Standard Reunification Method

**A Practical Method to Unite Students with Parents After an Evacuation or Crisis.
Based on the Adams 12, Five Star School District Practices.**

The "I Love U Guys" Foundation
Version 0.9.5

i love u guys
FOUNDATION®

standard™ reunification method

About The "I Love U Guys" Foundation

On September 27th, 2006 a gunman entered Platte Canyon High School in Bailey, Colorado, held seven girls hostage and ultimately shot and killed Emily Keyes. During the time she was held hostage, Emily sent her parents text messages... "I love you guys" and "I love u guys. k?" Emily's kindness, spirit, fierce joy, and the dignity and grace that followed this tragic event define the core of The "I Love U Guys" Foundation.

Mission

The "I Love U Guys" Foundation was created to restore and protect the joy of youth through educational programs and positive actions in collaboration with families, schools, communities, organizations and government entities.

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Funding

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Peace.

It does not mean to be in a place where there is no noise, trouble, or hard work.

It means to be in the midst of those things and still be calm in your heart.

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Churches, private and parochial schools that use *The Standard Reunification Method* are encouraged to license use of the materials through a subscription. While the subscription is modest, grants, scholarships, or subsidies are available to offset the subscription costs. The "I Love U Guys" Foundation also provides printed materials and "go kits" at a reasonable cost.

Warnings and Disclaimer

Every effort has been made to make this book as complete and accurate as possible, but no warranty or fitness is implied. The information provided is on an "as is" basis.

Change History

Contributor	Version	Revision	Revision Commentary
John-Michael Keyes	0.9.0	09/17/2011	Preliminary Draft
John-Michael Keyes	0.9.1	10/01/2011	First Final Content Revision
Ellen Stoddard-Keyes	0.9.2	10/16/2011	Preliminary Edits
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Introduction

Colorado has experienced a number of high profile acts of school violence. In response to this, The "I Love U Guys" Foundation has developed strategies, programs and protocols to help districts, departments and agencies respond to incidents.

One critical aspect of crisis response is accountable reunification of students with their parents or guardians in the event of a school crisis or emergency. *The Standard Reunification Method* provides school and district safety teams proven methods for planning, practicing and achieving a successful reunification. Keep in mind though, this is an evolving process. While there is a smattering of science in these methods, there is certainly more art. Site-specific considerations will impact how these practices can be integrated into school and district safety plans. Successful planning and implementation will also demand partnerships with all responding agencies participating in a crisis response.

Why Bother?

Crisis recovery starts with the crisis, not after. Simply "winging it" when reunifying ignores not just the mental health demands which accompany a crisis, but the responsibility of the school and the district in maintaining the chain of custody for every student.

No school is immune to stuff hitting the proverbial fan. Wildland or structural fires, hazardous materials, floods, tornados, blizzards, power outages, tsunamis, bomb threats, acts of violence, acts of terror... these just start the list of events that may initiate a reunification and release for a school or district.

A predetermined, practiced reunification method ensures the reunification process will not further complicate what is probably already a chaotic, anxiety-filled scene. In fact, putting an orderly reunification plan into action will help defuse the emotion building at the site.

What Does it Cost?

Implementing *The Standard Reunification Method* concepts and planning stages take a certain amount of time. But in the grand scheme of school safety the level of effort is modest. There will be some staff hours committed to the both the planning and practicing of these concepts. There will be some cost in printing and in creating the "Go Kits" necessary for a successful reunification. Since some of these items are happening at the district level, the cost of a $300 "go kit" can be spread among all of the schools in the district.

Shift the question. "What is the liability cost of not having a reunification plan?" In many instances, the cost of liability insurance for the school or district is affected by the level of response preparedness.

"District 12 has done 13 actual reunifications (not drills) in 6 years and the urgency of this process can't be overlooked. The speed at which this is all occurring is unbelievable."

Pat Hamilton
Executive Director of Operations
Adams 12 Five Star Schools

The Adams 12 Reunification Method

The core concept of the Adams 12 Reunification Method rests on accountability. Accountability achieved through a process based on managing the physical location of students, staff and of incoming parents. The process also uses perforated cards. These cards are completed by parents or guardians at the reunification site. The cards are separated at the perforation and a runner retrieves the child.

The methods detailed in *The Standard Reunification Method* are based on the practices developed at the Adams 12, Five Star School District, Thornton, CO, by Pat Hamilton, Executive Director of Operations, and also at Jefferson County School District, Golden, CO, by John McDonald, Executive Director of Security and Emergency Planning.

Objectives

The objective of this manual is to help district and school safety teams develop and implement tangible, on-site and off-site reunification plans. Inherent in this objective is creating or strengthening partnerships with first responder agencies – police, fire and medical. By having district and school personnel build a well designed draft plan, it becomes easier to engage the first responders and other key participants in the planning process.

Additionally, performing a successful reunification is highly more likely when rigorous practice and drills are conducted in advance of an incident. Tabletop exercises and live drills should be scheduled and performed.

Deliverables

The deliverables are simple.
1. Planning team identification and formation.
2. Safety team identification and formation.
3. A district reunification plan.
4. Individual school reunification plans.
5. Student education procedures.
6. Parent education procedures.
7. Tabletop exercise schedule.
8. Live drill schedule.
9. Show Time.

The Reunification Process in a Nutshell

The materials in this manual provide the fundamentals for a comprehensive plan. The beauty of the Adams 12 Reunification Method is its simplicity.
1. Establish a Parent Check-In Location.
2. Deliver the students to the student staging area, beyond the field of vision of parents/guardians. "Greeters" direct parents/guardians to the Parent check-In location, and help them understand the process.
3. Parents/guardians complete Reunification Cards.
4. Procedure allows parents/guardians to self-sort during check in, streamlining the process.
5. Runner recovers student from the student staging area.
6. Controlled lines of sight allow for communication and other issues to be handled with diminished drama or anxiety.
7. Medical or investigative contingencies are anticipated.

When it's all said and done, successful reunification is based on pre-planning and integration first responder personnel.

The following pages demonstrate the process in the context of Incident Command, including roles, assignments and responsibilities involved.

Not So Weird Advice

At first blush, this bit of advice may sound weird to educators: "Check out FEMA." Go online to http://training.fema.gov and complete the online training for IS-100 SCa Introduction to Incident Management for Schools. The course takes about an hour and a half to complete and introduces some basic emergency response principles in the context of school safety.

Here's why this advice isn't as weird as it sounds. Every first responder agency that partners with schools uses "Incident Command" during a crisis. The "Incident Command System" (ICS) is a response method that determines the role of everyone responding to a crisis and defines a shared vocabulary and shared expectations of behavior.

District and school safety teams need this shared vocabulary when interacting with first responders during a crisis. Just as important, when meeting with first responders, having the concepts and vocabulary of Incident Command remove some of the language barriers. It also shows a commitment to success that departments and agencies will appreciate.

(Note: The "I Love U Guys" Foundation is not affiliated with FEMA.)

Incident Command System

Whether it is a man-made or natural crisis, or an act of violence in the school, law enforcement, fire and medical teams will be involved in the controlled release reunification process. Learning to "understand and speak their language" as well as being familiar with their procedures is imperative to a successful outcome. With that in mind, district and school safety teams must understand and use the Incident Command System.

There is also a growing trend to add a social media expert (often a Twitter or other social media user), reporting to the Public Information Officer. Another growing trend is adding a new section by moving Information Technology out of Logistics into its own section.

Incident Command Organization Chart
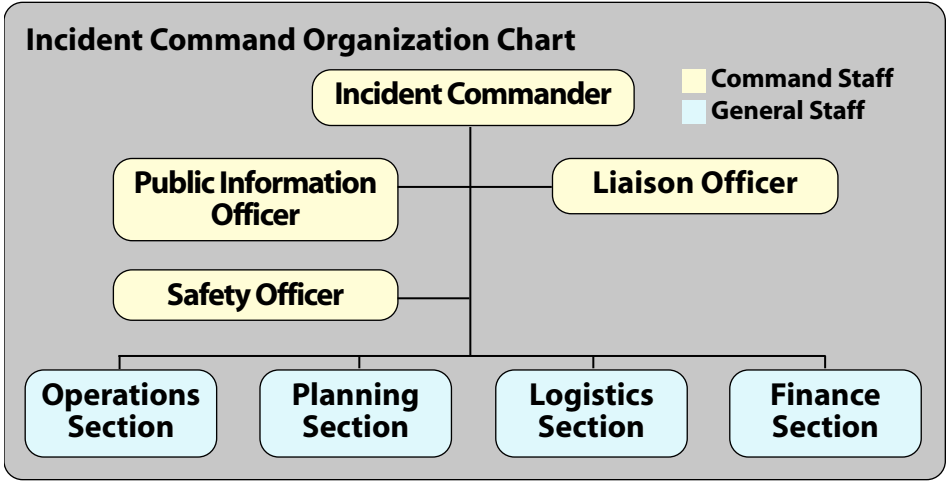
Incident Command System (ICS) Overview

The Incident Command System (ICS) is a standardized, on-scene, all-hazards incident management approach that:
- Allows for the integration of facilities, equipment, personnel, procedures, and communications operating within a common organizational structure.
- Enables a coordinated response among various jurisdictions and functional agencies, both public and private.
- Establishes common processes for planning and managing resources.

ICS is flexible and can be used for incidents of any type, scope, and complexity. ICS allows its users to adopt an integrated organizational structure to match the complexities and demands of single or multiple incidents.

ICS is used by all levels of government—Federal, State, tribal, and local—as well as by many nongovernmental organizations and the private sector. ICS is also applicable across disciplines. It is typically structured to facilitate activities in five major functional areas: Command, Operations, Planning, Logistics, and Finance/Administration. All of the functional areas may or may not be used based on the incident needs. Intelligence/Investigations is an optional sixth functional area that is activated on a case-by-case basis.

As a system, ICS is extremely useful; not only does it provide an organizational structure for incident management, but it also guides the process for planning, building, and adapting that structure. Using ICS for every incident or planned event helps hone and maintain skills needed for the large-scale incidents.

Source: *http://www.fema.gov/emergency/nims/IncidentCommandSystem.shtm*

Assignments

Your plan should have primary, secondary and optimally tertiary assignments of each of the incident command roles. It's not uncommon to double up some of the roles due to staffing constraints. Keep in mind, in the case of an off-site evacuation these roles will be replicated at the off-site location as the event unfolds. This will result in ICS being established at both the impacted school and the evacuation site.

A consideration regarding using teachers as command staff is that teachers usually have classroom assignments and responsibilities that might prevent them from acting in a primary ICS role. Consequently, ICS is typically populated by administrative staff.

Reunification Incident Team

For a reunification, there are some specific roles. The following chart demonstrates the structure of the Incident Team.

Reunification Incident Command Organization Chart

- Incident Commander
  - Public Information Officer
    - Social Media Coordinator
  - Liaison Officer
  - Safety Officer
  - Operations
    - Greeters
    - Checkers
    - Runners
    - Crisis Counselors
    - Kidherds
    - Movie Coordinator
  - Planning
    - Scribe
  - Logistics
    - Gatherer
  - Finance
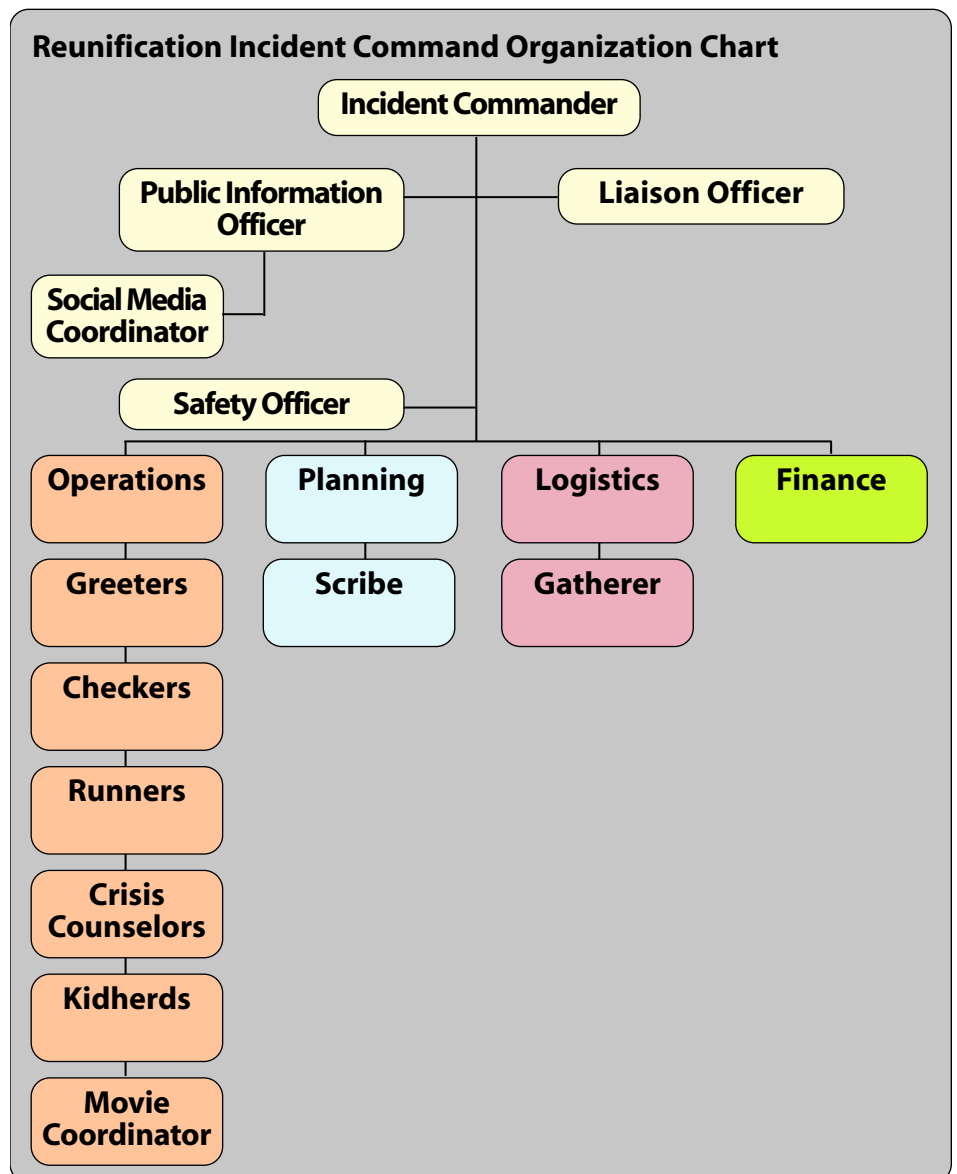
Role	Responsibilities
Incident Commander	Defining and coordinating the objective of accountable, easy, reunification of students with parents.
Public Information Officer	Communicating with Parents and Press, if appropriate. Coordinating use of mass call or text messages.
Social Media Coordinator	Tweeting Parents and Press, if appropriate.
Safety Officer	General site observation and safety concern remedy.
Liaison Officer	Communicating with Fire, Medical or Law Enforcement
Operations	Establish and manage operational staff
Greeters	Help coordinate the Parent Lines. Tell parents about the process. Help verify identity of parents without ID.
Checkers	Verify ID and custody rights of parents/guardians. Direct Parents to Reunification Location.
Runners	Take bottom of Reunification Card to Student staging area, recover student and bring to Reunification Area.
Crisis Counselors	Standby unless needed
Kidherds	Often Teachers or Staff in the Staging Area.
Movie Coordinator	At the elementary level, deploying a projector and screen can reduce student stress
Planning	May be staffed or the Planning Staff (Scribes) reports to Incident Commander
Scribe	Documents event.
Logistics	May be staffed or the Logistics Staff reports to Incident Commander
Stage Hands	Initial setup of the Check In area, the signage, Student Staging Area. Stage Hands may be assigned to Operations as the setup is completed.
Finance	May or may not be staffed during a reunification.

Cops own the crime. Fire owns the flames. Schools own the kids.

Procedures, Process and Branding

A controlled release reunification typically occurs because of a crisis or emergency. Consequently, not just students and parents/guardians are trying to function at extraordinary stress levels. Staff and other first responders also feeling the strain. By having a defined process with signage, cards, branding, procedures and protocols, the school presents an organized, calm face to all involved. Fear or uncertainty often results from the unknown. By adopting, communicating and practicing a "known" procedure, the school removes some of that uncertainty. As a result, better decisions occur, leading to successful reunification.

Evolution and Unified Command

As an incident evolves, first responders typically establish their own Incident Command and school or district officials will become part of a "Unified Command." While the responding department or agency will assume primary Incident Command, districts and schools remain responsible for reunifying the students with their parents/guardians. A good rule of thumb: "Cops own the crime. Fire owns the flames. Schools own the kids."

Daily Release, Controlled Release, Reunification

What's the difference between a Controlled Release and a full Reunification effort? Starting first with what happens every day at school, Daily Release, this is the procedure to let the students free. Some walk into the neighborhood. Others are transported by school or contracted buses. Others take public transportation. Some are picked up by parents or guardians.

A Controlled Release is a little different. Usually, it occurs at a different time than the daily release. Perhaps it's weather related, closing the school early, or a hazmat incident, chemistry class gone awry, ultimately the release of students is very similar to the daily release. The difference is typically that students are being sent home at an unusual time because of an unusual, but not traumatic event. Parents are notified that the school is closing early and students are being sent home.

Reunification occurs when events at the school or in the neighborhood demand students are physically returned to parents. In the event of criminal activity, injury or death, additional time may be needed for law enforcement interviews or crisis counseling.

Whitelist or Blacklist Custody Verification

There are several strategies for identifying custodial privilege during a reunification. The Whitelist method confirms the parent/guardian via photo identification and confirming the person's authority by comparing the ID to the student demographic card provided to the school during enrollment. The benefit of this method is absolute accountability. The cost is greater time and greater human resource needs to check the identification against enrollment records.

The Blacklist method relies on a pre-determined list of persons with custodial restrictions. Identification is used, in this case, to determine if preventing student release to the non-custodial parent/guardian is necessary.

Solving Other Custodial Identification Issues

In some cases, parents/guardians may not have photo identification. Sometimes ID can be verified by the student's teacher or other school staff. Another option is to solicit little known information about the student. The Standard Reunification Card has a space for the student's birthday. The area for this is on the Runner part of the card which can be verified against the demographic/enrollment card during a Whitelist custody verification. Or it can confirmed by the student when the runner retrieves the student from the staging area.

Controlling Sight Lines

The *Standard Reunification Method* can be overlaid on nearly any facility blueprint. There may be cases where there is direct line of sight between different reunification areas. The school or district usually has assets that can be utilized to break the line of sight. This is a critical aspect of maintaining control of the reunification because if parents see their students, they may be inclined to simply take their child and not participate in the accountability of reunification. School buses or vans are useful in controlling these sight lines.

Reunification Setup Roles and Procedures

There are a number of simple tasks necessary to prepare a site for reunification. The site prep can be accomplished by several individuals. During setup it's imperative to ensure school and district personnel know their roles and responsibilities. It is better to take a few extra minutes at this point, rather than stopping the process in mid stream.

Bring students to an entrance away from parent's line of sight

Reunification area is deployed out of Parent Check-in line of sight

Directional Signage

Parent Check-in
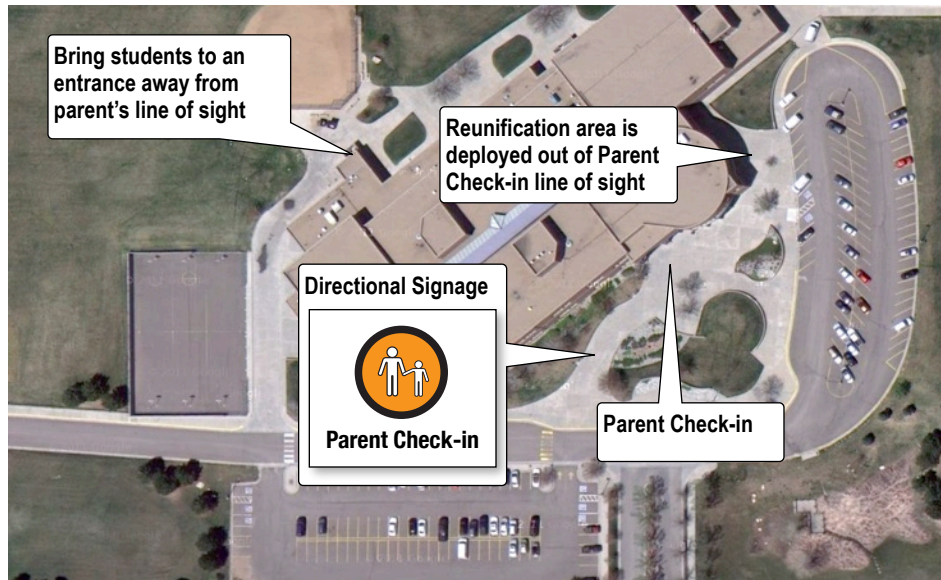
Parent Check-in

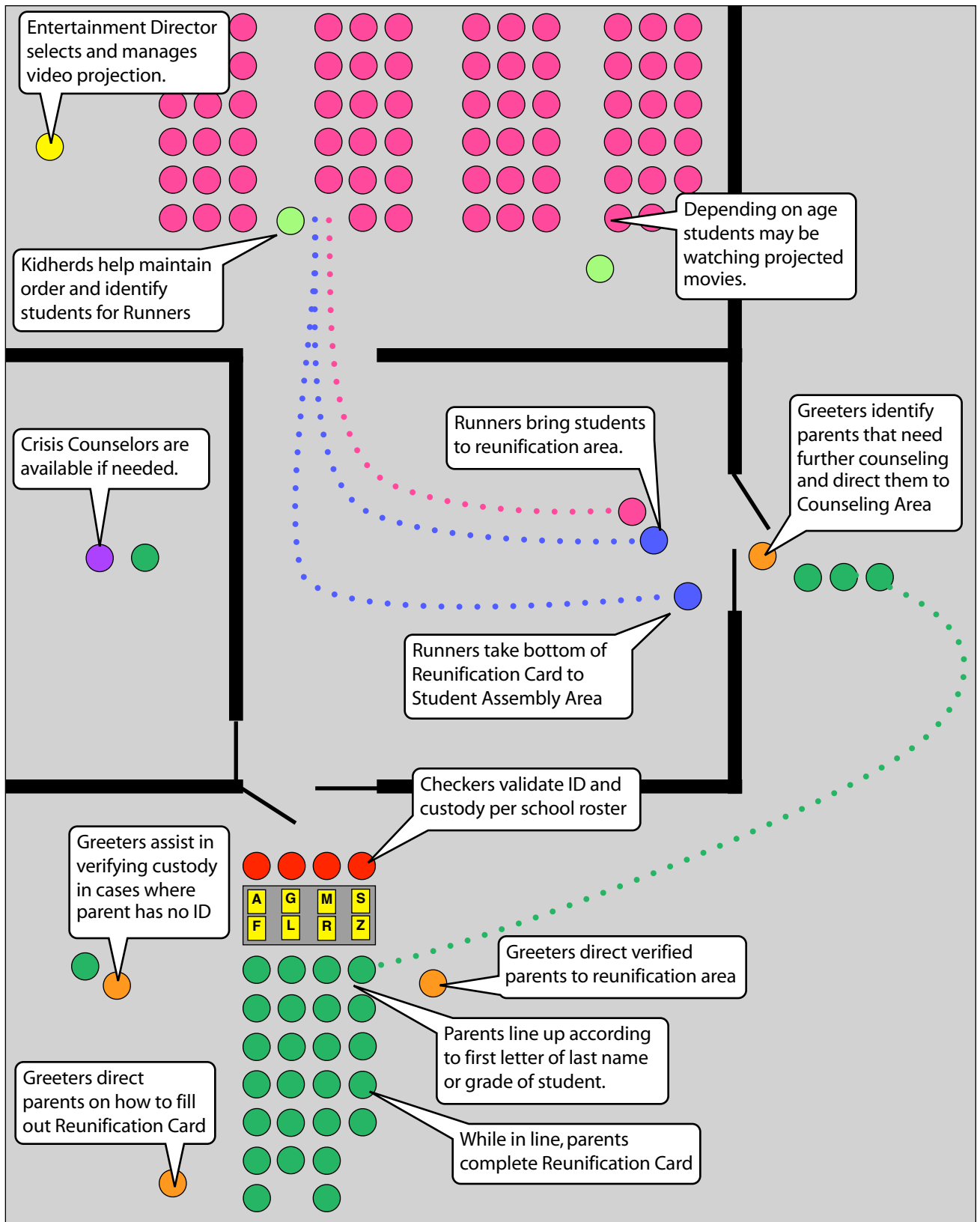# Setup Goals

For Setup the goals are:

1. Establish a visible Parent Check in Area and deploy tent and signage.
2. Check-In table is deployed.
3. Student Demographic Card/Binders are deployed at Check-In table.
4. Traffic directional signage is deployed.
5. Alphabet breaks are taped to the ground or table.
6. Student Parent Reunification Area is identified and marked.

These are the basic tasks expected to be included in the plan.

Parents Check-In Here

A	C	G	M	O	S	T
F		L	N	R		Z
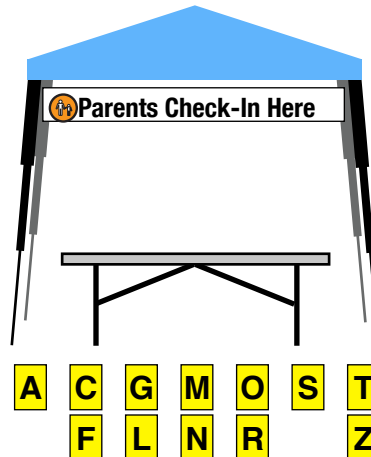
Demographic Cards or Electronic Verification

Most schools use a demographic card to retain information on each student. It's not uncommon for these cards to be kept in one or two enormous binders. That's typically because it's easier for school administrators to locate and maintain a handful of binders instead of multiple binders. Ideally, it is beneficial to separate the cards into multiple, thinner binders. Here's why: During a reunification, a school experiences hundreds or even thousands of parents arriving at the site, seeking their child. By separating demographic cards into smaller groups, the process tends to move faster and the goal of reunification is greatly accelerated. The system should be focused on the ease-of-use for stress-filled incoming parents.

Entertainment Director selects and manages video projection.

Kidherds help maintain order and identify students for Runners

Depending on age students may be watching projected movies.

Crisis Counselors are available if needed.

Runners bring students to reunification area.

Greeters identify parents that need further counseling and direct them to Counseling Area

Runners take bottom of Reunification Card to Student Assembly Area

Checkers validate ID and custody per school roster

Greeters assist in verifying custody in cases where parent has no ID

A F   G L   M R   S Z

Greeters direct verified parents to reunification area

Parents line up according to first letter of last name or grade of student.

Greeters direct parents on how to fill out Reunification Card

While in line, parents complete Reunification Card

Reunification Information (PLEASE PRINT CLEARLY)
Have photo identification out and ready to show school district personnel.

Student Name ....

Student Grade .... Student Cell Phone Number...

Name of person picking up student ....

Signature ....

Phone number of person picking up student ....

Relationship to student being picked up ....
Photo identification matches name of person picking up student? Y or N

Print Student Name Again ....

Student Grade ....

Student Birthday ....

School personnel completes upon release of student

TIME	INITIALS	OTHER

Reunification
First, we want to thank you for your patience during this reunification. We share the same goal during this process: Getting you and your student back together as quickly as possible. The reason we're going through this is that an event has occurred at the school that mandates we personally reunite you with your child.

Instructions
1. Please complete the information on the other side of this card.
2. Prepare identification (If you don't have ID with you, please move to the side of the line, it may take a little longer to verify your identity.)
3. Select the check-in line based on either student last name or student grade.
4. After check-in, staff will split this card and a runner will be sent to recover your student. Please step over to the Reunification Location.
5. If there has been injury or other concerns, you may be asked to meet a counselor.
6. Please don't shout at school or district staff. We'll get through this as quickly as possible.

Parent Guardian Sign Off
I have read and understand these instructions.

Print Your Name ....Date ....

Signature ....

Level of Effort Required

It may be best to look at reunification planning as a process, not a switch. There will be a point where the planning results in documents that outline procedures. Included in *The Standard Reunification Method* are sample district and school plans. The templates for these plans are available online at http://iloveuguys.org/srm and may help jumpstart plan creation. But they are just templates. Site-specific considerations have to be included in the planning. It may be the 80/20 rule in action. The template accommodates about eighty percent of the plan. The remaining twenty percent has to be customized.

Using the templates, it should take an afternoon to complete. Usually it's someone at the school level tackling the task. With smaller districts, it may actually be a district resource.

The district review is the next step. With larger districts, a one hour review of the school's first draft should be sufficient. There may be a couple of hours of revision following the district review.

After that, "process" comes into play. With first draft in hand, establishing review meetings with law enforcement, fire and medical will result in another round of changes. The district legal counsel will frequently have a role in plan review and approval review. Forwarding the work-in-progress to the district's insurance providers should also be on the checklist.

It's important to seek a level of completion which makes sense for the school or district – and its first responder participants. As mentioned earlier, there is a great deal of "art" involved in emergency planning. Consequently, it's okay to launch fundamental guidelines which are relevant to the majority of expected incidents instead of waiting until every conceivable scenario can be detailed.

Open Records Act

Plan documents should be immune or partially immune to Open Records Acts because there are specific tactics, emergency procedures and contact information involved. Consultation with district legal or the State Attorney General's office may be warranted. From The "I Love U Guys" Foundation's perspective, transparency in government is essential. But there is a balance when sensitive information is being created.

Launching: Ground Up

Reunification strategies should be a district priority. It may be the case that it's a lesser priority than others. Yet, someone in the district or at a school recognizes the importance of a solid reunification plan. In this case, it may be a ground up effort to integrate a reunification plan into the school or district safety plan. If so, then a launch strategy is probably going to involve creating the first draft of the reunification plan in order to show the decision-makers that the apparently "toughest" level of effort is already complete. This is the "Apologize instead of ask for permission" strategy. Recognize the champion of this effort may have to work "off the clock" in order to get a foot in the door. Experience has shown that these champions are often school resource officers, or counselors , or coaches, or teachers that have a strong personal motivation to enhance their school's safety.

Also recognize that The "I Love U Guys" Foundation can help. There are dozens of case studies where the Foundation has supported these "Champions" in their efforts to make a difference. Call or email us. The key objective is to get the first draft plan done. With that in hand, the rest will fall (or be nudged, pushed or coerced) into place.

Launching: Top Down

The more conventional approach is the top down launch. Here the process, schedule and deliverables are more clearly defined. It starts with the district requiring a response and reunification plan for each school. And then providing the schools with suggested tasks for how to get this done.

 The word "suggestions" indicates that there is a reality when working with schools. Principals are the "boss" or "CEO" of their schools. In order to achieve principal buy-in, the district may need to pilot a school reunification plan as a "Proof of Concept" to win over the resistors and skeptics, prior to "suggesting" that every school create one.

The reality is it's much easier for educators and administrators to start a project when they can see what the outcome looks like.

The top down launch usually involves a combined school administration and school safety team meeting. It might require a large room. The desired outcomes of this meeting include greater awareness for the importance of a reunification plan and the nuts and bolts of how to achieve it.

District Level and School Level Planning

There are two types of plans necessary: the district level plan and the school level plan. The district plan will include every school plan in the district. Much of the level of effort at the district level involves managing, reviewing and suggesting any needed modification of the individual school planning efforts. There is, however, a level of effort necessary to complete the district plan as well.

For both the district plans and the school plans, teams need to be assembled and tasked.

The Emergency Plan and the Deliberate Plan

One way to complete a comprehensive reunification plan is to break the project into smaller, more manageable phases. The first phase is the Emergency Reunification plan. If only one afternoon is available for planning, and tomorrow a reunification had to occur, what would that plan look like?

The Emergency Reunification plan is the core of what will be the final Deliberate Plan. The difference is in the review by the district and the first responder departments and agencies, and incorporating the suggested modifications into the plan.
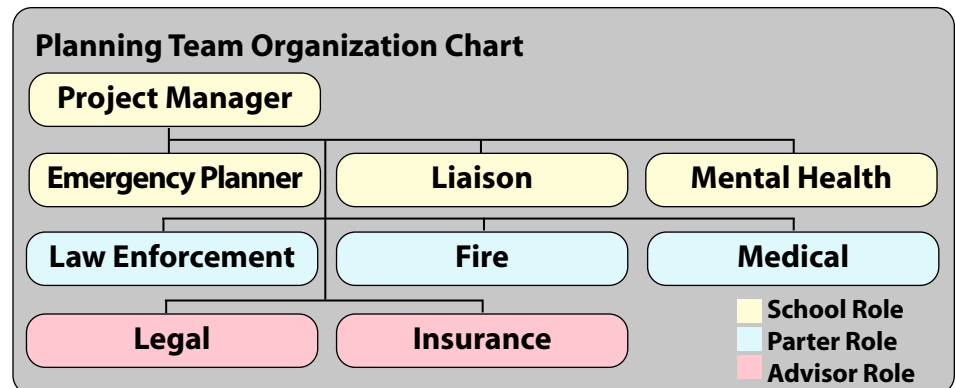
The Deliberate Plan will be accompanied by an exercise schedule. At a bare minimum, every school safety team should conduct a tabletop exercise around reunification. This exercise should include representation from the first responder departments and agencies. Conducting a full evacuation and parent reunification drill should be performed at the district level annually.

Assembling the Planning Teams

The first step to completing a comprehensive reunification plan is assembling the planning team and identifying individuals with planning parter organizations. While there are several roles specified, a number of them may be combined.

The key role is the Emergency Planner. This doesn't necessarily require an individual with extensive emergency planning experience, but someone with solid writing and computer skills. Strong partnerships with first responding agencies or departments will fill in most deficiencies that might arise.

The following organization chart outlines the roles associated with School planning.

Planning Team Organization Chart

Project Manager

Emergency Planner — Liaison — Mental Health

Law Enforcement — Fire — Medical

Legal — Insurance

School Role
Parter Role
Advisor Role

Sense of Urgency

Any new initiative often requires a sense of urgency to maintain momentum and deliver the expected result on schedule. Otherwise it falls off the task list. One way to invoke urgency is to establish a 30-day completion target. Here's what it might look like:

- Week 1 – First draft
- Week 2 – District, law enforcement, fire and medical review
- Week 3 – Tabletop exercise and revisions
- Week 4 – Final reviews and release.

The plan isn't rocket science, nor does it need to be overly elaborate. In essence, the plan simply outlines the physical site considerations, the roles of the students, staff, parents/guardians and responders, and the reunification process. Simple.

School Planning Job Skills

The following table outlines the responsibilities and skills of each role. Keep in mind though, smaller schools or districts may combine some or all of the planning roles.

Role	Responsibility	Skills
Project Manager	Scheduling, project management and oversight	At the district level this may be the superintendent or in larger districts it may be the safety director. At the school level this is often the principal or safety team lead. This position demands management and communication skills
Emergency Planner	Creating and revising the reunification plan	Good communication and writing skills are necessary. Either knowledge or willingness to learn enhanced features of Google Maps. Completion and certification of IS-100SCa online course It is not uncommon for this role to be filled by a vice principal, dean of students, safety team lead or school resource officer
Liaison	Facilitate meeting times and places, document forwarding	Scheduling, email and phone
Mental Health	Review materials with professional consideration	Respective professional skills
Law Enforcement, Fire and Medical	Review and contribution of individual office, department or agency concerns	Respective professional skills
Legal and Insurance	Review and contribution of individual office, department or agency concerns	Respective professional skills

Launch Meetings

The Launch Meeting should be conducted once the planning role assignments have been completed. The purpose of the Launch Meeting is to establish plan objectives, introduction of the people involved, deliverables and milestones. It is frequently attended by district personnel. It doesn't need to be long and arduous; the following simplified agenda should suffice:

Reunification Plan Creation Launch Meeting Agenda
- Introductions
- District Objective
- School Objective
- Example Plan
- Roles
- Deliverables
  - Emergency Reunification Plan
  - Deliberate Reunification Plan
- Project Gantt Chart
- Milestones
- Partner Agencies
- Advisory Entities

Creating the Plan

The Sample Plans available online at http://iloveuguys.org/srm contain the components listed on the next page. They are straightforward and can be easily customized for the school and the district. Some components demand consideration greater than simply "filling in the blanks" and are covered in greater detail.

As with any school safety plan, the concept of plan evolution is ever-present. Events may occur or lessons may be learned that impact these roles or procedures. Emergency planners should also remain vigilant and familiarize themselves with emerging trends regarding school safety and crisis response management in particular. For instance, the behavior of recent active shooter events reveals a new trend. There are recent incidents where the shooter has killed in one location then moved to another (Youth with a Mission, Virginia Tech). This trend has resulted in a number districts instituting district-wide Lockouts, whenever a Lockdown is called.

Additionally, depending on the type of event, plans may suggest districts ask law enforcement to help evaluate and secure evacuation locations prior to moving students.

What Does The Plan Look Like?

The school reunification plan has the following components:

1. Introduction
2. Objectives
3. Planning team acknowledgment and contact information
4. School, District, Law Enforcement, Fire, Medical, Legal and Insurance acknowledgment sign-offs
5. Definitions
6. Contact Information
7. Incident Command Structure
8. Attendance Procedures
9. Local site floor plan
10. Primary walking evacuation site floor plan
11. Primary walking evacuation routes with emergency services routes
12. Secondary walking evacuation site floor plan
13. Secondary walking evacuation routes with emergency services routes
14. (Optional tertiary walking site information)
15. Primary bus evacuation site floor plan
16. Primary bus evacuation routes with emergency services routes
17. Secondary bus evacuation site floor plan
18. Secondary bus evacuation routes with emergency services routes
19. (Optional tertiary bus site information)
20. District/School "Go Kits"
21. Notification Procedures
22. Media Management
23. Special Needs Considerations
24. Time of day contingencies
25. Type of incident contingencies
26. Reunification Setup Roles and Procedures
27. Reunification Process Roles and Procedures
28. Reunification Teardown Roles and Procedures
29. Debriefing Guidance
30. Exercise Schedule
31. Memorandums of Understanding

The district reunification plan has the following components:

1. Introduction
2. Objectives
3. Planning team acknowledgment and contact information
4. School, District, Law Enforcement, Fire, Medical, Legal and Insurance acknowledgment sign-offs
5. Definitions
6. Contact Information
7. Incident Command Structure
8. District/School "Go Kits"
9. Notification Procedures
10. Media Management
11. Time of day contingencies
12. Type of incident contingencies
13. Reunification Setup Roles and Procedures
14. Reunification Process Roles and Procedures
15. Reunification Teardown Roles and Procedures
16. Debriefing Guidance
17. Exercise Schedule
18. Memorandums of Understanding

Floor Plans

It's important to include on- and off-site floor plans in the reunification plan. If the off-site evacuation location is another school, it's usually a reciprocal case. Given that condition, advance communication and distributed effort can result in both schools having each others floor plans.

There may be different versions of the floor plan for each reunification location.

1. A floor plan with no annotations
2. A floor plan annotating student locations during an on site reunification
3. A floor plan annotating both home and guest student locations during an off site reunification. Occupancy limits should be noted on all rooms used during an off site reunification.
4. A floor plan annotating occupancy in the case of an off-site location not a school.
5. In the event of criminal activity, witness interview rooms and crisis counselor rooms should be annotated.
6. In the event of law enforcement debriefing needs, it is strongly suggested that a separate facility be used. While it may initially appear expeditious to conduct law enforcement or SWAT debriefings at the reunification location, further consideration may reveal that recovery of all participants may be impacted by commingling first responders and civilians.

One further consideration when selecting floor plans is level of detail. These need not be architectural blueprints. Rather, a simple diagram indicating rooms, halls and floors is sufficient.
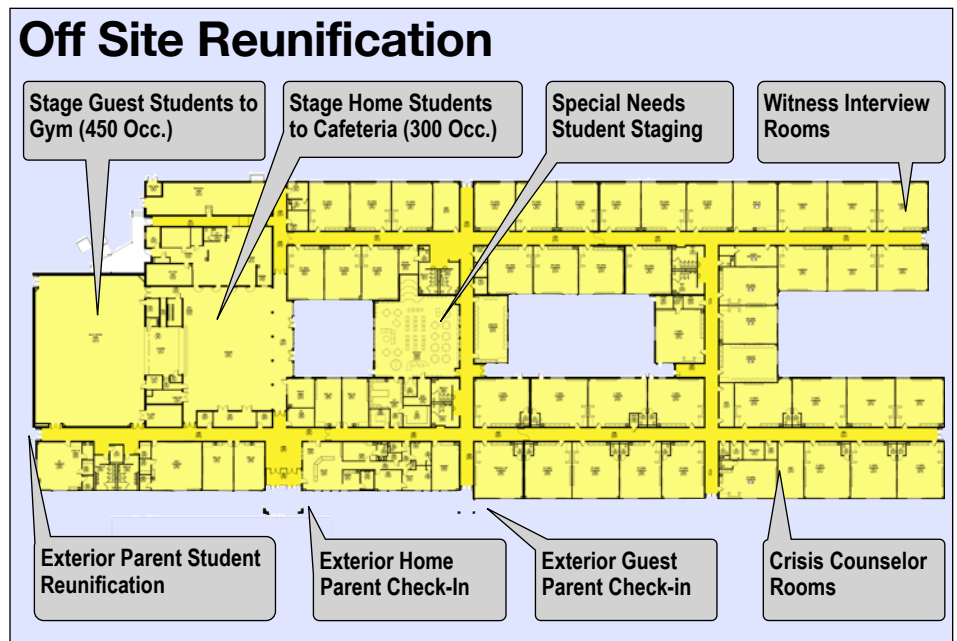

In this example, consideration of where to stage guest and home students, special needs students, parents, counselors, and law enforcement during an off-site reunification. Notice that after check-in, parents are guided around the corner to pick up their students. If necessary, parents can be brought into the building for interviews or counseling.

Site Planning and Google Maps

It's not necessary to be a GIS mapping expert to assemble site plans. Google maps is sufficient for the task. Creating custom maps starts by setting up an account with Google, then at http://maps.google.com/ select the "My Places" button.
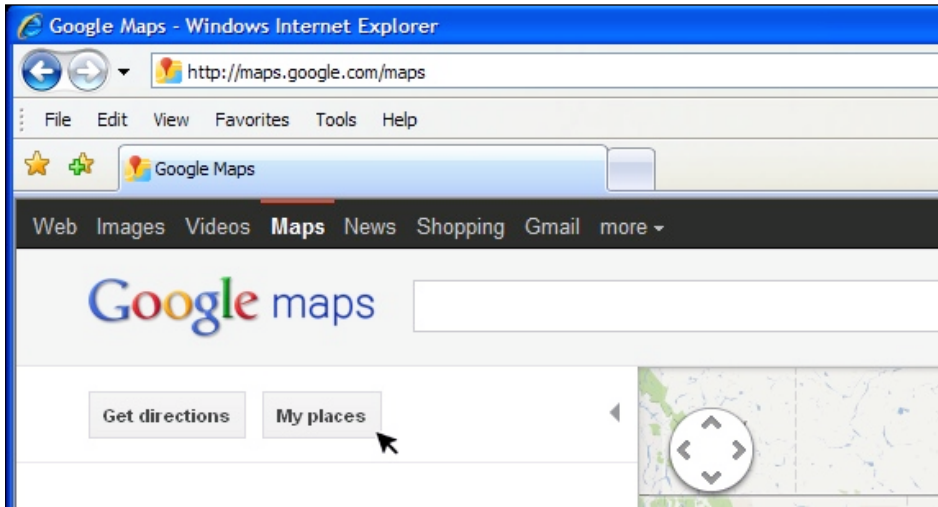
From there, it is relatively straightforward to use both map and satellite imagery to develop site plans and routes. It's strongly suggested that maps be categorized as "Unlisted."
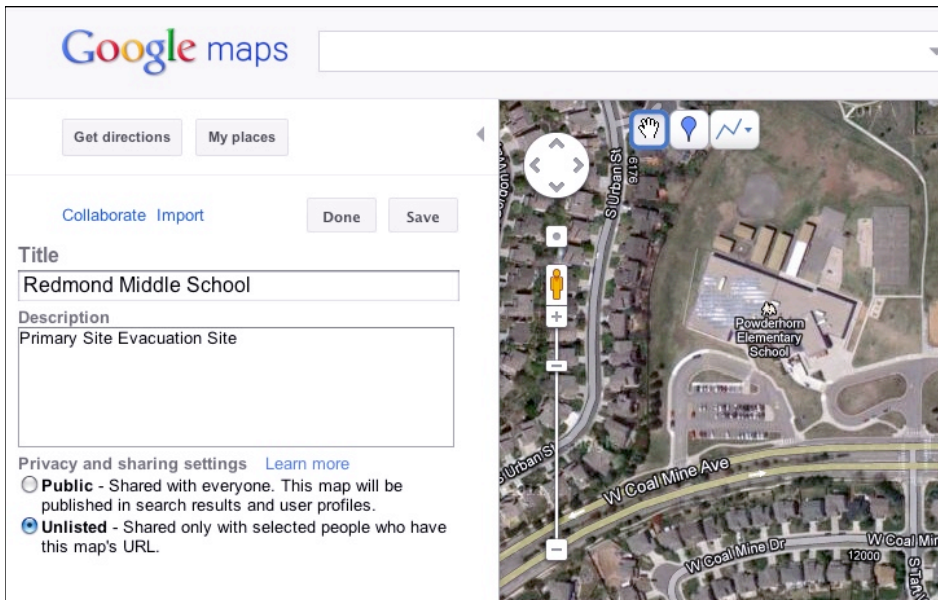
Evacuation Routes

In mapping both walking and bussed evacuation routes, it's important to identify potential traffic issues and first responder ingress and egress paths. The routes from the nearest fire station and the routes to the nearest hospitals must be considered. Are walking paths crossing streets that will be used by first responders? Are there some predictable streets that would be common for parents to use?

Sexual Offenders

It is also beneficial to determine the nature of the neighborhood around schools or other evacuation sites. Most states provide a mapping utility to locate sexual offenders. These maps often link to a database that provides name, address and photo of the convicted felon. It is important to identify these individuals and their proximity to the site. There are many documented cases of sexual predators using a crisis as an opportunity for sexual predation.
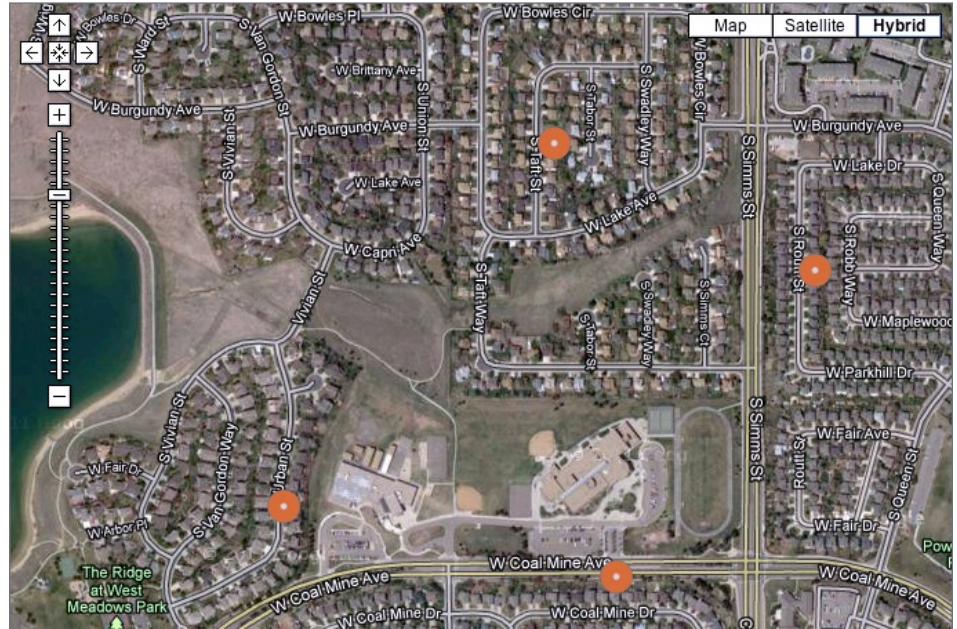
Route Map Checklist

These considerations should be included when mapping routes:

1. Evacuation routes
2. Incident Command Post locations
3. Incoming district responder routes
4. Incoming fire routes
5. Incoming medical routes
6. Outgoing medical routes
7. Incoming parent routes
8. Outgoing parent routes
9. Staging area
10. Landing Zone
11. Media Staging
12. Reunification signage locations
13. Parent check-in location
14. Possible road block sites
15. Possible neighborhood evacuation perimeter
16. Sexual offender locations
17. Security perimeter
18. Long perimeter

Notification Procedures

In the event of a reunification, parent/guardian notification is a necessary first step. Many schools or districts have mass notification systems to bulk call and/or text information to the parent population. It is imperative that accurate, factual information be delivered, starting with the crucial First Message. While it may seem comforting to tell parents that everyone is okay, or to minimize the number of injuries, this First Message not only begins the recovery process, it may be evidentiary for purposes of liability. Rather than saying "All students are safe," it is probably more accurate to report that, "We are in the process of establishing the safety status of all students and staff."

With the number of cell phones available to ever-younger student populations, parents will, in all likelihood, be the first to arrive at the impacted school. Prepare for the fact that this may occur prior to the transmission of any official notification by the school or the district.

Students will call or text their parents/guardians immediately during a crisis, despite school policy prohibiting mobile phone use. Additionally, some schools may not have accurate contact information for all parents. It may be possible during a crisis to leverage this to the school's advantage by writing out reunification information for the students to text to their parents/guardians.

Prepared notification language is vital. While anything written in advance may not exactly fit the circumstances of any given crisis, it may provide a valuable advantage in the initial phase of a crisis. These statements can be vetted with the district public information officer and legal counsel as part of the planning process. Other notifications should be considered. Contacting district legal counsel, as well as the district's insurance providers should be part of the notification process.

Special Needs Considerations

Schools are encouraging parents of students with special medication needs to consult their physicians about medication Go Kits. The medication Go Kit may include extra dosages that are not in the school medicine locker. If it's determined that the school does create a medication Go Kit, security and chain of custody should be part of the plan and procedure.

Other special needs considerations include mobility and care-taking. An evacuation and reunification can be especially disturbing and challenging for special needs students. The plan should consider staging special needs students apart from the general population to ensure adequate supervision and responsiveness.

Time of day contingencies

Time of day may impact how a reunification evolves. A crisis at the end of the day, when busses are already on site, may actually require a controlled release reunification. It is not beneficial to immediately release students who have witnessed a traumatic incident, even though the busses are there and it's the end of the school day. Mental health concerns might dictate a controlled release so that crisis counseling can be made available. This mandates a site plan that includes bus staging areas.

Parents are Capable

There may be circumstances where some of the early arrival parents can be given a task. This is situational, but consider that, when given a job, parents are now helping with the crisis. This has important psychological benefits in addition to distributing labor. "Can you help set up this table?" or "Could you help me by placing these signs
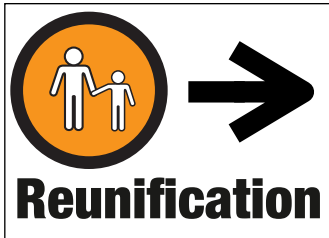
along Elm street?" Both are necessary tasks, and can enlist the parent into being part of the solution.

The Reunification Go Kit

Reunification "Go Kits" contain specialized items that are unique to the reunification process. Consequently, these kits are different than school evacuation go kits. Since reunification is often managed by district personnel, reunification Go Kits aren't necessary at each school, rather the kits can stay with district response teams. Larger districts may have several kits, one at the district office. Others in the trunks or backs of vehicles used by district responders. Smaller districts may have only two kits. One at the district office. One with the primary district responder. (Two is a suggested minimum: redundancy is important.)

Inventories and locations should be audited once a quarter.

Item	Count	Date	Date	Date	Date
Inventory Sheet	1				
Popup tent	1				
Parent check in banner	1				
Bungee cords	12				
Folding table (6 foot)	1				
Folding chairs	4				
24 count boxes of pens	2				
English reunification cards	2500				
Spanish (or another language) reunification cards	500				
Directional signs	12				
Bull horn	1				
Extra bull horn batteries	1				
Flashlights	4				
Extra flashlight batteries	12				
Safety vests	24				
Set of laminated alphabet sheets (A - Z)	2				
Set of laminated grade sheets (K - 12)	2				
Numbered plastic bins with lids	8				
Duct/Gaffers Tape	2				
Emergency contact hardcopy	1				
Suntan Lotion	10				

Some districts are moving to electronic parent verification (see page 11) and include electronic rosters, laptops and internet hot spots in their reunification Go Kits.

standard™ reunification method

Reunification Information (PLEASE PRINT CLEARLY)
Have photo identification out and ready to show school district personnel.

Student Name ....

Student Grade .... Student Cell Phone Number...................................

Name of person picking up student ....

Signature ....

Phone number of person picking up student ....

Relationship to student being picked up ....
Photo identification matches name of person picking up student? Y or N

Print Student Name Again ....

Student Grade ....

School personnel completes upon release of student.

Student Birthday ....   TIME   INITIALS   OTHER

Student/Parent Reunification

Circumstances may occur at the school that require parents to pick up their students in a formalized, controlled release. The process of controlled release is called a reunification and may be necessary due to weather, a power outage, hazmat or if a crisis occurs at the school. The Standard Reunification Method is a protocol that makes this process more predictable and less chaotic for all involved.

Because a controlled release is not a typical end of school day event, a reunification may occur at a different location than the school a student attends. If this location is another school, then those students may be subject to a controlled release as well.

Notification

Parents may be notified in a number of ways. The school or district may use its broadcast phone or text message system. In some cases, students may be asked to send a text message to their parents. A reunification text message from a student may look something like this: *The school has closed, please pick me up at 3:25 at the main entrance. Bring your ID.* "

Parent/Guardian Expectations

If a parent or guardian is notified that a controlled release and reunification is needed, there are some expectations that parents or guardians should be aware of. First, bring identification. That will streamline things during reunification. Second, be patient. Reunification is a process that protects both the safety of the student and provides for an accountable change of custody from the school to a recognized custodial parent or guardian.

What if a Parent Can't Pick-up Their Student?

When a parent can't immediately go to the reunification site, students will only be released to individuals previously identified as a student's emergency contact. Otherwise, the school will hold students until parents can pick up their student.

What if the Student Drove to School?

There may instances where a student may not be allowed to remove a vehicle from the parking lot. In this case, parents are advised to recover the student. In some circumstances, high school students may be released on their own.

How it Works

For students, the school asks that students be orderly and quiet while waiting. Students may be asked to text a message to their parents or guardians. Students are also asked not to send other text messages either in or out of the school or reunification area. Keeping the cellular network usage at a minimum may be important during a reunification.

Reunification Cards

For parents, there are a couple of steps. If a parent is driving to the school, greater awareness of traffic and emergency vehicles is advised. Parents should park where indicated and not abandon vehicles. Parents are asked to go to the Reunification "Check In" area and form lines based on the first letter of their students last name. While in line, parents are asked to fill out a reunification card. This card is perforated and will be separated during the process. Some of the same information is repeated on both the top and separated bottom of the card. Parents are asked to complete all parts of the card.

In the case of multiple students being reunified, a separate card for each student needs to be completed.

Bring ID to Check In

During check in, identification and custody rights are confirmed. The card is separated and the bottom half given back to the parent.

From the "Check In" area parents are directed to the "Reunification" area. There, a runner will take the bottom half of the card and take it to the Student Assembly Area to recover the student or students.

Parents should be aware that in some cases, they may be invited into the building for further information.

Interviews and Counseling

In some cases, parents may be advised that a law enforcement investigation is underway and may be advised that interviews are necessary. In extreme cases, parents may be pulled aside for emergency or medical information.

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