

MARYLAND CENTER for SCHOOL SAFETY

January 2026

Standard Response Protocols for Consideration

The following information and terms align with the [“I Love You Guys” Standard Response Protocol program](#).¹ The State promotes the use of the “I Love You Guys Foundation” standard response protocols. Schools that have not yet adopted these terms will need to analyze the actions within this document to determine alignment with their systems corresponding term.

In the event of large gatherings or disruptions adjacent to school property, local officials should consider the following protocols to maintain safety and operational continuity.

Protocol SECURE

Typical Duration: hours to days

A **SECURE** status necessitates that all staff and students move inside the building and exterior doors are locked. All outside activities, such as recess, physical education, outdoor learning, or student open campus privileges, are suspended and must be conducted inside the school building. During a SECURE status, normal operations continue inside the building with open halls; however, all exterior doors are locked and closely monitored by designated personnel. The level of restrictiveness of entry and departure is dependent upon the circumstances.

SECURE is an appropriate consideration when external circumstances may present an unsafe situation that could impact students and school staff. Generally, SECURE is used out of an abundance of caution while allowing typical operations to continue inside the school building.

Protocol HOLD

Typical Duration: minutes to hours

A **HOLD** status requires students to remain in a defined physical space inside the building. School leaders should determine the most appropriate holding location, which could be the students' current location or a designated space, such as their homeroom or advisory. Students and staff will remain there until further directions are given.

HOLD is an appropriate consideration when adults may need to provide unforeseen directions to students and school staff with little notice, as it minimizes the potential for students to be in transition when a direction is given. HOLD may also be considered when students are typically allowed open campus privileges, such as leaving school grounds for lunch or to attend dual enrollment classes, and school officials are attempting to alter these privileges to keep them safe from events happening in the adjacent community.

¹ For additional school safety information <https://schoolsafety.maryland.gov/Pages/MCSS-EM.aspx>.



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Additional Considerations

When school leadership anticipate impacts to normal operations, establishing clear protocols in advance empower school staff, students, and families to feel confident and capable in their ability to respond effectively.

Impact of Road Closure

Road closures near the school can make it difficult for buses and cars to get around, impacting how students and staff arrive or leave.

- Morning Supervision: Road closures can prevent staff from reaching their morning posts on time. School administrators may need to quickly reassign staff to cover student supervision and start the instructional day.
- Traffic Flow: Local law enforcement assistance may be helpful to maintain the flow of buses and private vehicles into and out of the school campus.
- Staggered Dismissal: For larger schools, letting students go in waves (staggered dismissal) can help manage changes in traffic flow.

Exterior School Campus Unverified Vehicle or Adult

When there is increased activity in the surrounding neighborhood, unfamiliar people or vehicles may be noticed near the school.

- Police Support: Ask local law enforcement to check on any vehicles or people that are unfamiliar or shouldn't be on the school campus.
- Staff Coordination: System security personnel can be moved to specific schools to help monitor the outside campus and manage doors during use of a SECURE protocol.
- Avoid Confrontation: School staff should stay inside and not feel like they have to go outside to confront strangers on campus.
- Clear Identification: If circumstances require a school official to approach a vehicle or person outside, they should clearly identify themselves using an ID badge and visible clothing—like a vest or jacket—that shows their name and role, such as "Principal" or "Security".

The landscape of school safety is continuously evolving, shaped by shifting trends and security challenges. Nationwide, schools face an array of complex issues that necessitate a proactive approach to student and staff safety. It is essential that schools maintain documented, tested, and clearly communicated emergency plans and procedures in order to maintain a safe, healthy, and supportive environment conducive to learning.

