



Opportunity · Unity · Excellence

District Administration Serious Incident and Emergency School Closure/Delay Communications Plan

Overview

The Upper Darby School District Administration Emergency and Serious Incident Communications Plan has been developed to assist District and school-level administration in providing timely and accurate information to school communities, the Township residents and the media when faced with an emergency or a serious incident and inclement-weather early dismissal, late start or school closure.

This Guide is designed to complement the District's existing *School Emergency Response Plan*, not to replace it in any manner. The *School Emergency Response Plan* is a framework designed to help schools respond to emergency and serious incidents and hazards. The District Administration Emergency and Serious Incident Communications Plan is designed to serve as a guideline for addressing two school District audiences: internal (students, teachers, staff, administration and the School Board) and external (parents, community partners, businesses and the media) in the event of an emergency or a serious incident that impacts students and schools. These two plans intersect in the use of social media platforms during all four phases of emergency and serious incident management: (1) Prevention-Mitigation, (2) Preparedness, (3) Response, and (4) Recovery. However, the District Administration Emergency and Serious Incident Communications Plan in no way replaces the *School Emergency Response Plan*.

This guide is also designed to inform stakeholders of District protocols for changes to the school schedule due to an emergency school closure or school opening delay. While the decision to close or delay school opening is based on several factors, the most important factor is student safety. The District takes into account several factors when deciding whether or not to close schools or to adjust the school schedule for inclement weather. These factors include road conditions and student transportation, temperature, weather predictions and school campus conditions (i.e. parking lots, sidewalks, bus loops, etc.).

Upper Darby School District officials who are charged with communications during an emergency or serious incident aim to disseminate accurate information as quickly as possible. Their objectives include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Maintaining a safe and welcoming school environment at all times for students, staff, parents and the school community at large
- Building trust with staff, students, parents and the community
- Providing timely, reliable and regular information to parents, staff, students

It is the goal of Upper Darby School District that the District be the official source of information for all things related to the Upper Darby School District. The reality for school districts is that the emergence of social media has provided a platform, at times, for dissemination of inaccurate information, incomplete information and emergency and serious incident-related rumors from unofficial sources. Unlike anonymous and/or unofficial sources, Upper Darby School District is obligated to investigate a matter as thoroughly as possible, provide due process to all involved, ensure notification of parent(s)/guardian(s), work with law enforcement and emergency and serious incident response personnel, and ensure student privacy rights are not violated (especially when minors are involved). One of the goals listed in our District Comprehensive Plan is to continue to improve communication with our stakeholders and this includes increasing the timeliness of our communications as much as possible.

District Administration Emergency and Serious Incident Communications Team

The UDSD Emergency and Serious Incident Communications Team has been established to manage District-level communication during an emergency or serious incident in the District. Each of these members are responsible for collaborating with the Superintendent of Schools and the Director of Communications in communicating to

District stakeholders any services and supports that may be activated during an emergency or serious incident.

The District Administration Emergency and Serious Incident Communications Team members are as follows:

- Superintendent of Schools
- Director of Communications
- Director of Safety
- Assistant Superintendent of Student Services
- Assistant Superintendent of Personnel and Equity
- Director of Secondary Education
- Director of Elementary Education
- Chief Financial Officer (Transportation, Facilities, Operations)
- Director of Federal Programs, Grants, Food Service, Counseling and Social Work
- Manager of Data and Information (Student Attendance)
- Director of Technology

District Administration Emergency and Serious Incident Communications Team Chain of Command
--

The Superintendent has established a chain of command for the Upper Darby School District Administration Emergency and Serious Incident Communications Team to serve as a hierarchy of authority that dictates levels of communication responsibilities throughout an emergency or serious incident.

The District Incident Commander is responsible for overseeing all matters related to the emergency or serious incident.

The District Communications Leader is responsible for ensuring that communication flows to District stakeholders during an emergency or serious incident.

The District Commander and District Communications Leader work collaboratively throughout an emergency or serious incident to ensure communication to District stakeholders is accurate, timely and disseminated regularly.

Both the District Incident Commander and District Communications Leader roles each designate primary and two back up personnel to carry out the specific responsibilities.

The Superintendent is designated as the Primary District Commander. In the event the Superintendent is not on site or unavailable, the Assistant Superintendent of Student Services serves in that capacity and the Assistant Superintendent of Personnel and Equity serves as the 2nd back up. The Director of Communications is designated as the Primary District Communications Leader. In the event the Director of Communications is not on site or unavailable, the Director of Curriculum serves in that capacity and the Director of Federal Programs and Grants serves as the 2nd back up.

Whoever is in charge during an incident must keep the Director of Communications informed throughout the incident.

The graphic below is a representation of the Upper Darby School District Administration Emergency and Serious Incident Communications Team chain of command.

	District Incident Commander	District Communications Leader
Primary	Dr. Daniel McGarry, Superintendent	Aaronda Q. Beauford, Director of Communications
1st Back Up	Edward Marshaleck, Assistant Superintendent of Student Services	Christine Kelley, Director of Curriculum
2nd Back Up	Dr. John Council, Assistant Superintendent of Personnel and Equity	Wendy Elgart, Director of Federal Programs and Grants

Again, each member of the District Administration Emergency and Serious Incident Communications Team is responsible for collaborating with the District Incident Commander (Superintendent of Schools or his designee) and the District Communications Leader (Director of Communications or her designee) in communicating to District stakeholders any services and supports that may be activated during an emergency/serious incident.

<p>Description of Communication Tools and Use of Tools for Emergency or Serious Incidents</p>
--

The Upper Darby School District will continue to strategically optimize emergency/serious incident alerting and social media tools and to leverage mobile technology for emergency/serious incident communication. These tools are used to

notify parents/guardians of an emergency or serious incident, to provide updates, and to provide information about any procedures related to the School Emergency Response Plan.

NOTE: This plan will be updated to include CrisisGo and the UDSD mobile application when these systems are activated.

- **ParentLink**, a robocall/email system, is used to send out mass emails and voice messages (as needed) to all parents/guardians using contact information from the Home Access Center (HAC). **IMPORTANT:** Parents/Guardians are responsible for keeping their contact information (i.e. email, phone number) up-to-date in the Home Access Center.
- The Social media tools, **Instagram**, **Facebook** and **Twitter**, are used to post the ParentLink message.
- **COMING SOON: CrisisGo mobile app** and **Upper Darby School District mobile app** are used as additional tools to accelerate emergency notification to school staff, parents/guardians and school community stakeholders.

Emergency and Serious Incident Communications Protocols

The Upper Darby School District Emergency/Serious Incident Communications Team will disseminate information throughout each of the four (4) phases of the *School Emergency Response Plan*: Prevention-Mitigation, Response, Preparedness and Recovery.

During the **Prevention-Mitigation** stage, the District communicates to stakeholders about the tools in place to positively impact school climate, culture and safety tools, protocols and programs that aim to prevent, mitigate and diminish hazards that can cause risks and subsequently an emergency or serious incident. These include building safety equipment and system additions and upgrades, Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS), Restorative Practices from SaferSaner Schools (a whole-school program that supports the improvement of school climate and culture by decreasing unsafe behavior and increasing prosocial interaction), 21 Day Planner, Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS), the addition of Elementary School Counselors and its Supportive Relationships Program.

During the **Response stage**, the District informs stakeholders in the event of an incident and provides status updates.

During the **Preparedness** stage the District takes a proactive approach in sharing with parents/guardians and stakeholders the *School Emergency Response Plan* and the *District Administration Emergency and Serious Incident Communications Plan*. The Superintendent and Principals communicate the meaning of safety terms and procedures and school emergency response protocols. Principals share the *School Emergency Response Plan* with staff and students and lead practice lockdown, shelter-in-place and evacuation drills.

Additionally, the Director of Communications prepares emergency and serious incident communications templates to expedite communication. These templates are adjusted as needed per incident to include relevant information.

During the **Recovery** stage, the District communicates about the resolution of the incident and provides information on post-incident procedures as needed.

Each phase includes organizational internal and external communications protocols. (See below.)

District Administration Emergency and Serious Incident Management

The following critical action steps are presented so that tasks can occur simultaneously during an emergency or serious incident.

1. The Superintendent's Command Center is activated as the centralized command location for the handling of and communication regarding an emergency or serious incident.
2. The Director of Communication activates the internal and external communications protocol.

Internal and External Communications Protocols

Internal Communication

The purpose of internal communications is to manage information-sharing from the District Administration Emergency and Serious Incident Communications Team to

District employees and parents/guardians. The Director of Communications is the point person for internal communications.

For school-level incidents, the Director of Communications may delegate the communications role to the building Principal(s) of the impacted school(s).

External Communication

The purpose of external communications is to manage information sharing from the District Administration Emergency and Serious Incident Communications Team to parents/guardians, Township officials, the media and other District stakeholders. The Director of Communications is the point person for all external communications.

The Director of Communications interfaces with the media and District stakeholders as per the *Response* stage in the Communications Protocols as outlined in this plan.

During the *Response* stage of an emergency/serious incident:

1. The Director of Communications sends out a ParentLink providing initial information about the incident.
2. The Director of Communications sends out updates regularly throughout the incident.
3. The Director of Communications sends out any update message(s) as needed.

Emergency School Schedule Change Communication Protocol
--

Winter weather may bring road and driving conditions that cause changes in the school day schedule. As a result, the school day might be adjusted to a 2-hour delay, an early dismissal, or a school closure. Our goal is to make information available to families about the change in the school day schedule as soon as possible through the communication tools outlined above.

The following protocol outlines the timeline for communicating a decision for altering the school schedule due to inclement weather or another emergency or serious incident. The District aims to communicate decisions regarding a change to the school schedule as far in advance of the weather event or known emergency/serious incident as soon as possible.

Schools Closed

- If a decision to close schools is to be made the day before the inclement weather event, it will be made by 6:15 p.m. If a decision to close schools is made on the morning of the inclement weather event, it will be made by 5:30 a.m.

2-Hour Delay

- If a decision to schedule a 2-hour delay is made before the inclement weather event, it will be made by 6:15 p.m. If a decision to close schools is made on the morning of the inclement weather event, it will be made by 5:30 a.m.
- A decision as to whether or not to close schools following a 2-hour delay will be made no later than 9:00 a.m.
- A decision to close schools early following an inclement weather event that begins after 9:00 a.m. will be made and communicated as soon as possible.
- A decision as to whether or not to cancel after-school activities will be made no later than 1:00 p.m. on the day of the inclement weather event.

Emergency Early Dismissal

- If a decision to dismiss schools early is made before the inclement weather event, it will be made by 6:15 p.m. If a decision to dismiss schools early is made on the morning of the inclement weather event, it will be made by 9:00 a.m.
- A decision to dismiss schools early following an inclement weather event beginning after 9:00 a.m. will be made and communicated as soon as possible.
- A decision as to whether or not to cancel after-school activities will be made no later than 1:00 p.m. on the day of the inclement weather event.