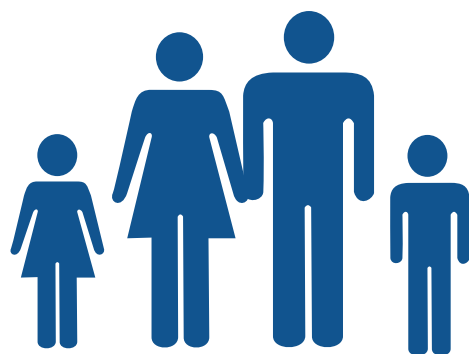




# 1 PLAN



## FAMILY REUNIFICATION GUIDE



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## FAMILY REUNIFICATION GUIDE

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## 01 INTRODUCTION

*Family reunification is the means for safe, orderly and documented reunion of students and families in the event of an emergency evacuation or school closing.*

There are a wide variety of emergency situations that might require family reunification such as the school is evacuated or closed as a result of a hazardous materials release near the school, major fire, localized flash flooding, school violence, bomb threat, or active shooter-type incident.



### a ASSUMPTIONS

- Some parents or guardians will be reluctant to cooperate with the family reunification process.
- Parents or guardians may be emotional when arriving at the school.
- While some emergency situations are slow to develop, others occur without warning. Hence, there may be time for deliberate family (students and parents/guardians) reunification or a family reunification may have to be conducted with minimal preparation time. In the case of short notice, there may be little time to obtain personnel and equipment from external sources to support reunification operations.
- Persons other than those on the student's emergency release form will try to pick up students during an emergency.

### b KEY DEFINITIONS

**DOUBLE GATE SYSTEM:** The Double Gate System is a family reunification process that utilizes a Request Gate and a Release Gate to formally verify that students are released only to verified and authorized parents, guardians or authorized adults (Requestors).

**REQUESTOR:** A Requestor is a parent, guardian, or an adult who is authorized, on the student's emergency release card, to pick up a student or students.

**FAMILY REUNIFICATION SITE:** The campus/location where family reunification takes place.

**FAMILY REUNIFICATION TEAM:** District and/or employees and/or verified volunteers who coordinate the family reunification process.

**REQUEST GATE:** Location where Requestors report to request custody of their student or students. The Request Gate is where Requestors present their identification and Team Members verify that the Requestor is authorized to take custody of the student or students.

**HOLDING AREA:** Area where students are held until they are released.

**WAITING AREA:** Area where Requestors wait after they have made their request and the student is being located at the Holding Area.

**RELEASE GATE:** Location where students are released to verified Requestors.

**NOTIFICATION AREA:** Private area where Requestors are taken for notification in the event their student is not available for release.



## 02 REUNIFICATION SITE SELECTION

*Part of the planning process includes finding a suitable family reunification site. It is rare to require a formal family reunification process at the same location that the emergency occurs.*

Note: Your district may have pre-selected a reunification site for your school.

### a SITE SELECTION CRITERIA

*If the school is experiencing an emergency, family reunification should take place at an alternate site (another school, church, community center, etc)*

- The size of the location and number of staff required to efficiently implement a family reunification is dependent on the number of students.  
*For elementary students, a suggested maximum student to adult ratio is 30 to 1. This may be increased to 50 to 1 for older students.*
- There should be adequate traffic control and parking for the number of parents
- Parking should be reasonably close to the Request Gate entrance and the Release Gate exit.
- Staff should have the ability to regulate access to the location. This includes preventing media from entering the site and stopping students from leaving without completing the required procedures.
- The location should provide adequate support for students (restrooms, activities, etc.).
- The reunification team should have the ability to communicate with officials and hospitals regarding child location, injuries, etc.
- The reunification site should be able to accommodate the Double Gate System.

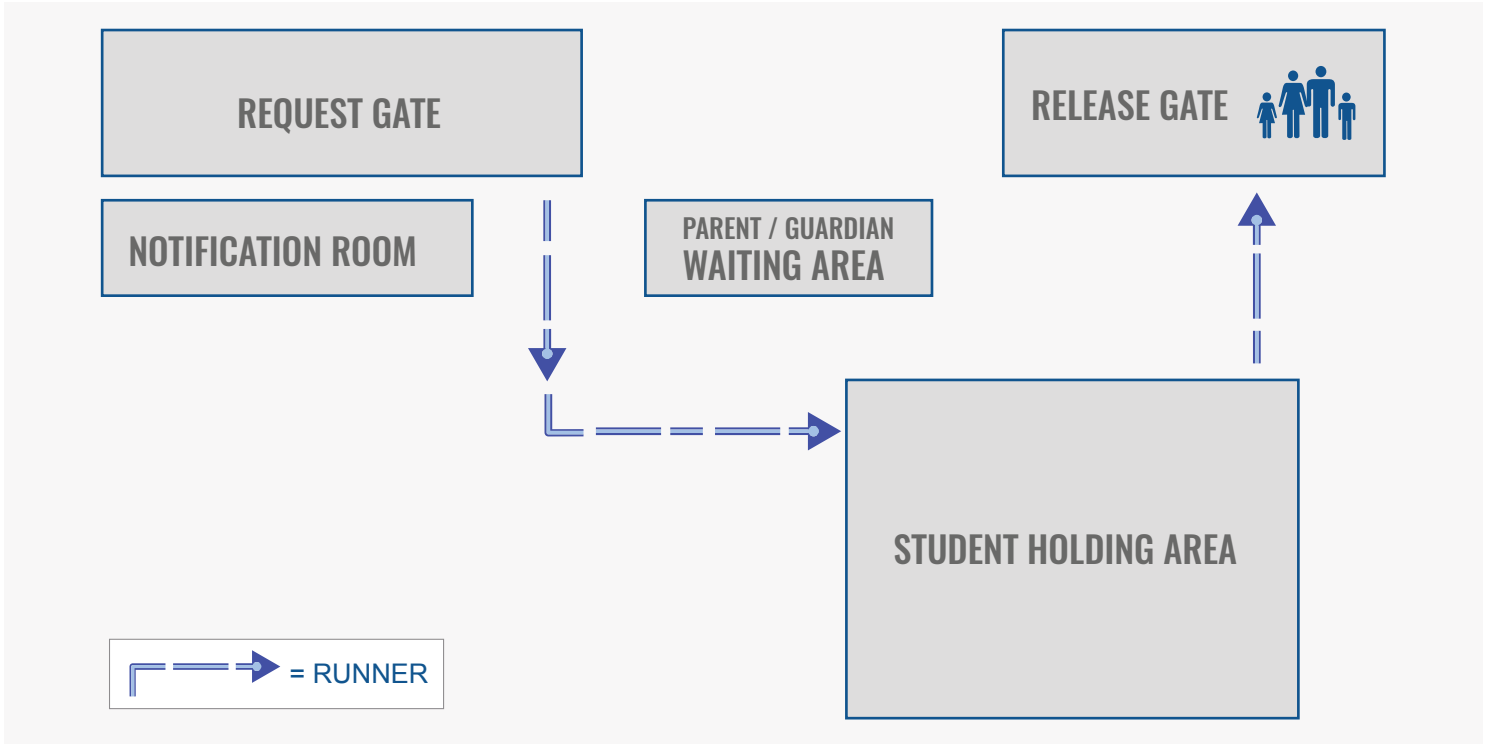
### b DOUBLE GATE SYSTEM EXPLAINED

- Parents, guardians or authorized adults (Requestors) request the release of a student at the Request Gate by completing a Student Release Form. The Requestor must present formal identification and be authorized to take custody of the student.
- After verifying the identity and confirming the Requestor is authorized to take custody, the Holding Area is contacted and the student\* is escorted to the Release Gate.
- The Requestor is directed to the Release Gate, where their identity is re-confirmed and the student is released.

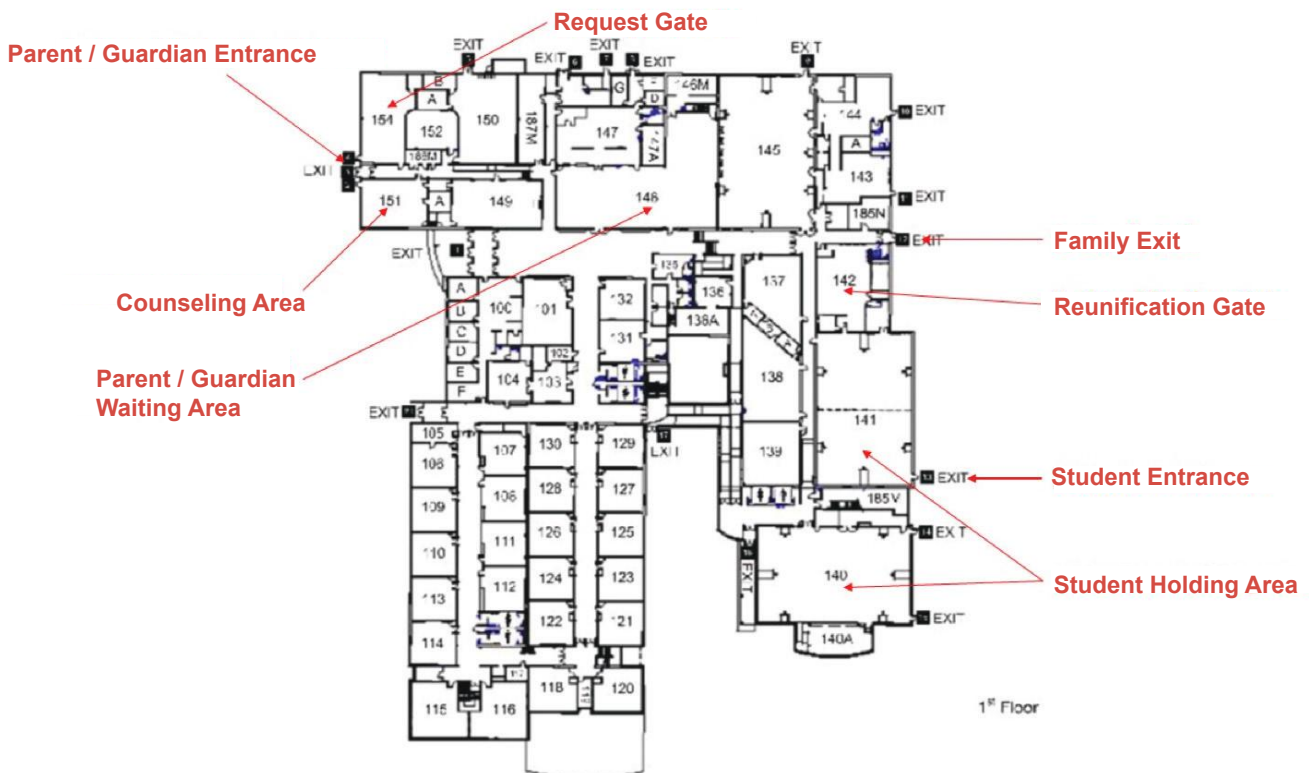
*\*Note: If the requested student is not available to be released, the Requestor is escorted to the Notification Area, where notification occurs in a private room and assistance is provided.*



### C EXAMPLE REUNIFICATION SITE



### d EXAMPLE SCHOOL DIAGRAM





### 03

### FAMILY REUNIFICATION COMMAND CHART

Reunification Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Parking Area: \_\_\_\_\_ Student Holding Area: \_\_\_\_\_

Waiting Area: \_\_\_\_\_ Notification Area: \_\_\_\_\_

Release Gate: \_\_\_\_\_

#### REUNIFICATION COMMAND CHART

##### INCIDENT COMMANDER

Name

Agency

Phone

##### PUBLIC INFORMATION

Name

Agency

Phone

##### REUNIFICATION TEAM LEADER

Name

Phone

##### STUDENT HOLDING AREA TEAM LEADER

Name

Phone

##### REQUEST GATE TEAM LEADER

Name

Phone

##### RELEASE GATE TEAM LEADER

Name

Phone

##### NOTIFICATION TEAM LEADER

Name

Phone

##### SECURITY LEADER

Name

Phone

##### TRAFFIC LEADER

Name

Phone



### a REQUEST GATE

#### SETUP:

- Two to six tables (based on the number of students to be released)
- Power supply and Internet access
- Student emergency release cards or access to online information
- Radio to communicate with Student Holding Area, Release Gate and Notification Area
- Staff/Team members to facilitate requests and serve as Runners to obtain students.
- Signage identifying “Request Gate” and breakdown of alphabetized last names for tables.

#### REQUEST GATE TEAM LEADER WILL:

- Direct team activities.
- Interact with the Incident Commander to identify problems and report status.
- Refer all outside requests for information to the Public Information Officer/Communications Department Director.

#### REQUEST GATE TEAM MEMBERS WILL:

- Greet parents, guardians, or designees.
- Greet and direct parents, guardians, or designees to the notification room as appropriate.
- Providing reassurance to parents, guardians, or designees.
- Request formal identification from the parents, guardians and designees.
- Verify that the requesting adult is authorized to take custody of the requested student(s).
- Maintain order.
- Dispatch runners to bring student(s) to the Release Gate.
- Direct requesting persons to either a general waiting area, notification room (if requested student is missing, injured or deceased), or to the Release Gate.

#### REQUEST GATE TEAM MEMBERS:




### **b** HOLDING AREA

#### SETUP:

- Area large enough to shelter students
- Radio to communicate with Request Gate, Release Gate, and Notification Area
- Staff/Team Members to supervise students.
- Student Roster(s)

#### HOLDING AREA TEAM LEADER WILL:

- Report missing persons to the Incident Commander.
- Direct team activities.
- Interact with the Incident Command to identify problems and report status.
- Collect the Injury and Missing Persons Information from the Team Members and make readily available to the Incident Commander.

#### HOLDING AREA TEAM MEMBERS WILL:

- Maintain accountability and control of the students.
- Provide reassurance to the students.
- Obtain reports of missing students.
- Interact with the Holding Area Team Leader.
- Verify release information when a student is requested.
- Assist the Release Gate Team.

#### HOLDING AREA TEAM MEMBERS:






### C RELEASE GATE

#### SETUP:

- Two tables
- Power supply and Internet access
- Radio to communicate with Student Holding Area, Request Gate and Notification Area
- Staff/Team members to review and approve requests

#### RELEASE GATE TEAM LEADER WILL:

- Direct team activities.
- Insure no student is released without formal authorization.
- Interact with the Incident Commander to identify problems and report status.
- Refer all outside requests for information to the Public Information Officer.

#### RELEASE GATE TEAM MEMBERS WILL:

- Greet parents, guardians, or designees.
- Greet and direct parents, guardians, or designees to the notification room as appropriate.
- Providing reassurance to parents, guardians, or designees.
- Verify that the requesting adult is authorized to take custody of the requested student(s).
- Maintain order.
- Release student(s) to authorized parent, guardian, or designee.

#### RELEASE GATE TEAM MEMBERS:




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### d NOTIFICATION AREA

#### SETUP:

- Private area with individual rooms.
- Power supply and Internet access.
- Radio to communicate with Student Holding Area, Release Gate, and Request Gate.
- Telephone to communicate with outside agencies and area hospitals.
- Counselors and/or trained mental health professionals to provide notification and support to families.

#### NOTIFICATION AREA LEADER AND NOTIFICATION AREA TEAM MEMBERS WILL:

- Greet parents, guardians, or designees.
- Verify the name(s) of the student(s) they are requesting.
- Verify the status of the student(s) being requested.
- Provide only parents or guardians with accurate information regarding the status of their student(s).  
Note: A neighbor or relative may be authorized to pick up a student, but only parents or guardians should be informed of injuries or death.
- Arrange for assistance in the way of transportation, clergy, or other support.
- Assign a district employee to serve as a liaison to the family.

#### NOTIFICATION TEAM MEMBERS:




## 04 REUNIFICATION PROCEDURES

*A double-gate system will be utilized with the students kept in a Holding Area. A Student Holding Area, Request Gate and Release Gate will be established. A Waiting Area and Notification Area should be established as needed.*

### a THINGS TO REMEMBER

#### REQUEST GATE

A Request Gate is where Requestors go to request students.

- Staffed by personnel and runners to obtain students.
- Counselors to assist family members may be required (i.e. if some students are unaccounted, injured, or deceased).
- Requestors are directed to the Request Gate.
  - Verify ID and authority
  - Have Requestor fill out reunification form
- Runner takes student from Holding Area to the Release Gate.
- Provide support to parents/guardians if students are not onsite.

#### RELEASE GATE

A Release Gate is where students are brought to their parents/guardians.

- Staffed by personnel.
- Verify release authority/documentation prior to reunification.

#### HOLDING AREA

Designated classroom teachers will remain with their assigned students in the holding area. Each will have the list of the students assigned to their supervision, including the exact name of their parents/guardians. Anyone who was absent at the start of the school day or who departed prior to the incident will be noted.



### REQUEST GATE OPERATIONS

When a Requestor arrives at the Request Gate, they will be asked for the name of the student(s) being picked up. The Requestors will then be required to show proof of their identification (driver's license or other government issued photo identification). When the staff member confirms the Requestors' identity and authority to pick up the student, the staff member will use a runner or a radio/cellular telephone to notify the staging area that the designated student(s) are to be escorted to the release gate. When the student(s) reports to the release point, the staff member will have the Requestor sign for the student(s) on the Student Release/Runner Form and the student(s) are released to the Parent or Guardian.

If a parent/guardian must be notified that their student(s) have been injured or for some other reason are not available for release to them, the staff member at the release gate will not indicate the status of the student but will ask the parent to report to a nearby room for further processing. The "notification area" will be manned by counselors.

### NOTIFICATIONS AREA OPERATIONS

Counselors will be responsible for notifying parents/guardians that their student is not available for pick-up for any of the following reasons: injured, deceased, arrested, witness, etc. The staff member will:

- Provide available information regarding the student(s) in a sensitive way.
- Will assure the parent/guardian that everything possible is being done to safeguard their child or their child's remains.
- Will inform the parent/guardian where they are to await further information about how they will be reunited with their student(s) or the remains of their student(s).
- Will assist the parent/guardian with their trauma.
- Will make available to the parent/guardian means for communicating with other family members and supporters.
- Will shelter the parent/guardian from media representatives.

As needed, teachers will call all those parents/guardians who have not yet picked up their student(s). If the parent cannot be reached, the student will be transported to his or her home by school district personnel.

## **b** TRAFFIC CONTROL

*Traffic will be controlled by law enforcement and or the local transportation agency.*

- To every extent possible two-way traffic will be maintained to allow for entry and exit of emergency vehicles.
- As the situation develops there may be time for barricades and other traffic control devices to be delivered and set up. It should be understood this will not occur at the beginning of the incident.
- When law enforcement arrives on the scene they will take charge and do whatever is necessary, including the towing of vehicles to manage the emergency or disaster.



### **c HAZARD SPECIFIC REUNIFICATION PLANNING**

*Hazard-specific reunification planning information should be considered when developing for certain known hazards.*

Weather related hazards may require students be held indoors until reunification. Threats of violence or fire may require students to be evacuated and reunification take place outside. Your plans should also consider the reunification process for situations where reunification takes place inside the school and outside.

Such plans should also identify potential reunification areas and, where appropriate, transportation pickup points or assembly areas.

### **d SECURITY**

*During reunification, the security of the holding area is extremely important. Staff and students must be removed from any and all danger. Law enforcement should establish access control points to limit entry into holding areas.*

### **e THINGS TO KNOW**

- Some parents/guardians may be reluctant to cooperate with the student/parent reunification process. This situation can be diminished, to some degree, if parents/guardians are informed about the school release procedures before the disaster or emergency occurs. They should be reminded that the safety of their child is your utmost priority.
- Parents/guardians may be emotional when arriving at the school. Have counselors available to deal with issues that exceed your area of expertise.
- Shortly after the incident the media will have a presence on your campus. The Public Information Officer, part of the command staff operating under the Incident Command System, will deal with the media. However, it is important that parents be sheltered from media representatives.
- DO NOT release students to people not listed on the student emergency card. A well-intentioned friend may offer to take a child home; however, school staff must be certain that students are only released to the appropriate people so students' families will know where they are.
- Student emergency cards should also include all pertinent medical information such as allergies, medications, and doctor contact information. These cards should be stored in the front office in both hard copy and electronically if possible.



## 05 PUBLIC INFORMATION

*When developing messages for an actual emergency, work with your response partners to provide consistent messages that target your audience. Provide only information that you are authorized to release.*

**Do not speculate or release unapproved information. Be sure your messages answer the four questions; this will help prevent an information vacuum.**

When the Family Reunification Plan is enacted, active crisis communications are required, there are just four things your stakeholders, the public, and the media want to know:

**01 WHAT HAPPENED?**

**02 WHAT IS BEING DONE?**

**03 WHAT ARE YOUR NEXT STEPS?**

**04 WHAT CAN WE DO TO HELP?**

### 01 WHAT HAPPENED?

Remember "B.L.U.F." (Bottom Line Up Front). A clear, concise statement that illustrates your organization understands the scope of the incident and is taking appropriate actions.

### 02 WHAT IS BEING DONE?

Without jeopardizing operational security, privacy or ongoing investigations, provide a brief, high-level overview of actions.

### 03 WHAT ARE YOUR NEXT STEPS?

Again, protect operational security and do not divulge too many specifics. For instance, if a school has not yet been evacuated, there is no need to publicly divulge where the students will be evacuated to before the site is prepared and parents have been notified. Remember, the overarching goal is to communicate that you have a plan.

### 04 WHAT CAN WE DO TO HELP?

The vast majority of people and the media want to help. Create strategies that let them help and prevent them from interfering with response and recovery operations.

## e EXAMPLE TALKING POINTS

- Please do not attempt to go to your child's school. No student will be released there, and you will only interfere with public safety emergency response efforts.
- To pick up students, please proceed safely to the reunification site located at \_\_\_\_ (give address) \_\_\_\_
- Bring photo identification so verifications can be done and we can safely return your student to you.
- When you arrive at the site, proceed through entrance number \_\_\_\_ to the Request Gate. Follow the instructions of the workers at the center.
- Please do not attempt to contact the school. The systems may be overwhelmed and you will not be able to get through.
- We will provide further updates and directions as they become available.



## 06 FAMILY REUNIFICATION CHECKLIST

- Copy of Student Release Form (ERIP Resource Section)
- Student Emergency Release/Contact Cards or Information
- Student Rosters
- Signage (ERIP Resource Section)
- Family Reunification Team
- Coordination for Security
- Coordination for Traffic
- Student Transportation (as needed)

# FAMILY REUNIFICATION FORM

Name of person requesting custody of student(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Verified by:    Driver License or Govt. ID    Known to Staff    Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Relationship to Student(s):    Parent / Guardian    Listed by Parent / Guardian in Records    Other: \_\_\_\_\_

NAME OF STUDENT(S)	SCHOOL	GRADE	AVAILABLE FOR RELEASE*

*\* Verify with student holding area that student is available to be released*

**NOTES:**

**REQUEST GATE**

I have verified the identity of this person and that this person has the authority to take custody of the students listed on this form

Name of Request Gate Official \_\_\_\_\_ Signature of Request Gate Official  \_\_\_\_\_

**RELEASE GATE**

I have verified the identity of the person to take custody of the students and the identity of the students listed on this form

Name of Release Gate Official \_\_\_\_\_ Signature of Release Gate Official  \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Person Taking Custody of Student(s)  \_\_\_\_\_