THE Big Five

Community Packet • 2026-27

Immediate Action Emergency Response for Schools

Coalition for Safe Schools & Communities

San Mateo County

SAN MATEO COUNTY OFFICE OF EDUCATION

STEERING COMMITTEE

COALITION FOR SAFE SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES STEERING COMMITTEE

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Burlingame School District	Don Scatena	Deputy Superintendent, Student Support Services
City of San Mateo Police Department	Ed Barberini	Chief of Police
Department of Emergency Management	TBD	TBD
Jefferson Union High School District	Dorene Basuino	Associate Superintendent, Human Resources & Student Services
Office of Supervisor Jackie Speier	Katrina Rill	Chief of Staff
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San Mateo County Attorney's Office	Lisa Cho	County Deputy Attorney
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San Mateo County Children and Family Services	John Fong	Director
San Mateo County Community College District	Brian Tupper	Director and Chief of Public Safety
San Mateo County District Attorney's Office	Nadia Hahn	Deputy District Attorney
San Mateo County Executive's Office	Linda Wolin	Assistant
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2026-2027 OVERVIEW

The Big Five protocol provides a shared understanding of emergency response using common language across San Mateo County's 23 school districts, numerous private and independent schools, and 20 municipalities and public safety partners.

First released in 2014 after a year-long development process involving experts in education, law enforcement, fire, public health, law, government, and community based organizations, The Big Five outlines five immediate actions to implement in any emergency. The Big Five action responses are Shelter in Place; Drop, Cover, and Hold On; Secure Campus; Lockdown/ Barricade; and Evacuation.

The Big Five is under constant review by the multi-disciplinary Steering Committee of the San Mateo County Coalition for Safe Schools and Communities (The Coalition). The Steering Committee meets regularly to build, strengthen, and sustain relationships, review activities, analyze emerging trends and challenges, and make recommendations.

In addition to The Big Five, the Coalition's robust portfolio of safety guidance tools (safety tools) includes the following: The Big Five Lesson Plans K-12; Student Threat Assessment; Suicide Prevention, Intervention, and Postvention Protocol; Child Sexual Abuse Protocol; Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC) and Human Trafficking Protocol for Educators, Naloxone for Schools Toolkit, Comprehensive School Safety Plans: School Planning Guide, Violent Threat to Schools Response Guidance, Trauma-Informed and Inclusive Practices Guidance, Student Release Guidance for Schools, and Hazard Responses Protocol. New for 2026-2027, Hazard Responses expands to include Wildfire guidance for schools. The San Mateo County Coalition for Safe Schools and Communities continues to provide technical support to schools within San Mateo County and to other County Offices of Education who wish to implement The Big Five and/or the Student Threat Assessment protocols.

The Coalition for Safe Schools and Communities remains committed to our vision to create and sustain safe and positive school and community environments so all youth may thrive and succeed.

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DISASTER SERVICE WORKER

California Government Code, Section 3100, Title 1, Division 4, Chapter 4 states that public employees are Disaster Service Workers and are subject to such disaster service activities as may be assigned by their superiors or emergency service commanders. The term "public employees" includes all persons employed by the state or any county, city, state agency or public district. The law applies in the following cases:

- When a local emergency is proclaimed
- When a state of emergency is proclaimed
- When a federal disaster declaration is made

WHAT DOES A DISASTER SERVICE WORKER DO?

- Public employees serving in the role of Disaster Service Workers may be asked to do jobs other than their usual duties for periods exceeding normal work hours
- Employees may be scheduled in shifts and asked to return to the work site at hours outside the normal workday
- Disaster Service Workers will be deployed within the Incident Command System and may perform a variety of duties including oversight of shelter care, communications, logistics, first aid and comfort, or community support and safety
- When pressed into disaster service, employees' Workers Compensation coverage becomes the responsibility of state government (OES), but the employer pays the overtime. These circumstances apply only when a local or state emergency is declared.

To provide effective support as a Disaster Service Worker, employees must have confidence their own families are well prepared to deal with emergencies in their absence. The time and energy a staff member commits to being prepared at home will provide the best assurance they are capable of dealing with the emergency situation at the school/work site.

CALLING 911

Response is the process of implementing appropriate actions while an emergency situation is unfolding. In this phase, schools mobilize the necessary resources to address the emergency at hand. This may include calling or texting 911.

When calling 911, be prepared to remain on the phone and answer specific questions. In order to complete an accurate assessment of the situation, the 911 Dispatcher must obtain as much information as possible to best inform emergency responders and engage the appropriate level of medical response.

WHEN REPORTING AN EMERGENCY:

- Remain calm and speak slowly and clearly
- Be prepared to provide name, location of the incident, and caller's location, if different from the scene of the emergency
- Although caller ID information may transfer immediately to the 911 Dispatcher, it is not available in all locations. The 911 Dispatcher will confirm and verify the phone number and address for every call received.
- Answer all questions asked by the 911 Dispatcher, even those that seem repetitious
- Do not hang up until the Dispatcher says to do so

CALLING 911 FROM A CELL PHONE:

- Cell phone calls to 911 are often sent to a 911 answering point based on cell radio coverage. Cell coverage areas don't always match city boundaries.
- Know your cell phone number and be prepared to give the dispatcher an exact address

TEXT TO 911:

Text to 911 is the ability to send a text message to reach 911 emergency call takers from your mobile phone or device. However, because text to 911 is currently only available in certain locations, always make a voice call to contact 911 during an emergency whenever possible. Call if you can. Text if you can't.

When calling 911, time is of the essence. Remain calm; speak slowly and clearly.
The 911 Dispatcher needs to gather the correct information the first time they ask for it.

INCLUSIVE PRACTICES

This section lists inclusive practices that can be employed to assist students with ambulatory, cognitive, developmental, sensory, and mental health needs.

- Student needs will vary depending on the individual student
- It is important to model confidence and competence during a safety drill or emergency incident
- All students need to know it is okay to feel afraid, sad, angry, or worried during an emergency incident and be encouraged to talk about what they are feeling or experiencing
- Consider creating an Individual Emergency Plan for each student

For students with unique needs, consider creating an Individual Emergency Plan for each student.

THINK ON YOUR FEET

In the event of an emergency, quick thinking is imperative for survival. During a crisis, an individual must think on their feet to determine the best course of action. These choices may include:

- Get off campus
- Hide
- Go into Lockdown/Barricade
- Protect/defend against an assailant in the most extreme circumstances

Understanding and practicing these options can help an individual respond decisively and in so doing, best ensure the safety and survival of self and others.

In the event of a Violent Intruder on campus, expect to hear noise from alarms, gunfire, explosions, and shouting. It is not uncommon for people experiencing a dangerous situation to first deny or rationalize the possible danger rather than respond. Quality training can help individuals think clearly and quickly during a chaotic scene. Proper training should include helping staff recognize the sounds of danger. Train staff and students to act decisively and remain flexible with a "think on your feet" approach.

LOOK, LISTEN, AND LEAVE: FIRE ALARM

The **LOOK, LISTEN, AND LEAVE** protocol is an important action to practice when training the “think on your feet” mindset. At the sound of a fire alarm, staff and other leaders should take a moment to assess the scene before evacuating. The three steps of **LOOK, LISTEN, AND LEAVE** are:

- **LOOK** - open the classroom door and look out. Do you see or smell smoke or fire? Is the path to the pre-planned evacuation spot clear of obstacles? Do you notice anything out of the ordinary?
- **LISTEN** - in addition to the alarm, are there other sounds? Do you hear anything that would indicate it is unsafe to leave the room (explosions, panicked voices, the discharge of a weapon)?
- **LEAVE** - having determined it is safe to do so, direct students to leave the room toward the pre-determined evacuation spot.

IMMEDIATE ACTION RESPONSE: THE BIG FIVE

The Big Five is a set of Immediate Action Responses intended to be implemented quickly in any variety of emergency situations. When an emergency occurs, it is critical that staff members take *immediate* steps to protect *themselves*, their *students*, and *other people* on campus.

Staff members must become familiar with each Immediate Action Response and be prepared to perform assigned responsibilities. All students must also be taught how to implement each of The Big Five protocols.

THE BIG FIVE IMMEDIATE ACTION RESPONSES

THE BIG FIVE ACTION	WHEN	WHAT
SHELTER IN PLACE	Environmental hazards, dangerous air quality due to smoke or other contaminants, fire off-site, dangerous wildlife in the area, or severe weather	For external environmental threats, medical emergencies, or tsunami warnings (outside the danger zone). Actions may include closing windows, sealing vents, and shutting down HVAC systems.
DROP, COVER AND HOLD ON	Earthquake, explosion, or falling debris	Protect students and staff from falling debris, drop to the floor, take cover under heavy furniture and hold on.
SECURE CAMPUS	Potential threat of violence in the surrounding community and/or police activity off-campus and nearby	For potential threats of violence nearby: Return to assigned classroom. Close and lock all doors. Remain inside and continue with learning.
LOCKDOWN/ BARRICADE	Violent intruder on campus	Immediately seek safety indoors. Once inside, lock and barricade all doors. Cover windows and turn off lights. Remain quiet and alert. No one is allowed to enter or exit for any reason unless directed by law enforcement.
EVACUATION	Bomb threat, chemical/gas leak, fire inside the building or nearby premises, severe weather alert, after an earthquake or explosion, or when implementing Student Release/Reunification	Use the "Look, Listen, and Leave" protocol. Once it is deemed safe to exit buildings, lead students and school staff from school buildings to a predetermined location.

SHELTER IN PLACE

SHELTER IN PLACE is implemented to isolate students and staff from the outdoor environment and prevent exposure to airborne contaminants or threats posed by wildlife or other environmental hazards. The procedures may necessitate closing and sealing doors, windows, and vents; shutting down the classroom/building heating, ventilation, and air conditioning systems to prevent exposure to the outside air; and turning off pilot lights.

SHELTER IN PLACE is also used during a medical emergency like cardiac arrest or other similar life-threatening emergency for privacy and clear access to the individual by emergency personnel.

SHELTER IN PLACE is considered appropriate for, but is not limited to, the following types of emergencies:

- External chemical release
- Fire in the community
- Hazardous material spills
- Unhealthy air quality outside
- Wildlife on or near campus posing a danger
- High winds or severe weather
- Tornado
- Tsunami- yellow and green zones
- Medical emergency

A Shelter-in-Place response may require that HVAC systems be shut down to provide protection from contaminated outside air. Students and staff may freely move about inside the buildings, but no one should leave the protected space until directed by fire officials, law enforcement, or site administration.

SHELTER IN PLACE:

- All heating, air conditioning, and ventilation systems may need to be shut down immediately depending on the hazard
- All pilot lights and sources of flame may need to be extinguished
- Any gaps around doors and windows may need to be sealed
- Allows for free movement within classrooms or offices
- Allows for free movement within classrooms or offices

DROP, COVER, AND HOLD ON

DROP, COVER AND HOLD ON is the immediate action taken in the event of an earthquake or explosion and protects students and staff from flying and falling debris. It is an appropriate action for, but is not limited to, the following types of emergencies:

- Earthquake
- Explosion

In the event of an explosion, earthquake, or other event causing falling debris, immediately "DROP, COVER, and HOLD ON." Students and staff should drop to the floor, duck under a sturdy desk or table, cover the head with arms and hands, and hold onto furniture. Turn away from windows to stay clear of breaking glass. Individuals in wheelchairs can secure against an interior wall and lock the wheels. Protect head by covering with arms if possible.

DROP, COVER, AND HOLD ON:

- Must be practiced for immediate and automatic response
- Is the single most useful action to protect from injury in an earthquake
- In the event it is impossible to duck under sturdy furniture, continue to cover face and head with arms and hold onto something sturdy
- Most injuries in earthquakes are caused by breaking glass or falling objects
- Fire alarms and sprinkler systems may go off in buildings during an earthquake, even if there is no fire
- Stay alert to aftershocks
- Assist those with special needs to ensure safe cover for all
- Evacuate **only if** there is damage to the building, the building is on fire, or location is in a tsunami zone

SECURE CAMPUS

SECURE CAMPUS is implemented when the threat of violence or police action in the surrounding community requires precautionary measures to ensure the safety of staff and students. When a school is in **SECURE CAMPUS** status, classroom instruction and/or activity should continue and all students and staff remain inside *through the duration of the event*, except for essential needs. Outer gates and other entrance/exit points can be closed (**NOT LOCKED**) to deter a potential perpetrator from entering school grounds.

During a Secure Campus, the Incident Command Team or staff assigned by the Incident Command Team shall assist in escorting students and staff who may need to leave the classroom for Essential Needs. Essential Needs can include but are not limited to the following:

- Bathroom/Toileting
- Medical Attention/Response
- Mental Health/Wellness Needs/Response

SECURE CAMPUS is considered appropriate for, but not limited to, the following types of emergencies:

- Potential threat of violence in the surrounding community
- Law enforcement activity in the surrounding community
- Anonymous targeted threat to campus

A **SECURE CAMPUS** response may be elevated to **LOCKDOWN / BARRICADE** as circumstances demand in which case instruction immediately ceases and students and staff follow **LOCKDOWN / BARRICADE** procedures.

Secure Campus allows for instruction to continue while the school takes preventative action in the event of a threat in the neighborhood surrounding a school. Lock all classroom/ office doors, close entrance and exit points on the school's perimeter, and continue classroom instruction.

SECURE CAMPUS

SECURE CAMPUS:

- Is intended to prevent a potential threat present in the community from entering campus
- Heightens school safety while honoring instructional time
- Requires that all exterior classroom/office doors are locked and remain locked
- Is intended to prevent intruders from entering occupied areas of the building
- Requires that students and staff remain in **SECURE CAMPUS** status until **ALL CLEAR** is issued by School Incident Commander

LOCKDOWN / BARRICADE

LOCKDOWN / BARRICADE is implemented when the imminent threat of violence or gunfire is identified on the campus, or the school is directed to do so by law enforcement. During **LOCKDOWN / BARRICADE**, students are to always remain in designated classrooms or lockdown locations. Do not evacuate until room is cleared by law enforcement or site administration. This response is considered appropriate for, but not limited to, the following types of emergencies:

- Gunfire
- Threat of extreme violence on the classroom

During a **LOCKDOWN / BARRICADE**, remember that immediate safety from the violent intruder is the priority and guides all actions, above all other concerns.

Lockdown/Barricade requires closing and locking doors and barricading with heavy objects. No one is allowed to enter or exit until door-to-door release by law enforcement or School Incident Commander who will unlock door from the outside with keys.

LOCKDOWN / BARRICADE:

- Is a response to an immediate danger; it is not preceded by any warning
- Demands quick action; an active shooter, for example, can fire one round per second
- Requires common sense thinking under duress; do what must be done to best ensure survival of students and staff
- If it is possible to safely get off campus with students, take that action immediately (Escape/Get Off Campus)
- If it is not possible to get off campus, quickly lockdown inside a safe room and barricade the entrance (Hide/Lockdown/Barricade)
- Once a room is secured, no one is allowed to enter or exit under any circumstances
- Prioritize clear communication
- In the extreme instance that a Violent Intruder is able to enter a room, occupants should be prepared to protect or defend by any means necessary (Protect/Defend)

LOCKDOWN / BARRICADE

THINK ON YOUR FEET

In the event of a Violent Intruder on campus, quick thinking is imperative for survival. Especially when an active threat of violence is present, an individual must think on their feet to quickly determine the best course of action.

In the event of a Violent Intruder on campus, expect to hear noise from alarms, gunfire, explosions, and shouting. It is not uncommon for people confronted with a threat to first deny the possible danger rather than respond. Quality training can help individuals think clearly during a chaotic scene. Proper training should include helping staff recognize the sounds of danger and teaching them to forcefully communicate and take necessary action.

These actions would likely include:

ESCAPE / GET OFF CAMPUS:

- Only attempt this if confident the suspect(s) is not in the immediate vicinity
- Safely get off campus; find a position of cover or safe place for assembly
- Guide/encourage others you might encounter on the way to follow you to safety
- Call 911 immediately to report location and request emergency services if necessary
- Once in a safe place – stay there

HIDE / LOCKDOWN / BARRICADE:

- Clear all hallways; get students and staff inside immediately
- Once locked and barricaded inside a room, follow all protocols for Lockdown/Barricade as practiced
- Direct all those in the room to remain still and quiet; turn off/silence cell phones
- If unable to find cover inside a secure room, quickly seek out a hiding place on campus

LOCKDOWN / BARRICADE

PROTECT/DEFEND:

- If confronted by a Violent Intruder, as a last resort, consider trying to disrupt or incapacitate through aggressive force or by using items in the environment such as fire extinguishers or chairs
- There are documented instances where aggressive action on the part of the victims resulted in stopping the attacker
- Protect/defend is NOT an expectation, merely one option for a last resort response

LOOK, LISTEN, AND LEAVE: FIRE ALARM

If an alarm is triggered during Lockdown/Barricade, always respond with caution and **LOOK** and **LISTEN** for unusual or violent activity before initiating an evacuation **LEAVE**.

- **LOOK** - open the classroom door and look out. Do you see smoke or fire? Is your pre-planned evacuation path clear of obstacles? Do you notice anything out of the ordinary?
- **LISTEN** - in addition to the alarm, are there other sounds? Do you hear anything that would indicate it is unsafe to leave the room (explosions, panicked voices, the discharge of a weapon)?
- **LEAVE** - only after determining it is safe to do so, direct students to leave the room toward the pre-determined evacuation location

EVACUATION

EVACUATION is implemented when conditions make it unsafe to remain in the building. This action provides for the orderly movement of students and staff along prescribed routes from inside school buildings to a designated outside area of safety.

EVACUATION is considered appropriate for, but is not limited to, the following types of emergencies:

- Bomb threat
- Chemical accident
- Explosion or threat of explosion
- Fire
- Earthquake

In the event of an explosion, earthquake, or other event causing falling debris, **EVACUATION** will be preceded by a **"DROP, COVER, and HOLD ON"** protocol. Students and staff should drop to the floor, duck under a desk or table, cover the head with arms and hands, and hold onto furniture.

THINK ON YOUR FEET:
LOOK, LISTEN, AND LEAVE - FIRE ALARM

Before evacuation, take a moment to look outside the door for any potential dangers. Listen for anything unusual that might pose a safety risk. Once it's determined the path is safe, evacuate the office or classroom to a designated safe area.

EVACUATION:

- Requires exit from the building to a designated safe site, on-campus or off-site
- May require that students and staff rely on district bus transportation
- May require staff to exit via alternate routes based on circumstances
- Requires that students remain with assigned teachers unless circumstances prohibit it
- Requires that staff and students assist those with special needs to ensure for safe egress of all

EVACUATION

EVACUATION ROUTES:

Take care in choosing a designated evacuation area. Consider whether there is a clear route to the area from all parts of the campus, and whether it is far enough away in the case of a fire or gas leak, but close enough to be reached on foot. Consider also having multiple designated evacuation areas in the event one is obstructed or otherwise becomes unsafe during an emergency. Make sure there is a clear, unblocked path onto campus for emergency vehicles. Be sure to include evacuation to designated area(s) as part of safety drills and training.