



## CRISIS COUNSELING & INTERVENTION SERVICES

### COLLABORATION WITH OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS

#### Guidelines from Office of Communications

**(213) 241-6766**

News media reporters, photographers and camera crews may come to your campus as allowed by state law to gather information for use as “news.” Media persons with legitimate press passes may be on school property with the principal’s (or designee’s) permission if they have checked in with the school office, stated the purpose of their visit and agree to comply with reasonable “ground rules” set by the school. This typically results in reporters conducting interviews and gathering news from the sidewalk, rather than from activity on school property. The District continues to adhere to this rule, and reporters, especially those who have previously covered crises at LAUSD schools, understand these guidelines. **School or law enforcement authorities can establish different ground rules in the aftermath of a crisis than might be in place for a reporter’s visit on a more routine story.**

The media can be a quick and effective tool providing post-crisis, emergency information to parents and the community. Whenever possible, the District strives to be first with informing parents and the public about a crisis at an LAUSD school. As a result, the District must move quickly to confirm details through the Office of Communications, which will help with preparing information for release.

#### Advance Preparation

- Designate the most appropriate spokesperson for the school (principal or a designee). Depending on the level of the crisis, the spokesperson can also be the chief of school police and/or the director of communications. A Spanish-speaking spokesperson should also be available.
- Identify a room or an area on campus (or an alternate location adjacent to the campus) as a place where news media can be briefed. Anticipate a large media presence after a serious incident and pre-select your briefing area(s) accordingly.

#### When a Crisis Occurs

- After requesting appropriate assistance from 911, the School Police Department or the Local District office, **contact the Office of Communications, (213) 241-6766**, as soon as possible. Provide enough information to enable that office to be in contact with the media and thus lessen the communications burden on the school. A communications officer may be assigned to your school to assist with media relations activities.
- Write a brief fact sheet that can be used by persons answering the phone in the school office when parents or news media call in the hours immediately following an incident. The fact sheet can serve to confirm known facts (i.e., “Yes, we did have an explosion in one of our science labs. Two students were injured and have been taken to the hospital.”), and use follow-up phrases such as: “We’re still checking the facts to find out exactly what happened...The police are still investigating...Children are now back in their classes with their teachers...Everyone followed the evacuation plan that we have practiced...School will be dismissed today at \_\_\_\_\_ instead of the usual time...Parents with proper I.D. can pick their

children up at the Reunion gate on the \_\_\_\_\_ side of the campus starting at 1 p.m....We will send a letter home to all parents...," etc.

- Media should be referred to the designated media liaison or the Office of Communications.
- Before group media briefings or talking with a reporter, employees should work with the Office of Communications to coordinate interviews. Some tips for preparing a response include:
  - Write some basic chronological notes about the incident to use as your statement of what happened.
  - Make your statement before taking questions.
  - Refer to your notes, if necessary, when speaking to reporters or answering questions.
  - Avoid implications of “blame” or “responsibility” for an incident before the matter has been fully investigated.
  - Be mindful about the type of information about students or staff that can be provided to media and what, by law, must remain confidential.

### Post Crisis

- Students and parents should be asked to refer media questions to the principal.
- If a reporter wants to interview students on campus, the administrator (or media liaison) should select students, however students have the right to decline speaking to the media.
- The liaison or another staff person should be present and should halt the interview if questions to students become inappropriate.
- On-campus interviews with elementary level students after a traumatic incident are not recommended (a parent who is on campus that day may be willing to permit an interview).
- **Students waiting to give witness statements to police or school staff should not be permitted to speak with reporters first.**
- Media cannot enter classrooms to speak with students without specific permission from the principal. Any interviews with or statements given by faculty members should be voluntary and not conducted during class time.
- Keep the Office of Communications staff (or the communications officer assigned to your school that day) informed of new developments.
- **Students waiting to give first hand witness statements are under police authority and should be isolated until released by law enforcement officials.**



LOS ANGELES UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT  
OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS

PUBLIC INFORMATION RELEASE

This is a form to guide you in preparation for a public information release.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Note: If this is used as a script, read only those items checked. Make no other comments.

(Check off, fill in, and cross off as appropriate)

- The (students/employees) [(are being) or (have been)] accounted for.
- No further information is available at this time.
- Emergency medical services [(are here) or (are on the way) or (are not available to us)]
- Police [(are here) or (are on the way) or (are not available to us)].
- Fire Dept./Paramedics [(are here) or (are on the way) or (are not available to us)]
- \_\_\_\_\_ [(are here) or (are on the way) or (are not available to us)].

- Communication center(s) for parents (is/are) being set up at: \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_ to answer questions about individual employees.

- Injuries have been reported at \_\_\_\_\_ and are being treated at
- the site by (staff/professional medical responders). (#) \_\_\_\_\_ reported injured.

- Students have been taken to a safe area, \_\_\_\_\_, and are with [(classroom
- teachers/staff) or (\_\_\_\_\_)]

- Students have been taken to the local emergency room for treatment of serious injury.

Parents of injured students should go to the emergency room at \_\_\_\_\_

- Structural damage has been reported at the following sites: \_\_\_\_\_

Release restrictions:  No  Yes If yes, what? \_\_\_\_\_

Released to the public as Public Information Release # \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_

**For further assistance, please contact the LAUSD's Office of Communications (213) 241-6766.**