

A Parent's Guide Emergency Preparedness

INTRODUCTION

The Richmond Board of Education has as its highest priority the safety of students and staff, and upholds the duty of care that is expected from our school community. The district is responsible for ensuring that emergency management protocols are established, practiced and activated as required by provincial legislation and regulations.

Being ready to address different scenarios in collaboration with first responders and relevant community agencies takes considerable preparation on the part of school and district staff. The district engages with an ongoing emergency management cycle in order to provide thoughtful and effective emergency response to our schools. Each school has staff trained in how to manage situations that may arise, and are supported by district-based personnel.

This document is intended to familiarize parents with district emergency management protocols. A critical incident, disaster, or emergency is unpredictable and depending on the nature of the event, can have significant negative impact on those affected. Schools are places where emergency management protocols are critically important to the well-being of students and staff and to the confidence that parents and guardians have in entrusting their children to our care.

IMPORTANT DEFINITIONS

- **All-Hazard:** Any incident or event, natural or human caused, that requires an organized response by public, private, and/or governmental entity in order to protect life, public health and safety, and minimize any disruption of government, social, and economic services.
- **Critical Incident:** Any incident, whether natural or human-caused, that has a negative emotional impact on those affected resulting in a state of stress or discomfort and feelings of loss of control.
- **Disaster:** An event, generally considered to have an even greater impact than an emergency, caused by an accident, fire, explosion or technical failure, or by the forces of nature, and has resulted in serious harm to the health, safety and/or welfare of people, or in widespread damage to property.
- **Emergency:** An event or circumstance that is caused by accident, fire, explosion, technical failure, human action or force of nature, that requires prompt coordination of action or special regulation of persons or property to protect the health, safety or welfare and/or a person or to limit damage to property.
- **Emergency Management Cycle:** An ongoing process to prevent, prepare for, respond to, and recover from an incident.

DUTY OF CARE

The Supreme Court of Canada has articulated that “The standard of care to be exercised by school authorities in providing for the supervision and protection of students for whom they are responsible is that of a careful or prudent parent.”

In the event of an emergency, staff must ensure that students are cared for until they are safely reunited with their parents or guardians.

DISTRICT RESPONSE PROTOCOLS

The district models emergency response protocols on the British Columbia Emergency Response Management System (BCERMS) which outlines the following priorities:

- Keep students and staff safe.
- Make sure that staff understand clear and consistent standards and procedures to follow.
- Clearly define roles and responsibilities.
- Ensure that communications and protocol are aligned with community partners (e.g., First Responders).
- Minimize disruptions and return to normal as soon as possible.

The district follows the Ministry of Education's Emergency Management Planning Guide for Schools, Districts and Authorities which outlines key elements of the Emergency Management Cycle:

Pre-Event Planning

Effective emergency management begins with ongoing assessment, prevention, planning, and training in preparation for the potential of an emergency situation.

Emergency Event

In the event of an emergency, the district operationalizes the All-Hazards Approach to emergency management. The All-Hazards Approach incorporates five key responses that must be activated appropriately based on the context of an emergency.

Drop-Cover-Hold On

Activated in an event such as an earthquake, where the physical structure becomes unstable. Students and staff must go into a drop-cover-hold on position to reduce the risk of injury.

Evacuation

Activated when the building or area becomes unsafe. In an evacuation, students and staff are to leave the building and go to a previously identified location outside of the building. If it is safe to do so, students and staff are able to re-enter the building.

Shelter-in-Place

Activated when a situation outside of the school is not safe. For personal safety, it is important for students and staff to remain inside the school. Exterior doors are locked and monitored to allow students and staff to enter. Once inside, no one leaves the building.

Hold and Secure

Activated by the RCMP when it is necessary to secure the school because there is a security threat occurring in close proximity. Exterior doors are locked and monitored to allow students and staff to enter. Once inside, no one leaves the building.

Lockdown

Activated in response to a significant act or threat of violence. If a lockdown is initiated by the principal, 911 is contacted for immediate response from the RCMP and other support agencies as necessary. Exterior doors and interior classroom doors are locked and no individual is permitted in or out of any area. Only the RCMP are permitted access to the school until the lockdown is over.

Post-Event Recovery

The following elements will require attention post-event:

- Emotional and psychological supports.
- Physical and structural needs of district facilities.
- Continuity of operations(e.g., alternate site arrangements).
- Restoring learning.
- Debriefing to support moving forward.

Violence Threat Risk Assessment

The Violence Threat Risk Assessment Protocol is one important aspect of the Ministry of Education's Expect Respect & A Safe Education (erase) Strategy. The Board of Education and our community partners are committed to making our schools safe for all students, staff and community members. As a result, we are committed to responding in a multi-disciplinary approach to all student behaviours that pose a potential risk to self or other students, staff and members of the community.

WE ARE IN THIS TOGETHER

Together we must commit to intervening in all situations in which students may be posing a threat to themselves or others. Parents, staff, students, and community members must report threat-related behaviours to the principal and/or appropriate authorities such as the RCMP or Child and Youth Mental Health.

WHAT IS A THREAT?

A threat is any expression of intent to do harm or to act out violently.



WHO IS PART OF THE THREAT ASSESSMENT TEAM?

Each school has a threat assessment team that includes a school administrator and counsellor. Schools are further supported by district personnel, the RCMP, and other support agencies as appropriate.



WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF A THREAT ASSESSMENT?

- Ensure the safety of the school community
- Understand the context of the threat(s)
- Assess the factors contributing to the behaviours
- Develop an intervention plan



WHAT HAPPENS IN A THREAT ASSESSMENT PROCESS?

The assessment process starts with a commitment to address all threat-making behaviours. Parents and the student(s) involved will be interviewed to determine the level of risk, and to collaboratively develop an intervention plan to support any student(s) involved in threat-making behaviours. A support plan will also be developed to support anyone in the school community that has been impacted by the threat(s).

GATHERING OF INFORMATION

The district will gather information in compliance with privacy laws. Information gathering will only be undertaken when there is reasonable cause to believe that a risk exists. Relevant information collected as part of a threat assessment process may be provided to the RCMP.

ANNUAL EMERGENCY DRILLS

Emergency drills provide students and staff with time to practice the All-Hazards Approach to emergency management. Through these drills, students and staff acquire the knowledge required to respond quickly and confidently in the event of an emergency. Each year, the principal schedules and conducts the following emergency drills:

- Six evacuation fire drills.
- Three drop, cover, and hold on earthquake drills.
- Two lockdown/hold and secure drills.

HOW PARENTS CAN ASSIST

Parents play an important role in support of the School Emergency Management Plan (SEMP) by:

- Ensuring that they are aware of the School Emergency Management Plan (SEMP).
- Providing up-to-date information regarding contact medical, and student release information.
- Following the guidance provided when an emergency is taking place.
- Participating in drills or exercises related to emergency preparedness (including student release drills), when invited to do so by the principal.
- Encouraging their child to take drills seriously.
- Assisting with the acquisition and organization of emergency supplies on an ongoing basis.

WHEN AN EMERGENCY IS OCCURRING

Please do not go to your child's school unless requested to do so

Although your natural instincts in an emergency may be to go to the school to safeguard your child, please understand that doing so could impede the response to the situation. Going to the school may interfere with emergency and school personnel efforts to address the situation. Extra vehicles and people arriving on-site make the task more difficult. Please follow the instructions provided to you through the communication channels outlined below.

If you happen to arrive at the school in the midst of an emergency

Please respect the protocol(s) in progress. While it is understandable that personal circumstances or initial reactions might move you to do something contrary to the school's established procedures, staff cannot compromise the safety of others to accommodate individual requests, such as gaining access to the school during a lockdown.

Please do not call the school or your child's cell phone during an emergency

Staff need to remain available for handling emergency communications with first responders. In addition, calling your child's cell phone during an emergency may be putting them at higher risk by disclosing their location or drawing attention to them during a lockdown.

KEEPING PARENTS INFORMED DURING AN EMERGENCY

During a school-wide emergency, you are asked to not attend or contact your child's school. It is unlikely that you will be able to reach the school by phone. School personnel will be focusing all of their efforts on managing the complexities associated with the emergency. You can expect that the school will send notifications and regular updates by email to parents. As time permits and as appropriate, other forms of communication will be activated such as parent letters, web posts, phone communication, etc.

STUDENT REUNIFICATION PROTOCOL

The district has developed a Student Reunification Protocol to reunite children with their parents as quickly as possible subsequent to an emergency which requires the activation of the protocol. Parents are asked to adhere to the Reunification Protocol described below. It is not unusual for emotions to surface as a result of an emergency situation. Staff will work to ensure this protocol takes place without delay, and your cooperation when you arrive is essential. If for any reason, your child cannot be picked-up, they will remain under the supervision of school personnel until alternate arrangements can be made.

1. A designated Student Reunification Area will be established. Parents will be notified at the time of an emergency where the Student Reunification Area is located. The location may not be at the school dependent on the specifics of the emergency.
2. Students will only be released to an individual designated on the Emergency Student Reunification Authorization Form completed during school start-up each year. Please be sure to keep this information up-to-date with your school.
3. Valid identification is required to pick-up your child. This is required to protect your child. This step will be completed at the designated Greeter Identification Check Table.
4. Once identification is confirmed, parents or a designated caregiver will be provided a copy of the Emergency Student Reunification Authorization Form and be guided to the Check-In Gate.
5. A signature will be required for the release of your child. This is an important step as it ensures your child is accounted for at all times. This step will occur at the designated Release Gate.
6. Once your child has been released from the Reunification Area, please depart immediately.