

Bemidji Area Schools Communications Plan



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Mission of Bemidji Area Schools

The mission of Bemidji Area Schools is to empower each learner to succeed in our diverse and changing world.

Outcome of Bemidji Area School's Communications Plan

To become the most trusted source of information for district stakeholders where residents of the community know how to acquire the information they need and trust the district as the best source.

Communications Vision

In order to build and maintain trust among key stakeholders, the Bemidji Area School District will always be honest and transparent in all forms of communication with the public.

The Bemidji Area School District will utilize a multi-layered communications approach in order to engage and inform all stakeholders.

Representatives of the Bemidji Area School District – administrators, staff and school board members – will be available and willing to engage in dialogue with all stakeholders.

The Bemidji Area School District will continue to improve its communications efforts by regularly measuring progress, as well as requesting and utilizing feedback from district stakeholders.

A Committed Communications Team

In order to initiate, maintain, evaluate, and revise communication strategies, a district Communications Team must be created. The Communications Team should consist of a cross-section of committed and interested staff members from across the district.

A Communications Team Prepared for Crises

Crisis communication is the ability to alert school or district stakeholders of an immediate or impending life-threatening or alarming event quickly and strategically, and have the ability to instruct them on how to respond. Situations such as active shooters, bomb threats, severe weather threats, chemical spills, fires, medical emergencies, etc. all require immediate action that includes comprehensive and concise communication both during the event and in the aftermath of the crisis.

A crisis may also be social, political, or cultural unrest such as a protest, sit-in, walk-out, or major distraction involving social media or mass media. The District Communications Team must be prepared to respond to and de-escalate such events as soon as possible. Ideally, a strong communications team with a solid plan will be able to prevent or preempt a crisis by anticipating an event or by providing the requisite communications that will keep a crisis from developing.

Guiding Principles for the ISD 31 Communications Effort

1. Communication efforts are tied to the Strategic Plan's objectives and strategies.

To be effective, communication efforts must be designed to support ISD 31's overall mission, objectives and strategies as laid out in the Strategic Plan. Communication should focus on teaching and learning and inform the public of progress toward student achievement goals. It should involve a structured, ongoing process to engage the public and promote an open dialogue on educational issues and goals. To be most effective, this should be a collaborative effort that seeks out the resources and expertise of residents and community organizations to take action in support of student achievement. At all levels, it is imperative that communication occurs consistently and information be presented with clarity. In order to accomplish this effectively and efficiently, objectives, strategies and timelines should be established to incorporate communication components into planning for all district initiatives, programs and activities. At both the district and building levels, implementation plans with timelines should

be utilized to ensure that team members understand who is responsible for implementing strategies and the timelines for completing them. **Communications objectives and strategies are located in Appendix A. An Implementation Plan and Timeline is located in Appendix B.**

2. Key messaging will position ISD 31 as a collaborative, community-centered school district that is committed to providing an exceptional education for all students.

The identity and image of every school district and school should be directly related to its core beliefs and values. There is a strong commitment to the success of ISD 31 schools from those who live and work in the community. The district has a solid reputation for providing students with excellent and varied educational programs and now needs to begin marketing itself as a leading school system in greater Minnesota. This strategy should be incorporated into all key communications efforts and publications and should be designed to build support and advocacy efforts on behalf of ISD 31's schools.

Key messages are developed with three components in mind: **media outlets, materials and themes. Examples of these three components are located in the Appendix C.**

3. Improving the use of communication technology must be a priority if ISD 31 is to improve and strengthen its image.

While ISD 31 has implemented a variety of educational technologies in classrooms and prides itself on the use of technology across the district, it must also include a technology-based platform to communicate effectively with key audiences.

E-mail, the Skylert mass messaging system, Facebook, Twitter, websites, employee intranets, and parent portals can all be used advantageously to improve and expand the district's communication infrastructure. While the district has invested in a number of technology tools, there is still much to be done in order to maximize their value in the area of communication. In addition, social media vendors can be a valuable asset as a partner and consultant providing resources to Bemidji Area Schools. It is important to note that although technology can greatly expand ISD 31's communication "reach," it does not totally replace traditional print communications or valuable face-to-face interactions. Communication must be multi-layered to be most effective. However, if ISD 31 truly aspires to being an innovative education leader, technology is an integral component that the district must use effectively in all communications.

4. Internal communication is a priority.

Communication efforts will be much more successful when employees become ambassadors for teaching, learning, and student achievement, and when they promote their schools. Employees have the ability to make or break the image of their schools and the district. Timely and consistent internal communication creates knowledgeable, articulate employees who are able to respond confidently to questions and requests from parents and the public. Employees can become true “ambassadors for achievement” when they receive regular updates on key district issues and initiatives and when they are provided with the tools and training needed to support them in their individual roles.

5. School-building-level communication is a major component of the communications effort with healthy and positive front-line responsiveness.

Research in school communication shows that the local school is usually seen as the public opinion barometer of how well schools or school districts are doing. The local school is a natural hub for communication with parents and other community members and should become a central focus of the communications plan. In a 2019 national survey of school districts, 15% of participating school district leaders said no one in their district is responsible for improving customer service while 19 percent said no one is monitoring the quality of customer service the district provides.

While school crises routinely dominate headlines, studies reveal that preventing public relations crises were among the lowest ranking strategic priorities for most leaders working in districts serving 75,000 or fewer students. Leaders from districts of all sizes ranked ***building community trust*** as their top concern. In open-ended responses, participating school leaders linked qualities like customer service and trust to future school success

Providing communications training and support for “front-line” administrators and staff at the building-level is critical to their success as communicators and ambassadors. Numerous services are available to assist schools with front-line communication responsiveness.

6. Effective stakeholder engagement requires interpersonal connections.

People are persuaded to action by others whom they respect or perceive as knowledgeable. When interpersonal connections are made by credible opinion leaders and spokespersons, people are more likely to be persuaded to action. Influential peers, such as respected staff members or parent and community leaders, are often the most effective advocates for education. Effective engagement efforts will help improve the credibility of ISD 31’s leaders and inspire confidence in the district.

7. Becoming a “listening” organization requires a commitment at all levels.

Effective communication efforts involve listening in equal proportion, or more, to disseminating information. Today’s education stakeholders are not content to let school district leaders make unquestioned decisions that impact students and staff. Active, informed members of the public expect to have a voice in decision-making. A strategic communications program recognizes this and incorporates opportunities for stakeholders to engage in dialogue with district leaders – from the Board and central office administrators to the school principals – on a variety of issues.

Listening and validating the concerns of district stakeholders is also an important part of any communications plan. The key components of communicating when addressing the concerns of any stakeholder, whether internal or external, are: **Listening, Reassuring, Validating, Responding, Repairing, and Resolving.** A detailed approach for each component can be found in Appendix D.

8. Being adept at delivering timely and accurate information in crisis situations.

The delivery of timely and accurate information before, during and after an incident is a critical component of crisis and emergency management. Bemidji School District administration has assessed school crisis communications needs, identified available technology, and matched appropriate high- and low-technology applications as part of its prevention/mitigation phase of crisis management planning.

Before an incident occurs, Bemidji School District will develop a relationship with parents/guardians so that they trust and know how to access alerts and incident information. The school district will also develop, as part of its communications plan, templates that may be used prior to a crisis as well as in the event of an emergency. **The templates can be found in Appendix E.**

During a crisis incident, communicating effectively with district leadership and internal staff, as well as with parents/guardians of students directly involved in or affected by the crisis event will be a priority. As necessary, district and school staff will be notified when an incident occurs and will be kept informed as additional information becomes available and as plans for management of the situation evolve. In addition, the district superintendent or designee will fulfill the role of keeping the public informed about the crisis while maintaining the privacy of students and ensuring as little interruption of the educational process as possible. **Strategies for communicating with internal and external stakeholders and templates for statements/press releases to the media, including standard procedures and protocols, have been developed and may be found in Appendix F.**

After an incident, ISD 31 leadership will recognize and communicate that while the crisis is over, the process of emergency management has NOT ended. Thus, as a part of the recovery process, district leaders will debrief, identify lessons learned, and evaluate weaknesses that became evident in the emergency management plan. District administrators will revise the plan accordingly.

Appendices

Appendix A

Communications Objectives & Strategies

All communications will be strategic and proactive at the district, building and individual levels.

- Develop a communication plan for the district.
- Develop a communication plan for each school.
- Establish communication guidelines and expectations for administrators, faculty and staff.
- Communicate the rationale behind important decisions.
- Communicate key messages internally first.
- Conduct regular research on communication and marketing efforts.
- Identify and frame issues to ensure clear, consistent messaging.
- Create a fact sheet that contains important information for the district and each school.

Improve internal communication systems to reach all staff.

- Provide regular opportunities for face-to-face communication.
- Improve message timeliness and consistency.
- Give the ISD 31 Strategic Plan a high profile.
- Continue to develop electronic communication with employees.
- Provide regular updates regarding facilities, programs, and staffing, to keep staff informed.
- Express appreciation for staff efforts, accomplishments, and successes.

Expand communication with parents and the community by creating new communication platforms and revising current communication vehicles.

- Provide regular opportunities for face-to-face communication
- Emphasize direct communication with stakeholders.

New Communication Vehicles

- Monthly district e-Newsletter.
- District Facebook platform.
- District Twitter platform.

- Vendor-provided online communications tools. (*Let's Talk by K12 Insight*).
- Web-based tools for showcasing the accomplishments of ISD 31 alumni.
- District Flickr page to organize and display school photos.
- District YouTube page to show parents what is happening in the district (educational initiatives, arts, sports) and incorporate more video as a communication vehicle. Perhaps the audio-video academy class could produce this project.

Revised Communication Vehicles

- Expand communication with community members who are not parents.
- Revise the website to meet the needs of students, parents, teachers, and community.

Develop new methods for expanding public engagement/outreach strategies.

- Increase the accessibility of school board members at meetings.
- Engage alumni and build relationships with them. Create an ISD 31 alumni program.
- Expand opportunities for parents to get involved by creating community advisory committees and focus groups.
- Increase the accessibility of school board members at meetings.
- Expand connections with families by having district/building level concierge services to meet with families and show them around school buildings.

Provide communication-related training for administrators and staff every year.

- Add a communication component to staff orientation/in-service.
- Offer training for principals on improving school-home and home-school communication
- Provide staff training and support for customer service ("front-line") efforts.
- Offer teacher in-service training on effective parent-teacher conferences and open house presentations.
- Offer staff training in preparing effective school newsletters and website design best practices.

Keep website content fresh by adding new stories/updates every week.

- Keep content fresh, interesting and relevant.
- Emphasize the school district's mission
- Incorporate marketing materials on the website.
- Use more interactive, dynamic content along with multi-media to engage users as the website develops.
- Continue to develop and support individual school websites.
- Keep staff apprised of website updates and enhancements and provide training as needed.

Develop a branding/marketing program to establish ISD 31 as a quality district.

- Develop a stronger web and social media presence.
- Develop guidelines for offering school tours.
- Offer information for real estate agents.
- Develop an exit survey for families leaving the district and for graduates.
- Develop information/marketing materials for multiple purposes.

The majority of ISD 31's communication strategies are ongoing. Once in place, they require time and attention to maintain. It is important that the Communications Strategic Team does not lose the effectiveness of a communication initiative that has been implemented. All strategies should be planned, coordinated, and launched with the commitment of time and effort necessary to maintain and revise as needed.

Different Communicators for Different Purposes

Superintendent or School Board

Superintendent

- Voice of the District
- Expertise
- Closely aligned with system (and often the status quo)
- Hired, responsible to board
- Delivers all news

Board Members

- Voice of community leadership
- Idealism
- Closely aligned with parents or other external groups
- Elected, responsible to voters
- Delivers mostly good news

Appendix C

Key Messaging Components

Media Outlets

- Newspapers
- Radio
- TV
- Internet
- Facebook
- Twitter
- Instagram
- Mail
- Email
- Gatherings
- Board meetings
- Word of mouth

Materials

- Videos
- Fact sheets
- PPT
- Blogs
- FAQs
- Mailers
- Posters
- Speeches

Themes

- Achievement
- Adaptation
- New employees
- Classroom activities
- Recognition/Awards
- Strategic planning
- Financial management
- Problem-solving
- Risk management

Appendix D

In Times of Crisis/Conflict, Effective Communication is Vital

1. **Listen:** Listen carefully and pause after listening.
2. **Reassure:** Let the other person know that his or her perspective is important.
3. **Validate (The emotional state):**
Connect with the right (the emotional part of the brain) before redirecting with the left (logical part of the brain).
4. **Respond:** An explanation, not a defense statement of what actually occurred.
5. **Repair:** A heartfelt apology for whatever role you or ISD 31 may have played in the situation (even if you don't believe you or ISD 31 were in the wrong).
6. **Resolve:** Coming to terms with what happened and collaborating to find alternative ways of acting to prevent future disruptions of the same type.

Appendix E

Communication Tools Prior to a Crisis

(The following pages include samples of messages for parents in the event of an emergency)

SAMPLE TEMPLATES FOR PARENT COMMUNICATION

RE: EMERGENCY PICK-UP Parent Procedures for Picking up Children in an Emergency

In a letter or as part of the school parent handbook, the school should inform parents, in writing, about the proper procedures to follow when picking up a child/children in emergency situations requiring a lockdown, shutdown or evacuation of the school. It is assumed that bus transportation will be provided; however, many parents will want to pick up their children and the provisions listed below apply to such situations.

Among the types of information that might be contained in the letter are:

- Emphasize that school is one of the safest places that students may be located during most crises or natural disasters.
- Assurance that emergency procedures have been established. Include a general description of the procedures.
- Assurance that students will be kept at school until the crisis is determined to be over.
 - For example, a chemical spill may delay student release when there is risk of exposure.
- Notification that under certain circumstances, students may be evacuated to another site.
 - The notification will include an explanation of how parents will be informed about the evacuation, as well as ways that parents may learn where their child will be.
- A request to NOT telephone the school and tie-up the few telephone lines that will be needed for emergency use. (Where capabilities exist, status reports might be posted on the school or school district website).
- Notification that students will be released to parents who come to get them and a reminder of procedures for release to other authorized parties.

SAMPLE PRE-INCIDENT PARENT COMMUNICATIONS

(May be published in parent/student handbooks or mailed to parents)

SAMPLE NOTIFICATION TO PARENTS REGARDING SCHOOL EVACUATIONS

Because of (name of incident) at (school name here), the students, faculty and staff have been evacuated to an alternate location as a preliminary measure. Students and staff of (School Name Here) have been relocated to (New Location Name Here).

(Repeat this information for as many schools as may be involved.)

Parents are instructed to pick up their children at (name of alternate location). Do not attempt to pick up children at (name of regular school). Please meet your child at (name of the alternate site) located at (address). All other schools and school facilities are unaffected. Parents and citizens are urged not to interfere in the operation of those schools by calling on the telephone or by personal visits. Your cooperation in this matter is expected and appreciated.

SAMPLE NOTIFICATION TO PARENTS REGARDING LOCKDOWNS

All school personnel have been trained in lockdown procedures. In the event of a lockdown, ISD 31 personnel will be doing their best to ensure that all students are held in a safe location on campus. Our goal is safe care, custody, and accountability of all students.

In a lockdown, we will not be able to answer incoming phone calls or make outside calls. Within minutes we will be assisted by law enforcement, who will secure the neighboring streets and the building perimeter. No one, including parents, will be allowed near the school during a lockdown.

Students will be kept inside locked classrooms with the blinds drawn. No one will be allowed to leave the classrooms/secure areas on campus until the lockdown is lifted. All students and faculty/staff will remain in lockdown mode until local law enforcement lifts the lockdown.

When the lockdown is lifted, parents may come to school to pick up their children.

Appendix F

Communication Tools During a Crisis

External Communications to Parents

Bemidji Area Schools will communicate with parents during an incident by:

Disseminating information via Skylert, emails and radio announcements to inform parents about exactly what is known to have happened. In addition, as much as feasible, messaging will include:

- How the district or school is implementing Emergency Operating Plans to manage phone calls and parents who arrive at school.
- How the school and school district are handling the situation.
- Information regarding possible reactions of their children and ways to talk with them.
- Phone numbers, web site addresses, or a recorded hotline where families can receive updated incident information.
- Information for families and students regarding when and where school will resume.

SAMPLE PARENT NOTIFICATION REGARDING A BUS ACCIDENT

Dear Parents:

This morning, prior to school, there was an accident involving a school bus and (_____). There were known injuries to the passengers of (_____). The students on Bus # _____ witnessed the aftermath of the accident, but were not involved in it.

The children from the bus involved in the accident were taken (name of site or location) by the (name of school or district personnel). The students were asked if they were injured in any way and their parents were then contacted. Your child, because of being on Bus # _____ may show delayed reaction to the accident.

Please be alert over the next several days to symptoms of delayed reaction, including:

- A desire to be alone, unusually quiet.
- Loss of appetite.
- Problems with sleeping, nightmares.
- Difficulty with concentration.
- Crying.
- Angry outburst, short temper.

- Headaches, upset stomach.

If your child exhibits any physical complaints, please contact (principal's name) to fill out an accident report. The school will offer support services for students needing help dealing with the accident. We will also provide counseling services to parents to assist them in helping their children to cope. Please don't hesitate to call if you have any questions or concerns. (Provide school phone number.)

Sincerely,

School Principal

SAMPLE PARENT NOTIFICATION REGARDING THE DEATH OF A STUDENT

Dear Parents:

Yesterday, we learned that one of our (___) graders, _____, died while in the hospital (or other scenario). _____ had a/an (explain incident) during the (provide time frame). Complications set in after his/her parents took him/her home and he/she was taken back to the hospital where he/she died yesterday afternoon. (Or other scenario)

Today, at school, each teacher read a short message about _____ to his/her class. We discussed what happened and how _____ died. Our guidance counselor and our school psychologist were available throughout the day to talk with any student that may have had a particularly difficult time dealing with the news.

Any death is difficult for children to understand. _____'s death is particularly difficult due to his/her young age and its unexpectedness. We recommend that you take some time to discuss _____'s death with your child. We suggest allowing your child to talk about how he/she feels and any fears or concerns he/she may have as a result of hearing this news. We are enclosing a list of suggestions to help you talk with your child about _____'s death and/or the death of any loved one.

If you feel that your child would benefit from talking with our guidance counselor or our school psychologist, please call us at the school and share your concerns.

Sincerely,

School Principal

SAMPLE COMMUNICATIONS TO STAFF AND STUDENTS

Internal Communications to School Employees

Faculty and staff will be notified when an incident occurs and kept informed as additional information becomes available and as plans for management of the situation evolve. The following practices will be utilized to disseminate information **internally** when appropriate:

Telephone Tree: A telephone tree is a simple, widely used system for notifying staff of

an incident when they are not at school. The tree originates with the principal, who contacts the members of the Incident Management Team. Team members, in turn, will contact groups of staff (teachers, administrators, and support staff).

ISD 31 News: This is a tool for providing immediate information in the form of an email to all staff members.

Skylert: If time allows, Skylert can be used to produce and distribute information through mass phone calls, emails, and text messages. While this approach takes more time, it ensures great reliability that the information will be received since it includes calls to cell and landlines and includes text messages along with emails.

Morning Faculty Meeting: As appropriate, updated information about an incident will be presented at the morning faculty meeting. Any new procedures for the day will also be reviewed at this time.

End-of-Day Faculty Meeting: As appropriate, updated information and a review of the day's events will be presented at the end-of-day meeting. Staff will also have the opportunity to address any misinformation or rumors.

ANNOUNCEMENT OF A STUDENT SUICIDE

TO: School Staff

FROM: Principal

SUBJECT: (Crisis)

DATE:

I regret to inform you about sad news. (Name of Student) committed suicide early/late (day). As a faculty, we extend our sympathy to (student's) family and friends.

Please let your teachers know if you would like to talk to a counselor or other staff member today.

Funeral services for John will be held in _____ and there will not be a memorial service in this area. Expressions of sympathy may be sent to (name and address).

INITIAL ANNOUNCEMENT OF A TRAGIC EVENT

TO:

FROM:

"We have just been advised of a tragedy involving a member(s) of our school. I am sad to announce that _____ has died/has been in a serious accident. As soon as we have more information, we will pass it on to you. People will be available in the building to help those of you who need extra support in dealing with this situation. Your teachers will advise you of the location and times available for this support."

"As soon as we know the family's/families' wishes regarding _____ we will share that information with you. We ask that all students remain in their classrooms and adhere to their regular schedules."

External Communications to Media

Bemidji Area Schools will communicate with the media during an incident by:

- Designating a Public Information Officer.
- Establishing an off-campus briefing area for media representatives.
- Determining the need to establish or participate in a Joint Information Center
- Coordinating messages with the principal and site leadership team.
- Requesting media contacts broadcast Bemidji Area School's external communications plans, including the information hotline for parents and guardians.

It is important to provide five messages to the media during any crisis:

1. What we DO know.
2. What we DON'T know.
3. What we are doing to find out what we don't know.
4. When we will know what we need to know.
5. Where people should go to find out what they need to know.

ISD 31 employees are to refer all requests for information and questions to the designated spokesperson or Joint Information Center (if established).

3. Rumor Control

In addressing rumors, the most effective strategy is to provide facts as soon as possible. To combat rumors, Bemidji Area Schools will:

- Provide appropriate information to internal groups including administrators, teachers, students, custodians, secretaries, instructional assistants, food service staff, and bus drivers. These people are primary sources of information and are likely to be contacted in their neighborhoods, at grocery stores, etc.
- Hold a faculty/staff meeting before staff members are allowed to go home so that what is (and is not) known can be clearly communicated.
- Designate and brief personnel who are answering calls to help control misinformation.
- Conduct briefings for community representatives directly associated with the school.

Enlist the help of the media to provide frequent updates to the public, particularly providing accurate information where rumors need to be dispelled.

SAMPLE MEDIA COMMUNICATIONS

SAMPLE PRESS RELEASE ABOUT A BUS ACCIDENT

DATE:

TO: Media Outlets

FROM:

SUBJECT: Morning Bus Accident

This morning at approximately ____ a.m. school bus #____ was involved in an accident at the intersection of _____ and _____.

A total of ____ students were on the bus at the time of the accident. Some students suffered bumps and bruises as a result of the collision. Emergency crews were dispatched to the scene of the accident, and all students were checked over at the scene. All students were released to their parents or sent to their schools. No students needed to be transported to the emergency room.

The driver of the car involved in the accident was taken by ambulance to the emergency room.

We want to thank the emergency responders for their excellent assistance during the aftermath of the accident.

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SAMPLE NOTIFICATION TO PARENTS REGARDING SCHOOL EVACUATION

DATE:

TO: Media Outlets

FROM:

SUBJECT: School Evacuation

Because of (name of incident) at (school name here), the students, faculty and staff have been evacuated to an alternate location as a preliminary measure. Students and staff of (School Name Here) have been relocated to (New Location Name Here).

Parents are instructed to pick up their children at (name of alternate location). Parents are also asked not to pick up children at (name of regular school). Parents should meet their children at (name of the alternate site) located at (address). All other schools and school facilities are unaffected. Parents and residents are urged not to interfere in the operation of those schools by calling on the telephone or by personal visits. Cooperation in this matter is appreciated.

SAMPLE PRESS RELEASE ABOUT A STUDENT WALKOUT

DATE:

TO: Media Outlets

FROM:

SUBJECT: Student Walkout

It has come to our attention that rumors are being circulated in the Bemidji Area that a student walk-out is being planned because students were suspended over wearing clothing depicting the American Flag. We would like to state that no students were suspended or disciplined for wearing such clothing.

We have also heard that people from the community are planning to support a walk out this afternoon. We are asking that people NOT come to the high school over a walk-out that is not occurring. Doing so would disrupt the learning environment of our students.

Communication Tools After a Crisis

After the safety and status of staff and students have been assured, and emergency conditions have abated following an incident, staff/faculty will assemble to support the restoration of the school's educational programs. Defining mission-critical operations and staffing will be a starting point for the recovery process. Collecting and disseminating information will facilitate the recovery process.

After an incident, Bemidji Area School administrators will:

- Schedule and attend an open question-and-answer meeting for parents and guardians as soon as possible.
- Conduct public meetings as needed. These meetings are designed to provide the opportunity for people to ask questions and receive accurate information.

After an incident, the staff/faculty teams will:

- Conduct a comprehensive assessment of the physical and operational recovery needs.
- Assess physical security, data access, and all other critical services (e.g., plumbing, heating electrical).
- Examine critical information technology assets and personnel resources, and determine the impact on the school operations for each asset and resource that is unavailable or damaged.
- Document damaged facilities, lost equipment and resources, and special personnel expenses that will be required for insurance claims and requests for state and federal Assistance.
- Provide detailed facilities data to the school district office so that district personnel can estimate temporary space reallocation needs and strategies.
- Arrange for ongoing status reports during the recovery activities to: a) estimate when the educational program can be fully operational; and b) identify special facilities, equipment, and personnel issues or resources that will facilitate the resumption of classes.
- Educate school personnel, students, and parents on available crisis counseling services.

After an incident, the school district will:

- Identify recordkeeping requirements and sources of financial aid for state and federal disaster assistance.
- Establish absentee policies for teachers/students after an incident.
- Establish an agreement with mental health organizations to provide counseling to students and their families after an incident.
- Develop alternative teaching methods for students unable to return immediately to classes: virtual classes, telegroup tutoring, etc.

- Create a plan for conducting classes when facilities are damaged (e.g., alternative sites, half-day sessions, portable classrooms).
- Seek stakeholder input on prevention and mitigation measures that can be incorporated into short-term and long-term recovery plans.

V. COMMUNICATION TOOLS

Some common internal and external communication tools that Bemidji Area Schools may use include the following:

- **Standard telephone:** Bemidji Area Schools may designate a school telephone number as a recorded “hotline” for parents to call for information during incidents. The goal is to keep other telephone lines free for communication with first responders and others.
- **Mobile/Cell Phones communication technology:** Mobile devices may be the only tool working when electric service is out; they are useful to faculty/staff enroute to or from a site.
- **Skylert mass communications system:** Skylert can be used to produce and distribute information through mass phone calls, emails, and text messages. While this approach takes more time, it ensures great reliability that the information will be received since it includes calls to cell and landlines and includes text messages along with emails.
- **Intercom systems:** The intercom system includes teacher-initiated communication with the office using a handset rather than a wall-mounted speaker.
- **Bullhorns and megaphones:** A battery-powered bullhorn is part of the school’s emergency to-go kit to address students and staff who are assembling outside the school. Procedures governing storage and use will help ensure readiness for use.
- **Two-way radio:** Two-way radios provide a reliable method of communication between rooms and buildings at a single site. All staff will be trained to understand how to operate the two-way radio.
- **Computers:** A wireless laptop computer may be used for communication both within the school and to other sites. Email may be a useful tool for updating information for staff, other schools in an affected area, and the district superintendent. An assigned staff member(s) will post information such as school evacuation, closure, or relocation on the home page of the school and district Website.
- **Fax machines:** Possible uses include off-campus accidents where lists of students and staff members involved, their locations, and needed telephone numbers can be quickly and accurately communicated. Medical information, release forms, and authorizations include the designated fax number.
- **Alarm systems:** Bells or buzzers are in place and sound in different ways to signal different types of incidents – for example, fire or special alert (with instructions to follow). All staff/faculty, support staff, students, substitutes, and volunteers should be trained on what the sounds mean and how to respond to them.
- **Whistles:** Whistles should be included in crisis kits in order to signal a need for immediate attention or assistance.