

Cypress Forest High School Sample Family Reunification Annex

Reunifying children with their parents or guardians (hereafter referred to as “families”) after an emergency event is a top priority. Family reunification is used to reunite children with verified and authorized family members after a critical and often highly stressful incident (e.g., fire, natural disaster, a situation involving weapons or violence at school, a school bus accident, etc.) that prevents a normal school dismissal. Unfortunately, a quick reunification between families and children will not always be possible due to situations such as students needing hospital treatment. If the incident is large enough to impact the whole community, reunification may require the efficient and coordinated use of resources and efforts across local, state, regional, and sometimes national levels (see the *Community Reunification Annex* of the Cypress Forest Emergency Operations Plan for more information), including the Cypress Forest Community Reunification Team. Following are the Before, During, and After goals; objectives; and courses of action for family reunification.

I. BEFORE Family Reunification is Necessary:

Goal: Equip the school community to carry out an orderly reunification under potentially high-stress conditions.

Objective 1: Review reunification logistics, check emergency supplies, and inform and train staff members, students, families, and other stakeholders in advance in order to:

- Identify all roles and responsibilities in reunification;
- Facilitate communication between the family check-in, family waiting, student assembly, and reunification areas; and
- Reduce confusion during the reunification process.

Objective 2: Collect student emergency information from families.

Courses of Action:

1. Identify Reunification Locations

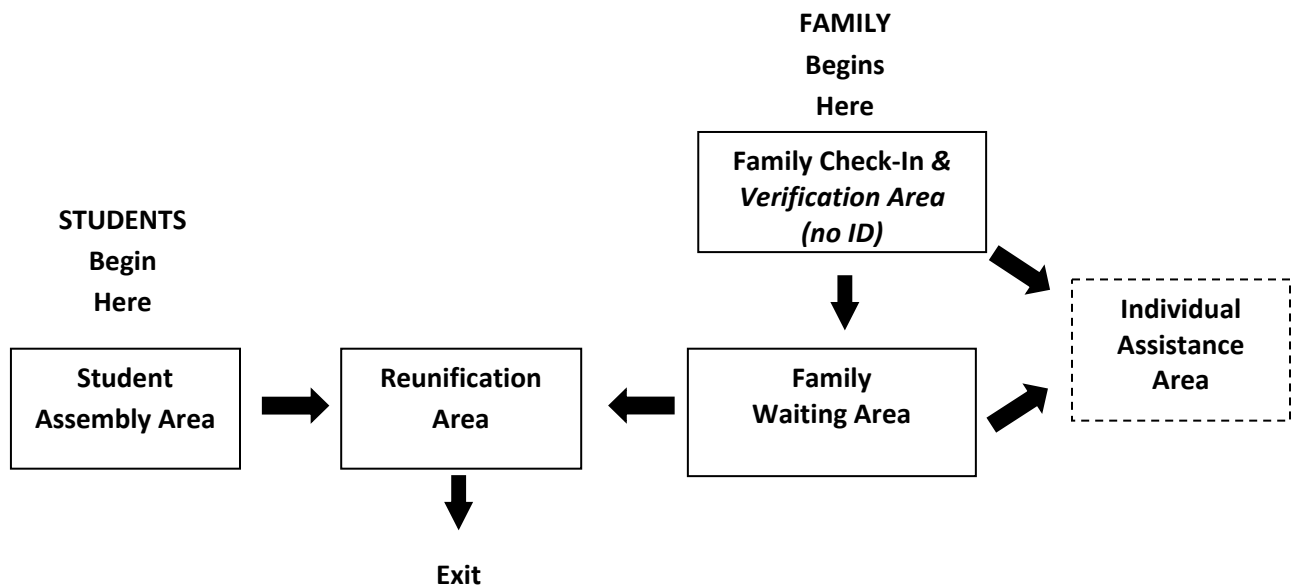
At least two weeks before the beginning of the new school year, the Principal will review reunification logistics with the Assistant Principal, the School Resource Officer (SRO), and members of the school safety team. Reunification locations may be *on campus (interior)*, *on campus (exterior)*, *off campus (interior)*, or *off campus (exterior)* and are divided into four distinct and separate areas to maintain separation between students and families: (1) *Student Assembly Area*, (2) *Family Check-In Gate*, (3) *Family Waiting Area*, and (4) *Reunification Area*. An *Individual Assistance Area* will also be identified at each location where family members can be escorted by a trained emotional health staff member to receive difficult information, such as a missing child, injured child, or a child detained by police, etc.

Signs are pre-made, for use to identify these areas if the reunification process is needed. At the all-faculty meeting before school opening, the Principal will review designated locations and areas (listed below) with all staff members and any community partners, including the Cypress Forest Community Center’s after-school program liaison and any

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organizations that will regularly use the building for activities out of regular school hours during the school year. This review will include discussion of different emergency scenarios and corresponding adjustments that could be made to the four designated areas:



- **On-Campus (Interior) Reunification** areas:
 - Student Assembly Area—Gym;
 - Family Check-In Gate—Teacher’s Dining Room;
 - Family Waiting Area—Cafeteria;
 - Reunification Area—Main Administrative Office; and
 - *Individual Assistance Area*—Guidance Office.

- **On-Campus (Exterior) Reunification** areas:
 - Student Assembly Area—Fenced softball field;
 - Family Check-In Gate—Concession stand;
 - Family Waiting Area—Football field;
 - Reunification Area—Tennis courts; and
 - Individual Assistance Area—Maintenance building.

- **Off-Campus (Interior) Reunification** areas:

In the event that the reunification process cannot take place on campus and community buildings have not been impacted by the event, the District Superintendent will activate agreements with Cypress Forest Grocery Mart and Cypress Forest Furniture.

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- Student Assembly Area—Cypress Forest Grocery Mart (the front cafeteria area will be used for students with disabilities or those with access and functional needs, as needed);
- Family Check-In Gate—Cypress Forest Furniture main entrance;
- Family Waiting Area—Cypress Forest Furniture Break Room;
- Reunification Area—Cypress Forest Furniture Business Office; and
- *Individual Assistance Area*—Cypress Forest Grocery Mart Business Office.

The Principal, Superintendent, and general counsel will review and update, as needed, Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) that are in place with each of these partners at the beginning of each school year. School buses will be used to transport students to this off-campus location.

- **Off-Campus (Exterior) Reunification areas:**

If an off-campus reunification is needed, but community buildings may have been damaged by the event (e.g., an earthquake), the following areas will be utilized:

- Student Assembly Area—Cypress Forest Community Park play area;
- Family Check-In Gate—Entrance to Cypress Forest Community Park;
- Family Waiting Area—Cypress Forest Community Park parking lot;
- Reunification Area—Cypress Forest Community Park tennis courts; and
- *Individual Assistance Area*—Cypress Forest Community Park picnic area.

Again, school buses will be used to transport students to this off-campus location.

2. Check Reunification Supplies:

- At least two weeks before the start of the new school year, the Assistant Principal and the Head Nurse will verify that the reunification supplies are located in the main office in a red duffle bag on wheels, and that it contains the following:
 - i. Vinyl signs (Parking Lot, Family Check-In Gate, Family Waiting Area, Reunification Area)
 - ii. 5 signs (Student Last Name Starts With A–E, F–I, J–M, N–S, T–Z)
 - iii. Sign clips, zip ties, and duct tape
 - iv. 50 Sign-Out Records, Evacuated Student & Staff Forms, and Injured Student & Staff Forms (See Appendix)
 - v. 12 vests with placards (4 Family Check-In Gate, 2 Security, 2 Information, and 2 Family Waiting Area, 2 Reunification Area)
 - vi. 2 mega phones
 - vii. 12 whistles
 - viii. 10 two-way radios
 - ix. 8 clipboards, pads of paper, and pens
 - x. Job description checklist for each reunification area
 - xi. 600 student release forms (See Appendix)
 - xii. Student Emergency Information binder (See Appendix)

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xiii. Media supplies, including signage, tape, and barrier

See the *Equipment, Supplies and Go-Kits Appendix* for a comprehensive list.

Adjacent to the supply duffle bag is a portable table, and the designated laptop computer (plugged in so that it remains charged). Next to the laptop is a USB drive that contains administration information, such as the list of current students.

- Two days prior to the opening of school, the Secretary and Head Nurse will update the Student Emergency Information binder containing student names, emergency contact information for family members, including cell phone numbers and at least two additional emergency contacts, and information on any unique needs a student may have (e.g., specific medical needs). The Secretary will add the names of any new students as they become enrolled throughout the year, and the Head Nurse will check and update the emergency contact and list of students with disabilities or those with access and functional needs every semester.

3. Conduct Stakeholder Trainings (Coordinated and Scheduled by the Assistant Principal):

- At least two weeks before the new school year:
 - Make Team Leader and staffing assignments to the Reunification Team and sub-sections:
 - Set-up;
 - Supervision for evacuation (student transportation, student assembly, and accounting for all students) [See *Evacuation Annex*¹, *School Bus Annex*, and *Accounting for All Persons Annex*.];
 - Family Check-In (including verification for pick-up without ID);
 - Escorts/runners; and
 - Support for individuals with disabilities or those with access and functional needs.
 - Make staffing assignments to other Incident Command System (ICS) positions, including the following:
 - Public Information Officer;
 - Security/Utilities Team Leader;
 - Psychological/First Aid Team Leader; and
 - Planning and Intelligence Section Chief.
 - Create flowchart designating team assignments, and chain of command, and check job descriptions for accuracy.
 - Hold meeting with General Staff to review corresponding job descriptions, roles, and responsibilities.
 - Prepare families for possible reunification processes, including the following:

¹ References to other annexes, such as this reference to “see *Evacuation Annex*,” do not refer to other sample annexes available from the REMS TA Center, but are instead meant to illustrate the interconnectedness of a real plan. All sample annexes are fictional and represent fictional schools. These are for reference only and do not depict actual decisions made by collaborative planning teams. A true annex would reflect the unique characteristics and resources of a school and its school district.

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- Creation of the *Reunification Newsletter for Families*. This will be distributed two times per year: (1) in registration packets before school starts in the fall; and (2) in mailing with report cards at the end of the first semester. This will also be provided in the orientation folder for family registering children during the school year.
 - Ensuring Student Emergency Information forms (see Appendix) are sent to families in their student registration packets, filled out, and collected on student registration days.
 - Obtaining permission to include medical health conditions, allergies, and medicines on Student Emergency Information forms at an Individual Education Program (IEP) or other applicable meeting. Families will be reassured that the information will remain private, secured, and accessed only by authorized individuals.
- At least one week before the new school year begins:
 - With SRO, train staff assigned to the Security/Utilities Team [security, SRO, and custodians²] on crowd management and de-escalation.
 - With the Guidance Director, review procedures for de-escalation and Psychological First Aid for any staff members who may be assigned to supervise students or assist families.
 - Ongoing, throughout the year:
 - Orient new staff on reunification roles and responsibilities, including substitutes or itinerant staff.
 - Orient new families on reunification roles and responsibilities as part of their school orientation.
 - Include information on reunification in family handbook and send updates and reminders at least every semester. [See *Communications and Warning Annex*.]
 - With the school Safety Team, plan and review on- and off-campus reunification procedures; review at all-staff meeting prior to opening day.
 - With the school Safety Team, plan and conduct two exercises during the year—one on campus and one off campus, and include key staff and community stakeholders.

II. DURING Family Reunification Process:

Goal: Safely and efficiently reunify students with verified and authorized families.

Objective: Initiate a systematic release of students to families once verified by student records.

Courses of Action:

1. The Incident Commander [Principal or designee], Command and General Staff

The following actions may take up to 15 minutes:

- Establish Incident Command Post and assign incident management personnel, as needed, according to ICS structure.

² Square brackets indicate who will likely fill the role under the Incident Command System (ICS).

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- Activate *Communications and Warning Annex*—Public Information Officer (PIO) [debate coach teacher]—to notify families, and other stakeholders, reminding families to bring government-issued identification to reunification site. The PIO will also address any media requests.
- Communicate with the District Superintendent and local law enforcement to determine whether to stage the reunification on or off campus. Notify Cypress Forest Community Reunification Team, if applicable.
- Activate Reunification Team and instruct them to prepare the reunification areas.
- Give clear instructions to school staff about the reunification location, how to move students, and release procedures (alphabetically, and/or as individual family members arrive).
- Arrange for supervision and extended care of students with disabilities or those with access and functional needs, and any students not reunified in a timely manner (First Aid/Medical Team; see *Overnight Sheltering Annex*).
- Arrange for the logistics of caring for injured students and staff members, including evacuation to a hospital as needed (Logistics Section Chief [member of administration]; see *Public Health, Medical, and Mental Health Annex* and *Evacuation Annex*).

NOTE: The reunification process, start to finish, may take several hours, or even require overnight coordination, depending on the nature of the emergency, the location and accessibility of the reunification, and the level of disruption that the precipitating event has caused in the surrounding community. The Incident Commander and all assigned personnel must be prepared to maintain responsibilities until the event has concluded or their responsibilities have been transferred to other personnel. And, if there is a community-wide incident, it will require additional coordination and communication working with the Cypress Forest Emergency Operations Center and its Community Reunification Team per the pre-established community reunification protocol.

2. Teachers (Department Chairs to coordinate, Assisted by School Adjustment Counselors)

The following actions may take up to 15 minutes:

- Account for all students (see *Accounting for All Persons Annex*). (5 minutes)
- Prepare students for movement to the reunification location. Explain what is being done and why, working to keep students calm. (5 minutes)
- Assess needs. Assist those needing special accommodations for evacuation and/or support in the Student Assembly Area; communicate medical needs to the First Aid/Medical Team; and provide for those with language barriers. (5 minutes)
- Escort students under care to the Student Assembly Area at the reunification location. (This action could take between 10–60 minutes, depending on whether reunification is on or off campus.)
- Continue supervising and caring for students until they are released to their families. (This action may take several hours, depending on the nature of the emergency and the level of disruption in the surrounding community.)
- Provide Psychological First Aid and lead activities to keep students occupied while awaiting reunification with their families.

3. Family Reunification Team



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The following actions may take between 15 and 30 minutes, depending on the location of the reunification areas:

- Bring reunification supplies to reunification location. Wear identifying incident command vests and identification badges.
- Bring two-way radios and keep them turned to channel 9.
- Set up tables, hang signs, and distribute reunification materials to each area.
- Make sure that Team Leaders are in place at each area. Team Leaders should distribute job description checklist for each role.
- Incorporate community partners who may be present to assist into the ICS structure (such as law enforcement into the Security/Utilities Team).

The following actions below may take several hours or longer, depending on the nature of the emergency and the level of disruption in the surrounding community:

- Conduct reunification process and repeat for each student until all students have been released:
 - When families arrive, those assigned as greeters (see flowchart) will direct them to the Family Waiting Area.
 - The Reunification Team Leader [Guidance Director] will explain the reunification process to families, directing them to check in at the table with their child's last name listed on the sign and provide frequent status updates to ease anxiety.
 - Using the Student Emergency Information binder, personnel assigned to the Family Check-In Gate will verify that the family member is on the list of individuals authorized to pick up the child. Only release a student to an authorized individual listed on their paperwork. The family member must show government-issued identification. Once verified, give them a reunification card.
 - The team members assigned as escorts will then individually escort the family to the Reunification Area where they will show their reunification card, show identification again, and the release of the student will be documented on the release log. Make sure that every line of the sign-out record is filled in, including the time the student was released, who they were released to, and where their next destination is.
 - The team members assigned as runners will then individually escort the student from the Student Assembly Area to the Reunification Area and officially release the student to his or her family.
 - The First Aid/Medical Team Leader [Head Nurse] will oversee support for students, staff members, and family members with disabilities or those with access and functional needs.

4. Special Contingencies

- Team Leaders should use radios to request assistance from specialized professionals (e.g., counselors) as follows. If families:
 - Cannot produce required identification, they will be escorted to a verification area by a Security/Utilities Team member, where a team member will ensure they are approved to pick up the student.
 - Become aggressive or potentially violent, contact the Security/Utilities Team.

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- Present signs of emotional distress, contact the Reunification Team Leader [Guidance Director], who will coordinate with the Psychological First Aid Team to dispatch a counselor or other mental health staff member.
- Are injured or have a medical emergency while awaiting processing, contact the First Aid/Medical Team.
- Require emergency medical services or transport to a hospital, contact the First Aid/Medical Team. The First Aid/Medical Team will coordinate transport with the Logistics Section. Students who are taken to a hospital will be assigned a staff member to ensure they are kept safe and cared for throughout the transport and hospital care until their family can take custody of them.
- Are to be told their loved one is missing, injured, or died in the incident.

III. AFTER the Family Reunification Process has been completed:

Goal: Comprehensively close reunification location and ensure continued care for students and staff not yet reunified (e.g., students at hospital, delayed arrival of family).

Objective 1: Initiate comprehensive closing of reunification location (return equipment and unused supplies, take down signs, clean up reunification location).

Objective 2: Ensure continued care of all students who are not reunified with families.

Objective 3: Evaluate and refine plans; maintain records and documentation.

Courses of Action:

1. Within 4 hours:

- The Incident Commander [Principal] will transfer operational control back from ICS positions to those used on a daily basis.
- The Principal, in conjunction with Superintendent's Office, will follow emergency communications protocols to reassure stakeholders and provide information about the status, instructions for families in special circumstances, and notification of availability of additional resources. [See *Communications and Warning Annex*.]
- The Guidance Director and Lead Teacher will update the Principal and Superintendent's Office on the status of family reunification.
- The Guidance Director and Lead Teacher will oversee support to:
 - The few remaining students whose families have been delayed, providing continued care; and
 - The students and staff members at the hospital (as applicable).
- The Assistant Principal and SRO will cross-reference other annexes to determine potential disruptions to the regular school setting as a result of the precipitating factors that led to the activation of the *Family Reunification Annex*.
- The Head Custodian will oversee the Clean-up Team as they:

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- Remove all school equipment;
 - Gather all unused supplies; and
 - Clean up reunification location.
- School Secretary will gather all forms, complete notes, summarize paperwork and submit to Principal.
2. Within 24 hours:
- The Guidance Director with Guidance Staff and community mental health partners will implement plan to support mental health needs of students and staff (follow Critical Incident Team response protocols). [See *Recovery Annex*.]
3. Within 48 hours:
- The Principal, Assistant Principal, and the Guidance Director will debrief in small groups with staff, and community partners, including providers of off-campus reunification locations. At least one member of the guidance staff should co-facilitate each debriefing group and transcribe notes from any key findings. Debriefing should include information about follow-up support resources. Mental health staff members trained in Post-Traumatic Stress Management will facilitate Coping Groups for students. [See *Recovery Annex*.]
 - The Head Custodian will oversee the restocking of reunification supplies as listed.
 - The Assistant Principal, Head Nurse, and school Secretary will:
 - Review and maintain records indicating that all students have been released to their lawful family members; and
 - Assess and document any financial obligations related to the reunification process (e.g., transportation or custodial overtime).
4. As soon as possible, but within two weeks of the event:
- The Principal will convene the school Safety Team to review the event and make adjustment to protocols within the *Family Reunification Annex*, and communicate with and retrain staff and stakeholders as needed.

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APPENDIX

FORM: STUDENT RELEASE

Use this form to keep track of students who are being reunited with family, or others on their emergency contact list.

FAMILIES—To be completed by a family member or authorized emergency contact at the Family Check-In Gate.

Family Check-In Gate			
Student Name:		Grade:	
Name of person requesting student:		Relationship to student:	

STAFF—To be completed by family reunification team staff in each of the following areas.

Family Check-In Gate		
Is the person requesting the student listed on the Student Emergency Information?	<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO	Staff initials:
Did you verify their photo ID?	<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO	Describe if identify was verified through another means:
Student Assembly Area		
Did you pick up the student from the Student Assembly Area and escort him/her to the Reunification Area?	<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO	Staff initials:
Did the teacher or Student Assembly Area supervisor mark the student as “released” on their checklist?	<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO	Staff initials:
Reunification Area		
Did you verify the family member’s photo ID again?	<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO	Staff initials:
Was the student successfully released?	<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO	Time of release:
Staff signature:		

FAMILIES—To be completed by a family member or authorized emergency contact at the Reunification Area:

Reunification Area	
Signature of the person to whom the student is being released:	
Next destination:	

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FORM: STUDENT EMERGENCY INFORMATION***

Use this form to collect emergency contact information of families and at least two additional contacts before an emergency. Please ensure that there are at least two phone numbers for each contact provided.

Student's Name: _____ DOB: ____/____/____
Last First MI

Address: _____ City: _____ Grade: _____

Home Language: _____ Medical Health Conditions: _____

Allergies: _____ Medications: _____

Parent/Guardian Name (1st Contact):

Last Name: _____ First Name: _____

Relationship to the Student: _____ Email Address: _____

Home Phone: _____ Work Phone: _____ Cell Phone: _____

Address (if different from student's address): _____

Parent/Guardian Name (2nd Contact):

Last Name: _____ First Name: _____

Relationship to the Student: _____ Email Address: _____

Home Phone: _____ Work Phone: _____ Cell Phone: _____

Address (if different from student's address): _____

List two emergency contacts who would have permission to pick your child up and assume temporary care of your child if you cannot be reached during an emergency. These contacts cannot be the same as parents or legal guardians, but may include grandparents, aunts, uncles, childcare providers, friends, and neighbors that live in the local area.

Emergency Contact Name (1st Contact):

Last Name: _____ First Name: _____

Relationship to the Student: _____ Cell Phone: _____

Address: _____

Emergency Contact Name (2nd Contact):

Last Name: _____ First Name: _____

Relationship to the Student: _____ Cell Phone: _____

Address: _____

By signing this form, you give permission for any of the emergency contacts to pick up your child in case of an emergency school closure, illness, or missed bus. Should any of your emergency contact information change during the school year, please remember you need to inform the school as soon as possible. You are also providing consent for the school to share the information on this form with authorized individuals.

Parent or Legal Guardian's Signature: _____ Date: ____/____/____

Print Last Name: _____ Print First Name: _____

***The information contained in this form is private and should be secured and accessed only by authorized individuals. This is needed to ensure compliance with HIPAA, FERPA, and individual rights to privacy.



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FORM: INJURED STUDENTS/STAFF

Use this form to keep track of students/staff members who are injured and transported to various hospitals. It is not always possible to learn which hospital an ambulance is going to, so try to get the ambulance number in which someone is being transported.

INJURED STUDENTS & STAFF—ACCOUNT FOR EVERYONE					
Time	Name of Student	Name of Staff Accompanying Student	Hospital	Ambulance Number	Check One
					<input type="checkbox"/> STUDENT <input type="checkbox"/> STAFF <input type="checkbox"/> VISITOR
					<input type="checkbox"/> STUDENT <input type="checkbox"/> STAFF <input type="checkbox"/> VISITOR
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