The Big Five

Student Release Guidance for Schools



Coalition for Safe Schools & Communities

SAN MATEO COUNTY OFFICE OF EDUCATION

© Coalition for Safe Schools & Communities and the San Mateo County Office of Education

STUDENT RELEASE GUIDANCE FOR SCHOOLS

The Student Release Guidance for Schools guides the reunification of students with their families after an evacuation or other emergency incident on campus. The guidance includes planning and preparation, roles, supply lists, and logistical considerations for both on-site and off-site student release locations. The guidance includes a flow chart of the student release process and a reunification form to assist in the efficient reunification of students with family members. The guidance is intended to be used in conjunction with Coalition for Safe Schools and Communities safety protocols and tools, including The Big Five Immediate Response Protocols, Communication Guidelines, Incident Command Staff Cards, and the school's/district's Emergency Operations Plan.

STAFFING CONSIDERATIONS

OPERATIONS SECTION:

Every school site is required by law to prepare an Incident Command System (ICS) and update it annually as part of the Comprehensive School Safety Plan. The Operations Section of the ICS is responsible for managing all incident-specific operations of an emergency response. The key responsibilities of Incident Command leaders involved in Student Release processes are:

THE OPERATIONS SECTION LEADER:

- Develops Incident Action Plan with Incident Commander
- Supports/directs on-scene response
- Supervises incident to ensure safety and welfare of all personnel
- Determines needs and requests additional resources
- Communicates concerns between Section Leaders and Incident Commander
- Briefs and assigns operations personnel in accordance with the Incident Action Plan
- Initiates recommendation for release of resources
- Coordinates the After-Action Report with Section Leaders

STUDENT RELEASE TEAM LEAD:

- Establishes and sets up reunification area according to Student Release Plan
- Provides for systematic and efficient reunification of students with parents/caregivers
- Maintains records of students who are released/reunified
- Provides master list of missing students/staff
- Identifies need for law enforcement/security assistance
- Identifies need for crisis support for family notification

REUNIFICATION/STUDENT RELEASE ROLES AND DUTIES

Family Check-In Area	Role	Duties
Families check-in and provide identification for verification	Check-In Area Supervisor	Establishes and manages the check-in process. Supervises greeters, checkers, and flow monitors.
	Greeter/s	Helps coordinate check-in lines, explains process and assists families.
	Traffic Control/Flow Monitor	Assists in guiding traffic flow. Informs families on where to check in, where to park, and whether to stay in vehicle.
	Checkers	Verifies the ID of the person picking up the student. Verifies student is present. Directs family members to Waiting Area or Assistance Area.
	Security/Law Enforcement	Provides crowd and car traffic control and assists with uncooperative or upset family members.

Family Waiting and Family Assistance Area	Role	Duties
Families with a student missing, injured, or detained by law enforcement would be directed to the Family Assistance Area	Family Waiting Area and Family Assistance Area Supervisor	Establishes and manages the Family Waiting Area and the Assistance Area. Responsible for supporting parents of missing, injured, or detained students after being notified by law enforcement or Superintendent. Provides information on next steps, hospital location, and other information.
	Mental Health Support/ Counselor	Provides crisis counseling and support to families receiving notification regarding missing, injured, or detained students.
	Security/Law Enforcement	Provides assistance with uncooperative or upset family members.

REUNIFICATION/STUDENT RELEASE ROLES AND DUTIES

Family Reunification/ Check-Out Area	Role	Duties
Families retrieve student and check-out	Reunification/Check-Out Area Supervisor	Establishes and manages the Reunification and Check-Out Area. Supervises Runners, Flow Monitors, and Checkers, and is the last staff member the student and family see before exiting the site. Offers a friendly face, wave, and goodbye. Is available to answer any questions.
	Runner	Assists in locating students in the Student Assembly Area and bringing them to the Reunification Area where a Checker will reunify the student with a family member.
	Traffic Control/ Flow Monitor	Assists in guiding traffic flow in the parking lot as families and students leave. Informs families on where to exit the Reunification Area and directs them to leave the location in a timely manner.
	Checker	Matches students with family member, using a reunification form, and then documents the student has been reunified.

Student Assembly Area	Role	Duties
Students wait to be retrieved	Reunification/Check-Out Area Supervisor	Responsible for monitoring and caring for students and staff at the evacuation location while waiting for release.

STUDENT RELEASE LOCATIONS

CONSIDERATIONS FOR STUDENT RELEASE LOCATIONS: OFF-SITE

- Ensure the Off-Site Evacuation Location is safe for students while they wait for family to arrive (including shelter, access to restrooms, ability to limit access to people who may pose a risk to students, ability to keep students contained in space)
- Consider developing a **Memoranda of Understanding** with multiple Off-Site Evacuation Locations near the school site
- If applicable, designate a Wildfire Evacuation Location located outside of the potential danger zone (work with local fire department and the San Mateo County Department of Emergency Management to identify a safe location)
    - Develop a plan for transporting students and staff to Wildfire Evacuation Location
    - Ensure the plan includes considerations for students with disabilities (for some of these students, an individual evacuation plan may be necessary)
- Coordinate selection of Off-Site Evacuation Locations with School Nursing and Special Education staff to ensure site accessibility for students with disabilities
- Coordinate transportation needs for students with disabilities to Off-Site Evacuation Location if needed
- Consider parking lot size and accessibility to families while they check in and wait to be reunited with their student. Parking should be near the Check-in Location and the Reunification/Check-Out Location
- Consider reducing the number of ingress/egress points to minimize traffic congestion
- Student Release Site should have four different areas, divided and separated from each other, to maintain separation between students and families until reunification occurs
    1. Family Check-In Area
    2. Family Waiting and Family Assistance Area
    3. Family Reunification/Check-Out Area
    4. Student Assembly Area

STUDENT RELEASE LOCATIONS

- Next to the Family Waiting Area, provide a confidential and private location for family members to be taken by a counselor or trained mental health provider when receiving difficult information such as a missing or injured child or a child detained by the police
    - Provide information regarding the student in a trauma-informed way
    - If the child was injured, provide the family with the location, address, and phone number of the hospital where their child was transported
    - If child was detained, provide family with the location, address, and phone number of the police station where their child was transported and provide case number if applicable
    - If child's location is unknown currently, inform family where they should wait or where they can obtain further information
    - Provide family with trauma grief support resources and/or crisis hotline
- Consider inclement weather, winter storms, or high heat when designating each location. If possible and safe, stage the Student Assembly Area inside or under an awning to protect students and staff from inclement weather
- School site Public Information Officer will organize and staff a media staging area located away from the families and students

STUDENT RELEASE LOCATIONS

CONSIDERATIONS FOR STUDENT RELEASE LOCATIONS: ON-SITE

- On-Site Student Release Location should have four different areas, divided and separated from each other, to maintain separation between students and families until reunification occurs
    1. Family Check-In Area
    2. Family Waiting and Family Assistance Area
    3. Family Reunification/Check-Out Area
    4. Student Assembly Area
- Next to the Family Waiting Area, provide a confidential and private location (Family Notification Area) for family members to be taken by a counselor or trained mental health provider when receiving difficult information such as a missing or injured child or a child detained by the police. Initial notification of missing, injured, or detained students should be performed by Law Enforcement or Superintendent
- Consider inclement weather, winter storms, or high heat when designating each location. If possible and safe, stage the Student Assembly Area inside or under an awning to protect students and staff from inclement weather
- Consider an indoor location or more private location for the Family Waiting Area

STUDENT RELEASE LOCATIONS

- Prior to incident, include other facilities/agencies that operate on the school site (adult school, preschools, community centers) in planning and training
    - Designate evacuation areas for those agencies at the On-Site Location. Coordinate how to implement and include them in Student Release procedures
    - Coordinate Off-Site Evacuation Location and procedures with those property owners
    - Determine if property owners will be included in the protocol or will operate independently and evacuate to a different Off-Site Location
- Organize the Family Check-In Area by alpha or by grade level, depending on the school site (elementary schools may consider by grade, whereas middle and high schools may consider using student last name or class period/teacher)
- Consider parking lot size and accessibility to families while they check in and wait to be reunited with their student
- Consider the number of ingress/egress points to minimize traffic congestion
- School site Public Information Officer will need to set up the media staging area located away from families and students and preferably off school campus

STUDENT RELEASE PROCESS

ON-SITE STUDENT RELEASE PROCESS

An On-Site Student Release may occur for incidents small enough to render the school building unsafe after an **EVACUATION**, but does not require students to be relocated to the Off-Site Evacuation Location. Some incidents may allow for Student Release while students are still in classrooms. Consult with local law enforcement and fire department to best determine location of Student Release (from inside classrooms or from On-Site Evacuation Location). The following are steps to follow for an On-Site Student Release:

- Assume and maintain Incident Command structure
- Contact local law enforcement, if you have not already done so. Provide reason for Student Release and request law enforcement presence if needed
- Initiate an **EVACUATION** if needed
- Contact District Office/Superintendent's Office
- Access Student Release Supplies, **Emergency Response Box**, and Evacuation Supplies (water and snacks) if needed
- Assign Student Release Roles and set up pre-determined On-site Student Release stations (Student Assembly Area, Family Check-In Area, Family Waiting Area, Reunification/Check-Out Area, and Family Assistance Area)
- Communicate next steps to teachers and staff who are with students at the Evacuation location and convey the situation is under control. Establish and move students to the Student Assembly Area, if different from the Evacuation location
- Communicate to families an Evacuation has occurred and a Student Release has been initiated. Instruct family members to bring a valid ID and notify them of where and when to arrive. Provide them with as much information as possible and thank them for being patient with the process
- Implement predetermined school plans for students who have transported themselves to school (walked, biked, or drove) or who rode the bus (public or school district's)

STUDENT RELEASE PROCESS

OFF-SITE STUDENT RELEASE/REUNIFICATION PROCESS

An Off-Site Student Release may occur for incidents where the school site is deemed unsafe or following an **EVACUATION** to the Off-Site Evacuation Location as required by law enforcement. In these cases, the Student Release process needs to be away from campus to ensure safety. The following are steps to follow for an Off-Site Student Release:

- Assume and maintain Incident Command Structure
- Contact local law enforcement, if you have not already done so. Provide reason for Student Release to Off-Site Evacuation Location and request law enforcement presence if needed
- Provide route to be taken and Off-Site Evacuation Location information
- Initiate an **EVACUATION** if needed
- Contact District Office/Superintendent's Office
- Access Student Release Supplies, Emergency Response Box and Evacuation Supplies (water and snacks), if needed, and transport to the Off-Site Evacuation Location
- Assign Student Release Roles and set up pre-determined Student Release stations (Student Assembly Area, Family Check-in Area, Family Waiting Area, Reunification/Check-Out Area, and Family Assistance Area) at the off-site location
- Communicate to teachers and staff who are with students once at the Evacuation Location. Share next steps and convey the situation is under control
- Communicate to families that an Off-Site Evacuation has occurred and that a Student Release has been initiated
    - Instruct families to bring a valid ID
    - Give the exact location of where and when to arrive
    - Provide families with as much information as possible when they arrive at the Off-Site Evacuation Location
    - Thank them for being patient with the process

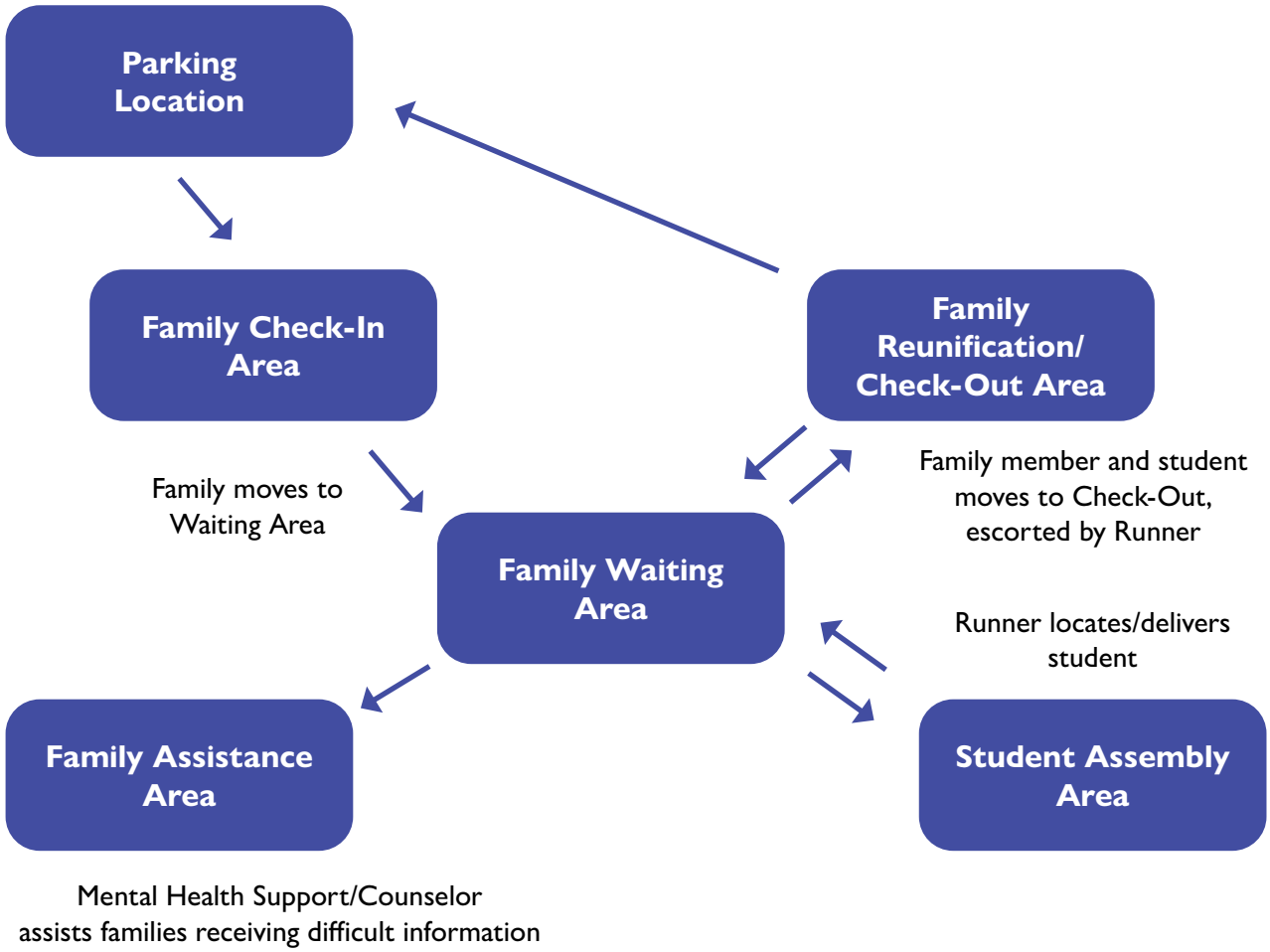
STUDENT RELEASE PROCESS

STEP-BY-STEP STUDENT RELEASE

- Send notification to families regarding need for Student Release
  - Location of Student Release Area (On or Off Site)
  - Instruct families to follow signs to the **Family Check-In Area**
  - Remind families that:
    - Person picking up student(s) must be listed on the Emergency Contact Form as someone authorized to pick student/s up
    - Parents/guardians may not pick up other students for whom they are not an Emergency Contact
    - Valid Form of ID will be required to verify identity
    - Reiterate need for patience, understanding, and cooperation
- Families arrive at Student Release Location
  - Traffic Control/Flow Monitors control parking area and direct families to **Family Check-In Area**
- Families arrive at **Family Check-In Area**
  - Greeters welcome families and ask them to complete the **Student Reunification Form**
  - Provide form, pen, and clipboard or table to write on
  - Families submit the completed form and show valid identification to Checker for emergency contact verification
  - Checker notes location of student based on Student Reunification Form and returns verified form to the family member to take to the Family Waiting Area and give to a Runner
  - If a student is listed as missing, injured, or detained, the Supervisor will bring the family to the Family Assistance Area where Law Enforcement or Superintendent will notify them, and a Mental Health Support/Counselor will be available for support

STUDENT RELEASE PROCESS

- Family is directed to **Family Waiting Area**
  - Family member hands Runner-verified Reunification Form. Family member retains the bottom portion of form. Runner takes the top portion of form to retrieve the student
  - Upon return, Runner delivers the student and then escorts the parent/guardian and student to **Reunification/Check-Out Area**
- Family Member is directed to **Reunification/Check-Out Area**
  - Traffic/Flow Monitors help ensure the parent/guardian completes check-out procedures and then leaves the area immediately
  - Checkers attach the verified portion of the form to the family member receipt portion and maintain records
  - The Reunification Supervisor is present to say goodbye to students and families as they leave



STUDENT RELEASE/REUNIFICATION FORM

Thank you in advance for your patience with this process. Our common goal is to get family members reunited with their student(s) safely and quickly.

Please complete this form and bring it, along with a valid form of identification, to the Family Check-In Area. A Checker will verify you are an official emergency contact for each student listed on this form.

Student's Name	Teacher's Name	Date of Birth	Student Grade

Name of person picking up student(s): _____

Phone number of person picking up student(s): _____

Relationship to student(s) being picked up: _____

Signature of person picking up student(s): _____

****** Top portion for verification by Family Check-In Area – Runner takes form to retrieve student(s) – Family Reunification Check-Out Area to match to Parent Portion *******

Family member: Submit form at Family Reunification Check-Out Area upon release of your student(s)

Student's Name	Student Grade

Name of person picking up student(s): _____

Emergency contact verification by: _____

Reunification confirmation by: _____

Attach both portions of the form and retain for records

SUPPLY LIST

- Tables
- Tape
- Pens
- Stapler with extra staples
- Signage– areas and directions for parents
- Forms
- Clipboard
- Bins with lids for paperwork by grade level
- Emergency contact binder
- Cones
- Consider: rain/wind shelter

RESOURCES

ADAPTED FROM THE FOLLOWING RESOURCES:

Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools: Family Reunification Sample Annex: A Fictional Example for Family Reunification Before, During, And After an Emergency

I Love You Guys Foundation: Standard Reunification Method V3

1 Plan: Family Reunification Guide, Safe and Sound Schools