

# **Crisis Communication and the Emergency Response Plan**

# Today's Presenters



**Gary L. Sigrist, Jr.**  
CEO & President  
Safeguard Risk Solutions



**Crystal Davis**  
Deputy Director of  
Communication Services  
OSBA



**Mary Beddell**  
Public Relations Director  
Plain Local School District



**Lou DeVincentis**  
Communications Coordinator  
Orange City School District



**Erika Daggett**  
Communications Coordinator  
Forest Hills School District

"The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place."

George Bernard Shaw

# What is an Emergency Response Plan (ERP)?

- In a natural or manmade disaster, or under elevated national security threat levels, events occur that necessitate the coordination and delivery of crisis intervention and response services.
- The School Emergency Response Plan guides a school's response to these events.



# Emergency Management



- Prevention-Mitigation
  - Risk Management
- Preparedness
  - Developing our ERP
  - Working with First Responders
  - Training
  - Exercises
- Response
  - Putting our plans into action
- Recovery
  - Getting back to business

# Crisis Communications

Experts say that what you do in the first 24 hours can determine whether the crisis remains an incident or becomes a full blown crisis; however, a proactive crisis preparedness plan can help reduce the fallout.

# Your ERP Should Include Your Communication Plans

## Preparedness/Response

- Superintended/First Responders
  - Business cards
- Joint Information Center
  - JIC location
  - PIO duties
- Shared Message

## Recovery

- Keeping the parents informed
- Working with First Responders
- Meeting the needs of the media

# Communications in an Emergency or Crisis

- Keep it simple
  - Who, what, where, when, why
  - How and How much
- Identify both external and internal stakeholders
  - Students
  - Parents
  - Community
  - Media
- No codes or ‘eduspeak’

# What Determines Our Response?

## Emergency

- Fire
- HazMat Situation
- Active Shooter Event
- Students injured at school
- Event in the neighborhood
  - Criminal Activity
  - Shooting

## Crisis

- Teacher accused of a crime
- Death of staff or student
- Allegations of wrong doing
- Natural disaster or epidemic
- Forced resignation
- Internet Rumors

# Crisis Preparedness

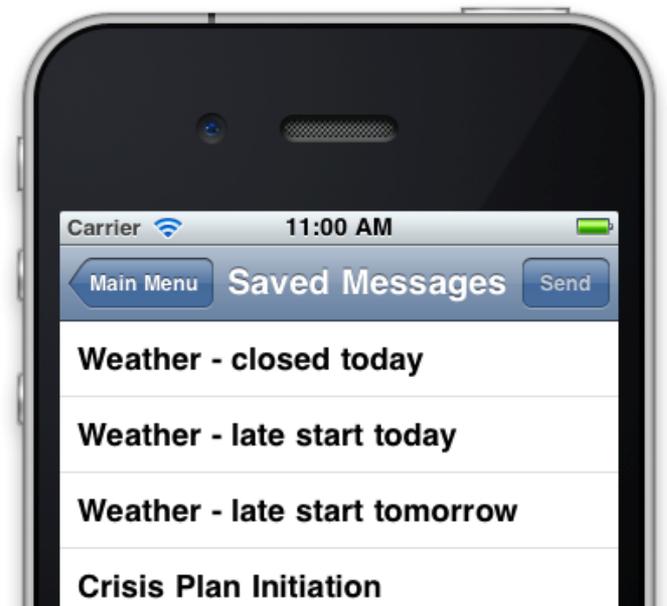
- Never fall prey to the notion that “It can’t happen here!”
- Good issues management is key
- Be proactive
- Create a crisis communications plan
- Put into place before a crisis

# Initial Messaging Considerations

- What's the best method:
  - Voice
  - Text
  - Push Notification
  - Email
  - Social Media
  - District Website
  - (Hint: it's never email)
- Students will text their parents-tell them what to text to avoid overblowing situation
  - The first message your parents receive is the one they are most likely to believe
  - Get your message out first
  - Reinforce your message with a message sent from the students
- Limit misinformation by communicating as quickly as possible once all the facts are known

# Does your mass notification system have a mobile launch app?

Accessibility on the move



# Messaging Considerations

- Rumors on social media will be rampant
  - Twitter
  - Facebook
- Media will be onsite almost immediately if the story is newsworthy
  - A slow day means anything is news
- Reporters will troll social media for students to get quotes
  - #PrayforUSAHigh
  - Training students before an emergency
- Remember once in Unified Command, messages go through the command center

---

# From a PIO Perspective

---



A+



SCHOOLMESSENGER®

# Educate Yourself First

- Demographic Information
  - Enrollment (by building)
  - Transportation Statistics
  - Academic Achievement/Testing Statistics
  - Ethnic Composition/Languages Spoken
  - Economically Disadvantaged
- Directory Information
- FERPA Rules and Regulations
- Public Record Access
- Board Policy

# Who is the Spokesperson?

- District-wide
- Building
- Athletics
- Crisis
- Topic-Specific
- Policy
- Board
- Legal/Negotiations



# Things to Consider

- Set expectations
- Anticipate questions
- What should you say to the media
- Prepare holding statements as necessary

# How to Keep Parents Informed

- Parent Mass Notification Calls
- Parent E-Mails/Texts/Push Notifications
- Website Messages
- Scripts for Secretaries
- Social Media
- Letters to Parents

Remember: Everything can and, most likely, will be forwarded to other parents and the media.

# Prepare the Communications Team

- Meet with team regularly to review crisis communication plan
  - leader of organization
  - police rep
  - someone trained in communications
- Have someone skilled in communication monitor social media and news coverage; respond accordingly

# Prepare the Communications Team-cont'd

- Pre-determine areas for student evacuation, student/parent reunification. Determine an area for media that is not in student / staff areas. Mark it off in caution tape or other medium. Tell media to stay in that area and meet with them every 10 - 15 minutes, even if you have to say there are no updates. This will keep them close to you and you will have more control.
- Return media calls promptly

# Prepare the Message

- Always tell the truth
- Be accurate
- Outline event (stick to the facts)
- Prepare a short, concise and clear statement (around 100 words)
- Repeat key message
- Show that you are working toward a solution

# Communicate

- Never say “no comment”
- Communicate message using channels available (Social Media, Website, All-Call, Text, Media)
- Tell reporters where/when they can get updates (social media, your name/number, etc.)
- Stick to message — do not embellish
- Make sure you remind your superintendent to tell the Board
- Tell staff and students not to engage with the media. Let them know that all media inquiries must go through the communication person.

# Voice

## Crafting Messages

- A familiar, trusted voice
- Identify yourself
- Aim for 30-60 seconds for entire message
- When to expect further communication (as needed)
- Prepare internal staff who will receive inquiries as a result of the message

# Voice

## Crafting Messages-Example

### *Scenario-Inappropriate teacher behavior*

This is Principal Skinner from Springfield School District. In the spirit of open communication, I am calling to let you know about a situation that occurred today and the steps we have taken to address it.

Today, students expressed concerns regarding a teacher's behavior. As we take all concerns shared with us seriously and it is our goal to provide comfortable learning environments for our students, we looked in to the concerns.

At this point, the teacher has been placed on administrative leave and we are working with legal counsel and local law enforcement to investigate concerns.

As we all play a part in providing a quality education and appropriate learning environment for students, we would like to commend our students for expressing their concerns. As always, I encourage students, parents, and staff to always contact me with concerns.

# Text

## Crafting Messages

- Be aware of your character count (160 characters max!)
- Identify your school district
- Link to further/follow-up information (as necessary)
- Prepare internal staff who will receive inquiries as a result of the message

# Text

## Crafting Messages-Example

### *Scenario-Bus fire*

Bus 47 had smoke coming from the dashboard. The bus was evacuated & the fire dept was called. All students are safe. Visit [springfieldschools.org](http://springfieldschools.org) for more info.

# Social Media

## Crafting Messages

- Update in real time
- Provide resources and accessibility for your stakeholders
- Be cognizant that your audience is more than just parents. It includes students, media, and the community, too.
- If you use a social media channel regularly, use it in a crisis

# Social Media

## Crafting Messages-Example

### *Scenario-Student death*

#### Facebook

It is with deep regret that we inform you of the loss of two of our students in the last week. Because of this, we would like to offer support to our grieving staff and students. Counselors will be available at the high school on July 7 from 1 p.m. until 7:30 p.m. and on July 8, from 9 a.m. until 12 p.m. Suffering a loss of this nature is significant and has greatly impacted our student body and our staff. Parents are also welcome to partake in the counseling services on Monday or Tuesday. Please check your email for more details regarding how to support our students.

#### Twitter

It is with deep regret that we share the loss of 2 students in the last week. Counselors are available at the HS on DATE/TIME. Check email for more info.

# Scenario

## Example #1-Stay Put

*An irate parent is in the school office screaming and using profanity. There is no threat to the students, but the behavior is such that you do not want the students to witness the parent's behavior and Law Enforcement is called to escort the parent from the premises.*

- What message would you craft?
- How would you send the message?

# Scenario

## Example #2-Secured Perimeter

*Your school was notified a person attempted to rob a pharmacy in the same neighborhood where a school is located. Your school is now in Secured Perimeter. No one is allowed in or out of the building until advised by Law Enforcement that everything is clear and the neighborhood is safe.*

- What message would you craft?
- How would you send the message?

# Scenario

## Example #3-Lockdown

*An adult entered the building and is in the halls during class change, using profanity and demanding to see the basketball coach.*

- What message would you craft?
- How would you send the message?

---

# Q & A

---



---

# Thank you!

---

**Gary L. Sigrist, Jr.**

Safeguard Risk Solutions

614.679.5608

[gary@safeguardrisksolutions.com](mailto:gary@safeguardrisksolutions.com)

**Erika Daggett**

OHSPRA

[erikadaggett@foresthills.edu](mailto:erikadaggett@foresthills.edu)

**Jeremy Dobberstein**

SchoolMessenger

888.527.5225 x457

[jdobberstein@schoolmessenger.com](mailto:jdobberstein@schoolmessenger.com)

