

SCHOOL CRITICAL INCIDENT RESPONSE MANUAL GUIDE

The School Board of Broward County, Florida is committed to ensure that all students receive a quality education within a safe and secure learning environment. The development and implementation of a School Critical Response Manual is an excellent part of the school's comprehensive safety plan and acts to support the goal that students will attend a school that is safe, secure and conducive to student health and learning.

There are a number of state requirements and shared responsibilities regarding safe schools that underscore the need to reinforce a community-oriented approach to school public safety.

In accordance with the rules of the State Board of Education, **district school boards** operate, control, and supervise all public schools in their respective districts and are required to make a reasonable effort to provide a learning environment free from harmful conditions [230.03(2),FS], [230.23(6)(c,d), FS], [6B-1.006(3)a, FAC]. Rules require that a reasonable effort be made to protect students from harmful, unhealthy and/or unsafe conditions. [6b-1.006(3)a, FAC].

The **superintendent** acts as the executive officer of the district school board and is responsible for recommending rules and regulations for the control, discipline, suspension, and expulsion of students, as well as assuring that all laws and rules of the state board are observed [230.31,FS], [230.32 (3, 4), FS], [230.33 (8), FS].

The **principal** is in charge of the school. In accordance with district school board rules and regulations, the principal is required to develop student control policies for use by teachers, instructional staff, and school bus drivers [232.26, FS]. Principals in charge of secondary schools are required to develop and implement school security programs [228.088, FS], [232.25, FS], [232.26 (1), FS], [6A-a.0403, FAC].

Each **teacher or instructional staff member** has the authority for the control and discipline of students as may be assigned to him or her by the principal or designee [232.25 FS], [232.27, FS].

Each **school bus driver** is authorized by the principal to establish and maintain control of students being transported to and from school or school events at public places [232.25, FS], [232.28, FS].

In essence, maintaining a safe school environment is everyone's responsibility. *The School Critical Incident Response Manual* was prepared with that in mind.

The School Critical Incident Response Manual, hereafter referred to as the Manual, has as its purpose(s):

1. Identification of issues and/or critical incidents that require special attention;

2. A means for the principal to inform all school personnel of security and response procedures;
3. A tool to evaluate the response system to make any changes needed to improve procedures;
4. An opportunity to involve, teachers, volunteers, neighborhood watch programs, school resource officers, administrative staff, and other community members to be a contributor to the safe schools effort.
5. A means of planning for the effective support of a number of interagency agreements which include information sharing and the reporting of all felonies and violent misdemeanors.

A Critical Incident is defined as a traumatic event which is beyond the range of experiences that a person usually encounters. The event has the potential to evoke an intense emotional response that can interfere with a person's ability to cope. It has a major impact on the routing functioning of the school.

The Manual design process is school-site based. It is not the intention of the process to address every possible incident. However, it is designed to provide an easily understood procedural approach to a representative sample of potential incidents. The exact timing of critical events is unpredictable. **There is no way that a site can create a plan for every possible scenario.** It is through the process of simulation, practice and in-service training that a staff as well as students, become familiar with effective decision making with regard to critical incident response. That decision making experience is then transferable regardless of which critical incident occurs.

A clearly written plan enables communication to all stakeholders (i.e. students, staff, parents, administrators) The "who", "what", "where", "when", "why", and "how" of the strategy is used to reduce school violence and improve the learning environment. There are a number of "climate indicators" that may forecast problems.

While the following conditions do not guarantee a safe school, they help create the conditions that do minimize inappropriate or even violent behavior.

- High parental involvement
- Student and faculty unification with the school
- High visibility of principal
- Low truancy rate
- A clean and excellently maintained school

These general areas of concern must be addressed specifically by way of a clearly articulated plan and a multi-disciplinary system of violence prevention programs. This Manual is one tool that all stakeholders can use to address specifics with regard to school violence.

Programs and plans must be designed to foster the creation and maintenance of a safe and secure learning environment within the school and to establish policies and enforcement procedures that will protect people and property under the school's supervision. The Manual then becomes a part of the school site safety plan.

The review process for the Manual is a part of the annual safety review that is required of the school principal. A written response plan is a good first step in the safety and security "programs and plans" for the school. The very best plans are plans that are consistently evaluated and refined.

A safety review must consider policies, procedures, programs and plans that impact school safety in such a way that those policies, procedures, programs and plans are:

1. Written.
2. Instructed.
3. Practiced.
4. Evaluated, reviewed, and up-dated/deleted.

Everyone at the site should be familiar with the Manual. In-service training should be provided to teachers, guidance counselors, administrators, cafeteria workers, maintenance staff, custodial staff and supervisory personnel. Students should be familiar with plan as well.

This guide is essentially a standards manual, which provides generic action steps for listed critical incidents. Although the manual is designed at the school site, a guide has been developed which includes "best practices" of all the school sites. An individual school should review their current response process to those in the guide or upgrade their process by inserting the response provided. **Each school site must evaluate incidents individually and tailor the school's response** to its geographic location with its specific support response resources, law enforcement, fire, emergency medical services, etc.

Information in this guide has been compiled from a variety of resources including—Special Investigative Unit, School Board Policies, Law Enforcement, Fire Suppression, Emergency Medical Service, and other governmental agencies/community organizations. It represents the collective experiences of many emergency professionals and community members who are concerned about school public safety and the most effective measures of resolving a school site incident.

Professional Standards and Special Investigative Unit is always open to suggestions that will improve the quality of the School Critical Incident Response Manual in a way that underscores our mutual commitment to the safety and security of the students and staff of the School Board of Broward County.

A special thanks is also given to the Florida Department of Education, Miami Dade School District, Volusia School District, and Brevard School District for sharing ideas and plans with us that will enable us to make our schools safer