

Emergency and Disaster Preparedness

[DISCLAIMER: THE EMERGENCY AND DISASTER POLICIES CONTAINED HEREIN ARE FOR INFORMATIONAL PURPOSES ONLY. THE POLICIES ARE A SAMPLE OF THE POLICIES THAT A DISTRICT CAN INCORPORATE. CONTACT YOUR LOCAL LAW ENFORCEMENT, MEDICAL PROVIDERS, AND/OR COUNTY OFFICES FOR PARTICULAR POLICIES THAT ARE APPLICABLE FOR YOUR DISTRICT.]

Cottonwood School District has developed procedures for dealing with existing and potential student and school crises. The Crisis Management Plan should include Crisis Response Procedures and Critical Incident Procedures. An important component of the Plan is a set of interagency guidelines with various city and county agencies to aid timely communication and help coordinate services between the agencies and individual schools or the entire District. Crisis Response Procedures guide staff in responding to more frequently occurring crises, such as deaths of students or teachers and other traumatic events, which can affect the school community for days. These procedures are intended to be time-limited, problem-focused interventions designed to identify and resolve the crisis, restore equilibrium, and support productive responses. The crisis team uses crisis response procedures to help administrators:

1. Gather information;
2. Establish communication with families;
3. Disseminate accurate information to faculty and students;
4. Intervene directly with students most likely to be affected;
5. Increase the available supportive counseling for students and staff; and
6. Guide students in helpful ways to remember the deceased.

Critical Incident Procedures help school personnel handle potentially dangerous events such as an armed intruder in a school and other life-threatening events. The District has developed a Plan which emphasizes a coordinated interagency approach. A Code Blue has been established in all school buildings to provide a uniform method of warning staff and students of high risk situations involving imminent danger to life or limb.

Cottonwood School District's Crisis Management Plan procedures provide benefits for students, parents, and the District. The procedures provide an organized, systematic method for helping students. Staff members know under what circumstances and how to refer a student for help. Crisis Team members operate within specific guidelines to make collaborative decisions and share the responsibility for these often difficult, stressful situations. Parents and other members of the community are assured that the District has established procedures which better prepare schools to respond to crisis.

The crisis team may include members with expertise in crisis response, parents, family services workers, mental health professionals, and physicians or other health care providers, among others.

The interagency agreements have fostered stronger collaborative relationships and have led to improved communication about students and family events that could impact the schools.

In the event of an emergency, employees are expected to remain at their worksite to ensure the safety and security of students under their care and/or the school's care until otherwise directed by the school administrator or person in charge. Those employees who have a child in another school should have arrangements in place for the care of their child by others until they can be released from their duties. Employees are strongly encouraged to take all steps necessary to provide for the well being of their family in advance of any major disaster. This will hopefully moderate fears and concerns sufficiently to permit rapid and effective completion of assigned tasks to ensure the well-being of students and staff.

Possible Hazards in Idaho

An emergency is a sudden, unexpected occurrence requiring immediate action to stabilize a situation. Emergencies may affect school facilities and/or school transportation and may prevent use for an unspecified period of time.

The Crisis Management Plan should address a range of events and hazards caused by nature or humans, such as:

1. Severe weather;
2. Bus crashes;
3. Bomb threats;
4. Student or staff deaths;
5. Chemical or hazardous material spills;
6. Fire;
7. School shootings;
8. Medical emergencies;
9. Acts of terror or war; and
10. Natural disasters such as earthquakes, tornados, floods, and volcanic eruptions.

Direct responsibility for what may occur immediately following a response to a 911 call will lie with the first responders, such as police or fire department. The District's first responsibility is to ensure the immediate safety of students and staff by activating the appropriate Crisis Management Plan.

To assist and expedite setup, the Board directs that emergency plans and procedures be developed, implemented, and maintained for all schools, District facilities, and school buses, and that:

1. All employees be informed about the emergency plans and procedures to be followed at their work site to ensure their safety and the safety of others;
2. Students and employees practice the emergency procedures implemented at their school or work site;
3. Parents be advised of the emergency procedures developed at the school their child attends by September 30;
4. If materials and supplies beyond those normally provided by the School District are to be kept on hand to augment the school emergency procedures, then it shall be the responsibility of each school to obtain and maintain such supplies in good order; and
5. This policy be reviewed annually.

Sequence of Crisis Management

The Crisis Management Plan should include the sequences of managing a disaster. Those sequences are as follows:

1. Mitigation and Prevention addresses what schools and Districts can do to reduce or eliminate risk to life and property;
2. Preparedness focuses on the process of planning for the worst-case scenario;
3. Response is devoted to the steps to take during a crisis; and
4. Recovery deals with how to restore the learning and teaching environment after a crisis.

Crisis management is a continuous process in which all phases of the plan should be reviewed and revised. Additional sequence steps to analyze in preparing the Crisis Management Plan are described below.

Mitigation and Prevention

The goal of mitigation is to decrease the need for response as opposed to simply increasing response capability.

1. Connect with community emergency responders to identify local hazards;
2. Review the last safety audit to examine school buildings and grounds;
3. Determine who is responsible for overseeing violence prevention strategies in each school;
4. Encourage staff to provide input and feedback during the crisis planning process;
5. Review incident data;
6. Determine major problems in your school with regard to student crime and violence;
7. Assess how the school addresses these problems; and
8. Conduct an assessment to determine how these problems, as well as others, may impact your vulnerability to certain crises.

Preparedness

Good planning will facilitate a rapid, coordinated, effective response when a crisis occurs.

1. Determine what crisis plans exist in the District, school, and community;
2. Identify all stakeholders involved in crisis planning;
3. Develop procedures for communicating with staff, students, families, and the media;
4. Establish procedures to account for students during a crisis;
5. Gather information about the school facility, such as maps and the location of utility shutoffs; and
6. Identify the equipment that needs to be assembled to assist staff in a crisis.

Response

A crisis is the time to follow the crisis plan and make use of your preparations.

1. Determine if a crisis is occurring;
2. Identify the type of crisis that is occurring and determine the appropriate response;
3. Activate the incident management system;
4. Ascertain whether an evacuation, reverse evacuation, lockdown, or shelter-in-place needs to be implemented;
5. Maintain communication among all relevant staff at officially designated locations;
6. Establish what information needs to be communicated to staff, students, families, and the community;
7. Monitor how emergency first aid is being administered to the injured; and
8. Decide if more equipment and supplies are needed.

Recovery

During recovery, return to learning and restore the infrastructure as quickly as possible.

1. Strive to return to learning as quickly as possible;
2. Restore the physical plant as well as the school community;
3. Monitor how staff are assessing students for the emotional impact of the crisis;
4. Identify what follow up interventions are available to students, staff, and first responders;
5. Conduct debriefings with staff and first responders;
6. Assess curricular activities that address the crisis;
7. Allocate appropriate time for recovery;
8. Plan how anniversaries of events will be commemorated; and
9. Capture “lessons learned” and incorporate them into revisions and trainings.

Prepare for Immediate Response

When a crisis occurs, quickly determine whether students and staff need to be evacuated from the building, returned to the building, or locked down in the building. Plan action steps for each of these scenarios.

Those in the building may be warned that an emergency is occurring via the fire alarm, the intercom, or in-person notification by office staff depending upon the amount of information to be relayed and the details of the emergency.

Evacuation requires all students and staff to leave the building. The evacuation plan should include backup buildings and other locations. Evacuation plans should include contingencies for weather conditions. Additionally, plans should include transportation options for students with disabilities. The evacuation of students and staff with disabilities should be practiced regularly.

When evacuation is required, the teacher or supervisor of each group of students will direct the evacuation. Preplanned and practiced evacuation routes will be used unless such routes are determined to be unsafe. At the time of evacuation, talking should be restricted so instructions may be easily heard. Students should leave books, coats, and other belongings in the room unless extreme cold requires students to bring any coats they have with them. Lines should be formed quickly in single file, and students should then walk briskly to the exit. Teachers are to take their roll books and, if time permits, close windows and doors when leaving.

The principal will designate door guards and individuals to search the building during the evacuation process. Door guards and searchers shall be support staff who do not have direct responsibility for a group of students.

If it is safe to do so, the custodian or principal will shut off the main power supply to the building before evacuating, and cooks will turn off stoves, ovens, or other equipment before leaving the kitchen.

Teachers and supervisors will escort students to an area on the school grounds as far from the danger as possible. Students shall be kept away from any streets or areas that might be used by any emergency vehicles. Class groupings must be maintained. Teachers and supervisors are to take roll immediately upon reaching the safety area. Missing students must be reported immediately to the principal or other office personnel.

Three short rings on the regular school bell system will indicate the facility is safe and return to class is required. The teacher or supervisor will again take roll in the building to ensure that all students have returned safely.

In the event the facility is unsafe, the principal will authorize students and staff to move to the designated alternate shelter until transportation can be obtained to return students to their homes. In the event is unsafe, the following shall be used as alternate shelters:

1. The Football Field House shall be the alternate shelter for Prairie Elementary School; and
2. St. Gertrude's Monastery shall be the alternate shelter for Prairie High School.

Teachers and supervisors must accompany students to the alternate shelter and be responsible for their supervision until such time as the students are released or taken back to school.

Reverse Evacuation requires all students and staff to leave the outdoors and return to the building quickly. Once staff and students are safely in the building, you may find the situation calls for a lockdown.

Lockdowns are called for when a crisis occurs outside of the school and an evacuation would be dangerous. A lockdown may also be called for when there is a crisis inside and movement within the school will put students in jeopardy.

Define Roles and Responsibilities

How will the school operate during a crisis? Define what should happen, when, and at whose direction; that is, create an organizational system. This should involve many of the school staff. Important tasks will be neglected if each person is responsible for more than one function. School staff should be assigned to the following roles:

1. School commander;
2. Liaison to emergency responders;
3. Student caregivers;
4. Security officers;
5. Medical staff; and
6. Spokesperson.

The District will work with law enforcement officers and emergency responders to identify crises that require an outside agency to manage the scene, such as fires, bomb threats, and hostage situations.

Assigned Roles for School District Staff During a School Emergency

Superintendent:

1. Direct all operations of the District in the management of the emergency;
2. Gather information on all aspects of the emergency for use in making appropriate decisions about the management of the emergency;
3. Assess the emergency situation and assign tasks based on the overall needs for managing the emergency;
4. Direct all activities of District and school staff in the management of the emergency;
5. Stay in contact with the leaders of the emergency service agencies and the law enforcement agencies working with the emergency;
6. Authorize the release of information to the public; and
7. Keep the Board informed of emergency status.

Executive Assistant to Superintendent:

1. From the District offices, direct all District office staff;
2. Establish and maintain lines of communication between the District and the emergency site. For off campus emergencies, lines of communication must be established for the involved school, as well. Such lines of communication may also include couriers;
3. Manage the teachers and classified staff from the District office;
4. Assign resources (persons and materials) to various sites for specific needs;
5. Communicate with other schools in the District during the emergency period; and

6. Arrange for the delivery of outside services and materials needed for the management of the emergency.

Administrator designated by the Superintendent:

1. Establish and implement a plan for the crisis. Form and coordinate crisis teams with the Counselor;
2. Maintain an active file of helping agencies within the community. The names of contact persons will be included;
3. Maintain an active file of community persons, such as counselors, doctors, psychologists, and ministers. Information regarding services and follow-up services will be included;
4. Create letters to notify parents of continuing care that is available to students. Available care will include local and State agencies, as well as school-based care;
5. Develop an information sheet for parents, teachers, and others. Information will include topics such as talking with students, signs of depression, and others relating to crisis stress.
6. Develop a schedule for activities for the first day of school following the crisis with support services.
7. Maintain follow-up activities such as referrals for help outside the school services setting;
8. Report immediately to the local hospital if students or adults are being sent to that hospital for treatment. If more than one hospital is admitting students or adults, coordinate communication among those hospitals and the District. Assign and direct other District staff to assist in those hospitals;
9. Coordinate communication between the hospital and the District office;
10. Meet and talk with the parents of students and spouses of adults who have been admitted to the hospital; and
11. Be aware of the requirements of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act and provide all appropriate information based on those requirements.

Administrator designated by the Superintendent:

1. Develop plans and scenarios in which District technological resources can be dispersed effectively to emergency sites;
2. Handle overflow telephone calls at the emergency site;
3. Make recommendations regarding the restarting of school activities from support services;
4. Serve as a liaison between the emergency school site and the emergency support teams that may be needed;

5. Coordinate and direct communication between the emergency site and county and State agencies;
6. Obtain and direct the placement of generators when power must be restored for a temporary period;
7. Coordinate and direct the acquisition of water when there is a disruption of water and sewer services;
8. Coordinate and direct contact with emergency medical services, local police and sheriff's departments, fire departments, and the highway patrol;
9. Coordinate and direct search-and-rescue operations when needed;
10. Supervise the use of the school computer system for communication with the District office and electronic bulletin board system;
11. As needed, report various sites involved in the communication system if there are problems in that system; and
12. Provide technical support for all communications hardware and software.

Administrator designated by the Superintendent:

1. Plan and initiate arrangements for food for building personnel;
2. Notify risk management of the emergency;
3. Coordinate with director of transportation as needed; and
4. Arrange for the payment of monies needed to respond to emergency situations. Authorize purchases and payments for such resources.

Director of Community Relations:

1. Collect and disseminate information to the media. Be aware of deadlines, the need for information accuracy, and other issues related to the media and the performance of their jobs;
2. Plan and coordinate press interviews to help the news media meet deadlines;
3. Create and disseminate press releases;
4. Respond to rumors through the dissemination of accurate information;
5. Organize a network of key people, such as police, fire, and health authorities, within the community through which accurate information can be disseminated;
6. Be aware of the requirements of the Freedom of Information Act and provide all appropriate information based on those requirements;
7. Plan and coordinate live and taped presentations. Press conferences can go out live. Updates for the public can be taped and aired as needed;
8. Coordinate information to be shared with school and District personnel during and after the crisis;
9. Act as a liaison between the media and District personnel whose attention must be focused on the immediate problems of managing the crisis without constant interruption;
10. Arrange interviews for the media with key school and District staff who are involved in the emergency or who act as spokespersons for the District; and
11. Establish and maintain a clearinghouse for calls and requests from schools, the community, parents, and the media and refer those to the appropriate person or place.

Principals:

In the event of a school crisis:

1. Be familiar with central office support available to principals;
2. Be responsible for following the designated plans and working in conjunction with other administrators, crisis team members, and the Superintendent in implementing and revising this plan as needed; and
3. Make a school crisis plan, crisis management handbook, and emergency management kit readily available to appropriate staff.

In the event of District crisis:

1. Remain at your respective school until the end of the school day;
2. When all students and staff members have left campus for the day, be prepared to report to the assistant superintendent; and
3. Perform tasks assigned by the assistant superintendent.

Procedure History:

Promulgated on: May 15, 2017

Reviewed on: March 20, 2023