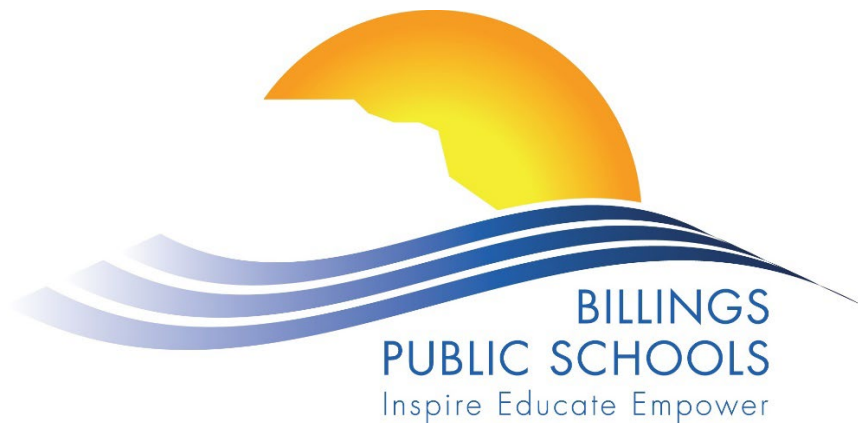


Billings Public Schools

Reunification Plan



September 2024

Reunification Plan

One critical aspect of emergency response is an accountable reunification of students with their parent/guardian in the event of a school crisis or emergency. *The Standard Reunification Method (SRM)*, developed by the *iloveyouguys* foundation, provides school safety teams methods for planning, practicing and achieving successful reunification. Site-specific considerations will impact how these practices can be integrated into school safety plans. Successful planning and implementation will also demand partnerships with all responding agencies participating in an emergency response. The Billings Public Schools has adopted the SRM as our primary framework for mass student/parent reunification of a school in the event of a hazardous community event, natural disaster or human caused mass casualty incident. The **Linked Video** provides an overview of the SRM.

Objectives

The objective of this plan is to help the district develop and implement tangible, on-site and off-site reunification plans. Strengthening partnerships with first responder agencies - police, fire and medical is a key part of the plan. By having district and school personnel build a well-designed plan, it becomes easier to engage the first responders and other key participants in the planning process. Additionally, performing a successful reunification is highly more likely when practice and drills are conducted in advance of an incident. Tabletop exercises and live drills should be scheduled and performed.

The Reunification Process – Simplified/Summarized (Video Overview of the SRM)

1. Establish a Parent Check-In Location.
2. Deliver the students to the Student Assembly/Supervision Area, beyond the field of vision of parents/guardians.
3. "Greeters" direct parents/guardians to the Parent Check-In Area, and help them understand the reunification process.
4. Parents/guardians complete Reunification Cards.
5. The procedure allows parents/guardians to self-sort during check-in, streamlining the process.
6. Parents are directed to the Parent/Student Reunification Area, with bottom portion of card in hand.
7. Reunifiers meet parents, take card and recover students from the student staging area.
8. Controlled lines of sight allow for communication and other issues to be handled with diminished drama or anxiety.
9. Medical or investigative contingencies are anticipated. Successful reunification is based on pre-planning and integrating first responder personnel.

On-Campus Reunification

Depending on the situation, we may be able to stage the reunification at an impacted school. Logistically, this is the easiest solution since students are already there, secured and supervised and won't have to be transported anywhere. We may choose this location if the campus is safe and doesn't interfere with a crime scene investigation or fire/rescue operation. Indoors, outdoors, or a combination of both, can be used for staging areas. Coordination with the Lincoln Center, School Safety Coordinator and SRO's will help determine if this is the best option.

Off-Campus Reunification

When it is not safe to remain on campus, or when parents coming to the school may create more of a hazard, we will initiate an off-campus reunification. This is more of a challenge since all students and staff will need to be moved, either by foot or bus to the off-campus location. Securing students and staff while in transit requires extra planning and diligence. We will have to factor in the time it will take bus drivers to report in, and determine if transportation would best be carried out by First Student, or MET. The decision for an *Off-Campus Reunification* needs to be made early in a crisis BEFORE parents start to arrive. Working through the Superintendent's office and Public Information Officer (PIO) to get a mass notification and/or phone call sent to families, arrange for buses and assistance with logistics at the Reunification site, will all be critical pieces of an off-campus reunification.

Communicating with Students & Staff

Provide clear instructions about the reunification plan to school staff using the intercom, email, and radios. If outdoors or in a large area a megaphone can be used, if it is safe to do so. Communicating with staff will help calm them and help to manage students more effectively. Prepare students for movement to the reunification area and explain what is being done and why. If boarding buses or walking, prepare students for the *Off-Campus Reunification* site. When arriving at the reunification site it is important to keep everyone together and prevent students from wandering off. **Do not release students to parents while moving students to the Reunification Site.**

Communicating with Parents & Guardians

Work with the Superintendent, PIO and Safety Coordinator to assist with parent notifications. Notification needs to take place as soon as possible, after an incident, using the following methods: mass phone calls, mass notification system (ParentSquare), district & school websites, social media sites, and press releases. Here is a sample message for parents using the phone system:

This is an important message from the Billings Public School District. Today is <day of the week>, <Date>. It is <Time> am/pm. The emergency situation at <School Name> School is over. Please listen carefully to these student-release instructions. Parents, please go to the <Reunification Site> located at <Address> to pick up your child. Do not come to the school. All students, including those who normally ride the bus, will be taken to the <Reunification Site> and released to parents and guardians there. Bring your photo identification with you to the <Reunification Site>. School staff will check your ID against a list of individuals approved to sign out each student. This is for the safety of your child. Thank you for your patience as we work to reunite you with your child.

Staging Areas

We will designate and manage several distinct Staging Areas. It is not uncommon for news of school crisis incidents to result in parents, guardians and loved ones to rush to the school or reunification site to pick up their children. Parents can become frustrated by heavy traffic, parking challenges and uncertainty about how to sign-out their students. We will need to be organized at the reunification site in order to reduce stress and work to provide a safe structure in which to conduct the reunification.

Clearly Identify these distinct areas: **1) Student Assembly/Supervision Area, 2) Parent/Family Parking Areas, 3) Parent/Family Greeting Area, 4) Parent/Family Check-In Area, 5) Parent/Family Reunification Area, 6) Crisis Counseling Area, and 7) Law Enforcement Interview Area.** Designate a different person to be in charge of each area and a team to assist in each area. We will utilize runners or "Reunifiers" to retrieve students from the Student Assembly/Supervision Area and bring them to the Parent/Family Reunification Area to be reunited with their families.

Logistics & Set-up: (Unified Command/Emergency Management Director/Site Leadership Staff)

Unified Command, Yellowstone County Emergency Management and reunification site leadership staff will assist in logistics and site set up for Reunification. Lincoln Center team(s) will bring the Reunification Kit(s) to the reunification site. All team members of the reunification site will wear identifying safety vests and ID bracelets. School staff will bring the student emergency information.

1) Student Assembly/Supervision Area: (Student Assembly Supervisors/Available School Staff/Admin/Crisis Response Team/Student Assembly Exit Accountant/Law Enforcement)

The Student Assembly/Supervision Area must be out of view from the Parent and Family Areas. This is where we will continue to supervise, secure and care for students until they are each reunited with family. If indoors, you may decide to keep students in classrooms or move them to a central location like a gym, sanctuary, cafeteria, or other large common area. If outdoors, a fenced area such as a ball field or grandstands may suffice. Consider how we will meet basic needs such as toilets, warmth, water, etc. Ensure that the transportation team (either First Student or MET) knows the location, and where to drop students off at the designated Reunification Site.

2) Parent/Family Parking Area(s): (Parking Supervisor/District staff/Law Enforcement)

Parking areas for parents and families need to be clearly marked and well-staffed. Please refer to the maps of each Reunification location to see designated parking for all parents and families. (Appendices B, C and D)

3) Parent/Family Greeting Area: (Greeter Supervisor/Greeters/Interpreter/Law Enforcement)

As parents begin to arrive, direct them to the Parent/Family Greeting Area, and give them a Parent Reunification Card. (Appendix A) This card provides some details on what to expect of the process and provides a mechanism for school staff to match up students with the appropriate parent, guardian or designated emergency contact. Staff should have pens/pencils available for parent use when filling out the Parent Reunification Card. After parents/guardians have been greeted, they will be moved on to the Parent Check-In Area.

4) Parent/Family Check-In Area: (Check-In Supervisors/Checkers/Lead Checker Accountant/PowerSchool Admin/Law Enforcement)

At the Parent Check-In Area, help the parent/guardian complete the Parent Reunification Card. Using the Student Emergency contact List, or PowerSchool, "Checkers" and "Accountants" will verify the person requesting the students on the list; check their ID against the list and/or PowerSchool; circle the name on the list. *PowerSchool techs/admin will be on hand at the

Parent/Family Check-In Area to assist with finding appropriate reports, and providing credentials for staff to access PowerSchool.

Once verified, tear the card at perforation, and return bottom portion to the parent. Retain the top portion for our record keeping. Ask them to proceed to the Parent/Family Reunification Area.

If a family member does not have an ID, work with staff who may know the families to help identify them and get through the process. *Ask “verification” questions that only a parent/guardian may know. Contact a supervisor to help with this process. Do not release a student to anyone who is not authorized on the student's paperwork, even if the student claims to know the person. If they become argumentative or uncooperative, notify law enforcement.

5) Parent/Family Reunification Area: (Reunification Supervisor(s)/Reunifiers/Exit Accountant/School Staff/Law Enforcement/Victim Advocate/Crisis Counselors)

The Parent/Family Reunification Area is where families wait for their children to be picked up during the reunification process. The process takes time and parents may become stressed and impatient. Provide staff who can be calm, understanding, and professional to answer questions and reassure parents. Assign reunification staff who are available and know the families, ideally school staff who may not have classroom responsibilities, ie. Librarian, Health Enhancement, Art, Music, etc.; staff members who know most/all of the kids. ***If available, the schools Principal(s) should remain close to this area throughout the Reunification process.**

- **Reunifiers:** This team will meet parents in the Reunification Area and collect the bottom portion of the Parent Reunification Card from the parent. With card in hand, each Reunifier will go to the Student Assembly Area to retrieve the student. The Reunifier will ensure that the supervising teachers/staff in the Assembly Area know that the student's parent(s)/guardian(s) are there, and they are being taken to them. Supervising staff will mark the student off of their respective roster. Before returning to the parent/guardian, Reunifier will ask the student if they feel safe/comfortable leaving with the adult named on the card. Once they have confirmed, the student and parent/guardian will be reunited, and allowed to leave the Reunification Area. Reunifiers will indicate the time of reunification on the bottom of the card, keep the bottom half of all Reunification Forms, and deliver them to the Exit Accountant/Director.
 - **If a student is not found to be in the Student Assembly Area, the Reunifier will give the card to the Victim Advocate or Crisis Counselor. The Advocate/Counselor will then separate the parent from the group and take them to a private location/area.**
- **Student Assembly Exit Accountant/Director:** This person will collect the bottom portion of all completed Parent Reunification Forms and store them, alphabetically, by the last name of the student. They will also be the final person to see student and parent upon exit.

6) Crisis Counseling Area: (Crisis Response Supervisor/Crisis Response Counselors/Victim Advocates/Law Enforcement)

In the event that a student is not at the Reunification Site with his/her classmates, it is necessary to have an area for the parents of those students to meet with a member of the Crisis Response team. While the status of the student may not be known at the time, it is important that we provide those parents with the most up to date, accurate information, in a more private setting.

7) Law Enforcement Interview Area: (All necessary members of the Law Enforcement Community)

If the reunification event involves criminal activity, on any level, we will establish an area for Law Enforcement representatives to conduct interviews, as needed, and have conversations with parents and families.

Operational Roles and Responsibilities/Duties: (This list does not include all roles)

Role	Responsibilities
Reunification IC/LE Liaison	Defining and coordinating the objective of accountable, easy reunification of students with parents.
Public Information Officer	Communicating with parents and press; coordinating the use of mass calls or texts, using PS.
Safety Officer	General site observation and safety concern remedy; works in cooperation with IC and local LE
Planning Chief/Scribe	Address short/long term problems, as they arise/Documents the timeline of the Reunification event
Finance/Admin Chief	Establish and manage administrative staff in each area; allocate and release funds for response
Student Assem. Supervisor	Oversees all school staff in the Student Assembly/Supervision Area(s); reports to Reunification IC
Traffic/Parking Lead	Coordinate traffic and parking of parents arriving to site; work with LE to establish flow
Lead Greeter/Greeters	Help coordinate parent lines, explain process, hand out Parent Reunification Forms, remind of ID
Check-In Account./Checkers	Verify identification and custody rights of parents/guardians; direct parents to Reunification Area
Reunification Sup./Reunifiers	Take bottom portion of Reunification Form to Student Assembly Area, recover student and reunify
Exit Accountant Director	Collects bottom of Reunification Card; Final person student/parent sees/Partner with school admin
Supervisor/Crisis Counselors	On standby and support until needed in the event a student is not at reunification site

Transportation

The Incident Commander will initiate the transport process by contacting the BPS transportation company, First Student. First Student will then evaluate and report on their ability to respond to the impacted site in a timely manner. In the event that First Student cannot respond quickly enough, or with enough resources, the IC, along with the Director of Transportation, will contact the city of Billings Transit Manager for support through MET.

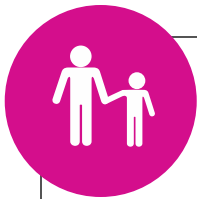
Staging the School for Transport from Impacted Site:

Classroom Evacuation: With the help of school Incident Command (Principal or lead staff) Classrooms are individually evacuated to the Secure Assembly Area. During a Police led Evacuation, students and staff will be asked to keep their hands visible.

If it is a Police Led Evacuation after a Lockdown, each room will be cleared by Law Enforcement personnel. This process may take up to several hours. The teacher should take attendance in the classroom, prior to evacuation. If there is a diverse special needs population, consider evacuating that population first. Once evacuated, this population will demand additional resources.

Secure Assembly Area: Once at the Secure Assembly Area, at the impacted site, it is preferable that teachers stay with their students. If some teachers are unable to be at the Assembly Area, doubling up classes with "Partner" teachers is appropriate. Teachers will verify attendance for all students, and provide their list to the Accountant (secretary/other admin) for Master Roster Verification.

Student and Staff Transport: Students and staff board the bus and are transported to the Reunification Site. Buses having audio video systems can be utilized for further accountability by having students face the camera and state their names. *LE may search students and staff prior to leaving the impacted site.



Reunification Information (PLEASE PRINT CLEARLY)

Have photo identification out and ready to show school district personnel.

Student Name

Student Grade Student Cell Phone Number

Name of person picking up student

Signature

Phone number of person picking up student

Relationship to student being picked up

School personnel completes:

Photo identification matches name of person picking up student?
Yes or No

Parent/Guardian completes:

Print Student Name Again..... Student Grade

Teacher

Student Birthday

School personnel completes upon release of student

TIME

INITIALS

OTHER

Parent Guardian Sign Off

I have read and understand these instructions.

Print Your Name

Signature

Instructions

First, we want to thank you for your patience during this reunification. We share the same goal during this process: Getting you and your student back together as quickly as possible. The reason we're going through this is that an event has occurred at the school that mandates we personally reunite you with your child.

1. Please complete the information on the other side of this card.
2. Prepare identification (if you don't have ID with you, please move to the side of the line, it may take a little longer to verify your identity.)
3. Select the check-in line based on either student last name or student grade.
4. After check-in, staff will split this card and a runner will be sent to recover your student. Please step over to the Reunification Location.
5. If there has been injury or other concerns, you may be asked to meet a counselor.
6. Please don't shout at school or district staff. We'll get through this as quickly as possible.