

## *School Emergency Guide for Parents*

### **Safe Learning and Working Environments – A Top Priority**

Creating and maintaining safe schools for students, staff, and visitors is one of Superintendent Ronald Blocker's goals within his strategic plan for Orange County Public Schools. Parental support and community involvement are vital to helping the district maintain safe, orderly schools. The district works in partnership with public safety agencies within the county, state and nation to develop and implement school and district emergency plans that help create safe school environments.

### **Emergency Preparation is Critical**

The district works closely with local government, law enforcement and other emergency management officials to monitor safety concerns and respond quickly to situations as they arise. The district and all schools in Orange County have plans to respond to emergencies, including inclement weather, fire, dangerous items on campus, etc. Schools update their site specific Safe School Plans annually, assisted by the law enforcement School Resource Officer (SRO) assigned to their location. The plans are then submitted for review and approval to the district Safety, Security and Environmental Services department.

The district also provides several training opportunities to school staff to assist them in preparing for a wide range of potential emergencies. In addition, all schools conduct emergency drills throughout the school year so that students and staff are aware of the most effective and safe emergency responses. Each school has assigned key staff members to perform roles and responsibilities during emergency situations as a part of their School Emergency Response Team (SERT). School and district emergency plans and procedures are modeled on the Department of Homeland Security's National Incident Management System.

### **Parents Have a Key Role in Emergency Response**

During and following an emergency situation, school and district officials must act quickly and follow established emergency protocols to safeguard students and staff, secure schools, and communicate accurate information in a timely manner. Parents can assist greatly by helping with preparation before the emergency. Here are a few critical steps you can take:

- Give school officials accurate contact information so you can be reached in case of emergency. Keep the information current by notifying officials of any changes as soon as they occur. Multiple contact sources are helpful, including home and office telephone and fax numbers, mobile telephone numbers and paging information, email addresses, etc. Also important, in case you cannot be reached, are the up-to-date names and contact information of family members, friends, and any other adults authorized as emergency contacts for your child.

- Talk to your child about your personal emergency notification arrangements and let your child and school officials know if you anticipate being unavailable or difficult to reach for an extended period of time.
- Stay informed about potentially serious situations, such as inclement weather.
- Monitor local media when serious conditions arise at school or in the community that might result in school evacuation, early dismissal, or school closing.
- Notify school officials if you see or hear of anything that could create a danger at school. If you prefer, you may call the anonymous Speak Out Hotline at 1-800-226-7733.

### **Delayed Dismissal and Emergency School Closings**

Occasionally, an unforeseeable event or emergency may require the closing of a school or all schools for a period of time. The decision to close schools, or alter opening and closing times is made by the superintendent after consulting with county and municipal public safety agencies and school district staff. Notification of emergency closings is given as soon as possible so parents and guardians can make arrangements for students to be cared for during these times. The decision to close schools is based on many considerations, the most important being the safety of students, staff, parents, and others in the community.

In cases of threatening weather, the district maintains close contact with the National Weather Service, the Orange County Office of Emergency Management and local law enforcement officials to help make decisions about dismissal of students or school closings. Officials want to make the safest possible arrangements for students and may delay the dismissal of students during exceptionally hazardous weather conditions, such as lightning. The district's Weather Delayed Dismissal procedures require that the nationally recognized "30-30 Rule" be enacted by schools if thunder is heard within 30 seconds of lightning strike. Students will not be dismissed until 30 minutes has passed from the last sound of thunder. However, parents and guardians will be allowed to sign their child out during these situations at the main school office.

The district's *Connect Orange* automated telephone system will be used to notify parents about delayed dismissals, closings or other emergency conditions. In most situations involving delayed dismissal, students who walk or ride bicycles may be kept at school until parents can arrange for them to be picked up. Bus riders will be delivered home when conditions allow for a safe dismissal.

### **Emergency Release of Students to Parents**

School officials want to maintain as safe and orderly an environment as possible at all times. During an emergency, special procedures are followed to help ensure student safety. Principals have procedures in place to help parents who wish to pick up their child from school. Depending upon the emergency conditions, students may be released from a designated area to parents and guardians with proper identification. For your child's safety, your child can be released only to an adult who you have

properly designated as an emergency contact and who has proper identification. Non-custodial parents who may pick up students must be listed with your child's emergency contact information as a guardian and also must show proper identification.

### **Emotional Support for Students during Emergencies**

It is important that students feel safe in their schools, especially after a crisis has occurred. Should there be a need, the district can provide psychological services to students and/or staff through the Crisis Intervention Specialist (CIS) assigned to their school. The CIS, part of the school's emergency response team (SERT), determines the extent of the need for services at the school and works with district staff and community support agencies to address identified needs. If a situation occurs at school or in the community in which students are emotionally affected, a crisis response team will provide counseling assistance to students to help them understand and cope with their emotions and reactions.

### **Important Points to Remember**

- **Your school has a plan** – Each school has a site-specific Safe School Plan. Teachers, administrators and staff have been trained and have completed drills using this plan.
- **Keep your emergency contact information current** – Please be sure your emergency contact information (home address, home/work/cellular telephone numbers, names of others with pick-up authority for your child) is updated whenever there is a change.
- **Monitor local news** – Information regarding school emergencies will be broadcast by local media outlets. Central Florida News 13 is the official media outlet for information related to school and district emergency situations. The station will broadcast emergency messages to parents, and will provide news and emergency information to other English and Spanish speaking radio and television stations. In addition, the front page of the district's web site is used for posting emergency "alerts" to the public in the event of an emergency affecting schools.
- **Be alert for a Connect Orange notification** – The district and schools will send emergency and routine messages to parents via mass telephone notification. Parents may register multiple phone numbers with their child's school to ensure messages are received.
- **Do not call or go to your child's school** – During an actual emergency, school staff will be busy responding to the emergency and addressing the needs of students. Calling the school will only tie up phone lines that must be used for emergency communications with staff and emergency responders. Please do not go to your child's school unless you have received direction from the school or district officials. Vehicular traffic around the school may impede the ability of emergency responders from entering/exiting the campus.
- **Reuniting with your child** – When the situation allows, students will be released following the "reunification procedures prescribed in the school's Safe

School Plan. This procedure ensures that each student is released to a parent, relative or other authorized person designated by the parent in an orderly manner. Individuals picking up students will be asked to present valid picture identification and may be asked to sign students out to ensure safety and accountability.

- **Alternate pick-up site** – In some emergencies, it may become necessary to move students and staff from their school to the “off-campus evacuation location” as prescribed in the school’s Safe School Plan. Due to the unpredictable nature of any emergency, the location of the evacuation site will be announced only at the time of the event. If this occurs, parents will be notified via multiple means, including **Connect Orange**, Central Florida News 13 and local radio.
- **Students who remain at school** – If a parent, guardian or authorized designee cannot pick up their child following an emergency, they will remain under staff supervision until the parent, guardian or authorized designee arrives at the school.

If you have any concerns or questions about district emergency plans, please call Safety, Security and Environmental Services at 407.317.3468