Next Steps in Crisis Management
Planning for Schools: Ensuring Seamless Recovery and Reunification Procedures

Michele Gay, M.Ed.
michelegay@safeandsoundschools.org
Melissa Reeves, Ph.D, NCSP, LPC
mereev@aol.com

Often Neglected
- Only 68% of school districts require family reunification procedures
- One of the most frequently ignored aspects of emergency planning
- Poorly executed plan is source of chaos
- Risk of secondary trauma increases with duration of separation and distance of evacuation
- Young children, those with cognitive delays at greater risk; unable or too afraid to provide info to assist

What Does It Look Like?
- Circumstances of Crisis Dictate Reunification
  - Type of Crisis
  - Safety of the building and campus
  - Presence of emergency responders
  - Capacity of Site
- Logistical Models
  - On Site
  - Drive Through
  - Off Site

On-Site Reunification
- When your school is NOT “ground zero”
- The building and campus area are deemed safe
- Reunification can take place without interrupting other emergency processes (crime scene, investigation, triage, etc.)
- You are able to secure the location/ restrict outside access
- Similar to an unscheduled “early dismissal” without buses
- Students may be able to remain in classrooms

Off-Site Reunification Areas
- Accessibility for all students and parents
- Parking, security, and traffic flow
- Ability to quickly move students to designated points
- Communication needs (fax, phone, internet; electrical plug-ins)
- Sufficient number of separate entrances and exits
- Ability to reduce crowding
- Should be at least a few miles from crisis scene


Drive-Through Reunification

- School campus and building are safe
- Can streamline the release process
- Protects parents and students from emotional stress
- Contains parents
- Consider allowing parents to print/fill out reunification cards ahead of arrival.
- Requires additional communication, signage, and staff support for parents waiting in car line.
- Practice as a community!

Selecting A Reunification Team

- Overall characteristics of team members
- Back up team and substitutes at the ready
- In-house team
- District level team
- Coordinate & practice with Emergency Responders

### Reunification Team: Roles & Responsibilities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Responsibility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lead (Student Accounting &amp; Release Team Leader)</td>
<td>Guides set-up, substitutes positions, maintains flow, troubleshoots, final accountability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greeter</td>
<td>Familiar face, welcomes, establishes interventions, provides assistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Checker</td>
<td>Examines ID’s; checks cards; cross references; directs individuals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Runner</td>
<td>Receives reunification cards from check-in, retrieves students from student holding area, brings to reunifier at reunification point</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herder</td>
<td>Gathers students, organizes classes, assesses students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertainer</td>
<td>Leads students in activities and entertainment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scribe</td>
<td>Recorder; observes and tracks times &amp; events during the process, manages information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accountant (Student Accounting &amp; Release specialist)</td>
<td>Receives torn cards, cross checks names, checks for accuracy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Who’s on Your Team?

Think about the human resources available in your school community. Select 2-3 people that could serve in each role:

- Greeter
- Checker
- Runner
- Lead
- Accountant
- Herder
- Entertainer
- Reunifier
- Scribe

### What Will I Need? The Reunification Go-Kit

- Have at least two identical kits
- One at school, one off-site
- Consider student medications—plan with nurse and district
  - Bull Horn/PA
  - Reunification Cards
  - Clipboards
  - Safety Vests
  - Hand held radios
  - Batteries
  - Snacks
  - Pens and Paper
  - Signs
  - First Aid Kit
  - Flashlights
  - Water
  - Space Blankets

### Preparing the Community-Before a Crisis

- Provide Basic Elements of Reunification Plan
  - School Handbook
  - Back-to-School Night
  - School Website
- Teach Basic Actions
  - Stay Home
  - Stay Informed
  - Stay Ready
Preparation the Community Ahead of Crisis

Adams 12 Five Star Schools:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d_Ya8Mf5174

Planning for a Formal Reunification Process
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vbRTGqOUPSo

Reunification Process at a Glance
1. Parents arrive – signs and Greeters provide direction to check-in location
2. Parents line up according to last name or grade at check-in
3. Parents complete reunification card – Greeters direct & assist
4. Checkers verify ID, Greeters verify those with no ID
5. Parents directed or escorted to reunification or notification area
6. Runners take Reunification Card (e.g., bottom portion) to Student Holding Area, bring students to Reunification Area
7. At Reunification Area, ID’s are double-checked, student signed-out and released, bottom portion of Reunification Card given to Accountant.
Parent Child Reunion Layout

Arrival Point
Requires several team members:
1) Check-in
2) Crowd Control
3) Runners

Release Point
Requires several team members:
1) Receivers – to reunite child with Parent/Sponsor and double-check ID; sign-out
2) Traffic control to ensure family exits

Witness/Interview Room
Requires several team members:
1) Students
2) Adults matching pick-up card to student
3) Adults supervising students

Students with Special Needs
Requires several team members:
1) Adults supervising students
2) Adults matching pick-up card to students
3) Adults giving students to runners who deliver them to parents
4) Mental Health professionals checking on adults and students

Notification Room
Requires several team members:
1) Mental health professionals

Imagining Reunification
Using your building as an example, imagine how you might lay out key areas of the reunification process to establish flow:
- Greeting
- Check-In
- Parent Staging
- Student Holding
- Special Needs
- Crisis Intervention
- Police Interview
- Media Holding
- Release

A Set up for Success: Layout Considerations
- Use separate rooms or natural barriers to break line of sight
  - Prevents parents from jumping the line
  - Maintains order and calm with students
  - Prevents parents of injured or missing students from viewing reunification of others
  - Contains areas of interview, triage, and counseling
  - Protects victims and victims’ families

Special Considerations
- Notification of Student Death or Injury
- Police Investigations and Interviews
- Mental Health Supports for students, parents, staff
- Student Perpetrator
- Special Needs Students
- Custody Verification

Death or Injury Notification
- Injured students
  - Identify and record location of transportation
  - School personnel accompany if possible
- Law enforcement typically takes lead
- Establish “notification room” that is private
- Mental health supports must be available
- Assign a primary contact/support person
- Provide age-appropriate resources-anticipate presence of younger siblings
- Provide protection from media
### Custody Verification

- "Whitelist" - confirms parent/guardian via photo ID and matching to emergency card
- "Blacklist" – predetermined list of persons with custodial restrictions
- Decisions to be made in advance:
  - Guardian without ID
  - Release of students 18 years and older
  - Translation capability for non-English speakers
  - Consider paper and electronic verification

---

### Room – Student with Special Needs

- Familiar location if possible
- Trained teachers/parent volunteers to help keep calm and regulate; familiar faces
- Activities to keep entertain and regulate students
- Supplies to address medical and comfort needs

---

### Additional Considerations

- Crisis team is incapacitated/still in lockdown during school-wide evacuation
- Students not picked up by a caregiver
- Managing parents/staff who have lost emotional control
- Runners unable to keep pace with demand
- Communicating if cell phone towers become overwhelmed, internet access interrupted
- Culturally specific norms - guardianship, extended family, emotions etc.

---

### Moving/Transporting Students

- Schools are responsible for "chain of custody"
- Supervise staging, transport, & arrival
- Verify who gets on/off bus
- Verify attendance again at off-site location
- Be aware of movement of vehicles
- Keep unauthorized persons away from scene
- Provide medical and mental health support
- Adults must stay calm!

---

### Reunification: Practice

- Use stuffed animals as students – place cards on them with specific details
- Practice at least once a year; include district personnel and first responders*
- Consider recruiting parents to help staff run through reunification practice—assign roles (i.e. upset parent, uncooperative parent, parent demanding information)
- At minimum, conduct table-top exercise

---

### Reunification: The Start of Recovery

*OPS School Safety Center; NASP; I Love U Guys