

ODE Guidance for Schools around Homeland Security

Please see the important message below and share with appropriate staff, constituents, board members and local officials. Also attached are the current Ohio guidelines for response to Orange and Red threat levels.

The Ohio Department of Education has received inquiries from school districts about guidance in preparing for a potential red alert situation in our state or nation.

During the uncertainty of the next several weeks or months, we do have the following suggestions:

- Review and update your District and building emergency plans;
- Communicate those plans with staff and parents;
- If you need help with the planning or the deployment of your emergency plans, contact the county EMA.
- Practice your emergency procedure with students and staff;
- Contact your local Emergency Response Team and confirm the phone numbers of people to contact in an emergency.
- Make sure all visitors register with the office along with the purpose of the visit and destination, if other than the office. The Red Cross suggests that driver's licenses or other ID be requested and kept in the office until the visitor signs out.
- Request that the district superintendent be added to your County Emergency Terrorism Task Force.

ODE's guidelines for "School Emergency Preparedness are available at:
http://www.ode.state.oh.us/safe_schools/SDFSpreparedness.asp

- **If the level of homeland security is raised to red, you need to make the best decision about the safety of your students and staff. Our best guidance is to take direction from your local County Emergency Terrorism Task Force about dismissing school.**

The nature of the emergency will drive the decision to send students home or to keep them at school. If it is in the best interest of staff and students to be sent home, the Ohio Department of Education will work with affected school districts to access every avenue of emergency funds available to reimburse costs associated with the disaster.

The advice for adults with working with students during these tense times is to:

- **Model calm and control.** Children take their emotional cues from the significant adults in their lives. Avoid appearing anxious or frightened.
- **Reassure children that they are safe** and (if true) so are the other important adults in their lives. Depending on the situation, point out factors that help insure their immediate safety and that of their community.
- **Remind them that trustworthy people are in charge.** Explain that the government emergency workers, police, firefighters, doctors, and the military are helping people who are hurt and are working to ensure that no further tragedies occur.

- **Let children know that it is okay to feel upset.** Explain that all feelings are okay when a tragedy like this occurs. Let children talk about their feelings and help put them into perspective. Even anger is okay, but children may need help and patience from adults to assist them in expressing these feelings appropriately.
- **Tell children the truth.** Don't try to pretend the event has not occurred or that it is not serious. Children are smart. They will be more worried if they think you are too afraid to tell them what is happening.
- **Stick to the facts.** Don't embellish or speculate about what has happened and what might happen. Don't dwell on the scale or scope of the tragedy, particularly with young children.

What Schools Can Do:

- **Assure children that they are safe** and that schools are well prepared to take care of all children at all times.
- **Maintain structure and stability within the schools.** It would be best, however, not to have tests or major projects within the next few days.
- **Provide teachers and parents with information** about what to say and do for children in school and at home.
- **Have teachers provide information directly to their students,** not during the public address announcements
- **Allow time for age appropriate classroom discussion and activities.** Do not expect teachers to provide all of the answers. They should ask questions and guide the discussion, but not dominate it. Other activities can include art and writing projects, play acting, and physical games.
- **Be careful not to stereotype people or countries that might be associated with the tragedy.** Children can easily generalize negative statements and develop prejudice. Talk about tolerance and justice versus vengeance. ***Stop any bullying or teasing of students immediately.***
- **Refer children who exhibit extreme anxiety, fear or anger to mental health counselors** in the school. Inform their parents.
- **Provide an outlet for students' desire to help.** Consider making get well cards or sending letters to the families and survivors of the tragedy, or writing thank you letters to doctors, nurses, and other health care professionals as well as emergency rescue workers, firefighters and police.

These tips are from the National Association of School Psychologists. For more information, go to http://www.nasponline.org/NEAT/crisis_0911.html

Additionally, here is a link for families that might be helpful to share Family Disaster Preparedness Guide, in the center of this site: <http://www.state.oh.us/odps/default.htm>

Finally, military personnel are being called up quickly. This may impact the care of your students. Some students may need to temporarily relocate to another school district to live with family or friends of the family. Under Ohio Revised Code 3313.64 – Free Schooling for residents, section (F) (4) – Any child residing with a person other than the child's parent is entitled, for a period not to exceed twelve months, to attend school in the district in which that person resides if the child's parent files an affidavit with the superintendent of the district in which the person with whom the child is living resides stating all of the following:

- (a) That the parent is serving outside of the state in the armed forces of the United States;
- (b) That the parent intends to reside in the district upon returning to this state;
- (c) The name and address of the person with whom the child is living while the parent is outside the state.

If you have other materials or information that you have found useful, please let us know and we'll share throughout the state.