

CRISIS PREPAREDNESS:



Parents and School Emergencies

The safety and security of our students and staff are top priorities for Henrico County Public Schools.

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Introduction

The safety and security of our students and staff are top priorities for Henrico County Public Schools (HCPS). This booklet explains some of the procedures that have been planned and practiced in the event of an emergency at your child's school.

School administrators work closely with police, fire, emergency services and public health to ensure our Safety & Crisis Manual reflects appropriate practices and all schools are prepared for emergencies. Key personnel are trained in National Incident Management System procedures, and HCPS takes an all-hazards approach to emergency readiness. We are prepared to work in partnership with emergency responders should a critical incident occur in one of our schools.

Our comprehensive emergency plan addresses a multitude of potential incidents, not because we expect them to occur, but because we want to be prepared in case they do. For security reasons, specific details are not made available to the public; however, parents and students have a vital role and it is important that you know what to do in an emergency. Please review information in this booklet, in advance of the school year, to make sure you and your child understand the emergency procedures.

What is an Emergency?

An emergency is any unexpected incident that could possibly put your child's safety at risk. It could be anything from a disruption in utilities to a terrorist activity and could affect one child, one school, or the entire school district. School officials, and sometimes emergency responders, will evaluate the seriousness of each situation and determine the best action to respond quickly, safely and appropriately.

Advanced planning and preparation can minimize the risks in any emergency situation. This brochure offers guidelines for preparedness, what parents should do, and what the school will do in the event of an emergency. Communication procedures and student release procedures are also outlined.

Preparedness – What Should Parents do to Prepare for an Emergency?

Parents have an invaluable role in preparing their children for emergencies. Listed below are some of the ways you can help them understand that if an emergency occurs at school, teachers and school officials are trained to handle the situation. Reassure them you will be contacted by the school and you will be reunited with them as soon as it is safe to do so.

- Be sure emergency contact information is current and correct. Contact the school secretary immediately whenever your work, home or cell number changes.
- Keep the school nurse informed of any medical conditions or physical limitations your child may have or medications your child may be taking. Provide the necessary medical supplies and medication for daily use and an additional supply to carry your child through an emergency. If there are questions about the appropriate amount of medication or supplies, please consult your child’s physician.
- Identify who is authorized to pick up your child if you are not able to respond. Make sure their contact information is current and correct. Please understand your child will only be released to parents and persons identified on the emergency contact list. Discuss this information with your child.
- Make sure your child knows their parent or guardian’s name, address and phone numbers. If there is only one parent or guardian, your child should have contact information for a second responsible adult.
- Talk with your child about the importance of remaining calm and following instructions in the event of an emergency. If an emergency occurs while they are at school, their teacher will provide them with appropriate instructions and information.
- Let your child know they could be moved to another location until you can pick them up. Explain the term “evacuation” so they are not afraid of being evacuated from their school.
- Explain that cell phones should not be used during an emergency unless directed to do so by a teacher. Emergency responders will depend on cell phones for communication. If students and parents are trying to contact each other, cell phone circuits may become overloaded, interfering with the ability of emergency personnel to communicate vital information.
- Whenever you are on school grounds, remain alert to activity in and around the school. Report any suspicious activity to school administration so they can investigate.
- Establish a family preparedness plan including a communications plan. This will enable you to communicate with all family members during an emergency.
- In case of an emergency in which your child cannot go to their home, make sure there is another place he or she can go and be safe while waiting for a family member to pick them up.

What Will Schools do in the Event of an Emergency?

What we do in an emergency depends on the situation and the specifics of the incident. We will make every attempt to ensure that instruction continues, even when it becomes necessary to lock down the school. Depending on the severity of the threat or emergency, additional measures may be taken, including sheltering-in-place, evacuating students from the building or closing the school early.

If emergency responders are called to the scene, we will work with them in a unified command to determine which plan should be implemented. School emergency plans vary from school to school, based on school size, building layout and other relevant factors, and are initiated depending on the events unfolding at the time of the incident. While every school has pre-established plans of action, evacuation sites, and family reunification plans, these plans must remain flexible as conditions change. Parents will be informed as soon as we have done everything we can to ensure the safety of students and when it becomes possible to provide accurate and helpful information.

Protective Actions the School May Use

Each school has an emergency preparedness plan involving a number of possible actions. The response varies, depending on the conditions and the situation, and is determined by a crisis management team trained to make such decisions. It is important for parents to understand that if a critical incident occurs, students will be dismissed to parents only when danger has passed.

Schools may use the following protective actions:

- **Lockdown** – A lockdown may be used because of an event inside the building or because something is happening outside and police have determined it is best to make sure the school is protected. The purpose of a lockdown is to restrict the movement of staff and students, and to fully secure the building. During a lockdown all interior and exterior doors are locked. No one is permitted to enter or exit the building until school officials, often working in conjunction with police, have determined it is safe to do so. All staff, students and visitors are accounted for and instruction continues. The length of the period of lockdown is based on the situation at hand, and could be a few minutes or hours.

It is possible that a lockdown might involve detaining students beyond the regular school day. It is never our intention to hold students unnecessarily, and we will not do so except to ensure their safety. Conditions will return to normal as soon as it is safe to do so.

Parents may or may not be notified when the school goes into lockdown. There are times when the school goes into lockdown for drills or training, or for an external event that does not involve the school. The school administrator and executive director of Communications & Community Outreach will determine when the event is significant enough to notify parents.

- **Shelter-in-Place** – This protective action is considered when an event takes place outside of the school and officials determine the safest course of action is to keep students and staff inside the school until the external event is handled. Some examples could be a weather situation, hazardous materials release, or a situation unfolding in the community into which children should not be released. Students who are outside are moved inside, including students who are in portable classrooms or trailers. If a shelter-in-place is called for and may extend beyond the school day, parents will be advised.
- **Evacuation** – If it is unsafe for students and staff to remain inside the building, the school will be evacuated. Students and staff may remain on school grounds until the building is safe to re-enter or be relocated to a safe location off school property, depending on a variety of circumstances. In the event of an off-campus evacuation, school administrators will work with emergency officials and the department of pupil transportation to move students to a safe location. From there the students will either be transported home or wait for family members to pick them up from the reunification site. In either event, the school administrator and executive director of Communications & Community Outreach will make sure parents are notified.
- **Emergency School Closing** – This procedure will take place when school administrators determine students are safer at home than at school. This most often occurs due to loss of utilities or a weather emergency. Parents will be notified that school(s) will be closing. Under normal circumstances students who normally ride the bus will be transported home and parents will be notified.
- **Off-Site Family Reunification** – Students are moved off-site when school officials determine students and staff should not re-enter the building until it is rendered safe. Several off-site locations are determined in advance, but are not shared with parents until an incident unfolds. Police and school officials choose the best reunification site at the time of the incident depending on the circumstances of the emergency. Parents will be notified of the family reunification site as soon as it is tactically appropriate to do so. Our main priorities in an off-site evacuation are student safety and accountability. We want to make sure students are released to authorized individuals and a sign-out procedure will be initiated. In the event of an off-site school evacuation, parents will be provided information as to where the reunification site is located. Parents or authorized adults will be required to show photo identification in order to pick up a child. The process may take some time because we want to make sure reunification is made with authorized individuals.

What Should Parents do in the Event of an Emergency?

The most helpful parental responses to a school emergency are to remain calm and wait for accurate information to be sent to the number listed on your child's emergency contact. We understand it is a natural instinct for parents to want to rush to their child. It is important for you to understand that, during such an event, individual schools and emergency responders have made preparations to deal with these incidents. Your cooperation in an emergency is essential to the safe and swift resolution of the incident.

Please do not call the school. It is essential to keep phone lines open so school officials can make outgoing emergency calls. If students are ill or injured, the parents of those students will be notified first.

Please do not go to the school. As we have learned from past school emergencies, one of our greatest challenges is how to manage an onslaught of parents and concerned citizens rushing to the scene to "help." By doing so, parents can inadvertently create traffic jams that may block emergency responders from getting to the scene or leaving if necessary to transport injured staff or students to emergency medical facilities.

- Remain calm, follow procedures, and cooperate with school and public safety officials.
- Remain close to the phone listed as your emergency contact number.
- Tune in to radio or television stations designated to carry HCPS emergency information. See "Emergency Communications" section below.
- Obtain current information about the incident from the district website at www.henrico.k12.va.us.
- Understand that emergency pickup procedures are different than routine pickup procedures. In the event you are notified to pick up your child at school or at the designated family reunification site, bring a photo identification card. If you must send someone else to pick up your child, be sure it is someone who is listed on school records as an authorized individual and they are in possession of a photo ID. Your child will not be released to anyone who is unauthorized or who cannot provide appropriate identification.
- Follow emergency procedures. If you are asked to pick up your child, you will be asked to follow the checkout procedure established for emergencies. The reunification system was developed to ensure the safety of students and it is vital that the procedure be followed.
- Remain in designated areas at the family reunification site.
- Be patient. It is essential that the family reunification procedure be carried out in an orderly manner so we can protect and account for all of our students.

Emergency Communications – How Will Parents be Notified if an Incident Occurs at School?

Our first priority is to ensure all students are safe, accounted for, and under adult supervision. As soon as it is possible to do so, the executive director of Communications & Community Outreach will communicate information to parents and the community. The school district has a variety of media available to parents which will be updated, as needed, with the most complete and accurate information available.

1. Blackboard Connect (phone notification to staff and student homes)
2. HCPS-TV (regular programming will be interrupted for updates and announcements)
3. HCPS Website (www.henrico.k12.va.us)
4. HCPS Main Number (652-3600)

In the event of a significant emergency, parents are encouraged to tune in to one of the following local television stations to follow the event as it unfolds:

- Channel 6 – CBS
- Channel 8 – ABC
- Channel 12 – NBC

Recovery After a Crisis

The school officials understand that a traumatic event in a school or in the community can have an emotional impact on staff and students. HCPS has a trained team of counselors, social workers, and psychologists who can respond to the school during and after a critical incident to provide assistance. If there is a chance a critical incident makes an emotional impact upon staff or students, the HCPS intervention team helps those affected cope with the aftermath of the incident.

For Additional Information

- For additional information about the HCPS Safety & Crisis Plan, contact Christine Bailor at 804.226.5550 or acbailor@henrico.k12.va.us or visit the Safety & Security webpage at www.henrico.k12.va.us.
- For information about the Safety & Crisis Plan for your child’s school, contact the school administrator.
- An excellent website on emergency readiness is www.ready.gov.

PARENT EMERGENCY CONTACT CARD

For your convenience

Please cut out and fold the wallet card below for use in an emergency.

Henrico County Public Schools

Emergency Numbers and Notes

Henrico County Public Schools
School Emergency Card

Tune into the following local media outlets for the most up-to-date information:

- ▶ Blackboard Connect notification system
- ▶ HCPS Web site www.henrico.k12.va.us
- ▶ HCPS-TV
- ▶ Local television and radio stations
- ▶ HCPS Main Number (804) 652-3600



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Produced by the Department of Communications & Community Outreach
