

# CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS

FOR SMALL SCHOOL LEADERS

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# Me.

- Crisis Communication Career.
- Crises in education.



# CRISES CAN TAKE MANY FORMS

- Student/staff death
- School lockdown
- Employee misconduct
- Threats/swatting
- Board member policy violations
- Infectious diseases
- Lead in water
- Social media allegations
- And more...



# UNDERSTANDING CRISIS

Not just emergencies

- Misconduct, major facilities issues, social media rumors, etc.

Any issue or event that threatens to **damage a relationship between your school district** and one or more of your **constituents or partners**.

Immediate | Emerging | Sustained

# DISASTER RELIEF PHASES & COMMUNICATIONS

- Preparedness (before)
- Response (during)
- Recovery (after)

Use these same phases  
to think about  
communications needs.

# PREPAREDNESS

PLANNING AHEAD



# CONSISTENT TERMINOLOGY

**Ensure  
everyone is  
using the same  
language.**

## STANDARD RESPONSE PROTOCOL (SRP)

Our school has adopted the "I Love U Guys" Foundation's Standard Response Protocol (SRP). Students and staff will be training, practicing, and drilling the protocol.

### COMMON LANGUAGE

The Standard Response Protocol (SRP) is based on an all-hazards approach as opposed to individual scenarios. Like the Incident Command System (ICS), SRP utilizes clear common language while allowing for flexibility in protocol.

The premise is simple. There are **five specific actions** that can be performed during an incident. When communicating these, the action is labeled with a "Term of Art" and is then followed by a "Directive." Execution of the action is performed by active participants, including students, staff, teachers and first responders. The SRP is based on the following actions:

**HOLD, SECURE, LOCKDOWN, EVACUATE, AND SHELTER.**



**HOLD**  
"In Your Classroom  
or Area"



**EVACUATE**  
"To a location"



**SECURE**  
"Get Inside; Lock  
Outside Doors"



**SHELTER**  
"State Hazard and  
Safety Strategy"



**LOCKDOWN**  
"Locks, Lights,  
Out of Sight"



**STANDARD  
RESPONSE PROTOCOL**

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# IDENTIFY YOUR CRISIS TEAM

- Pull together a core team people covering essential functions
- Include communications.
- Clearly define roles and responsibilities
- Roster with everyone's contact information
- Plug numbers into your cell phone

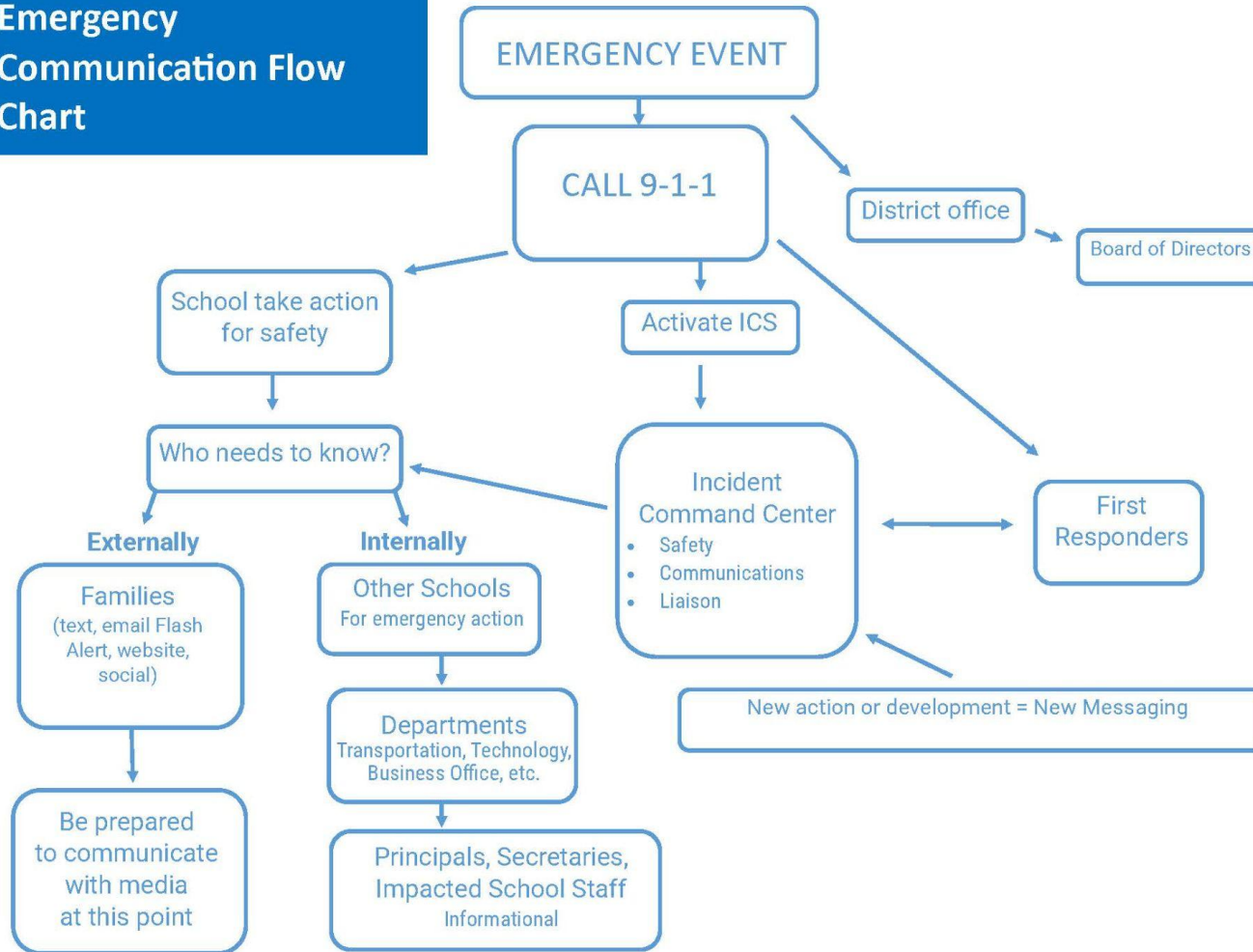


# PLAN AHEAD

**Know your plan,  
coordinate, and  
collaborate.**

- Communications annex of EOP
- Identify your communications team and spokesperson
- Develop relationships with local emergency response agencies
- Create and refer to emergency communications flow chart

## Emergency Communication Flow Chart



# CONSIDER AUDIENCES

**Think about  
who needs to  
know what  
and when.**

- Board of directors
- Internal audience (staff)
- External audience
  - Families
  - Other key stakeholders?
- Plans should consider removing language and access barriers
  - Built into school messaging platforms

# HOW WILL YOU REACH THEM?

## INTERNAL

- Text string, group chat, phone tree
- All-staff email distribution list

## EXTERNAL

- Parent phone, email, and/or text system
- Website post
- FlashAlert
- Social media posts

# DEVELOPING YOUR MESSAGE

STICK TO THE FACTS



# PRE-PLAN MESSAGING

**Consider: Who, what, when, where, why, and what's next:**

- Acknowledge those impacted (if applicable); **people before things.**
- Do not place blame
- Be transparent and factual
- Keep comms simple and concise
- Do not violate confidentiality
- Manage expectations

# RESPONSE

DURING AN  
INCIDENT / ISSUE



# MONITOR

**Gather  
confirmed  
information &  
prepare to  
message.**

- Activate crisis team
- Monitor the media and social media
- Prepare initial, confirmed information. Sometimes that is just an acknowledgment.
- Don't wait to confirm *all* details to share information

Scan for  
Holding  
Statements





# MESSAGE

**Stay in  
communication.**

- Communicate with the board and staff first. Work outward.
- Review your audiences and ensure you have a message deployment plan to reach all.
- Share basic, factual information that you are confident won't change.
- You can always share a little more later, but you can't pull info back.
- Refer to your pre-drafted templates.

Scan for  
templates:  
Safety &  
Security



# SOCIAL MEDIA

Overall, just over half of U.S. adults (54%) say they at least sometimes get news from social media

- Pew Research

- Don't ignore it
- Listen before posting
- If you must post, stick to facts
- Gently correct misinformation
- Algorithms and updates—include date and time in posts

# AI AND CRISIS COMMS

Human intervention and refinement are essential.

- AI can be a helpful brainstorming tool, however...
- It hallucinates sometimes
- Data is not confidential
- AI doesn't know the context of your community

# MONITOR & MESSAGE AGAIN

**Messaging may  
not be “one and  
done.”**

- Listen and ask trusted people to share insights
- If inaccurate information is shared, point to where facts can be found
- Consider other communications options: FAQ, web page, video message
- Don't go dark or say "no comment"

# RECOVERY

COMMUNICATING  
IN THE AFTERMATH



INCIDENT  
RESPONSE!

# REFLECT & RECONNECT

**Learn from  
experience.**

- After action review & lessons learned
- Update plans accordingly
- How can communications help with recovery?
  - Crowdfunding

# TO DO LIST:

**Do these things to be prepared for a crisis.**

- Develop a EOP with a crisis communications plan
- Develop prepared messages in advance
- Identify your core crisis response team (and extended team)
- Identify social listeners (who outside of you?)
- Set up Google alerts
- Learn from one another
- Have a “phone a friend”

# RESOURCES

Monique Dugaw:  
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Crisis templates & resources:



Meet my team, view work samples, and subscribe to our newsletter here:

