Introduction to Parent/Child Reunification

Pa State Police-Homeland Security Summit

CENTER FOR SAFE SCHOOLS

Safe Schools are Everyone's Responsibility

Participant Manual

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Disclaimer:

This program is intended to familiarize participants with the components of a Parent/Child Reunification Program for use during or immediately following an emergency or disaster situation. This introduction is not meant to be an all-inclusive program, but is designed to make school officials and emergency responders aware of the key components of a good parent/child reunification plan.

As with all components of an All-Hazards Plan, <u>coordination with local responders is recommended</u> by the Center for Safe Schools. Every component of an All-Hazards Plan should be supported by training, drills and exercises to increase efficiency and proficiency during actual emergencies.

This program is not intended to provide legal advice. Examples used in the presentation may not be suitable for all schools to utilize. Please refer any questions on specific wording to your local policies, procedures or legal counsel.

Terminology:

The use of the term "<u>parents</u>" in this manual is used as a generic term that includes: single parents, foster parents, legal guardians, other caregivers and anyone with parental rights under existing statutes and regulations.

The use of the term "<u>school</u>" or "<u>schools</u>" in this manual is used to imply any school (public or private) and any series of schools comprising a school district or educational service unit.

Objectives: Upon completion of this program each participant will be able to:

1. Identify the three key provisions for a Parent/Child Reunification Plan.

2. Identify the five recommended areas to be established in a model Parent/Child Reunification Plan.

3. Identify equipment, materials and supplies necessary for an efficient Parent/Child Reunification Program.

3 Key Provisions to a Successful Parent-Child Reunification Program:

Develop **"pre-incident"** accountability for students, staff and visitors.

Practice accountability and supervision during **all** emergency drills and exercises.

Develop a plan for releasing your students to parents or buses in non-traditional locations.

Parent/Child Reunification Plan
For Use After School Emergencies

Initial school actions should *always* include the provision to account for all students and staff members.

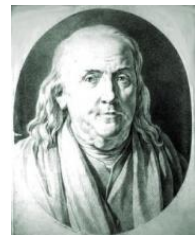Students need to be located in a safe area away from the actual emergency and away from press and media.

Student Holding Area

Site security must be initiated to:
1. prevent students from leaving; and
2. prevent parents from taking students without the knowledge of the school.

By failing to prepare,
you are preparing to fail.

Benjamin Franklin

Planning and Preparing is Critical:
All stakeholders involved need to be aware of the actions to take in an emergency to insure 100% accountability. Accountability may take time in escape situations

Stakeholders:

When we discuss all persons involved in the school's parent-child reunification process we will use the following groups:

- Emergency Responders
- Parents
- Students
- Staff
  - Home Based
  - Itinerant
- Non-Staff Adults
  - Vendors
  - Volunteers
  - Visitors

Emergency Responder Mentality:

All Persons Accounted for: **Risk** versus Benefit

Persons Missing: **Life Safety** is priority #1

Parental Expectations:

Parents simply expect that their son or daughter will be safe and secure in the school setting no matter what occurs.

When an emergency situation occurs it becomes even more critical that school officials can account for each and every child and do so in a quick and efficient manner.

Pre-event Notification
is Critical for Parents!

Administrators have an absolute duty to inform parents of the district/school student release procedures **before** a crisis occurs.

Parents need to understand the parent-child reunification process involves 3 basic steps:
1. Parent will be asked to present photo ID to school staff prior to picking up their child.
2. School personnel will locate the child and bring the child to the parent making the request.
3. The child/children will be brought to the parent.

Parental Responsibilities:

Let your parents know they are accountable for following proper <u>procedures</u> and <u>protocols</u> and why.

– Completing forms
– Reporting where directed
– Producing photo ID as needed
– Signing students out

Parent Notifications:

Remember that timely and accurate parent notifications must take place <u>swiftly</u> in an emergency.

Understand that parents are going to want <u>immediate</u> access to their children.

When you fail to communicate to the parents they will tend to come to the school for information.

Using every available <u>resource</u> and <u>method</u> to communicate accurate and timely information to parents will provide huge returns on your time and effort in the long run.

Communications Process:

- Remember to communicate <u>processes</u>, not specific locations.
- Operational Security (OP SEC)
- Prevents secondary attacks
- If necessary, changes should be communicated through the designated channels.

Goal:

It should be the goal of every school administrator to begin reunification procedures as soon as it is <u>practical</u> and <u>tactically</u> safe to do so.

The quick reunification will:

- <u>Reduce</u> student and parent stress
- Reduce the amount of staff needed for student supervision

Benefits:

Keeping parents informed as much as possible, will <u>reduce the numbers of requests</u> for information coming into the school or district and will <u>allow the school and emergency responders to concentrate</u> on the emergency.

Alternative to Good Parental Communications:

When parents are not provided information they will tend to assume the worst case scenario has taken place and attempt to handle matters on their own.

Why Address Accountability Every Day?

- Emergencies happen without notice and accountability of students needs to be a daily requirement and responsibility for every staff member each and every day.
- We never know what day an emergency or crisis will occur.

Figure 1

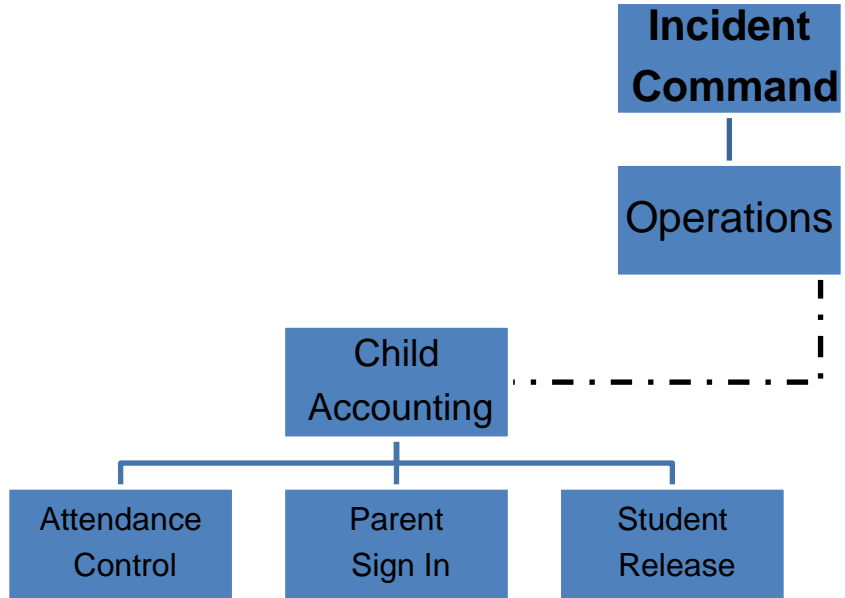# Getting Ready
Obtain and Maintain Resources

Obtain Materials & Supplies:
Obtain materials and stockpiling, with regular inventory checks, is necessary to be successful in your Parent/Child reunification process.

Update student rosters:
Rosters should be updated at a minimum of regularly; some districts require their schools to update rosters weekly. (Required Chapter 10 of 22 PA Code)

Distribute updated rosters:

All teachers need updated rosters of all their classes. This information should be stored in their classroom so that a substitute teacher could easily find it. A copy of all rosters should also be placed in the crisis response box, as well as with the principal and any other stakeholder as advisable. It is critical to know which students are present during a crisis.

Obtain Supplies and Equipment:

Materials and supplies needed for a parent reunification plan do not mysteriously appear when an emergency arises. Pre-planning and stockpiling, with regular inventory checks, is necessary to be successful in your parent-child reunification processing

Item Description	Parent Check In Area	Student Release Area
Sufficient Personnel – minimum of two per station	X	X
Tables and Chairs	X	X
ID Cards or Vests for Personnel Assigned	X	X
Umbrellas or Pop Up Canopies	X	X
Cell Phones or District Radios	X	X
Office supply box (pens, pencils, paperclips, note pads etc…)	X	X
Student Rosters (updated: by alpha, grade, teacher etc…)	X	
"No Contact" information (forms, file cards etc…)	X	X
Signs or Banners	X	X
Student Release Forms	X	
A computer with access to the student information system is beneficial, if computer access is available.	X	X
School Information Forms or letters regarding the event		X
List of physical signs and symptoms for parents to watch for regarding post-traumatic stress, etc.		X

Assign roles for staff:

Check-In Clerks	Several staff members should be assigned to "check in" the parents who arrive to pick up students. These workers need to be provided proper training. It is highly recommended that an administrator be assigned to supervise this area in the event a conflict arises over who is permitted to pick up students during an emergency. The check in clerk initiates the student release form. If an adult is not permitted to pick up a student they should never be sent to the student release area.
Runners	Several staff members, or parent volunteers, are needed to serve as runners. The runner obtains the student release form or card from a parent check in clerk and then goes to the student holding area. At the student holding area the runner obtains the student and logs them out of the student holding area. The runner then escorts the student to the student release area. Once the student is delivered to the student release area that "runner" returns to the Check In Area. If a student cannot be located in the student holding area the runner returns to the student release area and informs the student release area supervisor. The runner would then accompany the parent to the parent waiting area and turn the parent over to the waiting area staff. Once the parent is delivered to the parent waiting area the runner returns to the Check In Area for another assignment.
Release Clerks	Several staff members will also be needed to help sign out students to their parents at the student release area. Students should never be released until the parent signs for the student. This can be recorded on either the student release form or student release log.
Mental Health Workers	One of the areas established in a parent reunification plan is a mental health respite area. This area is established for students, or staff, that is having a difficult time dealing with the crisis at hand. This area serves a twofold purpose: first it will allow for some basic psychological first aid or mental health assessments to occur. It also will move emotionally distraught students away from the "general population" so as to not exasperate any problems in the student holding area. Student should never be sent to the mental health respite area for disciplinary problems and any student sent to this area should be properly noted at the student holding area in case a parent comes for the child. This area should be staffed by counselors, psychologists or other staff trained in psychological first aid or the student assistance process.
Parent Support	This area is necessary for times when students cannot be readily located. Parents that

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| Team	come to pick up a child should never be turned away from the school. If the parent comes to the parent check-in area and completes all required documentation and their child cannot be located, the parent should be invited to the parent waiting area. That parent waiting area needs to be staffed by school personnel that can comfort the parent, provide timely updates or information and continue to make contact with the student holding area and mental health respite area supervisors for status changes on the child. The parent waiting area supervisor can also make inquiries, through the ICS system, to the medical team leader for any information on the missing child's whereabouts.

Assignments:

- These roles should be assigned before a crisis occurs.
- Take into account the need for depth of position.
- Training is required to support the role and duties to be performed.
- Several persons should be trained for each role to be filled in an emergency.
- If roles change, the principal or designated leader should assign new roles.

The Physical Arrangement of a Parent/Child Reunification Plan:
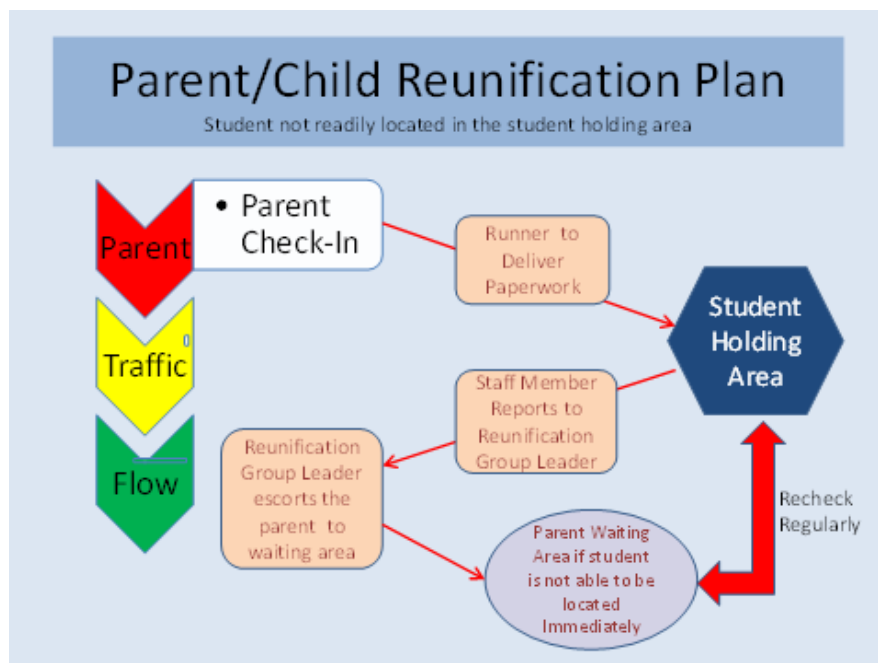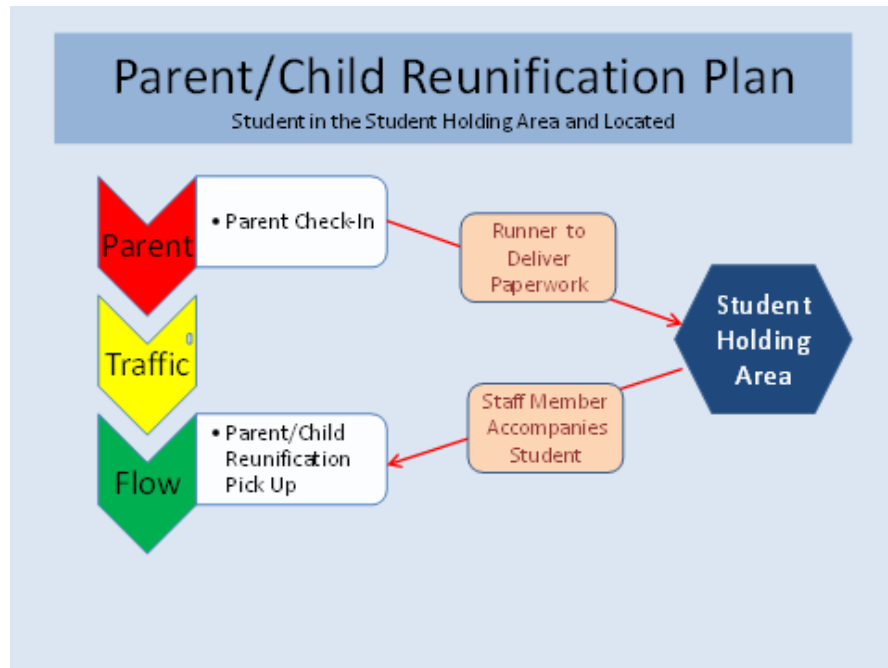
Every Parent/Child Reunification plan should have at a minimum five separate and distinct areas:

1. Parent Check-In Area
2. Student Release Area
3. Student Holding Area
4. Mental Health Respite Area (Psychological First Aid)
5. Parent Waiting Area
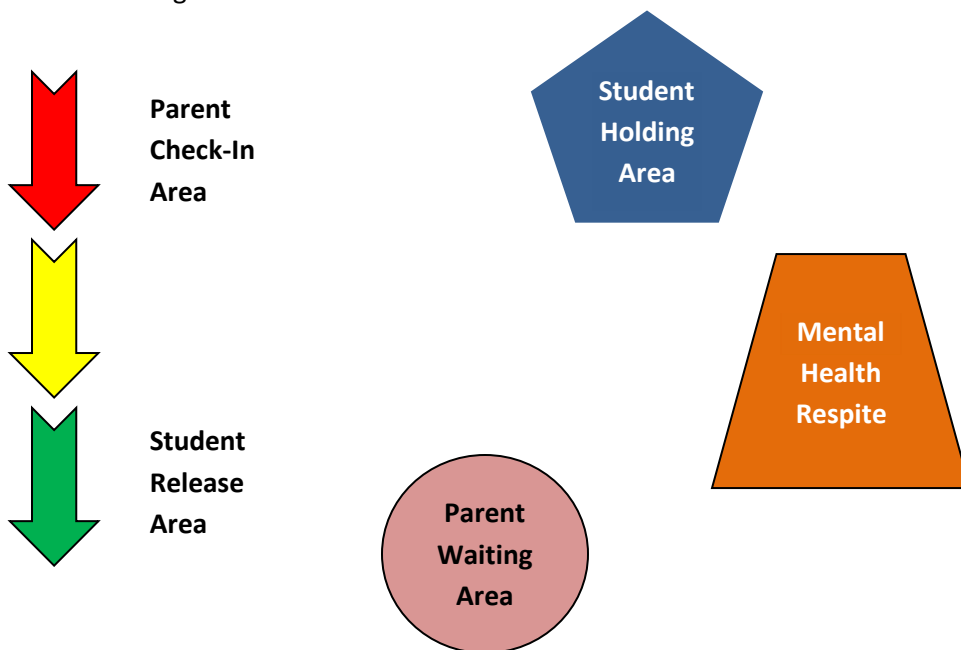
Create student release procedures:
These procedures should create a flexible, yet simple, system for the release of students. Families will want immediate access to their children; emotions will be running high. Create a system that considers this, and train staff to expect it. Procedures should require proof of identity; if necessary; wait until such proof can be ascertained. It is important not to release a student to a noncustodial guardian if custody is an issue for the family. Do not release students to people not listed on student emergency cards. A well-intentioned friend may offer to take a child home; however, school staff must be certain that students are only released to the appropriate people so students' families will know where they are.

Parent/Child Reunification Plan
Student in the Student Holding Area and Located

Parent — • Parent Check-In — Runner to Deliver Paperwork → Student Holding Area

Traffic

Flow — • Parent/Child Reunification Pick Up ← Staff Member Accompanies Student ← Student Holding Area

Parent/Child Reunification Plan
Student not readily located in the student holding area

Parent — • Parent Check-In — Runner to Deliver Paperwork → Student Holding Area

Traffic

Flow — Reunification Group Leader escorts the parent to waiting area ← Staff Member Reports to Reunification Group Leader ← Student Holding Area

Parent Waiting Area if student is not able to be located Immediately

Recheck Regularly

Parent/Child Reunification after a Mass Casualty or Mass Fatality Incident:

Types of School Based MCI/MFI:
- Active Shooter
- Transportation
- Food Poisoning
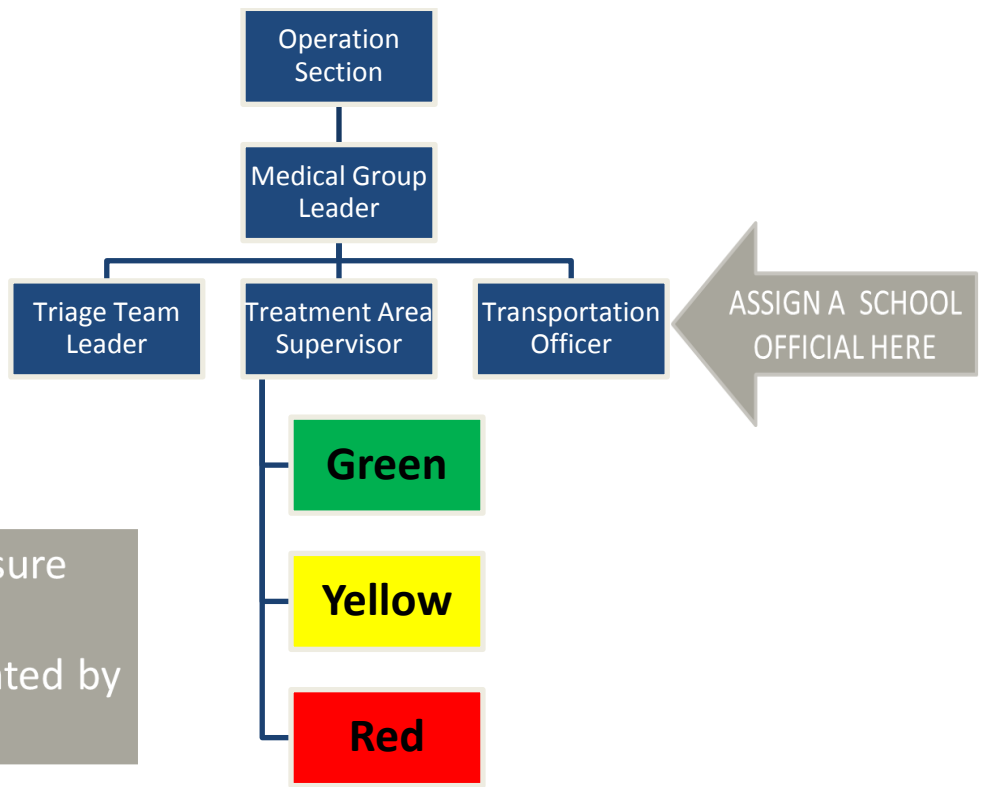- Carbon Monoxide
- Bleacher/Stadium Collapse
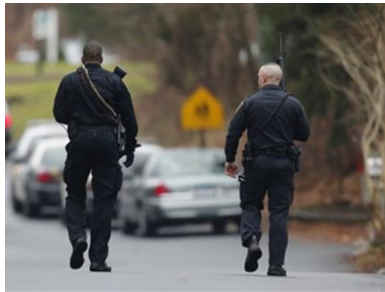
Pre-Incident Collaboration is the Key to Success:

1. <u>Meet</u> and greet.
2. Know the <u>capabilities</u> of your response organizations.
3. Consider forming school medical response teams.
4. Share your schools capabilities and <u>unmet</u> needs with local responders.
5. Learn EMS procedures and protocols.
6. Train <u>together</u>.
7. Conduct drills and exercises.

Common Myths versus Facts:

| Myth	Fact
The school will be in charge of the operation.	The <u>emergency</u> services will assume command: 1. Preferably <u>Unified</u> Command will be established. 2. Schools will merge into unified command <u>if</u> they have trained and drilled in advance.
The school nurse is in charge of all medical decisions.	EMS services will be in charge at an MCI: 1. Preferably, the school nurse will continue to function in the EMS/Medical Group. 2. The school nurse will be a <u>vital</u> resource for student and staff information.
The local EMS services will arrive quickly in great numbers and immediately relieve the school of medical care.	EMS services will arrive as quickly as <u>possible</u> with their limited resources: 1. Schools will need to <u>support</u> EMS initially until sufficient units arrive. 2. Sufficient units will arrive.

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                    ┌─────────────────┐
                    │   Operation     │
                    │    Section      │
                    └────────┬────────┘
                             │
                    ┌────────┴────────┐
                    │ Medical Group   │
                    │    Leader       │
                    └────────┬────────┘
        ┌────────────────────┼────────────────────┐
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│  Triage Team   │  │ Treatment Area  │  │  Transportation  │  ◄── ASSIGN A  SCHOOL
│    Leader      │  │   Supervisor    │  │     Officer      │       OFFICIAL HERE
└────────────────┘  └────────┬────────┘  └──────────────────┘
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Green

Yellow

HIPAA limits disclosure
of information
once patient is treated by
EMS or hospital

Red

Patient Classification System

Class	Priority	Color
1	Immediate	Red
2	Delayed	Yellow
3	Minor	Green
4	Dead/Dying	Black
n/a	Non-Injured	White

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Types of Triage Tags
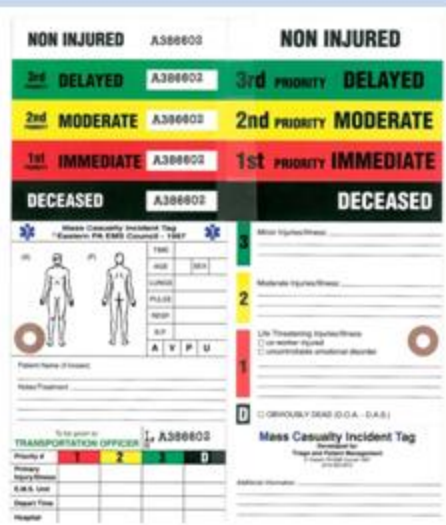
Send School Administrators to Hospitals