

A Parent/Guardian Guide to Emergency Preparedness

Introduction

The Richmond Board of Education places the safety of students and staff at the centre of its work. The district is responsible for ensuring that emergency management procedures are in place and activated in accordance with provincial legislation and regulations.

Preparing for emergencies requires ongoing planning, training and coordination. Schools work closely with first responders and community agencies to ensure that staff are ready to respond effectively in a range of situations. Each school has trained staff who are supported by district personnel as part of a coordinated emergency management system.

This document outlines how the district prepares for and responds to emergencies. While critical incidents and disasters are unpredictable, schools must be prepared to act quickly and thoughtfully to protect students and staff. Clear procedures, trained staff, and coordinated communication help ensure that we maintain the confidence families place in us each day.

District Approach

The district's emergency procedures are guided by the British Columbia Emergency Response Management System, or BCERMS, which outlines the following priorities:

- Keep students and staff safe.
- Make sure that staff understand clear and consistent standards and procedures to follow.
- Clearly define roles and responsibilities.
- Ensure that communications and protocols are aligned with community partners (e.g. First Responders).
- Minimize disruptions and return to normal as soon as possible.

The district also follows the Ministry of Education and Child Care's Emergency Management Planning Guide for Schools, Districts and Authorities. This guide outlines the key stages of the emergency management cycle including:

Pre-Event Planning

Effective emergency management begins with ongoing assessment, prevention, planning, and training in preparation for the potential of an emergency situation.

Emergency Event and Response

In the event of an emergency, the district follows an all-hazards approach to emergency management.

This approach includes five standard response actions that may be activated depending on the nature of the situation.

1. **Drop-Cover-Hold On**

Activated in an event such as an earthquake, where the physical structure becomes unstable. Students and staff must go into a drop, cover, and hold on position to reduce the risk of injury.

2. **Evacuation**

Activated when the building or area becomes unsafe. In an evacuation, students and staff are to leave the building and go to a previously identified location outside of the building. If it is safe to do so, students and staff are able to re-enter the building.

3. **Shelter-in-Place**

Activated by the principal when a situation outside of the school is deemed unsafe. For personal safety, it is important for students and staff to remain inside the school.

4. **Hold and Secure**

Activated by the RCMP and principal when it is necessary to secure the school because there is a safety concern occurring in the neighbourhood or in close proximity. Exterior doors are locked and monitored to allow students and staff to enter. Once inside, no one leaves the building until RCMP provide the All Clear.

5. **Lockdown**

Activated in response to a significant act or threat of violence. If a lockdown is initiated by the principal, 911 is contacted for immediate response from the RCMP and other support agencies as necessary. Exterior doors and interior classroom doors are locked, and no individual is permitted in or out of any area. Emergency responders will control access to the school until the lockdown is lifted and an All Clear is provided.

Post-Event Recovery

Following an emergency, the district will focus on recovery and restoration. This includes providing clear communication to families, offering emotional and psychological supports for students and staff, addressing any physical or structural needs of district facilities, ensuring continuity of operations, including alternate site arrangements if required, restoring learning as quickly and safely as possible, and conducting a debrief to inform ongoing improvement and future planning.

Working Together

Parents play an important role in supporting the School Emergency Management Plan by:

- Ensuring they are aware of the district emergency procedures and drills.
- Providing up-to-date information regarding contact, medical and student release information.
- Following the guidance provided during an emergency.
- Participating in emergency preparedness drills or exercises, including student release drills, when invited by the principal.
- Encouraging their child to take drills seriously.
- Assisting with the organization of emergency supplies, when requested.
- Ensuring they are opted in to School Messenger to receive text messages from the district.

Annual Emergency Drills

Emergency drills provide students and staff the opportunity to practice the district's emergency procedures in a structured and supportive environment. These drills help ensure that everyone understands what to do and can respond calmly and confidently if a real emergency occurs.

Each year, the principal schedules and conducts the following emergency drills:

- Six evacuation (fire) drills.
- Three drop, cover, and hold (earthquake) drills.
- Two lockdown or hold and secure drills.

When an Emergency is Occuring

Please do not go to your child's school unless specifically requested to do so

Although your natural instincts in an emergency may be to go to the school to safeguard your child, please understand that doing so could impede the response to the situation. Arriving at the school during an emergency can interfere with emergency responders and staff who are managing the situation.

If you happen to arrive at the school in the midst of an emergency

Please respect the protocol(s) in progress. While it is understandable that personal circumstances or initial reactions might move you to do something contrary to the school's established procedures, staff cannot compromise the safety of others to accommodate individual requests, such as gaining access to the school during a hold and secure or lockdown.

Please do not call the school or your child's cell phone during an emergency

Staff need to remain available for handling emergency communications with first responders. In some situations, calling a student's cell phone could increase risk by drawing attention to them or revealing their location.

Keeping Parents Informed

During a school-wide emergency, please do not attempt to attend or contact your child's school. You may not be able to reach the school by phone during an emergency. The school or the district will provide notifications and updates as information is confirmed. Emergency information may be communicated through School Messenger, email, the district website, and other official channels.

After an emergency event, the district and school will provide verified and factual information as it becomes available. Depending on the nature of the emergency event, RCMP may provide directions to the district on the content of information that can be shared. In some circumstances, information may be limited while emergency responders conduct their work.

Student Reunification Protocol

The district has developed a Student Reunification Protocol to reunite children with their parents as quickly as possible following an emergency. Parents are asked to adhere to the Student Reunification Protocol described below. It is not unusual for emotions to surface as a result of an emergency situation.

Staff will work to ensure this protocol takes place without delay, and your cooperation when you arrive is essential. If for any reason your child cannot be picked up, they will remain under the supervision of school personnel until appropriate arrangements are confirmed.

1. A designated student reunification area will be established. Parents will be notified at the time of an emergency where the student reunification area is located. Depending on the specifics of the emergency, the location may not be at the school.
2. Students will only be released to an individual designated on the Student Reunification Authorization Form or Student Verification Form. Please complete this form at the beginning of the school year and be sure to keep this information current. The school will only release your child to someone listed on these forms.
3. Valid identification is required to pick up your child. This is required to protect your child. This step will be completed at the designated check-in gate.
4. A signature will be required for the release of your child. This is an important step as it ensures your child is accounted for at all times. This step will occur at the designated release gate.
5. Once your child has been released from the student reunification area, please depart promptly to allow the process to continue efficiently for others.

Important Definitions

All-Hazard

Any incident or event, natural or human caused, that requires an organized response by a public, private, and/or governmental entity in order to protect life, public health and safety, and minimize any disruption of government, social, and economic services.

Critical Incident

A critical incident in the education sector is an event that disrupts normal school operations, such as violence, serious injury, death, or natural disaster, and requires an immediate and coordinated response to ensure safety and recovery.

Disaster

An event, generally considered to have an even greater impact than an emergency, caused by an accident, fire, explosion or technical failure, or by the forces of nature, and has resulted in serious harm to the health, safety and/or welfare of people, or in widespread damage to property.

Emergency

An event or circumstance caused by accident, fire, explosion, technical failure, human action, or force of nature that requires prompt coordination to protect the health, safety, or welfare of people or to limit damage to property.

Emergency Management Cycle

An ongoing process to prevent, mitigate, prepare for, respond to, and recover from an incident.

Duty of Care

The Supreme Court of Canada has articulated that “The standard of care to be exercised by school authorities in providing for the supervision and protection of students for whom they are responsible is that of a careful or prudent parent.” In the event of an emergency, staff are responsible for supervising students until they are safely reunited with their parents or guardians.