

Parent-Student Reunification Procedures (from Washington Military Department's Emergency Management Division)

Student release is a crucial part of emergency planning. During an emergency or disaster the traditional student release procedure is often unsafe and therefore not operable. Accordingly, a comprehensive emergency plan needs to include certain procedures to accomplish the main priority of safety planning, which is to ensure the safety of the students to every extent possible.

There are a wide variety of emergency situations that might require student/parent reunification. Parent-student reunification may be needed if the school is evacuated or closed as a result of a hazardous materials transportation accident, fire, natural gas leak, flooding, earthquake, tsunami, school violence, bomb threat, terrorist attack, or other local hazard.

Parent-student reunification is part of the Incident Command System and is assigned to the Operations Area.

Reunification Procedures

In an emergency, schools must establish a safe area for parents to go to pick up their children. This area must be away from the both the damage and the student assembly area. In a typical release, the following steps will be followed:

- Parents will report to the assigned area and give the name of their child/children.
- Picture I.D. will normally be required by the person in charge to ensure the person requesting the child/children is a match to the name on the emergency release card.
- A runner will go to the student assembly area and get the child/children requested by the parent or adult. The runner will escort the student back to the pick-up area.
- Parents will be asked to sign a form indicating they picked up the child/children. The date and time will also be indicated on the pick-up form.
- If the child is in the first aid area, the parent will be escorted to that area for reunification with their child/children.
- Counselors, when available, will be located close to the first aid area in the event they are needed.

Traffic Control

- Traffic will be controlled by school-based law enforcement until local law enforcement is available and on scene at the school.
- To every extent possible two-way traffic will be maintained to allow for entry and exit of emergency vehicles.
- As the situation develops there may be time for barricades and other traffic control devices to be delivered and set up. It should be understood this will not occur at the beginning of the incident.
- When law enforcement arrives on the scene they will take charge and do whatever is necessary, including the towing of vehicles, to manage the emergency or disaster.

Maintaining the Procedures

- Student rosters should be updated at least twice a year. If your enrollment dictates, you might want to update more often.
- Updated rosters should be stored in every classroom in an area easily identified by the both teachers and substitutes. Additional copies of the rosters should be distributed to the principal, and placed in the back of the emergency plan binder.
- Emergency cards should be filled out at the beginning of the year. This card should include contact information for parents/guardians, as well as other adults who can be contacted if the parent/guardian is not available. The card should also indicate who the child is permitted to leave campus with, if necessary.

DO NOT release students to people not listed on the student emergency card. A well-intentioned friend may offer to take a child home; however, school staff must be certain that students are only released to the appropriate people so students' families will know where they are. The card should also include all pertinent medical information such as allergies, medications, and doctor contact information. These cards should be stored in the front office in both hard copy and electronically, if possible.

Things To Remember

- Some parents will refuse to cooperate with the parent-student reunification process. This situation can be diminished, to some degree, if parents are informed about the school release procedures before the disaster or emergency occurs. They should be reminded that the safety of their children is your utmost priority. It is a good idea to include this material in your student handbook distributed at the beginning of the school year.
- Parents may be emotional when arriving at the school. Have counselors available to deal with issues that exceed your area of expertise.
- Shortly after the incident the media will have a presence on your campus. The Public Information Officer, part of the command staff operating under the Incident Command System, will deal with the media. However, it is important that parents be sheltered from media representatives.