

# **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: December 13, 2023**

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December 13, 2023

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](mailto:joseph.pignataro@maryland.gov) or 410-281-2335.

Sincerely,



Kate Bryan  
Executive Director



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

On September 6, 2023, there was a threat within a Wicomico County Public School (WCPS) 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 September 6, 2023, the WCPS staff notified the Maryland Center for School Safety (MCSS) of the incident.

### **After-Action Meeting** [COMAR 14.40.05.04B]

On September 8, 2023, an after-action meeting was held involving school representatives, law enforcement, and a representative from MCSS.

### **After-Action Report** [COMAR 14.40.05.04C]

On November 9, 2023, WCPS submitted an after-action report to MCSS.

### **Lessons Learned**

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

1. The school's efforts to encourage students to report behaviors of concern proved effective in this situation as students reported a threat to school administrators, allowing them to locate and address the threat immediately. The incident was resolved quickly without creating undue fear among parents, staff, and students because students chose to inform trusted adults in the school, and those adults took immediate action.
2. The school emergency plan was activated, and the "Hold"<sup>1</sup> status was implemented. Classroom teachers and other school staff followed the "Hold" procedure, continuing to provide instruction to students in their current location. Using the "Hold" status was

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<sup>1</sup> Hold is the standard response protocol that notifies students and staff to remain in their current classroom and continue business as usual until an "all clear" is announced  
<https://iloveguys.org/The-Standard-Response-Protocol.html>.

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critical to minimize students' movement outside of secured classrooms, potentially placing them in harm's way while staff located and addressed the threat. There was only a minimal disruption to the instructional school day because of the incident.

3. Procedures should be developed and reviewed to ensure steps are taken to mitigate any residual impact of securing an individual who posed or instigated a threat. School officials should be prepared to de-escalate behaviors from others during a response, including students, and adults.

## School Safety Recommendations

1. School leaders and school security officials should be familiar with an established procedure for quickly and safely locating and containing an individual, student, or adult who poses a threat to the school community. This procedure should take into consideration methods for engaging with the individual when they are in various locations (classroom, hallway, school bus, outdoors, lunch room, gym, etc), determining what school officials are best suited to engage with the individual, and identifying areas of the building that are best suited to safely hold an individual that may pose a threat during an investigation or while awaiting law enforcement support.
2. During any emergency situation, emotions of fear and anger run high and will manifest in different ways for students, staff, and caregivers. It is important for school leaders and school security officials to be proactive in coordinating efforts to engage with those individuals who are likely to respond negatively during and after an emergency. Some things to consider include;
  - a. Recognizing in advance who may need special attention following an emergency event, for example, students, staff, and caregivers who have previously been involved in an emergency event or were the victim of violence.
  - b. Identifying adults such as caregivers, spouses, or other adults with a history of negative interactions with school officials or law enforcement that may have a direct nexus to the initial event.
  - c. Current students who have a close alliance with a student impacted in the initial event or feel passionately about a dynamic that played out during the event, for example, the involvement of law enforcement.
3. Maryland schools and school systems should continuously encourage students to immediately report safety concerns to a trusted adult or through a 24/7 reporting system like [Safe Schools Maryland](#). Information on reporting methods should be available on the school and system webpage, in newsletters, print materials disseminated, and any other means to ensure a wide distribution. These materials should be accessible and available to the public in multiple languages.



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4. Threat reporting and communication protocols, which allow rapid notification to critical staff and law enforcement, should be tested regularly to ensure designated individuals know how to respond. School leaders should participate with their school security officials and local law enforcement officers, providing adequate coverage in discussion and operational-based exercises<sup>2</sup> that test their response to school threats. Additionally, school and systems leaders should develop a mechanism to track corrective actions to completion following these exercises to ensure identified problem areas are addressed.

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<sup>2</sup> “Discussion-based exercises include seminars, workshops, tabletop exercises (TTXs), and games. These types of exercises familiarize players with or develop new plans, policies, procedures, and agreements ... [and] focus on strategic, policy-oriented issues.” FEMA, Homeland Security Exercise Evaluation Program (2020), <https://www.fema.gov/sites/default/files/2020-04/Homeland-Security-Exercise-and-Evaluation-Program-Doctrine>.

