



BERRIEN COUNTY EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT
DIVISION OF BERRIEN COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

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September 4, 2017

Dear Parents and Guardians,

We would like to extend our welcome to the 2017-2018 school year. We know your student's school is working hard to give every educational opportunity possible for success. With that, we wanted to take a moment to explain some points on what could be expected if an emergency at your student's school occurs.

Each Berrien County school works with our Emergency Management Office to develop Emergency Crisis Plans that cover likely emergencies for our area. The local police and fire departments are partners in this school safety program as well. Each plan is designed for the safety and security of all students. Our schools have taken these plans very seriously and we are proud of them. They conduct several practice drills each year to make sure their plan will work well during an emergency. Over 820 emergency drills were conducted last school year by Berrien County Schools.

We need help from you during an actual emergency. Our partnership with Parents/Guardians during an emergency can make responding and recovering from the emergency better for everyone. Below are some key points we ask you to understand.

Before an Emergency:

- The school is a secure environment. Visitors are asked to check into the designated office, produce identification, and explain why they are there. We need help to ensure everyone does this and does not give the school staff a hard time when they enforce security policies.
- Students and Parents/Guardians should understand that threats affecting the safety of the school, faculty, and student body will be taken very seriously. Discuss this point with your student so they understand that joking around about this topic is an inappropriate choice.
- If your student discusses security related threats with you, take them seriously and report it. **If you see something, say something (Now!).** You may report it to your school or police directly. It is helpful for investigators to be able to contact a "reportee" to get clarifying information necessary to properly investigate. If the threat is time sensitive, call 911.
- You may also use an anonymous reporting system called Ok2Say; which offers text, phone hotline, and web-based reporting services. (<http://www.ok2say.com>, text 652729, email ok2say@mi.gov). This is an important point to emphasize because we have seen too many instances, after a tragedy occurs, where many people knew an attack was being planned and said nothing about it. Help us to not allow that to continue to be a trend. If the threat is time sensitive, call 911.
- Report security concerns, no matter how small the matter seems to be. Some reports could lead toward stopping an attack; some could lead to a person getting emotional or behavioral help they need. Each instance will be evaluated and the appropriate action will be determined for each case.
- Understand that there are different types of lockdowns and not all of them mean the school is in danger. The word "lockdown" has become scary to some, but the reality is that many of the lockdowns we implement are used as a precautionary measure. For the majority of the lockdowns that were requested last school year, classes continued and the perimeter doors were locked. The perimeter lockdowns were requested to prevent danger to the school, but were done in a way where classes could continue.
- Make sure your school's emergency contact information and authorized "pick-up" list is updated.

During an Emergency:

- School staff will be concentrating upon keeping all students safe. They will need their phone lines open so they can report the emergency and work with local Police/Fire/EMS. Do not call the school. Do not call 911 unless you need emergency services.
- During the initial stages of an emergency, staff will be focused on the safety of the school and students. They will provide a formal release of information after they are confident the school is safe. Also, there are Federal and State privacy laws that may prevent the release of some information. School officials will attempt to release information regarding the safety of students, instructions to parents, and as much information about the emergency as possible, after they ensure the school is safe. They will not be able to release information related to educational records, medical conditions, or identify juvenile offenders.
- Do not go to the school unless otherwise instructed. Students may be moved to a safer location and we will need roadways/parking lots clear to do so. By coming to the school or evacuation site, you may prevent us from making students safe.
- If a student is on a bus during an evacuation, they will not be released from the bus. They will be taken to the reunification area where they will be released.
- Listen to media broadcast or school notification system instructions informing you when and where to go to be reunited with students. Special instructions will be given out through these systems. Hotline numbers may be established to answer questions, after we are certain the students are safe.
- Social Media can be a good way to connect with one another, but there is often a lot of misinformation shared as well. Understand that information given out from non-official social media accounts should be verified. Refrain from releasing inaccurate information via your social media account.
- Only authorized persons identified on school emergency forms, **with identification**, will be allowed to take custody of your student.
- The process for reuniting students and parents/guardians will be a slow, methodical process. It is important to be patient. We understand and appreciate that parents/guardians want to be with students quickly, but we have to make it a controlled process for the safety of everyone involved.
- The area you are instructed to go to for reunification will be on a “lockdown”. You likely will not be permitted to enter beyond a reception area. After you are identified, your student would be brought to you for reunification.
- If you are not calm or reasonable during this process, it will delay you and others from being reunited with their student. Please help other parents/guardians understand this as well.

We all have to work together during an emergency to ensure everyone’s safety. Safety and security will be our top priority during an emergency and we understand that we cannot do it without the entire communities help. We will need your help and understanding. Emergency instructions are given with the best intentions of keeping everyone safe and secure. Following those instructions will help ensure safety and security.

If you have any questions regarding school safety or the topics outlined in this letter, you may contact us to discuss. Our contact information is below. Our Office email is bcoem@berriencounty.org (it goes to everyone below).

Stay Safe,



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