

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: June 13, 2025

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June 13, 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



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

On April 02, 2025 there was an incident within Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) 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 April 02, 2025, MCPS staff notified the Maryland Center for School Safety of the incident.

After-Action Meeting [COMAR 14.40.05.04B]

On April 29, 2025, 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 April 30, 2025, MCPS submitted an after-action report to MCSS.

Lessons Learned

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

1. Following the discovery of a student's injury, school security personnel promptly initiated treatment and alerted emergency services. Within approximately five minutes, school administrators activated the shelter-in-place protocol. Subsequently, after an initial investigation, the school transitioned to a lockdown state nineteen minutes later. To expedite the implementation of emergency procedures, schools should ensure staff receive comprehensive and recurring training on protocols that mandate immediate action upon discovering a serious injury or violent incident.
2. While law enforcement was contacted and arrived swiftly, no officers were present at the school during the incident. Subsequently, the immediate cleanup of the scene by building services staff potentially hindered evidence collection.



Additionally, the lack of a Community Engagement Officer¹ on campus at the time may have contributed to delays in the investigation and response.

3. Prompt communication updates using pre-scripted emergency messages were sent to the school community through various channels during the lockdown. The front office efficiently managed inquiries from parents and the media by using pre-prepared scripts. However, an unanticipated media presence at the school emphasized the need for school emergency communication plans to include specific procedures for handling media during incidents. These protocols should involve designated on-site staff who can set up an off-campus media staging area.
4. An immediate post-incident debriefing, or "hotwash," is crucial for evaluating event performance and emergency plan effectiveness from multiple viewpoints. This timely review allows for fresh perspectives and can lead to necessary updates in emergency plans or identify areas for additional staff training.

School Safety Recommendations

1. To ensure the swift implementation of school emergency procedures, school systems should implement local policies requiring all school staff, including teachers, administrators, support staff, and security personnel, undergo annual, comprehensive training. This training should reinforce protocols for immediate action upon discovering a serious injury or violent incident, thereby increasing the safety of students and staff even while more information is being gathered. It should also cover clear distinctions and activation triggers for "shelter-in-place" versus "lockdown" protocols, and delineate the roles and responsibilities of all staff during various emergency scenarios. A standardized curriculum, incorporating practical drills and tabletop exercises, should be developed.
2. School leaders should receive training on how to preserve potential crime scenes following incidents. Keeping an incident area undisturbed is paramount to maintaining the integrity of crucial evidence. By treating the scene as a crime scene and ensuring it remains unaltered until cleared by law enforcement, schools directly support the investigative process. This careful preservation prevents the loss, contamination, or alteration of physical evidence, which can be vital for understanding the sequence of events and ultimately aiding in successful investigations.

¹ Education Article §7-1501(j) of the Maryland Annotated Code defines School Resource Officers (SROs). In Montgomery County, these officers are known as Community Engagement Officers.

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3. School systems should develop and implement comprehensive emergency communication plans that extend beyond internal procedures. These plans should include pre-scripted messages for parents and the general public, ensuring the community is effectively informed about emergency events, school status, and the meaning of specific terms like "shelter-in-place." To enhance efficiency during incidents, scripts for front office staff are an effective tool for managing incoming calls. Furthermore, communication plans should include clear procedures for managing media presence during school emergencies, assigning on-scene responsibility for establishing an off-campus media staging area.
4. A hotwash is an informal, immediate post-event debrief focused on initial observations and immediate issues with direct participants, whereas an After-Action Review (AAR)² is a more formal, structured, and comprehensive analysis conducted to identify longer-term improvements and often includes a wider range of stakeholders. Both are crucial for enhancing preparedness and response plans by identifying what worked and what needs improvement in emergency procedures, ultimately leading to more effective future responses. These reviews are vital for identifying gaps in protocols and procedures, enabling schools to refine existing safety measures and communication channels. Schools should conduct immediate hotwashes while events are still fresh in the minds of those involved and follow them with a more formal and comprehensive review at a later time. MCSS has created an online tool to facilitate after-action reviews for schools in response to events or emergencies of varying scales.

² AARs are required to be conducted by public schools following any critical life-threatening incident, Md. Ed. Art. § 7-1510 (g) and COMAR 14.40.05. MCSS has created an online tool and resources, <https://schoolsafety.maryland.gov/Pages/RES-AAR.aspx>, to support local schools in the conduct of these reviews.

