The Safety Response Protocols All School Leaders Should Know

Safety response protocols are foundational to creating a culture of safety in schools. District leaders should adopt and implement response protocols that cover all types of emergencies. Schools should have building-level response protocols and protocols for incidents when first responders are needed. These practices are critical to keeping the community safe during emergencies.

CENTEGIX is the industry leader in incident response solutions. Educational leaders nationwide trust CENTEGIX safety solutions to accelerate emergency response and provide peace of mind in school communities. With years of experience and innovation in the school safety industry, CENTEGIX is uniquely positioned to offer insights into safety response protocols and guidance for schools seeking to implement them.

How Emergency Planning Empowers Staff

When staff members are empowered to participate in emergency planning and response, their sense of safety is improved. Unfortunately, many staff members do not feel safe at school. In a 2024 nationwide survey of educators, nearly one-third of K-12 staff said they think about their safety daily. Yet, only 26% of respondents said they feel "extremely supported" by their employers to handle emergency incidents in their school environment.

According to Dr. Gabriella Durán Blakey, Superintendent of Albuquerque Public Schools, staff disempowerment is "a central problem." Dr. Blakey adds that teachers don't feel empowered to take action when a problem emerges and don't feel they have the tools to handle those situations. Staff members' fear is rooted in an awareness that emergencies can happen and their lack of tools for addressing those emergencies. Said Dr. Blakey, "The sense of anxiety is that they don't have tools to ask for help."

To counteract this problem, school leaders can implement response protocols that empower staff to understand and participate in emergency response. Schools nationwide use a two-tiered system of emergency response.

- A building-level emergency planning and response team develops an Emergency Operations Plan (EOP). This plan includes an emergency response protocol.
- Administrators adopt protocols to follow when they need first responders to intervene.

30% of K-12 staff think about their physical safety when at work every day.

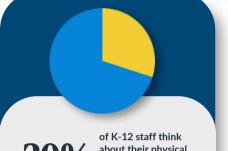**74%** of K-12 staff said they do not feel supported by their employer to handle emergency situations at work.

"*What does safety mean for educators to really be able to feel safe in their classroom, to impact student achievement, the well-being of students? And how does that anxiety play with how the students feel in the classroom?*"

Dr. Gabriella Durán Blakey, Superintendent, Albuquerque Public Schools, NM

What Response Protocols Should Schools Be Familiar With?

STANDARD RESPONSE PROTOCOL (SRP)

Standard Response Protocol (SRP) empowers school community members to participate in emergency response at the building level.

INCIDENT COMMAND SYSTEM (ICS)

An Incident Command System (ICS) is a standard protocol that dictates steps schools should follow when first responders are involved in an emergency.

Standard Response Protocol

SRP specifies actions community members follow in different types of emergencies. SRP establishes a universal vocabulary that can be adapted to each building's infrastructure and needs. SRP names five specific actions:

◉ HOLD   ◉ SECURE   ◉ LOCKDOWN   ◉ EVACUATE   ◉ SHELTER

1 HOLD: "In Your Room or Area"

Some emergencies require that students remain in their classrooms until the situation is resolved. Alternatively, there may be a need for students outside of classrooms to relocate to a safe area. During a HOLD, the school's public address system announces: "Hold in your room or area. Clear the halls" or a similar statement. Schools should customize the announcement to include all directives needed to keep the community safe during emergencies. A second announcement should be made to end the HOLD.

THE CENTEGIX SAFETY PLATFORM™ HELPS SCHOOLS ENACT THE SRP'S HOLD STEP:

◉ **Audio and visual notifications notify everyone rapidly of an emergency.**

◉ **Desktop takeovers deliver instant protocol notifications to every screen in the building.**

◉ **Solutions integrate with schools' existing safety infrastructure and assets, including intercom systems, to extend their capabilities.**

◉ **Private, managed networks provide campus-wide coverage that doesn't rely on Wi-Fi or cellular.**

◉ **Notifications can be customized to fit your school's specific needs.**

◉ **Mapping capabilities provide precise locations of emergencies and safety assets to reduce response time.**

② SECURE: "Get Inside. Lock Outside Doors."

Administrators initiate a SECURE protocol when a threat or hazard exists outside of the school building. All students are brought into a secure building, and all outside access points are locked. Regular classroom activities continue when possible.

CENTEGIX SCHOOL SAFETY SOLUTIONS FACILITATE THE SECURE PROTOCOL:

- ⦿ **School administrators can initiate a SECURE protocol from on or off campus from the CENTEGIX Responder App.**

- ⦿ **Intercom takeover announcements (including outdoors) instruct students and staff to return to the building.**

- ⦿ **Audiovisual notifications can be customized from the CENTEGIX Dashboard.**

③ LOCKDOWN: "Locks, Lights, Out of Sight"

A school emergency response team initiates a LOCKDOWN when a threat or hazard exists inside the school building. This protocol specifies classroom and school security actions to protect community members from danger. These steps include locking interior doors, moving occupants out of the line of sight of corridor windows, and requiring occupants to remain silent. LOCKDOWN specifies that external doors remain unlocked to facilitate first responder entry into the building. Community members should stay in place until first responders open room doors.

CENTEGIX SOLUTIONS AID SCHOOLS IN EXECUTING THE LOCKDOWN PROTOCOL:

- ⦿ **Emergency response teams can see the precise location of an incident on the Safety Blueprint™ digital map.**

- ⦿ **Desktop takeovers provide precise instructions to every screen in the building.**

- ⦿ **All staff can initiate a LOCKDOWN protocol anywhere on campus using their CrisisAlert mobile panic button.**

4 EVACUATE

EVACUATE is called when an emergency or safety incident requires moving students from one location to another. Schools customize their public announcement to specify evacuation points.

SCHOOLS CAN FACILITATE THE EVACUATE PROTOCOL USING SAFETY PLATFORM SOLUTIONS:

- **Safety Blueprint digital map shows evacuation routes and precise locations of safety assets.**
- **CENTEGIX Reunification marks students and staff safe at the reunification site, providing an accurate, real-time digital roster.**
- **Intercom and desktop takeovers provide evacuation information and instructions.**
- **Reunification reunites students with approved guardians, performs custody checks, and collects signatures and timestamps.**

5 SHELTER

When specific protective actions are needed in response to a threat or hazard, the school emergency response team initiates a SHELTER protocol. Hazards may include severe weather, natural disasters, or hazardous materials incidents. Schools issue customized announcements during a SHELTER to direct community members' actions. Announcements may include the following directives: evacuate to a sheltered area; seal the room; drop, cover, and hold; and get to high ground.

CENTEGIX SAFETY PLATFORM COMPONENTS HELP SCHOOLS EXECUTE THE SHELTER PROTOCOL:

- **Customizable public announcements allow schools to create and issue instructions specific to the ongoing incident.**
- **Reunification empowers staff to create a roster of students at evacuation points and reunite them with approved guardians.**
- **Appropriate shelter areas for every type of emergency are visible on the CENTEGIX Safety Blueprint critical incident map.**
- **Digital Safety Blueprint maps provide precise locations for needed safety assets during emergencies.**

Incident Command System

An Incident Command System is a standardized structure that specifies roles and actions to accelerate emergency response. The school emergency response team acts as a bridge, serving as first responders until police, fire, or emergency medical services arrive on campus. A typical ICS structure in a school includes:

- ⦿ Incident Commander
- ⦿ Operations Section
- ⦿ Planning Section
- ⦿ Logistics Section
- ⦿ Finance and Administration Section

These roles and teams do not correlate with the school's administrative structure but establish a clear chain of command specific to emergencies. Typically, the Incident Commander is a permanent staff person designated for this role, and they designate individuals to serve as Section supervisors.

ICS follows a series of six steps designed to facilitate effective management of every incident, regardless of size or complexity:

1. Understand agency policy and direction.
2. Assess incident situation.
3. Establish incident objectives.
4. Select appropriate strategy or strategies to achieve objectives.
5. Perform tactical direction.
6. Provide necessary follow-up.

Incident Commander

The Incident Commander is the individual designated by school leaders to manage an incident. They set the objectives, strategies, and priorities for incident response. They are responsible for incident management and can delegate this authority to others. In large-scale incidents, for example, the Incident Commander may appoint a Public Information Officer, Safety Officer, or Liaison Officer. In smaller-scale incidents, such as individual medical emergencies or injuries, the Incident Commander may not need to appoint Section supervisors. In these cases, the Incident Commander would perform all incident management functions.

THE CENTEGIX SAFETY PLATFORM FACILITATES EFFECTIVE INCIDENT COMMAND:

- ⦿ **The CENTEGIX Dashboard shows the precise locations of alerts, safety assets, and evacuation routes. All relevant information is in one place, so Incident Commanders know they have the full picture when making decisions.**
- ⦿ **The CENTEGIX Dashboard empowers the Incident Commander to issue instructions to specified teams, and to customize audiovisual notifications.**

Operations Section

The Operations Section directs the tactical distribution of resources to achieve the incident response objectives set by the Incident Commander. In small facilities or during small-scale emergencies, this may be the only Section required to achieve incident objectives.

CENTEGIX SOLUTIONS ASSIST IN EXECUTING OPERATIONS FUNCTIONS:

- ⦿ **Operations Sections can see where safety assets are located and where more resources are needed on Safety Blueprint digital maps.**

Planning Section

The Planning Section manages incident response. This team collects, evaluates, and shares incident information. This Section also provides critical information and resources to first responders, including maps, floor plans, and a roster of people in the building. The Planning Section also records and documents all activities during and after a safety incident.

CENTEGIX SAFETY PLATFORM HELPS PLANNING SECTIONS ACCESS AND DISTRIBUTE UP-TO-THE-MINUTE INFORMATION ABOUT AN ONGOING INCIDENT:

- **The CENTEGIX Dashboard allows teams to quickly disseminate and customize information during an emergency using audiovisual notifications and desktop takeovers.**

- **The Planning Section can update maps, floorplans, and safety asset locations and share them with first responders.**

- **Safety Blueprint maps show details about evacuation routes, reunification points, staging areas, shelters, and safety assets that inform the Planning Section's decision-making.**

- **CENTEGIX Reunification helps the Planning Section create a roster of students and staff and ensures that students are reunified with authorized guardians.**

Logistics Section

The Logistics Section is responsible for ensuring that adequate resources are available, including personnel, supplies, and equipment. This team procures food and water, arranges evacuation logistics, provides communication equipment, and manages the facility.

THE CENTEGIX SAFETY PLATFORM FACILITATES THE LOGISTICS SECTION'S WORK:

- **Safety Platform's private, managed networks provide reliable connectivity during emergencies.**

- **Logistics Sections can update Safety Blueprint maps in real time to ensure that responders have accurate information about safety assets, incident locations, and evacuation routes.**

CENTEGIX designed the Safety Platform to help schools plan for emergencies, respond effectively to crises, and accelerate emergency response. To learn more about the CENTEGIX Safety Platform and how it can help with your emergency response protocols, visit our website at www.centegix.com.

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