

# Family Reunification Sample Annex: A Fictional Example for Family Reunification Before, During, and After an Emergency



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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>SCENARIO</b> . . . . .	<b>1</b>
<b>BEFORE FAMILY REUNIFICATION IS NECESSARY</b> . . . . .	<b>2</b>
<b>GOAL</b> . . . . .	<b>2</b>
<b>OBJECTIVES</b> . . . . .	<b>2</b>
<b>COURSES OF ACTION</b> . . . . .	<b>2</b>
Principal . . . . .	2
Assistant Principal and Head Nurse . . . . .	4
Secretary and Head Nurse . . . . .	4
Assistant Principal . . . . .	5
<b>DURING THE FAMILY REUNIFICATION PROCESS</b> . . . . .	<b>6</b>
<b>GOAL</b> . . . . .	<b>6</b>
<b>OBJECTIVE</b> . . . . .	<b>6</b>
<b>COURSES OF ACTION</b> . . . . .	<b>6</b>
Incident Commander [Principal or designee], Command, and General Staff . . . . .	6
Teachers (Department Chairs to Coordinate, Assisted by School Adjustment Counselors) . . . . .	7
Family Reunification Team . . . . .	7
<b>AFTER THE FAMILY REUNIFICATION PROCESS HAS BEEN COMPLETED</b> . . . . .	<b>9</b>
<b>GOAL</b> . . . . .	<b>9</b>
<b>OBJECTIVES</b> . . . . .	<b>9</b>
<b>COURSES OF ACTION</b> . . . . .	<b>9</b>
Incident Commander/Principal . . . . .	9
Guidance Director and Lead Teacher . . . . .	9
Assistant Principal and SRO . . . . .	9
Head Custodian . . . . .	9
School Secretary . . . . .	9
Guidance Director and Guidance Staff . . . . .	10
Principal, Assistant Principal, and Guidance Director . . . . .	10
Head Custodian . . . . .	10
Assistant Principal, Head Nurse, and School Secretary . . . . .	10
Principal . . . . .	10

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>APPENDICES. . . . .</b>	<b>11</b>
STUDENT RELEASE FORM . . . . .	11
STUDENT EMERGENCY INFORMATION FORM . . . . .	13
FAMILY REUNIFICATION SIGN-OUT RECORDS FORM . . . . .	15

Annexes are a critical component of any comprehensive, high-quality emergency operations plan (EOP). Functional annexes contain information about the activation of emergency management functions (cross-cutting activities that can be carried out in response to multiple different types of threats and hazards that impact a school). Functional annexes should ideally describe and outline goals, objectives, and courses of action that should be undertaken before, during, and after a specific emergency management function. The [Guide for Developing High-Quality School Emergency Operations Plans](#) recommends that school EOPs include functional annexes for at least 10 of the most common emergency management functions, one of which is family reunification.

This document presents a scenario and a sample Family Reunification Annex from a fictional high school. Intended to provide one potential example of the content, format, and structure of an annex, the following sample Family Reunification Annex is a reference tool and should not be copied or used as a template. All annexes and appendices referenced within are fictional and are intended to illustrate the interconnectedness of a real plan.

## SCENARIO

Reunifying children with their parents, caregivers, 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 or the death of a student. 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 city EOP for more information), including the city Community Reunification Team. The following are actions to take before, during, and after an emergency requiring family reunification.

# BEFORE FAMILY REUNIFICATION IS NECESSARY

## GOAL

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

## OBJECTIVES

- Review reunification logistics; check emergency supplies; and inform and train staff members, students, families, and other stakeholders in advance 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.
- Collect student emergency information from families.

## COURSES OF ACTION

### Principal

#### *At Least 2 Weeks Before the New School Year*

- With the Assistant Principal, School Resource Officer (SRO), and members of the school Safety Team, review reunification logistics.
  - Reunification locations may be on campus (interior), on campus (exterior), off campus (interior), or off campus (exterior).
  - Reunification locations 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 or injured child, a child detained by police, etc.

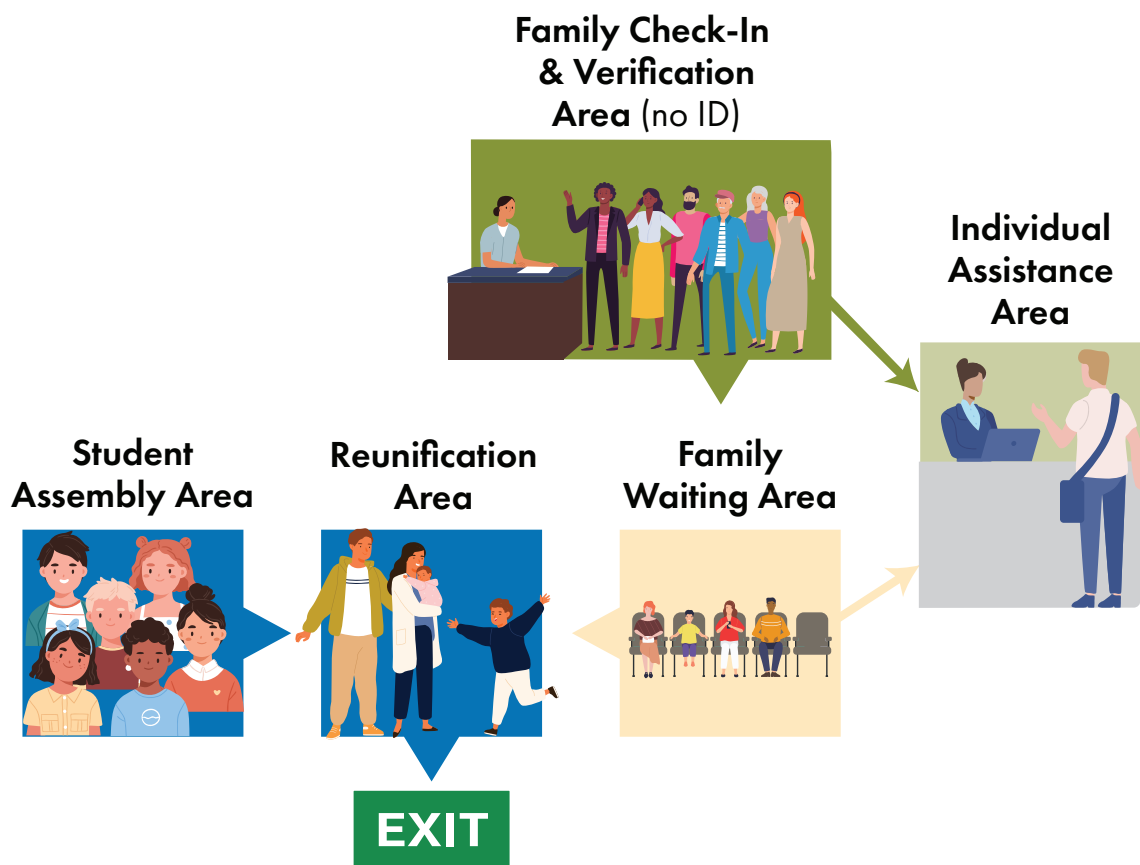
- School buses will be used to transport students to off-campus locations.

- Ensure signs are pre-made for use to identify these areas if the reunification process is needed.
- In consultation with the Superintendent and general counsel, review and update the memoranda of understanding that are in place with off-campus reunification partners.

#### *During All-Faculty Meeting Before School Opening*

- Review designated locations and areas with all staff members and any community partners, including the afterschool program liaison and any organizations that will regularly use the building for activities out of regular school hours during the school year.
- Discuss different emergency scenarios and corresponding adjustments that could be made to the four designated areas.

# BEFORE FAMILY REUNIFICATION IS NECESSARY



- 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
  - 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
  - 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.
  - 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
  - Individual Assistance Area—Cypress Forest Grocery Mart business office



# BEFORE FAMILY REUNIFICATION IS NECESSARY

- 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.

## Assistant Principal and Head Nurse

### At Least 2 Weeks Before the New School Year

- Verify that the reunification supplies are located in the main office in a red duffle bag on wheels.
- Check that reunification supplies contain the following (see the *Equipment, Supplies and Go-Kits Appendix* for a comprehensive list):
  - Vinyl signs (Parking Lot, Family Check-In Gate, Family Waiting Area, Reunification Area)
  - 5 signs (Student Last Name Starts With A–E, F–I, J–M, N–S, T–Z)
  - Sign clips, zip ties, and duct tape
  - 50 Sign-Out Records, Evacuated Student & Staff Forms, and Injured Student & Staff Forms (See Appendix)
  - 12 vests with placards (4 Family Check-In Gate, 2 Security, 2 Information, 2 Family Waiting Area, and 2 Reunification Area)
  - 2 megaphones
  - 12 whistles
  - 10 two-way radios
  - 8 clipboards, pads of paper, and pens



- Job description checklist for each reunification area
- 600 student release forms (see Appendix)
- Student Emergency Information binder (see Appendix)
- Media supplies, including signage, tape, and barrier
- Ensure that adjacent to the supply duffle bag is a portable table, the designated laptop computer (plugged in so that it remains charged), and a USB drive that contains administration information, such as the list of current students.

## Secretary and Head Nurse

### Two Days Prior to the Opening of School

- 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).
  - Secretary to add the names of any new students as they become enrolled throughout the year.
  - Head Nurse to check and update the emergency contact and list of students with disabilities or those with access and functional needs every semester.

# BEFORE FAMILY REUNIFICATION IS NECESSARY

## Assistant Principal

### At Least 2 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\* School Bus Annex*, and *Accounting for All Persons Annex*]
  - Family Check-In (including verification for pick-up without ID)
  - Escorts/runners
  - 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
  - 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:
  - 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 mailings 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 or other applicable meeting. Families will be reassured that the information will remain private, secured, and accessed only by authorized individuals.

### At Least 1 Week Before the New School Year

- With SRO, train staff assigned to the Security/Utilities Team [security, SRO, and custodians<sup>2</sup>] 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 and share 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, including key staff and community stakeholders.



# DURING THE 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

### Incident Commander [Principal or designee]<sup>1</sup>, 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.
- Activate *Communications and Warning Annex* — Public Information Officer (PIO) [debate coach teacher] — to notify families and other stakeholders, and to remind 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 the city 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 city Emergency Operations Center and its Community Reunification Team per the pre-established community reunification protocol.*

<sup>1</sup> Positions listed in square brackets are the titles of individuals who would likely fill that role under the ICS.

# DURING THE FAMILY REUNIFICATION PROCESS

## 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.

## Family Reunification Team

*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 and identification again. Then 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.

# DURING THE FAMILY REUNIFICATION PROCESS

- 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.
- 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.
  - 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.



## GOAL

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

## OBJECTIVES

- Initiate comprehensive closing of reunification location (return equipment and unused supplies, take down signs, clean up reunification location).
- Ensure continued care of all students who are not reunified with families.
- Evaluate and refine plans; maintain records and documentation.

## COURSES OF ACTION

### Incident Commander/Principal

*Within 4 hours*

- Transfer operational control back from ICS positions to those used on a daily basis.
- In conjunction with the Superintendent's Office, 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*).

### Guidance Director and Lead Teacher

*Within 4 hours*

- Update the Principal and Superintendent's Office on the status of family reunification.
- Oversee support to the
  - Few remaining students whose families have been delayed, providing continued care; and
  - Students and staff members at the hospital (as applicable).

### Assistant Principal and SRO

*Within 4 hours*

- 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*.

### Head Custodian

*Within 4 hours*

- Oversee the Clean-up Team as they
  - Remove all school equipment;
  - Gather all unused supplies; and
  - Clean up reunification location.

### School Secretary

*Within 4 hours*

- Gather all forms, complete notes, summarize paperwork, and submit to Principal.



# AFTER THE FAMILY REUNIFICATION PROCESS HAS BEEN COMPLETED

## Guidance Director and Guidance Staff

Within 24 hours

- With community mental health partners, implement plan to support mental health needs of students and staff, following Critical Incident Team response protocols (see *Recovery Annex*).

## Principal, Assistant Principal, and Guidance Director

Within 48 hours

- 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 finds. 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*).

## Head Custodian

Within 48 hours

- Oversee the restocking of reunification supplies as listed.

## Assistant Principal, Head Nurse, and School Secretary

Within 48 hours

- 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).

## Principal

As soon as possible, but within 2 weeks of the event

- Convene the school Safety Team to review the event and adjust protocols within the *Family Reunification Annex* and communicate with and retrain staff and stakeholders as needed.

\*References to other annexes, such as the reference to the “*Recovery 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 EOP. 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, capabilities, resources, and policies of a school and its school district.



## STUDENT RELEASE FORM

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

Family Check-In Gate		
Is the person requesting the student listed on the Student Emergency Information Form?	<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:		

# APPENDICES

**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 Form?	<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:	

## STUDENT EMERGENCY INFORMATION FORM

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:

Last Name:	First Name:	MI:
DOB:	Grade:	
Address:	City:	
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 who live in the local area.

### Emergency Contact Name (1st Contact):

Last Name:	First Name:
Relationship to the Student:	Cell Phone:
Address:	

# APPENDICES

## 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 listed 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 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 the *Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act*, the *Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act*, and individual rights to privacy.

# APPENDICES

## FAMILY REUNIFICATION SIGN-OUT RECORDS FORM

Use this form to account for each student being reunified with family or others on their emergency contact list.

ACCOUNT FOR EVERYONE					
TIME OF RELEASE	NAME OF STUDENT (Print)	RELEASED TO: (Print Name) <i>Must show picture ID</i>	RELEASED TO: (Signature)	NEXT DESTINATION	RELEASED BY: