our investigation of this matter. Although the original post did not mention a school or school violence, law enforcement is continuing to investigate the matter. As we mentioned in our communication to you yesterday, any information that is shared with us because it causes concern is thoroughly investigated. The sharing of this information is important and we appreciate those who brought this information to our attention. We will continue to have a law enforcement presence at our school. Please feel to contact the school with any additional questions.

Verbal Threat/Comments- Parent Letter

I wanted to take this opportunity to make you aware of an issue that we addressed this afternoon when it was reported to school administration that a student had made several comments regarding school violence. We immediately investigated this in conjunction with law enforcement and addressed the situation.

Situations of this nature are taken very seriously by both the school system and law enforcement. This situation serves as a reminder that information such as this should always be reported immediately to school officials or law enforcement. In this case, the open lines of communication that exist between students, parents, school administrators, and law enforcement allowed us to swiftly and thoroughly investigate this particular matter.

Thank you for your support as we work to provide a safe, secure learning environment for our students. Please feel free to contact me with any further questions.

WEAPONS

During school today a student reported that another student had a handgun in his backpack. The backpack was secured by administration, and the local police department was immediately notified. The police quickly responded, and the student and backpack were detained by police. The administration is working with the police department in an ongoing investigation.

I want to assure you that the safety of our students and staff is our top priority. The confiscation of the backpack and the detention of the student is due to the efforts of our staff and the local police department. Our administration and the local police department will continue to work together to make sure that all parties involved are held accountable.

Our school's staff and the school district are committed to keeping our campus safe. There are no additional safety issues related to this incident. We will continue to be diligent in the enforcement of our rules and will work in conjunction with law enforcement to keep our campus a safe place to learn.

Look-Alike Weapon

Dear Parents:

This morning a student brought a cap gun (INTO SCHOOL/ONTO BUS). The situation was addressed immediately and the student will face appropriate disciplinary consequences.

This situation serves as a reminder that look-alike weapons of any kind should never be brought into school. Please take time this evening to share this information with your child and to also reinforce that information such as this should always be reported immediately to school officials or law enforcement.

Thank you for your support as we work to provide a safe, secure learning environment for our students. Safety is our top priority. Please feel free to contact me with any further questions.