

Crisis and Emergency Preparedness



Prince William County

PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Providing A World-Class Education

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A MESSAGE FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT



Dear Parents/Guardians:

The safety and well-being of our students, staff, and community is our top priority in Prince William County Public Schools (PWCS). The need for students to achieve high academic standards within a safe learning environment makes the words, “crisis management,” more important than ever. They are important to understand and are essential to student learning.

Our School Division and each of our schools have developed crisis response plans to be prepared for and respond to emergencies and challenging circumstances.

The plans provide protocols to coordinate responses and to ensure safety and minimize disruptions for students, their families, and the Prince William community.

Schools routinely practice responses to various emergencies and review their plans annually. Additionally, our School Division enjoys a close relationship with the police department and works in cooperation with county and state agencies to ensure that our crisis management plan is well-defined and effective.

We know that it is extremely important for you to have accurate and timely information regarding emergency situations. You will find a variety of communication outlets used by the School Division noted in this pamphlet. The pamphlet also outlines various actions PWCS will utilize during emergencies. We have included school responses to such events as a lockdown, shelter-in-place, and evacuation, so parents and guardians will be better prepared.

We hope that this information will clarify any questions you may have regarding our crisis management responses while your child is in school or being transported by the School Division. If you need additional assistance, you may contact the PWCS information line at 703.791.2776.

We will continue to evaluate and update our plans so that all students and staff can have a safe, positive school experience. I know that I can count on you to know and do your part — the success of our plans depend on all of us.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Steven L. Walts". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Steven L. Walts
Superintendent of Schools

COUNTY AND SCHOOLS WORK TOGETHER

The basic Emergency Operations Plan for Prince William County incorporates the School Division in a supporting role to the Prince William County Department of Social Services. The Prince William County School Division's area of responsibility during a county emergency consists of the following components of the County Emergency Operations Plan:

- Providing emergency shelter and temporary housing. All school sites are subject to emergency shelter designation.
- Providing emergency and temporary food services.
- Providing transportation for displaced persons.

Prince William County Public School Division support services, including custodial, food service, maintenance, and security will be provided on a stand-by basis, ready to support the shelter operations when notified.

SECURITY MEASURES IN PLACE

Security measures in place within PWCS and buildings comply with the federal school safety plan and ensure that the School Division is responsive to a variety of crises and emergencies. These measures include:

- Daily review of local, national, and global events by the Superintendent and his senior staff.
- Maintaining a heightened state of vigilance.
- Employee and visitor identification system.
- School security residents on many campuses.
- The PWCS anonymous tip line, 703.791.2821.
- Security patrols of schools.
- Security cameras in schools and other buildings.
- Emergency communication and messaging systems.
- Armed Community Safety Officers randomly assigned to elementary schools.
- County police officers assigned to middle and high schools.
- Video cameras on school buses.
- Threat assessment.
- Designation of Emergency Team responsibilities.



CRISIS RESPONSE READINESS OF SCHOOLS

School Division policies and the Division Crisis Management Plan provide the framework for addressing emergencies that may occur during school hours and business hours. The Crisis Management Plan manual includes guidelines for responding to biological, chemical, and other terrorist attacks, as well as more common situations.

Each school has emergency and contingency plans for weather, weapons, or medically related emergencies. Staff members from the PWCS Office of Risk Management and Security Services conduct on-site crisis training for school personnel. Schools follow by preplanning for such vital needs as sheltering, evacuation, command post operation, student accounting/release to parents/guardians, medical response, information sharing, and post-event counseling for students and staff. All buildings have evacuation plans and conduct periodic drills to assess the effectiveness of evacuation procedures.

The Office of Transportation Services is responsible for coordinating the safe return of children to their homes or to alternate shelter locations. Should a crisis/emergency situation occur while students are being transported to or from school, school bus drivers will contact the Office of Transportation Services for instructions. If necessary, parents/guardians will be informed of an alternate location for picking up their children via the School Division's crisis/messaging system.

Emergency needs are met with the assistance of a crisis response team that is an integral part of each school's emergency management plan. The crisis response team is designated by the school principal and includes school administrators, security, and other designated staff.

In addition, the PWCS Office of Student Services dispatches critical incident teams of school counselors, psychologists, school social workers, and nurses to schools as needed during and after emergencies to provide support to students and staff.





PRINCE WILLIAM COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS' RESPONSE TO AND DEFINITIONS FOR NATIONAL TERRORISM ADVISORY SYSTEM (NTAS) ALERTS

The National Terrorism Advisory System

The National Terrorism Advisory System, or NTAS, replaces the color-coded Homeland Security Advisory System (HSAS). This new system will more effectively communicate information about terrorist threats by providing timely, detailed information to the public, government agencies, first responders, airports, and other transportation hubs, and the private sector.

NTAS Alerts

After reviewing the available information, the Secretary of Homeland Security will decide, in coordination with other Federal entities, whether an NTAS Alert should be issued.

NTAS Alerts will only be issued when credible information is available. There will not be a constant NTAS Alert or blanket warning that there is an overarching threat.

These alerts will include a clear statement that there is an imminent threat or elevated threat. Using available information, the alerts will provide a concise summary of the potential threat, information about actions being taken to ensure public safety, and recommended steps that individuals, communities, businesses and governments can take to help prevent, mitigate or respond to the threat.

The NTAS Alerts will be based on the nature of the threat: in some cases, alerts will be sent directly to law enforcement or affected areas of the private sector, while in others, alerts will be issued more broadly to the American people through both official and media channels.

Alert Announcements

NTAS Alerts will be issued through state, local and tribal partners, the news media and directly to the public via the following channels:

- Via the official DHS NTAS Web page – www.dhs.gov/alerts
- Via email signup at – www.dhs.gov/alerts
- Via social media
 - Facebook – www.facebook.com/NTASAlerts
 - Twitter – www.twitter.com/NTASAlerts

The public can also expect to see alerts in places, both public and private, such as transit hubs, airports, and government buildings.

PWCS is persistent in conducting an ongoing review of the School Division's readiness and ability to respond in the event of a crisis. The PWCS Crisis Management Plan details procedures for responding to emergencies and is in compliance with the framework for preparedness established by NTAS. All schools have a crisis response team that is an integral part of the school's emergency management plan.

Response to crisis may differ depending on the circumstances; however, the protective measures described below are applicable but not limited to the following for NTAS Alerts.

- In partnership with public safety officials, assess increased risks and enhanced security efforts as necessary.
- Take additional precautions at public events and consider alternate venues or cancellation.
- Review and modify field trip requests as appropriate.
- Increase facility surveillance by staff.
- Increase communications with parents/guardians and the community.
- Provide staff members to assist the Prince William County Emergency Operations Center.
- Assess threat level to determine status of school openings and closings.
- Address critical emergency needs in cooperation with public safety officials and in accordance with the Crisis Management Plan.
- Increase or redirect personnel to address critical emergency needs.

IMMINENT THREAT ALERT

Warns of a credible, specific, and impending terrorist threat against the United States.

ELEVATED THREAT ALERT

Warns of a credible terrorist threat against the United States.

KEEPING INFORMED THROUGH CRISIS/EMERGENCY MESSAGES

PWCS transmits emergency information via one or more of the following methods:

- Alerts posted on pwcs.edu and school websites;
- Notifications sent to MyPWCS mobile app;
- PWCS postings on Facebook/Twitter;
- School-to-Parent messages (email, text, and phone);
- Official information provided to local radio, TV, and news outlets;
- PWCS-TV (Comcast Cable Ch. 18; Verizon Cable Ch. 36);
- PWCS E-News subscription service; and
- PWCS telephone Information line: 703.791.2776 (when directed).

Note that unofficial information received in phone calls or via social media may spread rumors or lack accurate, up-to-date information, even when senders are “on the scene.” PWCS will provide official, accurate information and timely updates as quickly as possible.

Keep phone lines accessible – Please do not call schools in emergencies so that lines can be used to handle the situation.

KEEPING CHILDREN SAFE

Our first priority is keeping children safe. In many circumstances, school is the safest place for children. However, outdoor activities, sports events, and field trips may be cancelled to reduce any potential danger to students.

If federal authorities announce a threat of a terrorist attack, the School Division will follow directions provided by health and public safety officials. Schools will initiate procedures to “Secure the Building.”

Secure the Building

Staff will “Secure the Building” when there is a potential threat in the vicinity of the school. This action is typically initiated due to a police action in the area. The threat may be general (e.g., sniper event, 9/11) or known (e.g., person reported in the area with a gun). To ensure the safety of students, the school campus is secured and visitors are closely scrutinized; some may be denied entry, depending on the event and direction from public safety officials. Advisory signs will be posted at the main entrance doors noting the building secure status. The school will remain in this status until cleared by public safety officials.

Shelter-in-Place

A “Shelter-in-Place” event occurs when harmful external atmospheric conditions may exist. These potential conditions or attacks may be biological, chemical, nuclear, naturally occurring, or radiological in nature.

To ensure the safest environment, all students and staff will be brought into the main school structure and the site secured from entry. Advisory signs will be posted at the main entrance doors that read “Shelter-in-Place.” Neutral pressure is created in the school/facility by closing all windows and doors, and shutting down the heating, ventilation, and air conditioning system so that contaminated air will not be drawn inside.

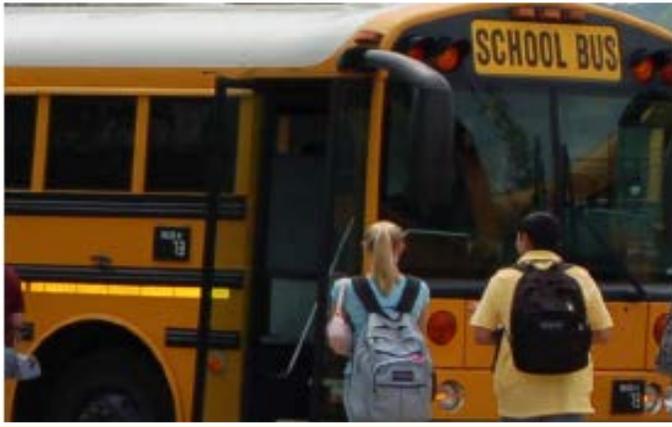
School officials will watch for students or staff who may exhibit exposure symptoms. For those exhibiting exposure symptoms, appropriate basic first aid will be rendered and medical assistance summoned via the public safety call center. Decontamination of clothing and skin may also be required and involves separating the exposed student from others and directing the student to wash with soap and water. If possible, staff will allow the student to shower and provide alternate clothing. Exposed clothing will be sealed in plastic bags.

Events such as a biological threat may require students to remain in school for an extended period of time. It is the School Division’s goal to return students to their parent/guardian as soon as it is determined safe to do so. The School Division will maintain close contact with and follow the directions from public safety and health officials. Updates will be provided via school communication channels.

Lockdown

A “lockdown” event occurs when there is an immediate hostile threat to the school. This may be an intruder, a firearms event, or an angry non-custodial parent/guardian trying to take their child from school. A lockdown announcement is made and all staff and students seek immediate cover in a locked room or initiate defend options as instructed. All school activities cease and 911 is called. All staff and students remain in lockdown until released by the police or school administration.





Field Trips

Field trips will be cancelled Divisionwide during a crisis/emergency situation. Cancellation information will be announced via the School Division's messaging system.

Stockpiling of Food and Water

School sites maintain limited supplies of food and beverages should the need for additional food services arise.

Students Requiring Medication

Parents/guardians of students who require medication are asked to make sure that the school has an appropriate amount of medication on hand. The appropriate amount should be based upon advice from the student's physician.

Student Access to News Broadcasts

School staff will limit the use of television and radio broadcasts in classrooms to avoid overexposure to media reports. Principals will use discretion in determining the appropriateness of the use of media broadcasts

Bus Transportation Under NTAS Alert

Should a crisis/emergency situation occur while students are in the process of being transported to and from school, school bus drivers will contact the Office of Transportation Services for instructions. If necessary, parents/guardians will be informed of the parent/guardian-student alternate shelter location via the school messaging system.

Tornado Alerts

The School Division's Crisis Management Plan provides detailed instruction to schools on what actions to take when a tornado watch or warning is issued. All schools and administrative offices have a weather radio to receive immediate notification when these alerts are issued. For tornado warnings, all students will be led to the school's designated "safe zones" until the tornado warning advisory is lifted. Everyone on buses located on school property will move inside the building. Buses traveling on nearby roads are to proceed to the nearest school to seek shelter, in coordination with the transportation dispatch office.

Earthquake Response Actions

The School Division's Crisis Management Plan provides detailed instruction to schools on what actions to take when an earthquake occurs. Staff and students indoors will drop to the ground, take cover, and hold on until the shaking stops. Once the shaking stops, the evacuation will commence. Staff and students outdoors will move away from buildings, streetlights, and utility wires until the shaking stops.

PARENT/GUARDIAN-STUDENT REUNIFICATION PROCESS

Evacuation of Schools

- To further ensure the safety of our students and staff, please ***do not rush to school to pick up your child***. This will only create additional traffic that may impede needed emergency vehicles and your presence at the site could delay the evacuation process. Children and parents/guardians will be reunited in a safe, orderly and timely manner.
- School will not automatically be cancelled in a crisis/emergency situation. School may well be the safest place for students. The School Division will ensure that students are safe inside their schools until such time that the threat has been reduced or eliminated.
- Even if children call you directly from their cell phone asking that you pick them up, please wait for the official word from the school or School Division before coming to the school as misinformation is often rampant during emergencies.
- If the situation requires transporting students, parents/guardians will be informed of any alternate shelter location(s) via the School Division's messaging system.
- The School Division website (www.pwcs.edu) is regularly updated and is always a good place to go for the most accurate and up-to-date information.

Release of Students to Parents/Guardians

- Should public safety officials call for the evacuation of a school, students and staff members may be safely transported by bus to a designated parent/guardian-student alternate shelter location. Students may be held at this alternate shelter site for various reasons until release is approved by public safety or health officials, depending on the circumstances of the event.
- Parents/guardians will be permitted to pick up their children unless public safety or school officials have restricted access to the school. This may occur during a shelter-in-place, secure-the-building scenario, or other event as deemed necessary.

- Students will only be released to those individuals authorized on the school emergency card or who have written permission from a parent or guardian.
- Parents/guardians will be required to present proper identification in order for students to be released from an alternate shelter location.

CRISIS/EMERGENCY RESOURCES

In addition to the resources below, the Office of Student Services has information regarding referrals for appropriate support services within the schools and community. The Office of Student Services can be contacted at 703.791.7257.

Student Services Resources:

Office of Student Services Web page:
www.pwcs.edu/departments/student_services

Website Resources:

- www.nasponline.org
(National Association of School Psychologists)
- www.ready.gov
(Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) / US Department of Homeland Security)
- www.fema.gov/kids
(FEMA for Kids)
- www.redcrossna.org
(American Red Cross – National Capital Region)
- www.nimh.nih.gov
(National Institution of Mental Health)
- www.sesameworkshop.org
(Sesame Workshop)
- www.childtrauma.org
(Child Trauma Academy)
- www.cdc.gov
(Center for Disease Control and Prevention)
- www.schoolcounselor.org
(American School Counselor Association)



COPING IN A CRISIS CHECKLIST

WHEN CRISIS OCCURS: A QUICK REFERENCE FOR PARENTS/GUARDIANS

A crisis or safety concern may occur at any time in our community or in neighboring communities. Children may be confused and/or frightened by information they hear in conversations and in news reports and they will look to adults for guidance as to how to react. The following quick reference offers parents/guardians suggestions for establishing a sense of security and safety to help their children cope in a crisis situation. Additionally, following a crisis, the school psychologist, school social worker, school counselors, and members of the School Division's Critical Incident Team are available to assist students.

Emotional Support:

- Limit the amount of exposure your child has to newspapers and televised news reports. Repetitive discussion of the situation may re-traumatize a child.
- Be honest with your children about what has occurred and provide facts about what has happened. Use age-appropriate terms for better understanding.
- Encourage your child to talk to you about his or her feelings and concerns. Share your feelings with your child.
- Spend extra time with your child, especially doing something fun or relaxing for both of you.
- Remember the importance of touch. A hug can reassure your child that he/she is loved.
- Watch for ongoing signs of difficulty, which could indicate that your child may need additional help. Some warning signs are: withdrawal from social contact, change in eating or sleeping habits, nightmares, and unusual clinging.

Safety Support:

- Review basic safety precautions.
- Review family safety procedures so your children will feel prepared if an emergency situation occurs.
- Monitor and supervise your child's outdoor (play) activities.
- Know with whom and where your child is at all times.
- Prearrange a place where your children should go in the event you are delayed and are not home at the end of the school day.
- Remind your child to always report any suspicious persons or activity to a trusted adult.

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