



COMMUNICATION

Welcome Back To School: Re-entry...It Is More Than Just A Splashdown!

This summer was a season-long celebration of space exploration, rocket-powered travel, and the wonder of scientific engineering. I remember those days from my youth, especially in July of 1969, as the Apollo astronauts navigated to the moon and landed on the meteor-pocked surface. I had excitedly listened to the event in real-time on the radio and marveled at the accomplishment.

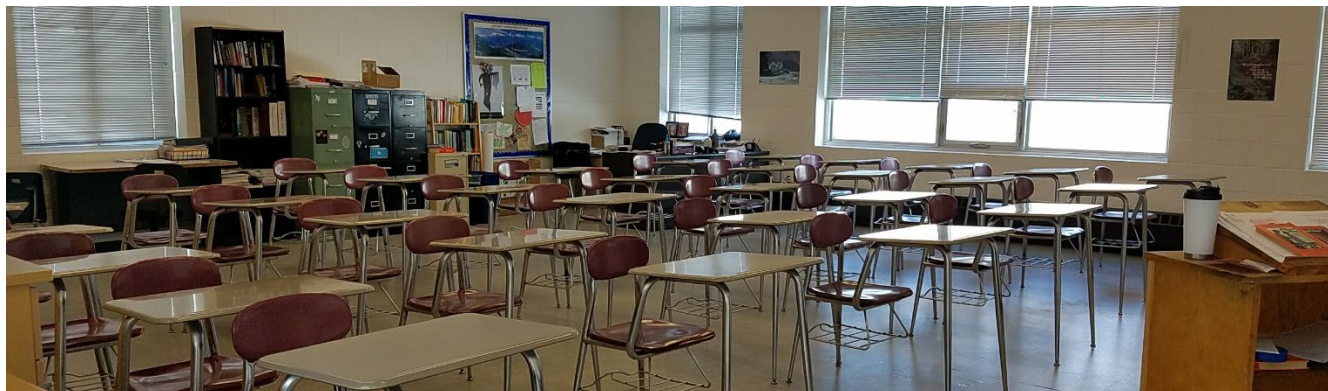
My father attended a national school leadership conference in August of that year in Houston, Texas. I anxiously awaited his return home, especially since he had the opportunity to tour the NASA Houston Space Center. On his return home-or *re-entry*-he gifted me an Apollo capsule tie tack which I wear to this day. He returned home safely from his trip, just as the Apollo astronauts had.

Students, families and staff have navigated the excitement of summer. The focus now is on a safe return to school or the *re-entry* filled with wonder, curiosity, teaching, learning, growth and service. Teachers, administrators, custodians, specialists, paras, bus drivers, food service staff, support staff and volunteers all supporting, encouraging, and nurturing students to experience the joy of learning.

Sincerely,
Randy Johnson
Director of the Minnesota School Safety Center (MnSSC)



There is so much that needs to be communicated with students, staff, and family members to make the *re-entry* and school year run smoothly for everyone. As you go through the list of “information to communicate” during these first couple weeks of school, consider what emergency planning information will be shared and the best way to do it. Effective communication is key in everything we do, but during an emergency it is essential. [Creating templates with “fill in the blank detail”](#) fields that can be used during an emergency will help the “bad day” go a little better. The following sections will provide best practices, helpful guides and tips to achieving communication success—before, during and after any emergency.





Communicating With Staff

School staff (whether it is the classroom teacher, para professionals, front office and kitchen staff or the custodians) are masters at thinking on their feet. Empower them with information and training so they can transfer these “thinking on their feet” skills when called upon to respond to an emergency. Share information about the school emergency plan, expectations and guidelines to help them be better prepared should the “bad day” occur.

In an emergency, the first three to five minutes are critical for minimizing damages. In these crucial minutes, communication is key. Allowing staff members close to the emergency to notify the rest of the building can make a difference in the outcome.

Many schools have discovered that there are communication gaps with traveling staff, post-secondary enrollment option (PSEO) students, staff that frequently work with students outside, and in the high-volume areas of the building. To overcome these obstacles, schools are building redundancy into communication systems. In combination with the traditional public announcement (PA) system, this is being done through the use of mobile safety apps, walkie-talkies, speakers and/or lights and display boards in high-volume areas and on the exterior of the building.

Communicating With Students

Students have an important role in promoting school safety. Encourage students to take responsibility for their part in maintaining a safe and welcoming school environment. Share the school rules and expectations with students and create methods for students to report problems and concerns to staff members.

Adults in the school can provide the reassurance to students that schools are safe places. They should also share support systems that are in place. The [National Association of School Psychologists](#) (NASP) suggests reassuring children that they are safe while validating their feelings and concerns. Assist them in expressing feelings appropriately, providing time to talk and ask questions, keeping responses and explanations developmentally appropriate.



NASP suggests the following points when talking with children:

1. Schools are safe places. School staff works with parents and public safety providers (local police, fire, emergency responders, hospitals, etc.) to keep you safe. The school building is safe because ... (cite specific school procedures).
2. We all play a role in the school safety. Be observant and let an adult know if you see or hear something that makes you feel uncomfortable, nervous or frightened.
3. There is a difference between reporting, tattling or gossiping. You can provide important information that may prevent harm either directly or anonymously by telling a trusted adult what you know or hear.
4. Although there is no absolute guarantee that something bad will never happen, it is important to understand the difference between the **possibility** of something happening and **probability** that it will affect you (our school community).



Communicating With Parents

Parents and guardians are more concerned than ever about the safety of their children. It is considered best practice to address these concerns through open communication. Update parents about what you are doing to keep students and staff safe. Highlight violence prevention programs currently being taught. Emphasize the efforts being made to create a positive culture and interpersonal relationship skills.

Inform them that you have an emergency plan (as required by Minnesota law) in place and practice it with staff and students through fire, severe weather and lock down drills. Keep this information general. It is not recommended that the specifics of the school emergency plan are shared with the public. Many schools also share information after a drill or an event with talking points that can be discussed at home.

Let parents know what you expect of them prior to an event. Several schools have produced [videos](#) and [brochures](#) to share with parents at back-to-school nights, on websites and social media platforms. Use tag lines that are easy to remember and understand such as: "Stay home. Stay informed. Be prepared."

- **STAY HOME:** Parents are going to want to come to school, but this can complicate the situation in many ways. Let parents know that, in an emergency, it can be chaotic and can hamper emergency response if they come to the school. Students may also be at a different location due to safety issues. (Think of the 2018 Superior refinery explosion.)
- **STAY INFORMED:** Tell parents where they should go for information if an emergency occurs. This could include social media, television and radio channels as well as the normal communication avenues that you are using.
- **BE PREPARED:** This is a good place to remind parents that, in an emergency, it is critical to reunite students with family members as quickly as possible. Keeping emergency contact information up-to-date will help ease this process.

Communicating With Other Agencies

Increasing the resiliency of schools depends on open communication and cooperation with other agencies including public safety partners. The shared understanding of roles, plans and procedures (as well as threats and hazards) can improve everyone's safety and ability to recover. This can occur through a review of communication systems within the school district and with community responders, combined training, and open dialogue about the threats/hazards that are present in the school and the larger community.

Many children come to school each day with trauma. Handle With Care (HWC) is a program that helps create a supportive school environments for children traumatized by family violence. This program is aimed at ensuring that children who are exposed to violence receive appropriate interventions so they can succeed in school to the best of their ability.

The basis of HWC is that when a public agency has contact with a family during non-school hours a HWC Notice is created and shared with the school. No details are given. It arrives at the school before the start of the next school day. It is on a need to know basis only. The notice does not stay in a child's permanent record, includes child care service agencies, and does not mean you approach child. It provides teachers with a heads up, identifies kids at risk, strengthens and improves relationships in the community.



[West Virginia Center for Children's Justice](#)



Data Privacy

Threat assessment processes were the topic of many conversations and trainings conducted by the MnSSC during the 2018/19 school year. We anticipate this topic will continue to be one of interest. Many of the conversations around threat assessments revolve around privacy issues. The U.S. Department of Education has created a [Model of Notification of Rights under FERPA for Elementary and Secondary Schools along with a Balancing Student Privacy and School Safety: A Guide to the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act for Secondary Schools](#).

Social Media

Social media is everywhere and new platforms seem to appear daily. Give parents information about which social media platforms the school uses to disseminate information. Actively post to sites so parents are accustomed to going to the platforms you are using.

Schools throughout the state have shared concerns about false and/or damaging information shared on social media. Encourage parents, students and staff to direct questions and complaints to administration rather than through social media so issues can be dealt with appropriately and the correct information can be given. When you are alerted to misinformation being shared, actively post correct information about the topic. Acknowledge the rumor when appropriate.

During emergencies, it is even more critical that families have correct information. The United States Department of Homeland Security has created a guide to [Countering False information On Social Media in Disasters and Emergencies](#).

See Something, Say Something, Do Something: Tip Lines



The national [“See Something. Say Something”](#) campaign carries over to schools. According to a report published by the [National Threat Assessment Center](#) (NTAC) earlier this year, three out of every four perpetrators in 55 mass shootings and attacks in 2017 and 2018 made prior threats or sent messages that sparked concern.

It is important to have an avenue for students, parents, and staff to share information, knowledge, and concerns about potential threats and problems, including bullying, suicidal tendencies, safety concerns, and substance abuse. Direct reporting to an individual is always the preferred method. It is important to have other means of reporting information for those uncomfortable or unable to share the information directly. An anonymous tip line or other reporting method gives students a way to reach out without breaking the code of silence that often causes people to keep information to themselves.

There are some issues to consider when setting up a tip line. The tip line needs to be closely monitored so tips can be dealt with in a timely, effective manner. Policies and procedures on responding to tips need to be created as well as how the data is maintained. It is important for people to understand that all tips will be investigated and dealt with even though the person sharing the information may not see how this occurs.



What Is New At The MnSSC?

The MnSSC is currently a team of three. The Minnesota legislature approved funding for two new positions at the end of last session. The positions were posted and interviews will be conducted within the next month or two. The MnSSC team is looking forward to expanding the team to better serve schools throughout the state.

Training Opportunities

Public Information Officer Course

Throughout the year, Minnesota Homeland Security and Emergency Management provides a Basic Public Information Officer (PIO) course through the training division. This two day, free course provides a basic understanding of the PIO function for those new to the position. The primary audience for this training is individuals who have public information responsibilities as their main job or as an auxiliary function.

For more information or questions, please call 651-201-7441 or email at hsem.training@state.mn.us.

School Resource Officer (SRO) Training

A free advanced SRO class will be held on October 16 from 8:30 A.M. to 3 P.M. at the Minneapolis Public Schools/John B Davis Education Center. Topics will include sex trafficking awareness, drug trends, social media investigations, table top exercises for all hazard emergencies, group violence monitoring/identification and community engagement idea sharing.

Contact [Jennifer Larrive](#) for more information and registration.

Transforming the School Safety Paradigm

The East Metro Crime Prevention Coalition will be hosting a free training on October 2 from 8:30 A.M. to 3 P.M. at the Lake Elmo Event Center. This training will cover how to create a healthy school environment, importance of data sharing, lessons learned from Red Lake and information about the Ana Grace Project.



[Registration](#) deadline is September 23.

Crisis Management for School Based Incidents-Partnering Rural Law Enforcement, First Responders, and Local School Systems

The Rural Domestic Preparedness Consortium is bringing free Department of Homeland Security-certified training to Park Rapids on October 3rd. This eight-hour course for school administrators, law enforcement personnel and emergency responders will demonstrate how to effectively respond to an emergency involving a school building or an entire school system. It will provide participants with the foundation of knowledge and skills that will enable them to establish a school based emergency response plan and crisis management team through information sharing and training.

[Registration](#) deadline is September 19.



Crisis Training

On November 4, MnSSC will partner with the Minnesota Nonpublic School Accrediting Association (MNSAA) Conference to provide the following training: *Crisis Communication in Schools: It is not What you Say, it is What They are Hearing*.

To register for the conference [contact MNSAA](#).

Risk Management for Interscholastic Athletics and After School Activities Online Course

Texas A&M Engineering and Extension Service and the University of Southern Mississippi National Center for Spectator Sports Security and Safety have partnered to create an online course which assists schools to identify and develop an increased understanding of planning and responding to incidents that may occur after school hours. This free course covers the basics of emergency planning and response through a series of modules that may occur after school hours. Training covers the basics of emergency planning and response that include scenarios which enable learners to apply skills.

To register for Risk Management for Interscholastic Athletics and After-School Activities (AWR-375-W) training course, visit <https://www.ncs4.com/trainingportal>.

The MnSSC wishes you a smooth splashdown and rousing *re-entry* to the new school year!

***The Minnesota School Safety Center** cares about the safety of Minnesota schools. The MnSSC provides training and resources to schools to help them prepare, respond, mitigate and recover from all hazard emergencies.*

Contact the MnSSC team for more information:

- [Randy Johnson](#), Director, 651-201-7094
- [Jennifer Larrive](#), School Resource Officer Coordinator, 651-201-7092
- [Connie Forster](#), Safe School Assessment Coordinator, 651-201-7093

If you have ideas or topics for the MnSSC Newsletter, contact [Connie Forster](#).

