

Maryland Public School Critical Life-Threatening Incident After-Action Summary Report

This report has been compiled in response to a life-threatening incident that occurred on public school grounds. The report includes lessons learned and recommendations identified following a local review of the incident and is aimed at identifying ways to improve the safety of Maryland public schools.

MARYLAND CENTER for SCHOOL SAFETY

Education Article § 7-1502(g)(21) (MSAR #11851)

Education Article §7-1510(g)(3) (MSAR #11594)

COMAR 14.40.05

School Year: 2023-2024

Submitted: February 6, 2023

MARYLAND CENTER for SCHOOL SAFETY

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February 6, 2024

The Honorable Wes Moore
Governor
100 State Circle
Annapolis, MD 21401

The Honorable William C. Ferguson IV
President
Senate of Maryland
State House, H-107
Annapolis, MD 21401

The Honorable Adrienne A. Jones
Speaker
House of Delegates
State House, H-101
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: Critical Life Threatening Incident Report required by Education Article § 7-1502(g)(21) (MSAR #11851) and Education Article §7-1510(g)(3) (MSAR #11594)

Dear Governor Moore, President Ferguson, and Speaker Jones:

Pursuant to Education Article § 7-1502(g)(21), Education Article §7-1510(g)(3), and State Government Article §2-1257, the Maryland Center for School Safety (MCSS) respectfully submits the following report, which contains identified lessons learned and school safety recommendations following a critical life-threatening incident on public school grounds.

If you have any questions about this report or would like additional information, please contact MCSS Deputy Director, J. Dino Pignataro at joseph.pignataro@maryland.gov or 410-281-2335.

Sincerely,



Kate Bryan
Executive Director



Maryland Public School Critical Life-Threatening Incident After-Action Summary

On October 27, 2023 there was an incident within Baltimore City Public Schools (BCPS) that met the criteria to be considered a *Critical Life-Threatening Incident* pursuant to Md. Ed. Art. § 7-1510 (g) and COMAR 14.40.05.

Notification [COMAR 14.40.05.04A]

On October 30, 2023 staff notified the Maryland Center for School Safety (MCSS) of the incident.

After-Action Meeting [COMAR 14.40.05.04B]

On November 27, 2023 an after-action meeting was held involving school representatives, law enforcement, and representatives from MCSS.

After-Action Report [COMAR 14.40.05.04C]

On January 11, 2024 BCPS submitted an after-action report to MCSS.

Lessons Learned

Based upon the after-action review led by BCPS, the following lessons learned were identified by individuals participating in the after-action meeting:

1. The school utilized one door as both the entry and exit points during the reunification process, which led to bottlenecks. Schools should pre-identify alternate locations that can be used when reunifying students with their parents.
2. This incident took place at the beginning of the school day, when many students were entering the building. In response to the incident, the school initiated their lockdown¹ protocol, which created confusion and led to some students and staff being unsure of what to do. School lockdown procedures should include procedures for actions to be taken when schools are opening or dismissing.

¹ Lockdown is a protocol that is used to ensure students and staff secure themselves in a classroom or other location that can be locked to prevent access by an intruder. Lockdown typically includes procedures to turn off lights, turn off sounds from phones, and remaining quiet.

School Safety Recommendations

1. All schools should include reunification exercises in their annual emergency preparedness training and exercise schedules. These exercises not only prepare students and staff for a crisis but allow schools to evaluate and refine their emergency procedures. Practicing in all forms (i.e., discussions, drills, full-scale exercises) can help participants test plans and identify gaps in their planning assumptions (e.g., alternate early release locations).
2. Effective emergency response begins with well planned and practiced command and control of any incident. National standards including the National Incident Management System (NIMS) and Incident Command System (ICS)² provide guidelines on the organizational structure and incident management operations that can be used in an incident of any size or complexity. As such, schools should pre-designate members of the school or school system to serve on the incident command team or within the incident's unified command, as appropriate. The pre-identification of an incident commander or unified command representative is critical for effective incident response. The school and school system should work closely with responding agencies as they develop their emergency response plans and conduct regular discussion and operations-based exercises that allow the school and system to test their plans and response of the school and partner agencies to all-hazards.
3. Local Education Agencies (LEAs) across the State would benefit from implementing common response and reunification protocols. Similar to national standards like NIMS, which recommends the use of "shared vocabulary, systems, and processes,"³ the use of common terms (i.e., Hold, Secure, Lockdown, Evacuate, and Shelter)⁴ across school officials, emergency responders, students and parents is critical to an effective response.

² National Incident Management System, Federal Emergency Management Agency, October 2017 (3rd Edition), https://www.fema.gov/sites/default/files/2020-07/fema_nims_doctrine-2017.pdf.

³ *Id.* at 1.

⁴ MCSS recommends schools and school systems adopt the "I Love U Guys" Foundation's programs for crisis response and post-crisis reunification. These programs are used in more than 45,000 schools, districts, departments, agencies, organizations and communities around the world. They are created through the research-based best practices of school administrators, psychologists, public space safety experts, families, and first responders. <https://iloveuguy.org/The-Standard-Reunification-Method.html>