

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

This report, compiled in response to a life-threatening incident on public school grounds, details lessons learned and recommendations gathered from a local review to enhance 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: June 18, 2025

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June 18, 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 would like 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 January 23, 2025 there was an incident within Anne Arundel County Public Schools (AACPS) 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 January 23, 2025 the AACPS staff notified the Maryland Center for School Safety (MCSS) of the incident.

After-Action Meeting [COMAR 14.40.05.04B]

On January 28, 2025 an after-action meeting was held involving school representatives, law enforcement, and representatives from MCSS.

After-Action Report [COMAR 14.40.05.04C]

On May 7, 2025 AACPS submitted an after-action report to MCSS.

Lessons Learned

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

1. Dispatching a senior executive to an incident site as a liaison to the school system significantly improves communication and coordination during emergencies. This executive presence allows the building administrative team to focus on the students and staff, relieving them of communication burdens with the central office. With sufficient organizational authority, an on-site senior executive can implement directives and quickly relay real-time information to the Central Office. This unified coordination, including proactive monitoring of public safety radio communications, leads to improved information exchange, expedited resource allocation, and rapid, accurate dissemination of information to parents and the public regarding the incident and school status. Ultimately, on-site leadership and direct communication with the central office streamlines operations, facilitates



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student needs, manages campus access, and helps maintain operational continuity throughout an incident.

2. The use of the "hold-in-place" posture allowed halls to remain clear for the investigation to proceed while minimizing trauma often associated with a full "lockdown." This approach isolates students with teachers in smaller groups to continue instruction and enables administrative staff and police to focus on locating and addressing the problem.
3. The incident highlighted the inherent challenge schools face in preventing pre-arranged interpersonal conflicts among youth. These conflicts often lack obvious precursors or reporting, making them difficult to detect through traditional safety measures. The issue is further exacerbated by the influence of social media, which can facilitate the arrangement of such conflicts and contribute to the impulsiveness of participants. The unwillingness of participants to disclose their intent or bystanders to report significantly inhibits the ability of schools to determine patterns or implement meaningful preventative strategies. This points to a critical gap in proactive intervention when conflicts are pre-planned and not reported to school leaders.
4. The presence of the police Crisis Intervention Team to attend to staff mental and emotional health needs post-incident was identified as a valuable resource. A police Crisis Intervention Team is particularly important for adults because school personnel are generally not qualified to provide support and trauma counseling for adult staff members. Therefore, this team serves as an important resource in the school system's recovery plan by addressing the mental and emotional health needs of staff following critical incidents.

School Safety Recommendations

1. School systems that formalize and regularly test multi-agency response plans are better-positioned to respond during real emergencies. By establishing and rehearsing how the organizations will communicate with each other and what roles each involved department and external partner (e.g., law enforcement, emergency medical services) will serve, schools and responders can build and sustain capabilities to effectuate the seamless flow of information and multi-agency coordination, particularly during large-scale incidents. Regular exercises involving all internal and external stakeholders should be part of schools' comprehensive preparedness strategy to test and refine a coordinated response.



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2. School systems should prioritize and practice a range of emergency response protocols beyond "lockdown". Many incidents can be effectively managed using "hold" and "secure" protocols, which offer significant benefits over "lockdown" in scenarios where a threat is contained or under investigation. Training for school leaders and staff should cover the nuanced application of these protocols, including how to continue to manage student and staff needs while appropriately restricting movement. This approach can minimize the psychological impact on individuals while simultaneously maintaining safety and facilitating investigative efforts.
3. Preventing pre-arranged interpersonal conflicts among youth, particularly those exacerbated through social media, necessitates a multi-faceted approach. Schools should continue fostering strong, trusting adult-student relationships and mentorship opportunities, creating environments where students feel comfortable confiding in adults about brewing conflicts. Alongside this, schools must aggressively promote easily accessible and highly trusted anonymous reporting systems, educating students on their purpose and building confidence in reporting concerns, even about planned violence. Concurrently, incorporating positive digital citizenship and media literacy programs into the curriculum can teach responsible social media use, highlight the consequences of online conflict escalation, and address the dangers of recording and distributing violent incidents, thereby countering impulsiveness and fostering a greater understanding of real-world repercussions. Furthermore, expanding social-emotional learning (SEL) and conflict resolution programs equips students with vital skills in emotional regulation, empathy, and peaceful dispute resolution, offering alternatives to physical confrontations. Finally, enhancing the capabilities of school-based threat assessment teams to identify and intervene with students exhibiting behaviors indicative of escalating conflict, even subtle ones, is crucial for proactive intervention.
4. School systems must recognize the importance of providing dedicated mental and emotional health support for adult staff members following critical incidents. Given that school system personnel are generally not qualified to offer specialized intervention or trauma counseling to adults, partnerships with external resources, such as a police Crisis Intervention Team or other qualified mental health professionals, are invaluable. Therefore, school systems should establish formal agreements that provide immediate and ongoing access to professional mental and emotional health services for all adult staff impacted by critical incidents, making such support a cornerstone of the system's comprehensive recovery plan.

