

Crisis and Emergency Preparedness



A MESSAGE FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT



Dear Parents/Guardians:

The safety and well-being of our students, staff, and community is always our top priority in Prince William County Public Schools (PWCS). Our goal is for all students to achieve high academic standards within a safe learning environment. Today more than ever, the words, “crisis management response,” have become important for everyone to understand – they have become part of student learning.

Our School Division and each of our schools have developed crisis response plans to be prepared for, and respond to, emergencies and challenging circumstances. The plans provide protocols to coordinate responses and minimize disruptions to our students, their families, and the Prince William community.

Schools routinely practice responses to various emergencies and review their plans annually. Additionally, our School Division enjoys a close relationship with the police department and works in cooperation with county and state agencies to ensure that our crisis management plan is well-defined and effective.

We know that it is extremely important for you to have accurate and timely information regarding emergency situations. You will find a variety of communication outlets that our School Division utilizes noted in this pamphlet. The pamphlet also outlines various actions PWCS will utilize during emergencies. We have included school responses to such events as a lockdown, shelter-in-place, and evacuation so parents and guardians will be better prepared.

It is our hope that this information will clarify any questions you may have regarding our crisis management responses while your child is in school or being transported by the School Division. If you need additional assistance, you may contact the PWCS information line at 703.791.2776.

We will continue to evaluate and update our plans so that all students and staff can have a safe, positive school experience. I know that I can count on you to know and do your part – the success of our plans depend on all of us.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Steven L. Walts".

Steven L. Walts
Superintendent of Schools

COUNTY AND SCHOOLS WORK TOGETHER

The basic Emergency Operations Plan for Prince William County incorporates the School Division in a supporting role to the Prince William County Department of Social Services. The Prince William County School Division's area of responsibility during a county emergency consists of the following components of the County Emergency Operations Plan:

- Providing emergency shelter and temporary housing. All school sites are subject to emergency shelter designation.
- Providing emergency and temporary food services.
- Providing transportation for displaced persons.

Prince William County Public School Division support services, including custodial, food service, maintenance, and security will be provided on a stand-by basis, ready to support the shelter operations when notified.

SECURITY MEASURES IN PLACE

Security measures in place within Prince William County Public Schools and buildings comply with the federal school safety plan and ensure that the School Division is responsive to a variety of crises and emergencies. These measures include:

- Daily review of local, national, and global events by the Superintendent and his senior staff.
- Maintaining a heightened state of vigilance.
- Employee and visitor identification system.
- School security residents on many campuses.
- The PWCS anonymous tip line, 703.791.2821.
- Security patrols of schools.
- Security cameras in schools and other buildings.
- Emergency communication and messaging systems.
- County police officers assigned to all middle and high schools.
- Video cameras on school buses.
- Threat assessment.
- Designation of Emergency Team responsibilities.



CRISIS RESPONSE READINESS OF SCHOOLS

School Division policies and the Division Crisis Management Plan provide the framework for addressing emergencies that may occur during school hours and business hours. The Crisis Management Plan manual includes guidelines on how to respond to biological, chemical, and other terrorist attacks.

Each school has emergency and contingency plans in place to respond to weather, weapons, or medically related emergencies. Staff members from the Prince William County Public Schools' Office of Risk Management and Security Services conduct on-site crisis training for school personnel. Schools follow up on this crisis response training and preplan for emergencies including command post and crisis communication issues, logistics, release of information, sheltering, evacuation, student accounting/release to parents/guardians, medical response, media coverage, and post-event counseling for students and staff. All buildings have evacuation plans and conduct periodic drills to assess the effectiveness of evacuation procedures.

The Office of Transportation Services is responsible for coordinating the safe return of children to their homes or to alternate shelter locations. Should a crisis/emergency situation occur while students are in the process of being transported to or from school, school bus drivers will contact the Office of Transportation Services for instructions. If necessary, parents/guardians will be informed of an alternate location for picking up their children via the School Division's crisis/messaging system.

Each school also has a crisis response team that is an integral part of the school's emergency management plan. The crisis response team is designated by the school principal and includes school administrators, security, and other designated staff.

In addition, the PWCS Office of Student Services dispatches critical incident teams of counselors, psychologists, student assistance program specialists, and nurses to schools as needed during and after emergencies to provide support to students and staff.



PRINCE WILLIAM COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS' RESPONSE TO HOMELAND THREAT CONDITIONS

Prince William County Public Schools (PWCS) is persistent in conducting an ongoing review of the School Division's readiness and ability to respond in the event of a crisis. The PWCS Crisis Management Plan details procedures for responding to emergencies and is in compliance with the framework for preparedness established by the Homeland Security Advisory System. All schools have a crisis response team that is an integral part of the school's emergency management plan.

Response to crises may differ depending on the circumstances; however, the protective measures described below are applicable and may be implemented under the nation's security code system.

LOW CONDITION (GREEN)

Low risk of terrorist attacks.

- Review and refine school crisis plans.
- Update emergency contact information.
- Continue interagency collaboration on county's emergency preparedness plan.
- Maintain employee and visitor identification system.

GUARDED CONDITION (BLUE)

General risk of terrorist attacks.

In addition to implementation of the above protective measures, the following actions will be taken:

- Test communications with designated emergency response or command locations.
- Review and practice emergency response procedures.
- Provide resource information to employees, parents/guardians, and community.
- Ensure compliance with employee and visitor identification procedure (Regulation 501-6).

ELEVATED CONDITION (YELLOW)

Significant risk of terrorist attacks.

In addition to implementation of the above protective measures, the following actions will be taken:

- In partnership with public safety officials, assess increased risks.
- Increase surveillance of critical locations.
- Review Crisis Management Plans with School Division staff.
- Ensure coordination of emergency plans with Prince William County.
- Refine protective measures at school facilities.

HIGH CONDITION (ORANGE)

High risk of terrorist attacks.

In addition to implementation of the above protective measures, the following actions will be taken:

- In partnership with public safety officials, assess increased risks and enhance security efforts as necessary.
- Take additional precautions at public events and consider alternate venues or cancellation.
- Review and modify field trip requests as appropriate.
- Review employee contact list and callback procedure with employees.
- Increase facility surveillance by staff.
- Increase communications with parents/guardians and the community.

SEVERE CONDITION (RED)

Severe risk of terrorist attacks.

In addition to implementation of the above protective measures, the following actions will be taken:

- Provide staff members to assist the Prince William County Emergency Operations Center.
- Activate Prince William County Public Schools' Incident Command Center.
- Assess threat level to determine status of school openings and closings.
- Address critical emergency needs in cooperation with public safety officials and in accordance with the Crisis Management Plan.
- Coordinate parent/guardian-student reunification process, if necessary.
- Enhance staff, parent/guardian, and community communication.
- Increase or redirect personnel to address critical emergency needs.

KEEPING INFORMED THROUGH CRISIS/EMERGENCY MESSAGES

Prince William County Public Schools transmits crisis/emergency messages when necessary using one or more of the following media:

- Web site at www.pwcs.edu
- Information line: 703.791.2776
- Local radio and television station broadcasts
- PWCS-TV, Channel 18
- School Autodialer system
- Prince William County eNotifications System

Keeping phone lines accessible – Parents/guardians are asked not to call the school in emergency situations so that the phone lines can remain accessible for handling the crisis/emergency.

KEEPING CHILDREN SAFE

Our first priority is keeping children safe. In most circumstances, the safest place for children can be their school. Parents/guardians should be aware that outdoor activities, sports events, and field trips might be canceled to reduce the risk of danger for students.

If federal authorities announce a “Severe Condition” (Red), indicating a severe threat of a terrorist attack, the School Division will follow directions provided by health and public safety officials. Under “Severe Condition,” schools will initiate procedures to “Secure the Building.”

Secure the Building

Staff will “Secure the Building” when there is a potential threat in the vicinity of the school. This action is typically initiated due to a police action in the area. The threat may be general (e.g., sniper event, 9/11) or known (e.g., person reported in the area with a gun). In order to ensure the safety of students, the school campus is secured and visitors are closely scrutinized or not allowed at all, depending on the event and direction from public safety officials. Advisory signs will be posted at the main entrance doors noting the building secure status. The school will remain in this status until cleared by public safety officials.

Shelter-in-Place

A “Shelter-in-Place” event occurs when there are harmful external atmospheric conditions that may exist. These potential conditions or attacks may be biological, chemical, nuclear, naturally occurring, or radiological in nature.

To ensure the safest environment, all students and staff will be brought into the main school structure and the site secured from entry. Advisory signs will be posted at the main entrance doors that read “Shelter-in-Place.” Neutral pressure is created in the school/facility by closing all windows and doors, and shutting down the heating, ventilation, and air conditioning system so that contaminated air will not be drawn into the building.

School officials will be on watch for students or staff who may exhibit exposure symptoms. For those exhibiting exposure symptoms, appropriate basic first aid will be rendered and medical assistance summoned via the public safety call center. Decontamination of clothing and skin may also be required and involves separating the exposed student from others and directing the student to wash with soap and water. If possible, staff will allow the student to shower and provide alternate clothing. Exposed clothing will be sealed in plastic bags.

For events such as a biological threat, students may be required to remain in school for an extended period of time. It is the School Division’s goal to return students to their parent/guardian as soon as it is determined safe to do so. The School Division will maintain close contact with and follow the directions provided by public safety and health officials.

Lockdown

A “lockdown” event occurs when there is an immediate hostile threat to the school. This may be an intruder, a firearms event, or an enraged non-custodial parent/guardian trying to take their child from school. A lockdown announcement is made and all staff and students seek immediate cover in a locked room. All school activities cease and 911 is called. All staff and students remain in lockdown until released by the police or school administration.





PARENT/GUARDIAN-STUDENT REUNIFICATION PROCESS

Evacuation of Schools

- To further ensure the safety of our students and staff, please ***do not rush to school to pick up your child.*** This will only create additional traffic that may impede needed emergency vehicles and your presence at the site could delay the evacuation process. Children and parents/guardians will be reunited in a safe, orderly and timely manner.
- School will not automatically be canceled in a crisis/emergency situation. School may well be the safest place for students. The School Division will ensure that students are safe inside their schools until such time that the threat has been reduced or eliminated.
- Even if children call you directly from their cell phone asking that you pick them up, please wait for the official word from the school or School Division before coming to the school as misinformation is often rampant during emergencies.
- If the situation requires transporting students, parents/guardians will be informed of any alternate shelter location(s) via the School Division's crisis/emergency messaging system.
- The School Division Web site (www.pwcs.edu) is regularly updated and is always a good place to go for the most accurate and up-to-date information.

Release of Students to Parents/Guardians

- Should public safety officials call for the evacuation of a school, students and staff members may be safely transported by bus to a designated parent/guardian-student alternate shelter location. Students may be held at this alternate shelter site for various reasons until release is approved by public safety or health officials, depending on the circumstances of the event.
- Parents/guardians will be permitted to pick up their children unless public safety or school officials have restricted access to the school. This may occur during a shelter-in-place, secure-the-building scenario, or other event as deemed necessary.
- Students will only be released to those individuals authorized on the school emergency card or who have written permission from a parent or guardian.
- Parents/guardians will be required to present proper identification in order for students to be released from an alternate shelter location.

Field Trips

Field trips will be canceled Divisionwide during a crisis/emergency situation. Cancellation information will be announced via the School Division's crisis/emergency messaging system.

Stockpiling of Food and Water

School sites maintain limited supplies of food and beverages should the need for additional food services arise.

Students Requiring Medication

Parents/guardians of students who require medication are asked to make sure that the school has an appropriate amount of medication on hand. The appropriate amount should be based upon advice from the student's physician.

Student Access to News Broadcasts

School staff will limit the use of television and radio broadcasts in classrooms to avoid overexposure to media reports. Principals will use discretion in determining the appropriateness of the use of media broadcasts.

Bus Transportation Under Condition Red

- Should a crisis/emergency situation occur while students are in the process of being transported to and from school, school bus drivers will contact the Office of Transportation Services for instructions. If necessary, parents/guardians will be informed of the parent/guardian-student alternate shelter location via the crisis/emergency messaging system.

Tornado Alerts

The school division's Crisis Management Plan provides detailed instruction to schools on what actions to take when a tornado watch or warning is issued. All schools and administrative offices have a weather radio to receive immediate notification when these alerts are issued. For tornado warnings, all students will be led to the school's designated "safe zones" until the tornado warning advisory is lifted. Everyone on buses located on school property will move inside the building. Buses traveling on nearby roads are to proceed to the nearest school to seek shelter, in coordination with the transportation dispatch office.

CRISIS/EMERGENCY RESOURCES

In addition to the resources below, the Office of Student Services has information regarding referrals for appropriate support services within the schools and community. The Office of Student Services can be contacted at 703.791.7257.

Student Services Resources:

- “When Crisis Occurs: A Quick Reference for Parents”
- “Helping Children Cope with Trauma”
- “How Children Respond to Trauma”

Web Site Resources:

- www.nasponline.org (National Association of School Psychologists)
 - “Helping Children Cope in Unsettling Times: Tips for Parents and Teachers”
 - “Coping in Unsettling Times: Tips for Students: Parents Called to Active Duty – Helping Children Cope”
 - “Talking to Children about Violence: Tips for Parents and Teachers”
 - “Helping Children After a Natural Disaster: Information for Parents and Teachers”
 - “A National Tragedy – Helping Children Cope”
 - “Coping with Crisis: Tips for Parents and Educators”
 - “Coping with Crisis – Helping Children with Special Needs”
 - “Preventing Youth Suicide – Tips for Parents and Educators”
 - “Children’s Response to Trauma”
 - “Identifying Seriously Traumatized Children – Tips for Parents and Educators”
 - “Managing Strong Emotional Reactions to Traumatic Events: Tips for Parents and Educators”
 - “Children and Fear of War and Terrorism: Tips for Parents and Teachers”
 - “Crisis Resources in Spanish and other Languages”
 - “Helping Children Cope with Loss, Grief, and Death”
- www.ready.gov/ (US Department of Homeland Security)
- www.fema.gov/kids (Federal Emergency Management Agency – FEMA for Kids)
- www.pwarc.org (Prince William Chapter American Red Cross)
 - “Facing Fear Helping Young People Deal with Terrorism and Other Tragic Events”



COPING IN A CRISIS CHECKLIST

WHEN CRISIS OCCURS: A QUICK REFERENCE FOR PARENTS/GUARDIANS

A crisis or safety concern may occur at any time in our community or in neighboring communities. Children may be confused and/or frightened by information they hear in conversations and in news reports, and they will look to adults for guidance as to how to react. The following quick reference offers parents/guardians suggestions for establishing a sense of security and safety to help their children cope in a crisis situation. Additionally, following a crisis, the school psychologist, school social worker, school counselors, and members of the School Division’s Critical Incident Team are available to assist students.

Emotional Support:

- Limit the amount of exposure your child has to newspapers and televised news reports. Repetitive discussion of the situation may retraumatize a child.
- Be honest with your children about what has occurred and provide facts about what has happened. Use age-appropriate terms for better understanding.
- Encourage your child to talk to you about his or her feelings and concerns. Share your feelings with your child.
- Reassure your child that he/she is safe.
- Spend extra time with your child, especially doing something fun or relaxing for both of you.
- Remember the importance of touch. A hug can reassure your child that he/she is loved.
- Watch for ongoing signs of difficulty, which could indicate that your child may need additional help. Some warning signs are: withdrawal from social contact, change in eating or sleeping habits, nightmares, and unusual clinging.

Safety Support:

- Review basic safety precautions.
- Review family safety procedures so your children will feel prepared if an emergency situation occurs.
- Monitor and supervise your child’s outdoor (play) activities.
- Know where your child is at all times and whom your child is with.
- Prearrange a place where your children should go in the event you are delayed and are not home at the end of the school day.
- Remind your child to always report any suspicious persons or activity to a trusted adult.

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PUBLIC SCHOOLS
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