

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 22, 2024

MARYLAND CENTER for SCHOOL SAFETY

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April 22, 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 26, 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 27, 2023 MCPS staff notified the Maryland Center for School Safety of the incident.

After-Action Meeting [COMAR 14.40.05.04B]

On December 1, 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. Initiating a school evacuation before involving law enforcement or emergency services can compromise the safety of the response efforts. Therefore, it is essential to ensure that all relevant authorities are informed and involved from the onset to prevent confusion and enhance the effectiveness of the response plan.
2. Insufficient fencing around school property might lead students to wander off the premises during a building evacuation, if left unsupervised. Additionally, the absence of these boundaries can pose challenges for staff in tracking the whereabouts and ensuring the safety of all students during and after an evacuation.
3. In the midst of the school's evacuation, it became apparent that the evacuation sites outlined in the school's emergency plan were located too close to the school premises to protect the well-being and safety of the students. This realization led to the decision that, to prioritize the safety of everyone involved, it was necessary to



relocate evacuees to an alternative location that was further away from the school. This adjustment was made to ensure that a safer and more secure distance should be maintained, thereby significantly reducing the risk to all individuals during the emergency response.

4. Following a school evacuation, the establishment of a structured reunification process for parents and students is a critical step in ensuring the safety and emotional well-being of all involved. Selecting the right location is essential to ensuring an effective reunification process. Pre-planning and testing of reunification plans and locations are essential steps in preparing for emergencies.

School Safety Recommendations

1. School safety plans must incorporate predefined procedures for effective communication and collaboration with law enforcement as soon as a threat is detected, aiming for a coordinated response to emergencies. It is crucial that these procedures are tested, refined and enhanced by conducting training and exercises and by identifying corrective actions to be implemented as part of improving preparedness.
2. Schools should conduct frequent tests of evacuation and other emergency response protocols. Drills and exercises are essential for testing the collaboration between schools and emergency responders in an effort to support a seamless response in times of crisis. Moreover, by regularly testing these protocols, schools can significantly minimize confusion and panic during actual emergencies, safeguarding both students and staff.
3. Schools are required to conduct regular physical assessments of their schools and school grounds. These assessments help schools identify issues with physical security, such as the need for fencing around the school perimeter, to control access and egress. Regulations should be established that include specific time-frames for when schools should be required to conduct these assessments.
4. 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 (i.e., discussions, drills, full-scale exercises) can help participants test plans and identify gaps in their planning assumptions (e.g., alternate reunification locations and managing large crowds).

