

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: April 24, 2024

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April 24, 2024

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 Hogan, 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 or 410-281-2335.

Sincerely,



Kate Bryan
Executive Director



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

On October 18, 2023 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 October 19, 2023 the MCPS staff notified the Maryland Center for School Safety of the incident.

After-Action Meeting [COMAR 14.40.05.04B]

On December 01, 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 March 21, 2024 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. Threats to schools are often made over social media platforms. It is crucial for schools to monitor online platforms and prompt bystanders to report threats made against the school. These actions play a key role in swiftly investigating threats to the school, improving student welfare, and preventing violence on school grounds.
2. Effective management of responses to threats or emergencies relies heavily on clear and frequent communication with the school community before, during, and after an incident. For this communication to be effective, it is crucial schools use multilingual messages when communicating with their school community.
3. Emergencies vary, so schools need to be prepared to adjust parent-child reunification procedures and other emergency response protocols quickly.



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Moreover, school emergency plans should incorporate and regularly test designated primary and backup reunification sites in preparation for different emergency situations, which will improve the response to emergencies.

4. Regular communication with parents and the school community about safety protocols and emergency responses in schools can significantly improve trust and foster cooperation during crises. By keeping these vital lines of communication open, we not only reassure those concerned about the well-being of students but also strengthen the collective response to unforeseen events.

School Safety Recommendations

1. Communication plans for sending emergency notifications and providing timely information updates to various stakeholder groups should include specific procedures for individuals to follow. It is recommended that schools develop and use templates and statements prepared in advance to facilitate speed and thoughtful messaging. As appropriate, these templates should be drafted in multiple languages to ensure they are accessible to the entire school community.
2. Implementing standardized response and reunification protocols across schools statewide could significantly enhance safety and efficiency during emergencies. Similar to the principles of the National Incident Management System (NIMS), which emphasizes the importance of a “shared vocabulary, systems, and processes,” utilizing common procedures and terminology, such as *Hold, Secure, Lockdown, Evacuate, and Shelter*,¹ would greatly reduce confusion and facilitate a coordinated response, thereby potentially saving lives.
3. All schools should include reunification exercises in their annual emergency preparedness training and exercise schedules. These exercises not only prepare students and staff for a crisis but allow schools to evaluate and refine their emergency procedures. Practicing in all forms (e.g., discussions, drills, full-scale exercises) can help participants test plans and identify gaps in their planning assumptions like the need to pre-identify alternate on-site reunification locations.

¹ MCSS recommends schools and school systems adopt the “I Love U Guys” Foundation’s programs for crisis response and post-crisis reunification. These programs are used in more than 45,000 schools, districts, departments, agencies, organizations and communities around the world. They are created through the research-based best practices of school administrators, psychologists, public space safety experts, families, and first responders.

<https://iloveguys.org/The-Standard-Reunification-Method.html>



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410-281-2335 | schoolsafety.maryland.gov | school.safety@maryland.gov