****

*Please use the following as a template to create a customized tabletop exercise for your District/School.*

# Tabletop Exercise: Crisis Communication Planning

## Exercise Title:

*Managing Erroneous Emergency Alerts*

## Purpose:

To enhance the ability of school district leaders and staff to respond effectively to erroneous emergency communications sent to parents and the community, minimizing confusion, restoring trust, and ensuring operational continuity.

## Scenario Summary:

At 10:15 a.m. on a regular school day, an emergency alert is mistakenly sent to all parents and guardians. The alert, reading, "There is an emergency situation at [School Name], and the building is evacuating. Further information to follow," is received through text messages, emails and the school’s app. The message results from a software malfunction or accidental user error. The error causes panic among parents, staff and the community, with local media picking up the story within five minutes.

## Objectives:

1. **Assess Response Protocols:** Evaluate the district’s current crisis communication plan for addressing erroneous messages.
2. **Develop Messaging Strategies:** Craft effective follow-up communications to clarify the error and reassure stakeholders.
3. **Engage Stakeholders:** Identify and address key concerns from parents, staff, media and community members.
4. **Prevent Recurrence:** Review and improve existing systems and processes to avoid future incidents.

## Exercise Details

**Participants:**

* District Leadership Team
* School Administration
* Communications Team
* Technology Department Representatives
* School Resource Officers (SROs)
* Local Emergency Responders (optional)

**Facilitator Preparation:**

* Prepare printed/email versions of the initial erroneous alert.
* Develop a timeline of simulated events (e.g., media coverage, parent reactions, social media posts).
* Have access to the district’s communication plan for reference.

## Phases of the Exercise

### Phase 1: Initial Reaction (10 minutes)

**Prompt:**

* What are your immediate actions upon learning of the erroneous message?
* How do you identify the source of the error?
* Who needs to be informed within the district?

**Key Considerations:**

* Activating internal communication channels.
* Assigning roles for addressing inquiries and media.
* Stopping further erroneous alerts.

### Phase 2: Clarification and Response (20 minutes)

**Prompt:**

* Draft a follow-up message to parents and guardians to clarify the situation.
* How do you manage calls from concerned parents and media inquiries?
* Do you have pre-prepared messages for front office staff receiving inquiries? (If not, develop example)
* How do you address misinformation spreading on social media?

**Key Considerations:**

* Tone and transparency in the follow-up message.
* Providing clear next steps to stakeholders.
* Identifying trusted voices within the community for information dissemination.

### Phase 3: Managing the Fallout (20 minutes)

**Prompt:**

* What steps will you take to restore trust with parents and staff?
* How will you review and address potential reputational damage?
* What immediate adjustments are needed to prevent a recurrence?

**Key Considerations:**

* Debriefing with staff and community leaders.
* Reviewing software or procedural flaws.
* Updating communication protocols.

## Evaluation and Debrief (20 minutes)

### Facilitator Discussion Points:

1. What went well in the response process?
2. What gaps or weaknesses were identified?
3. What specific actions will be taken to improve future responses?
4. How will updates to policies, training and technology be communicated to staff?

Takeaways:
Develop a short-term action plan to address findings from the exercise, including follow-up communication, training or software updates in addition to scripted messaging for school stakeholders during the event.