

April 17, 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  
Maryland 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 §7-1501(g)(3) (MSAR #11594)

Dear Governor Moore, President Ferguson, and Speaker Jones:

Pursuant to Education Article §7-1502(g)(21), Education Article §7-1501(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.

Any questions related to this report or for 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 December 8, 2022 there was an incident of physical harm to a student involving a school within Prince George's County Public Schools (PGCPS) 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 December 8, 2022, the (PGCPS) School Security Coordinator (SSC) notified the Maryland Center for School Safety of the incident.

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

On January 20, 2023, an after-action meeting was held involving the PGCPS system and school representatives, law enforcement, and representatives from MCSS.

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

On March 21, 2023, PGCPS submitted an after-action report to MCSS.

#### **Lessons Learned**

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

1. The PGCPS school system emergency management plans include procedures for communicating critical information to parents and the media as well as procedures for reunifying students with their families. However, this incident highlighted the need for schools to be prepared to handle an unplanned and rapid influx of parents and media to a school. Without an established and practiced procedure to swiftly communicate to parents and media information about the incident--including a location they should go to receive the most accurate and up to date information--schools may end up having to manage a second emergency.
2. The PGCPS school system emergency management plans include

procedures to lockdown<sup>1</sup> the school in response to a potentially life-threatening incident. However, PGCPs recognizes the need for schools to have multiple response protocol options that allow for the school campus to transition to an option less restrictive than lockdown. For example, school hallways and other areas may need to remain off limits to ensure officials can continue investigation, but once there is no longer an immediate threat to life-safety, schools should consider moving to less restrictive protocol. In particular, operation of the food service program during emergency responses other than a lockdown could and should take place. If students are in their classrooms for a hold or secure response that extends into a meal time, food service should be considered, especially for those students that have special medical concerns.

Therefore, staff should be trained in how to utilize the least disruptive and appropriate response, as well as how to transition between different response protocols (e.g., hold, secure, lockdown) as an event unfolds. When a school does not transition properly through the levels of response protocols or does not use the proper level of response for an incident, they risk unintended consequences including unnecessary loss of instruction time, inaccurate implementation of a protocol, and desensitization to the serious nature of a lockdown protocol.

3. PGCPs recognizes the need for schools to be mindful of areas of the school campus where there are no effective ways to visually monitor activity. The use of cameras, and elimination of visual barriers, including landscaping and structures, can improve sightlines and help staff monitor the safety of all areas of the school campus.

## **School Safety Recommendations**

1. School leaders should lead monthly discussions reviewing safety procedures with all employees. The continued reinforcement will build muscle memory that staff can draw upon in times of emergency. Conducting tabletop exercises to test plans and staff's knowledge of plans should be part of this process. Additionally, school staff should be provided the opportunity to assume different roles during these exercises to practice various responsibilities and be prepared to respond to various types of emergency situations.

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<sup>1</sup> Lockdown is a procedure 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 procedures include procedures to turn off lights, turn off sounds from phones, and remaining quiet.

2. A family notification location,<sup>2</sup> which may or may not be the future reunification site, should be established early on in an incident as a method of directing caregivers to gather at a physical location. Because some responses may include numerous officials and lots of equipment coming to the school campus, schools should consider selecting notification and reunification locations away from the school. Additionally, media should be provided a separate location--away from families--that allows them to receive incident information directly from school and jurisdiction officials.
3. Communication plans for sending emergency notifications and providing timely information updates to various stakeholder groups *must* include specific procedures for individuals to follow including who, how, when, and where. It is recommended that schools develop and use templates and statements prepared in advance to facilitate speed and thoughtful messaging.

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<sup>2</sup> Notification centers allow caregivers to receive accurate information directly from school officials in a controlled location and provides school personnel the opportunity to address misinformation immediately.