

Crisis Communications "In The Trenches"

Before a Crisis/Emergency

- Make sure you have a plan (school floor plans should be included)
- Review the plan with staff, parents, students, board members
- Make sure staff know their roles during a crisis, so they won't panic during a crisis
- Make sure parents/students know the plan and their roles
- Practice
 - Drills (fire, lockdown, shelter in place)
 - Review after each drill, identify areas that need improvement, re-drill
 - Make sure you have supplies on hand for lockdown and shelter in place (food, water, medical items)

Before the Crisis/Emergency Communications

- How do you communicate with staff during the school day? Is it effective? What happens in an emergency?
(PA System, Walkie Talkies, Student messengers, cell phones, e-mail)
- How do you communicate with parents during an emergency? Are they receiving and responding to messages?
 - Reverse 911 (phone, e-mail, text messages), Website, student cell phones, media
- How do you communicate with the media during an emergency?
 - (Who is your Public Information Officer – identify that person, as well as a back-up person ahead of time).

**Before the Crisis/Emergency
Planning**

- Plan as much as possible, but know that you cannot plan for everything
- Review with staff, students, parents and board members.
- If you have a reverse 911 system, use it for non-emergency communications so parents are accustomed to receiving messages from the school. Make sure info in your Student Information System is accurate.
- Make sure your website is updated often, so when parents check the site, they have updated and accurate information. They will go back to the website if it always has new information. Remember, the larger community will also visit your website for information.

**During the Crisis/Emergency
Implementation**

- Implement the plan
 - You have a plan, you have reviewed the plan with everyone, so implement the plan you have in place. Don't try to create a new plan because it will cause confusion (e.g. you identified Anne as your POI, but now you want to use Jane even though Anne is available).
 - In emergencies things can change quickly, so you need someone who can keep the staff calm at school and the parents calm when communicating with them
- Use plain language (e.g. lockdown instead of the lady with the red purse please come to the office).

**During a Crisis/Emergency
Communications**

- Communicate with local officials (fire, police, EMS) – Share the school's floor plan if needed, who is in the building and where,
- Communicate with the staff – stay calm, give factual information. Be sure that someone is checking on staff and students. (Staff may need a back up person – e.g. they need to leave the room to go to the restroom, take medicine, take care of a sick student or bring one to the office. Make sure you stay in touch.
- Communicate with the parents. Use reverse 911. You will receive lots of calls to the school from concerned parents (if the emergency occurs during the school day). Who is answering the phone? What are they saying?
- Communicate with your Charter School Board and LEA

During the Crisis/Emergency Action Steps

- Actions to take
 - Depends on the nature of the emergency. If it is a school evacuation during the day, the actions you take will be different than a weather event that closes the school. Likewise a school lockdown will require different actions by everyone involved.
 - The key to knowing what actions are necessary is to have a plan in place, practice and review the plan with stakeholders and implement the plan you have. There will be an opportunity to review how things worked after the crisis.
 - If the emergency happens during the school day, remember to check on needed supplies (do we need water, do we need food, medical supplies, power source).

During the Crisis/Emergency Resources

- Use your resources – schools are not experts in everything.
 - State and local officials
 - Social Workers
 - Physicians
 - Public Relations
 - Others

After the Crisis/Emergency

- Stick to the plan.
 - Re-uniting parents and students (if necessary)
 - Communications – still very important
 - Action Steps (what will it take to get school-re-opened?)
 - Cleaning/dis-infecting (swine flu)
 - Repairs/cleanup (damage after the storm)
 - Replacing items (e.g. restocking kitchen, medical supplies, books, etc.)
 - Review
 - What worked? What did not work?
 - Make changes to the plan as necessary. Remember to keep everyone involved and informed of changes

Closing thoughts

- Have a plan
- Review and practice the plan
- Be prepared
- Remember the children – sometimes in a crisis people are so worried about getting through the crisis, or dealing with the many things that have to be done, we can forget about the children.
- Debriefing – faculty/staff, students, others involved in the incident
 - Lessons Learned
 - Possible plan revisions

Resources

- www.fema.gov
- rems.ed.gov
- www.Louisiana.gov
- Local School Board
- Other local and state agencies (DHH, Fire, Police, EMS, Hospitals, etc.)
