Student/Parent Reunification:

A Critical Element in Emergency Preparedness

Chief Brian J. Klimakowski (Ret.)
U.S. Department of Education

- Has identified several critical components in the Preparedness Phase.
- One of those components is the Emergency Management Plan.
- Two of the primary elements in the emergency management plan are:
  - Communications
  - Parent Reunification
New Jersey Department of Education

School Safety and Security Plans

Minimum Requirements

- N.J.A.C. 6A:16-5.1 requires each school district to have a school safety & security plan.
- Plan must include documented procedures and protocols for both
  - Public Information / Media Communications
  - Student / Parent Reunification
Effective **Communications** will be the most critical function during the Preparedness, Response & Recovery Phase.
We NEED to COMMUNICATE
Lessons Learned

Through lessons learned, we find that public trust is gained rapidly through effective and timely communications.
Communication with Parent/Guardian

- Information pertaining to parents and families, including modes of communication and emergency release information, must be updated and distributed at the start of each school year.
- A specific emergency authorization form should be developed, providing detailed contact information for multiple authorized adults who are able to retrieve the student following an event.
Communication with Parent/Guardian

• Have a **previously agreed upon** method of communicating with parents.
• **Do not delay** the Communication Process.
• **Tell parents exactly what is known and factual.** Do not embellish or speculate.
• Discourage parents from contacting the school, law enforcement or 911.
• Parent should be instructed to remain close to the phone and/or communication source as instructed.
Communication with Parent/Guardian

• When communicating with Parents, we need to be prepared to answer immediate concerns about their child’s
  – Health
  – Safety
  – Welfare

• Message needs to be delivered with reassurance.

• Information should be delivered ASAP. (School PIO or IC PIO)
Parsippany Schools Put on Lockdown

Police issue alert at 11:14 a.m., say incident is 'non-threatening.'

Posted by Jason Koestenblatt (Editor), February 11, 2014 at 11:32 AM

A non-threatening incident has put Parsippany area schools on lockdown Tuesday morning, according to a NIXLE alert released by the local police department.

The incident has taken place at Brooklawn Middle School, the alert said, and parents are asked not to contact any of the schools for the time being.
Parents want to know what to do...
Communication with Faculty & Staff

- Use common terminology
- Integrate different communication platforms.
- Keep the faculty & staff informed.
- They need to know the reunification process.
Communication with the Media

• Designate a PIO.
  – These are the only people who will provide information to the Media.

• Designate media staging area.

• Provide consistent and timely releases.

• Establish relationships prior to an event.

• Harness their power!
Reunification

A predetermined, practiced reunification method ensures the reunification process will not further complicate what is probably already a chaotic, anxiety-filled incident.
Reunification

• Reunification of students with their parents or guardians during a time of crisis, is a critical aspect of crisis response.

• It is the responsibility of the school and the district in maintaining the chain of custody for every student, and ensuring efficient reunification.

• It is Law Enforcements responsibility to facilitate the process.
So why do we plan?

- Crisis recovery starts with the crisis, not after.
- Simply “Winging it” will not work.
  - Ignores the mental health demands which accompany a crisis.
  - Threatens the Districts responsibility in maintaining a chain of custody.
So why is it important for parents to understand that the school has a plan in place for reunification?

- It will **aid in the emergency response** because parents will already be aware that there will be an off-site reunification.
- It will **increase the cooperation** from parents because they have confidence that the school is prepared for a crisis.
- It will **increase participation** in keeping contact information updated, since this will be the method of notification during a crisis event.
Families wait hours to be reunited after shooting (Arapahoe H.S.)
Daily Release, Controlled Release and Reunification

**REUNIFICATION:**
- Reunification occurs when events at the school or in the neighborhood demand students are physically returned to parents.

**CONTROLLED RELEASE:**
- Controlled Release occurs at a different time than the normally scheduled daily release.
- Similar to daily release.
- May be as a result of a weather related event, bomb threat etc.

**DAILY RELEASE**
What does the process entail?

• A commitment to the process.
• Identifying the planning team members.
  – School Faculty & Staff
  – Law Enforcement
  – OEM
  – Fire & EMS
  – Mental Health
  – Legal
• Developing both a School and District wide plan.
• Implementing, Updating and Practicing the plan!
Successful planning and implementation will require partnerships with all responding agencies participating in the crisis response.
Reunification Decisions

- How will parents or guardians be advised of situation?
- What do students take with them?
- Where will release take place?
- What transportation is needed?
- What traffic control is needed?
- Anticipated Duration?
Incident Command System (ICS)

- Standardized, on-scene, all-hazard incident management approach that:
  - Allows for the integration of facilities, equipment, personnel, procedures and communications operating within a common organizational structure.
  - Enables a coordinated response among various jurisdictions and functional agencies, both public and private.
  - Establishes common processes for planning and managing resources.
Selecting a Reunification Area

Factors to Consider

• Location, Location, Location
• On-Site vs Off-Site
• Primary & Secondary
• Accessibility and the ability to quickly and safely move the students.
• Sufficient Parking and Facility Access.
• Communication Capabilities
  – Phone
  – Fax
  – Internet
• Able to accommodate the needs of students and staff with disabilities.
Location
Marysville-Pilchuck High School (Reunification in Progress)
Location
Reynold High School
Location
Location
Location
Sandy Hook Fire House
Reunification Setup

• Establish a visible Parent Check in Area.
  – Tent, Table, Signage
• Student Demographic Card/Binders are deployed at Check-In Table.
  – Alphabetical or Grade?
• Establish a Student/Parent Reunification Area that is clearly identified.
• Establish a Student Holding Area.
• Traffic directional signage is deployed.
• Control Sight Lines
Control Sight Lines
Reunification Go-Kit

- Popup tent with appropriate signage.
- Table & Chairs
- Emergency Contact Binders
- Reunification Forms
- Radios, Bull Horns
- Safety Vests
- Name/Grade Placards
- PENS, Batteries, Tape, etc.
- Clipboards
- Filing System for Release Forms (Binders, Folders)
- Batteries
- Maps/GRG’s
Student Release Forms

- Form contains 4 Sections.
  - Section 1 – Completed by Parent/Guardian
  - Section 2 – Completed by Staff at Report Point
  - Section 3 – Completed by Staff at Holding Area
  - Section 4 – Completed by Staff at Parent at Release Point

- Documents are retained at the release point, then forwarded to Command
Reunification Setup (Cont.)

- Reunification site generally requires three specific areas.
  - Student Holding Area
  - Report Point
  - Release Point
- Should also consider a designated area for crisis counseling.
- Reunification staff should be clearly identified.
Micro Layout

Bus Stop

Release Point

Report Point
Reunification Process

• Parent will be directed to Report Point.
• Parent will complete top portion of Student Release Form. (Name, Teacher, Grade and Parents Name)
• Parent will be directed to Specific line.
• Staff member will complete 2\textsuperscript{nd} portion of form. (Permission to Pick Up & Proof of Identification)
• Form will be given to runner, parent will be directed to release point.
• Teacher will document student status and send student to release point with runner. (Absent, Hospital, Missing, Etc.)
• Staff member will confirm Identification, parent will sign for student, student will be released.
Reunification Process (Cont.)

- Parents should be escorted to the “Crisis Counseling Area” if it is determined that the Student is missing or Hospitalized.
- Parents should be updated as soon as information becomes available.
  - Columbine Review commission recommends that victim identification procedures are relaxed
Advancements in Technology
“We were told by three different people to look for our daughter at three different places. The chaos made it so much worse for all of us”

-Alissa Parker
The Student/Parent Reunification Plan needs to be shared with all stakeholders.
Process Recap

✔ Establish a Parent Check-In Location
✔ Deliver students to staging area.
✔ Greeters direct parents/guardians to parent check-in location & help them understand the process.
✔ Parents/Guardians complete the Reunification paperwork & self-sort.
✔ Runner recovers the student from the staging area & brings them to the reunification area.
✔ Parent is directed to the reunification area.
✔ Greeter in identification area identifies students and/or parents that need counseling, and directs them to the designated area.
Reunification Plans & OPRA

- OPRA is the State statute which governs the public’s access to government records in New Jersey.
- There are 24 specific exemptions contained in OPRA
  - “Emergency or security information or procedures for any buildings or facility which, if disclosed, would jeopardize security of the building or facility or persons therein.”
  - “Security measures and surveillance techniques which, if disclosed, would create a risk to the safety or persons, property, electronic data or software.”
FERPA & Information Sharing

- The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) is the federal law that dictates what information school officials are allowed to disclose regarding individual students.
  - “FERPA expressly permits appropriate disclosure in times of actual or potential emergency, and in various less drastic circumstances in which an individual seeks to communicate sincere concerns for a student’s well-being.”
My 2 cents

Advice to our Educators
• Develop and Practice the Plan.
• Train your employees
  – http://training.fema.gov (IS-100 Sca)
• Educate your Parents!

Advice to Law Enforcement
• Get involved in the planning process.
• Prepare for the worst, it can happen here!
• Think beyond your schools.
Reunification goes beyond the Active Shooter and other acts of Violence

- Forest & Structure Fires
- Hazardous Materials
- Floods
- Power Outages
- Bomb Threats
- Tornadoes
- Earthquakes
- Gas leak
April 20, 1999
Columbine High School

Columbine High School Massacre
Littleton, CO April 20, 1999

- **Incident**: In the 3rd deadliest school shooting in United States history, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold killed and wounded students and teachers before committing suicide.

- **Weapons**: 12-gauge shotgun (fired 25 times), Hi-Point 9mm semi-auto carbine (fired 96 times), sawed off shotgun, Tec-9 (fired 55 times).

- **Casualties**: 12 students and one teacher killed, 24 injured.

- **Outcome**: Klebold and Harris were engaged by police outside the school, but retreated inside and killed at will for an extended period of time before committing suicide.

- **Motivation**: Revenge for being “picked on” and being outcasts.

- **TURNING POINT FOR SCHOOL SECURITY**
April 16, 2007
Virginia Polytechnic Institute

Virginia Tech Massacre
Blacksburg, Virginia April 16, 2007

- **Incident:** A 23 year old Virginia Tech student, Cho Seung-Hui, killed two (2) in a dorm, then killed thirty (30) more two (2) hours later in a classroom building. His suicide brought the death toll to thirty three (33), making the shooting rampage the most deadly in U.S. History.
- **Weapon:** Glock model 19, 9mm pistol & Walther P22, .22 caliber pistol
- **Casualties:** Cho killed five (5) faculty members and twenty seven (27) students and wounded seventeen (17) more.
- **Outcome:** self-inflicted gunshot wound to the temple.
- **Motivation:** Cho's underlying psychological diagnosis at the time of the shootings remains a matter of speculation. In 2005, Cho had been declared mentally ill by a Virginia special justice and ordered to seek outpatient treatment.
In Sandy Hook Elementary School, Newtown, Connecticut on December 14, 2012:

- **Incident:** 20 year old Adam Lanza shot his way through a locked glass door on the front of the school, then fatally shot 20 children and 6 adult staff members shortly after 9:30 am. 14 Students killed in one classroom, 6 in the other.

- **Weapon:** Rifle (Bushmaster XM15-E2S)

- **Casualties:** 26 Killed, in addition to his Mother.

- **Outcome:** Self inflicted gun shot wound to the head upon arrival of Police.

- **Motivation:** Undetermined... “extensively researched school shootings” Reported to have been diagnosed with Asperger syndrome.
Platte Canyon High School

Platte Canyon High School
Bailey, Colorado  September 27, 2006

• **Incident:** 53 year old, Duane Roger Morrison, a petty criminal, methodically selected six girls, and took them hostage in a second-floor classroom. After sexually assaulting the girls, he released 4 of them.

• **Weapon:** Glock model 22, .40 Caliber pistol and a S&W .357 Caliber revolver

• **Casualties:** Morrison killed 16 year old Emily Keyes during his shoot out with police.

• **Outcome:** self-inflicted gunshot wound.

• **Motivation:** It is unknown why Morrison selected the Platte Canyon High School. He was unemployed at the time of the hostage crisis. In a 14-page suicide letter, Morrison claimed that he was mentally and physically abused by his father as a child, and had suicidal thoughts since he was 21 years old.
So what do all of these tragedies have in common?
I love u guys

• Emily Keyes, age 16
• Killed during the Platte Canyon Hostage Crisis.
• During the time she was held hostage, Emily sent her parents these text messages: "I love you guys" and "I love u guys. k?"
• 2012 – The Foundation developed the Standard Reunification Method (SRM)

www.iloveuguys.org
Questions

Klimakowski@gmail.com
cell (732)684-1440
@ManchesterPDNJ
School Reunification (Adam 12)
Response
Taking action to effectively contain and resolve an emergency.
Most critical aspect of the response phase will be the efforts put forward during the Prevention/Mitigation phase.