

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. It includes lessons learned and recommendations identified following a local review of the incident and aims to identify ways to improve the safety of Maryland public schools.

MARYLAND CENTER for SCHOOL SAFETY

Education Article § 7-1502(g)(21)

Education Article §7-1510(g)

COMAR 14.40.05.04

School Year: 2024-2025

Submitted: January 30, 2025

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January 30, 2025

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), Education Article §7-1510(g) (MSAR #11594), and COMAR § 14.40.05.04 (MSAR #15583).

Dear Governor Moore, President Ferguson, and Speaker Jones:

Pursuant to Education Article § 7-1502(g)(21), Education Article §7-1510(g), and State Government Article §2-1257, and COMAR § 14.40.05.04, 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 want additional information, please contact Joseph 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 September 6, 2024, an incident occurred within Harford County Public Schools (HCPS) that met the criteria for being considered a *Critical Life-Threatening Incident* under Md. Ed. Art. § 7-1510 (g) and COMAR 14.40.05.

The following serve as preliminary findings. *MCSS is continuing to engage with local officials to obtain additional information to inform lessons learned and recommendations. Upon completion, an amended report will follow.*

Notification [COMAR 14.40.05.04A]

On September 6, 2024, the HCPS staff notified the Maryland Center for School Safety of the incident.

After-Action Meeting [COMAR 14.40.05.04B]

On October 1, 2024, an after-action meeting involving school representatives, law enforcement, EMS, fire departments, an MSDE representative, and MCSS representatives was held.

After-Action Report [COMAR 14.40.05.04C]

On December 17, 2024, HCPS submitted an after-action report to MCSS.

Lessons Learned

Based upon the after-action review led by Harford County's Department of Emergency Services, the following lessons learned related to operational coordination and communication were identified by individuals participating in the after-action meeting:

1. The review highlighted the need for a clearer understanding of individual roles and responsibilities within an incident command system (ICS) structure, specifically regarding the identification of the entities necessary to staff unified command. A pre-planned, clear, and practiced ICS framework, developed in collaboration with responders and school leaders, would facilitate clear lines of communication and ensure consistent dissemination of critical information.



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2. The safe and rapid reunification of students with their families is paramount. To achieve this, law enforcement and school personnel must proactively collaborate to develop a comprehensive reunification plan. This collaboration should focus on identifying best practices for reunification, establishing clear roles and responsibilities, and defining a coordinated approach. Crucially, this interagency collaboration should result in pre-established protocols that are not only documented but also regularly tested and refined through drills and exercises. This proactive approach ensures that all stakeholders are familiar with the plan and prepared to execute it effectively in the event of an incident.
3. First responders, including police, fire, EMS, and other relevant agencies, should be provided with the most current Emergency Operations Plans (EOPs) for every school. These plans should be updated and disseminated to first responders at least every two years or more frequently as needed to reflect changes in school layout, security protocols, or contact information. Providing updated EOPs ensures that first responders are thoroughly familiar with each school's specific standard response protocols, designated evacuation and reunification sites (primary and secondary), access points, potential hazards, and other pertinent information. Plans should be readily accessible to first responders, both in physical and digital formats, to facilitate rapid access during an emergency situation.

School Safety Recommendations

1. Local Education Agencies (LEAs) should establish and maintain a collaborative partnership with their respective response agencies (including law enforcement, fire departments, EMS, and other relevant agencies) for all aspects of school emergency preparedness and response. This partnership should encompass joint facility assessments to identify vulnerabilities and inform mitigation strategies, collaborative development of comprehensive and site-specific Emergency Operations Plans (EOPs) that address a range of potential emergencies, and regular multi-agency exercises and drills to test and refine these plans. These collaborative efforts should focus on clearly defining roles, responsibilities, and communication procedures for all school staff and responding agencies, supporting interoperable communication systems and a coordinated response.
2. LEAs should develop crisis communication templates that clearly describe the various school response protocols (e.g., lockdown, shelter-in-place) and share these templates with responding public safety agencies. This ensures consistent terminology among the school, school system, and response agencies when communicating about school actions during emergencies.



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3. A critical aspect of crisis response is the safe and accountable reunification of students with their parents or guardians during a school crisis or emergency. The Standard Reunification Method¹ provides school and district safety teams with proven methods for planning, practicing, and executing successful reunifications. This method emphasizes clear procedures, designated reunification sites, and staff responsibilities to facilitate efficient reunification of families.
4. Effective emergency response begins with well-planned and practiced command and control. National standards, including the National Incident Management System (NIMS) and the Incident Command System (ICS),² provide guidelines for the organizational structure and incident management operations applicable to incidents of any size or complexity. Therefore, schools should pre-designate school or school system members to serve on the incident command team or within the incident's unified command, as appropriate. Pre-identifying an incident commander or unified command representative is critical for effective incident response.
5. Schools should establish a site-specific chain of command to outline clear responsibilities, ensure efficient communication, and enhance order and control in an evolving situation. This designated chain of command should be clearly documented and readily accessible to all staff members. Schools should regularly practice executing their chain of command through discussion-based exercises,³ drills, and ongoing professional development sessions to ensure familiarity and effective implementation during a crisis.

¹ MCSS recommends schools and school systems adopt the "I Love U Guys" Foundation's programs for post-crisis reunification <https://iloveguys.org/The-Standard-Reunification-Method.html>

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 "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://emilms.fema.gov/is_0011a/groups/94.html

