Response: Emergency Actions for K-12 Schools

March 30, 2011
Colorado School Safety Resource Center

It is recommended that schools have protocols for five basic emergency actions that are communicated in clear, consistent language. These emergency actions may be used to ensure the safety of all individuals on a K-12 school site in the event of an actual emergency or for various crisis situations. These actions are best standardized across a school district and developed with local response agencies. Actions can be further customized and defined as part of a district or school emergency plan. Individualized plans will need to be developed for students and staff with disabilities or special needs. Schools and districts are encouraged to plan for the use of these response actions in a variety of potential situations. It is suggested that all school district employees be informed and reminded of these procedures yearly, including drill and practice of all emergency actions. Students should also be informed and trained, as developmentally appropriate. Schools are encouraged to share their emergency action protocols with parents of students and emergency responders in their community.

A Superintendent (or designee) or a Principal (or designee) who is acting as the School Incident Commander for a school site should have authority to initiate building emergency actions as situations warrant, to provide for the safety of all those on the school site. School staff should be empowered to initiate life-saving removal of kids from harm's way. Return to a normal building condition can occur when threats to safety are resolved. Schools need to be prepared for a controlled release of students with a planned system for reunification with families after an incident. After action reports are encouraged to review the event and procedures and make necessary revisions to plans.

The School Emergency Actions described in this document are:
1. Lockdown
2. Lockout (Secured Building)
3. Shelter-in-Place (Includes Weather Shelter)
4. Evacuation
5. Release and Reunification

This document is intended as guidance to Colorado schools. Consultation with local response agencies, such as fire and law enforcement, is recommended. Further consultation and template formats may also be obtained from the Colorado School Safety Resource Center.

Key messages:
- Develop emergency action procedures in consultation with community emergency responders.
- Use clear, consistent communication during emergencies. Use of code words is not advised.
- Customize procedures as needed for individual school sites.
- Develop plans for students and staff with special needs.
- Train all staff and students and provide drill and practice.
- Inform parents/guardians.
- Evaluate all drills and actual events.

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➢ **LOCKDOWN:** Procedures used to <u>protect building occupants</u> from potential *dangers in the building or external threats that enter the building.* Actions are used in situations where an actual emergency or crisis threatening the safety of building occupants is occurring or has occurred on a school campus. It may also be used when the potential for such a situation is high.

➢ **LOCKOUT (Secured Building):** Procedures used in a heightened state of security, to <u>secure the building</u> and protect building occupants where a higher than normal *threat is present near or in the vicinity of the campus.* The lockout condition is used as a preventative measure when threat of danger is <u>outside</u> the school building, and may be in place for a few minutes or longer periods of time, until the threat to safety is resolved.

➢ **SHELTER-IN-PLACE (Includes Weather Shelter):** Procedures used when the <u>building is seen as a place of safety</u> and building occupants *must remain in a school building* for extended periods of time during an event such as a weather emergency, a chemical contaminants, or terrorist attack. To shelter-in-place means to *take shelter where you are and isolate the inside environment from outside environment.* Additional hazard-specific directions will be needed. Be alert to individualized plans for those students or staff with disabilities or special needs.

➢ **EVACUATION:** Procedures used in a variety of school emergency situations when <u>remaining in the building is unsafe</u>. Evacuation is *moving building occupants to a designated safe area.* An evacuation may be signaled by a fire alarm, direction from the School Incident Commander over the intercom or other emergency notification system, or by the instruction of emergency personnel. Some evacuations may involve moving students and staff to an alternate or off-campus site, as instructed. A partial evacuation of a section of the building may also occur, if a situation warrants. If evacuation is other than a fire situation, further instructions should be given. Implement individualized plans for those students or staff with disabilities or special needs.

➢ **RELEASE/REUNIFICATION**: After Lockout, Lockdown, Shelter-in-Place and/or Evacuation a controlled release/reunification may be necessary to release or reunite students with parents and/or caregivers. This process requires accurate accountability of students and release of students to authorized adults only. Communication capability must exist between Command Post, district office, transportation, and school or evacuation sites. Redundant emergency notification system(s) are developed and communicated to parents/caregivers prior to an event: auto dialing; website; media partners etc. The "administrator's go-kit" is ready with all necessary items for a controlled release/reunification process.

For consultation, technical assistance, protocol examples, or school district contacts, please contact the Colorado School Safety Resource Center.