

Emergency Planning and Crisis Response

Keeping Students and Staff Members Safe at School

Fairfax County Public Schools' main goal is to keep students and staff safe at school. Our crisis and emergency response plans have been cited as a national model. We continually work with county, state, and federal health, safety, and emergency personnel leaders to ensure coordinated responses to potential threats. We also drill for emergency situations and then review and revise plans as needed.

In Fairfax County Public Schools, three offices play lead roles during critical incidents.

Crisis Management

Leading the immediate and long-term response to the incident itself is the Department of Facilities and Transportation Services' Office of Safety and Security (OSS).

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Crisis Communications

Ensuring students, employees, parents, the media, and the community have accurate and timely information during a crisis is the responsibility of the Office of Communication and Community Relations (CCR). CCR is responsible for broadcast of all FCPS [emergency messages](#).

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Crisis Intervention Services

Crisis response teams are staffed by school psychologists, school social workers, and school counselors.

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Emergency Messages

General emergency messages and changes to school openings and closings will be found on FCPS' Twitter ([@fcpsnews](#)) and [Facebook](#) pages, as well as on the [FCPS home page](#), Channel 21, and local TV and radio stations. Text messages and emails are sent to parents and employees. Emails are sent to [News You Choose](#) subscribers of "Delayed Openings and School Closings."

Terms and Procedures for Emergency Response

It is important that all public safety officials, school administrators, communication officers, and members of the media understand and use a common terminology. For parents, understanding the terminology may ease fears and concerns during an incident.



Lockdown

Threat is possibly **INSIDE** the building.

Lockdown describes enhanced security measures taken to protect against potentially violent intruders that may be inside the building or on the school site.



Secure the Building

Threat is **OUTSIDE** the building.

Secure the building is used to prevent unauthorized entry if the threat is outside the building i.e., a robbery in proximity to the school. Outside activities are canceled; all exterior doors are secured while staff and students are free to move about inside their building.



Shelter in Place

Hazardous outdoor atmosphere.

Shelter in Place procedures are used to temporarily separate people from a hazardous outdoor atmosphere, e.g., a hazmat incident. The building is secured, and measures are taken to shut down the intake of outside air. No one is allowed to enter the school until public safety officials give the all clear.



Stay Put, Stay Tuned

Limit impact on the **transportation** infrastructure.

Stay Put, Stay Tuned is implemented at the request of public safety officials to limit any impact on the transportation infrastructure. Normal end-of-day release will not occur until authorized by public safety officials. Parents are allowed to check out their students from school.

Lockdown

Used to describe security measures taken to protect against intruders.

- All students stay in place with a teacher or staff member.
- Students and teachers remain in locked classrooms, unobservable from outside (lights-off, window blinds closed, door windows obscured with paper) and outside potential lines of fire.
- Students and staff members disregard fire alarms.
- No one enters or exits the school, except public safety personnel.
- Persons in trailers remain in locked trailers.

Secure the Building

Used if the danger is outside the building, e.g., a robbery near the school.

- No students allowed outside of buildings and trailers (no P.E., recess, etc.).
- All building and trailer exterior doors are closed and locked.
- People in locked trailers remain in locked trailers.
- Staff members and students are free to move about inside buildings and trailers.
- Staff member posted at building main entrance to control visitor access, issue passes, and direct to reunification area, if necessary.

Shelter-In-Place

Used to temporarily separate people from a hazardous outdoor atmosphere, such as in a hazmat incident.

- “Shelter-In-Place” announcement made via PA system and radio.
- Students and staff members move into main building from trailers, unless it is unsafe due to environmental contamination.
- All windows and doors are closed, locked and sealed, with materials that will hinder air flow.
- Staff members shut off main building power to stop HVAC, exhaust, and roof ventilators.
- Signs placed on the front door making notification of Shelter-in-Place Emergency.
- Building entry forbidden until public safety officials arrive and give the “all clear.”
- Exposed or contaminated people will be kept separate from the rest of school population, and directed to wash with soap and water.
- If possible, alternative clothing for exposed individuals will be provided and contaminated clothing will be removed and sealed in plastic bags.
- Administrators will listen to local emergency management officials and follow directions from responding public safety officials.

Stay Put, Stay Tuned

Implemented at the request of public safety officials to limit impacts on the transportation infrastructure during large-scale events.

- Stay Put, Stay Tuned announcement made via PA system and radio.
- No unsupervised release of students will occur until direction is provided by competent authority.
- Staff members will monitor local media and messaging systems for updates.
- E-notify messages will be sent by affected schools.

- Students can be released to parents with proper identification.

Parent Reunification

If public safety officials require that a school building be evacuated, students and staff members will be safely transported by bus to a designated parent-student reunification center. Parents will be informed of the reunification location via FCPS' emergency messaging system and local media. At the reunification center, students will be released to their parents upon presentation of proper identification.

FCPS does not release this type of specific information, pursuant to the Virginia Freedom of Information Act. This law provides specific exclusions to the type of information that can be released (2.2-3705). Also, during emergency situations, circumstances could arise that might force changes to previously designated locations. Parents will be informed of parent-student reunification center locations via the local media and through school resources.

Bus Safety

School bus drivers will be in contact with the Office of Transportation for instructions in the event that a crisis occurs while students are in transport. Bus drivers will be informed to use common sense and not travel toward the crisis location. Parents will be informed of the parent-student reunification center location via FCPS' emergency messaging system and local media.

Field Trips

If the situation warrants, all field trips will be canceled. Cancellations could also include travel to academies, community programs, and other events. There may be circumstances that could require the cancellation of field trips to certain areas. All school buses are equipped with radio communications with the transportation office. If a field trip is under way and must be recalled, buses would be directed to return to the school or a designated safe area. Any such decision will be announced using FCPS' emergency messaging system. Parents are reminded that FCPS retains the right to cancel any field trip for safety reasons and is not responsible for any financial obligations parents may have.

Student Release

Parents are allowed to pick up their children unless public safety officials have declared a shelter-in-place response, or there is some other reason why facility access is restricted. During any emergency, school personnel will maintain as safe and normal environment for children within the school as is possible. School is not automatically canceled in emergency situations. School may be the safest place for children.

Children will not be released to individuals who are not authorized on the student's emergency care card or who do not have written parent authorization.

The Emergency Care Form is completed by parents and guardians at the start of each school year. Parents and guardians are encouraged to access the SIS (Student Information System) to update emergency information online. Updated paper forms can also be found at your school.

Friends and neighbors may sign a child or children out with written permission from a parent or parents. Both parents have to give permission in writing for the sign-out and pickup. Schools prefer to have written permission on the day that a child's pickup will change, but schools will also keep written permission on file. School offices will keep the permission notes--usually they will attach them to the Emergency Care Card(s) of those involved. Schools will also ask for identification when the child is released to the one(s) mentioned in the permission note. We recommend communicating with the teacher as well, perhaps with a copy of the signed written note.

Health Concerns

Parents or guardians should make sure that the school has an appropriate amount of medication on hand in the event of a short-term emergency. Talk with your school nurse for more information.

Cell Phone Use

In the event of an emergency, students will be allowed to use their phones to communicate with parents with the permission of the school principal. In an emergency, cell phone circuits may become overloaded, interfering with public safety's ability to communicate. Students' use of cell phones during an emergency will be appropriately limited.

Parents are asked not to call the school in emergency situations, so phone lines can remain accessible for handling the specific situation. Parents will be kept informed via text and email as well as the FCPS [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#) accounts.

If you have questions about your child or about your school's safety and support responses, please contact your principal. Everyone in Fairfax County Public Schools continues to work to make all our schools safe and secure environments for all our students.