

A Message from Our Superintendent, Dr. Keith Allen Stewart

We are devastated by the tragic news too often recurring around the country. Our hearts and prayers are with the children, families, staff and communities impacted by these senseless events. In an effort to keep parents and community stakeholders informed about the preparedness of our local schools, the following information is provided for your review:



What is emergency preparedness?

The Bessemer City School District has taken steps to ensure your child's safety while in school. Each school has developed a crisis response plan. Emergency preparedness is basically preparing the steps we will take in the event of an emergency, such as contact information, communications, and evacuation plans.

How will my child's school handle an emergency situation?

All Bessemer City Schools facilities have an emergency preparedness plan. The specifics of each plan differ for each location. The response to each situation will differ based on the specifics of that situation. The flexibility of the plan is key to the success of the response. In general, each plan involves the designation of a crisis management team; development of evacuation, shelter-in-place, and lockdown procedures; preparation of a portable critical response kit that contains key information and supplies; designation of one or more appropriate evacuation sites; provisions for training personnel and updating the plan; checklists for dealing with specific types of incidents; and resources for help before, during and after an event. All Bessemer City School plans have been reviewed within the last twelve months, and school crisis teams have received training. While the school specific plan is exempt from release to the public per the Alabama Freedom of Information Act, the template that schools use to construct their plan is available at <http://www.alsde.edu/fileviewer/aen/january2011.pdf>

What is lockdown?

An emergency may prevent the safe evacuation of a school building and require steps to isolate students and faculty from danger by instituting a school lockdown. In an interior lockdown situation, all students are kept in classrooms or other designated locations that are away from the danger. Faculty members are responsible for accounting for students and ensuring that no one leaves the safe area. School personnel will also secure building entrances, ensuring that no unauthorized individuals leave or enter the building. Exterior lockdown procedures may also be used to ensure the safety of students when an incident occurs in the community. Parents are permitted access to the building and to their children if it is safe for them to do so.

Why are you keeping children from their parents?

The Bessemer City School District does not intend to keep children from their parents if a crisis occurs during school hours or school activities. It is the school system's intent to make sure that children are safe inside their schools until such a time that the threat has been reduced. Parents will be informed of the parent-student reunification center location via the school system crisis management system and local media.

What if my child is riding a school bus at the time of a crisis?

School bus drivers will be in contact with the Office of Transportation for instructions in the event that a crisis occurs while students are in transport. Bus drivers will be informed to use common sense and not travel toward the crisis location. Parents will be informed of the parent-student reunification center location via the school system crisis messaging system and local media.

Can I pick up my child?

Parents are allowed to pick up their children unless public safety officials have declared a shelter-in-place response, or there is some other reason why access to the facility is restricted. During any emergency, school personnel will maintain as safe and normal environment for children within the school as is possible. School is not automatically canceled in emergency situations. Remember, school may be the safest place for children to be.

Who can pick up my children?

Children will not be released to individuals who are not authorized on the student's emergency care card or who do not have written parent authorization.

The emergency care form is completed by parents and guardians at the start of each school year. Parents and guardians are encouraged to update the emergency care card as needed throughout the school year.

Friends and neighbors may sign a child or children out with written permission from a parent or parents. Both (or all) parents have to give permission in writing for the sign out and pickup. Schools prefer to have written permission on the day that a child's pickup will change, but schools will also keep written permission on file. School offices will keep the permission notes--usually they will attach them to the emergency care card(s) of those involved. Schools will also ask for identification when the child is released to the one(s) mentioned in the permission note. It is advisable to communicate with the teacher as well, perhaps with a copy of the signed written note.

What about my child's medication?

If your child takes medication regularly, you, the parent, should make sure that the school has an appropriate amount of additional medication on hand. Talk with your child's school nurse for more information.

Are students allowed to have cell phones at school?

Students are allowed to have cell phones at school for educational purposes only. They are not allowed to use them unless directed by the principal or principal's designee.

Can I contact my child?

Parents are asked not to call the school in emergency situations so phone lines can remain accessible for handling the specific situation. Parents will be kept informed via the Bessemer City School District's crisis messaging system.