

10 Safety Priorities

As schools prepare to welcome students and staff back for another school year, administrators should take time to revisit the everyday systems, procedures, and policies that can make a significant difference during an emergency. School safety isn't simply about having a plan on a shelf—it's about making sure the people responsible for implementing that plan understand it and are prepared to act.

1

Know your
communication system
and its capabilities

Don't wait for an emergency to learn what your communication system can and cannot do. Know how to initiate alerts, who has authorization to use the system, which communication methods are available, and what backup methods are available if the primary system fails. Will the system continue to operate during a power failure?

2

Review your
parent communication
portal

Who communicates with parents during an emergency? What information will be released, through what platform, and by whom? Establishing those responsibilities before an incident can reduce confusion, rumors, and conflicting information.

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Know your evacuation locations

Primary and alternate evacuation locations should be identified and evaluated before they are needed. Consider accessibility, transportation, weather, student accountability, communications, and whether those locations remain appropriate based on changes in your campus or surrounding community.

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Know your reunification protocol

Evacuation and reunification are not the same thing. Administrators should know where reunification will occur, how students will be accounted for, how parents will be notified, who can pick up students, and how identification and documentation will be handled. Be cautious when using canned reunification programs that do not factor in the uniqueness of your campus.

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Ensure classroom and exterior doors are secure

Review your policy for classroom doors while students are present. Teachers and staff should understand how doors lock, when they should be secured, and what to do if a lock or door isn't functioning properly. A security measure only works when it is consistently used and maintained. Avoid door lock magnets that allow doors to remain access easy.

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Review your visitor management system

How does someone enter your campus? Are visitors required to use a single point entrance, provide identification, sign in, and display visitor credentials? Just as importantly, does every staff member know what to do when they encounter someone who hasn't followed those procedures?

7

Re-read your school safety plan

Administrators and key staff should review the entire school safety and emergency operations plan—not simply assume it is the same as last year. Pay particular attention to updates, personnel changes, new procedures, construction, technology changes, and lessons learned from drills or incidents.

8

Conduct campus familiarization tour for new staff and substitutes

Every new employee and substitute teacher should receive a basic campus safety orientation. They should know evacuation routes, emergency terminology, communication procedures, important locations, and how to summon assistance. The middle of an emergency is the wrong time to discover someone doesn't know the campus.

9

Conduct background checks on volunteers

Confirm that volunteers are properly screened and that background-check policies are being consistently followed. Also take a look at reserved parking spaces for administrators and School Resource Officers. A clearly marked but empty "Principal" or "SRO" parking space can unintentionally advertise that a key person is not on campus. Consider whether those reserved spaces are necessary.

10

Meet with your first responders school safety team

Don't let an emergency be the first time administrators meet the police officers, firefighters, EMS personnel, emergency managers, or SROs who may respond to their campus. Early conversations and campus walkthroughs can identify challenges, clarify standards, improve access, and build relationships that become essential during a crisis.

Preparation Starts Before Students Arrive

The beginning of a new school year provides an important opportunity to look at school safety with fresh eyes. Walk the campus. Ask questions. Test systems. Review plans. Meet with your partners. Fix the small problems before they become big problems. School safety isn't defined by what is written in a plan. It is defined by how prepared people are to put that plan into action when it matters most. The MSSC is here to assist with Emergency Operations Planning, Site Assessments, and Safety Team Planning.

To find out more information, contact Jack Peck.

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