K-12 CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS READINESS CHECKLIST

15 questions every school should answer before the first parent text arrives

In a school crisis, families often hear from their children or from social media before they hear from the school. The schools that keep their community's trust decided who speaks, what they can say and how fast families hear it, long before they needed to.

> **How to use it:** Answer each question honestly with a yes or a no. Every "no" is a gap that rumor and misinformation will rush to fill. Count your "yes" answers and find your score on page 2.

1. PLAN AND PEOPLE — BEFORE ANYTHING HAPPENS

01 **Do we have a written crisis communications plan reviewed in the last 12 months?**
Covering violence, threats, staff misconduct, cyber events and AI-generated images
☐ Yes ☐ No

02 **Is there a clear trigger for activating the plan, plus a 24/7 notification tree?**
Who gets called, in what order and at any hour, with a backup for every role
☐ Yes ☐ No

03 **Does every crisis team role have a named owner and a trained backup?**
Decision maker, spokesperson, family liaison, staff communications and social media
☐ Yes ☐ No

04 **Has our superintendent or head of school been media trained in the last year?**
With at least one trained alternate who has practiced on camera and under pressure
☐ Yes ☐ No

2. PRIVACY, SAFETY AND THE LAW — RULES THAT SHAPE EVERY WORD

05 **Do our spokespeople know what FERPA and law enforcement allow us to say?**
Student privacy limits what a school can release about any individual student[3]
☐ Yes ☐ No

06 **Have legal counsel approved our message templates in advance?**
A defined review path keeps the first message on schedule and protects the school
☐ Yes ☐ No

07 **Have we agreed with local police on how joint statements work?**
Who speaks first, who confirms facts and how briefings are coordinated
☐ Yes ☐ No

08 **Do we have a plan for hoax threats, swatting calls and AI-generated images?**
Including when and how to tell families, and what not to repeat
☐ Yes ☐ No

WHY IT MATTERS NOW

235
U.S. school shootings recorded in 2025[1]

51%
of districts reported a cyber incident in the past year[2]

67%
of parents knew of no school policy on explicit or deepfake images[4]

3. THE FIRST HOUR — SPEED AND ACCURACY

09 **Can we send a holding message to every family within 30 minutes, at any hour?** ☐ Yes ☐ No
Pre-written templates that confirm awareness, state safety steps and commit to updates

10 **Has our mass notification system been tested this semester?** ☐ Yes ☐ No
Text, email and voice together, with current contacts and translation

11 **Do we have one update page ready to go live in minutes?** ☐ Yes ☐ No
A single source of truth for families, staff and reporters, updated in time order

12 **Can we monitor social media and parent group chats for rumors in real time?** ☐ Yes ☐ No
Video and rumors often reach families before the school's first message does

4. STAFF, FAMILIES AND PRACTICE — BEYOND DAY ONE

13 **Do staff hear from leadership before families and the media do?** ☐ Yes ☐ No
Teachers, coaches, bus drivers and front office staff know what to say, and what to refer

14 **Have we run a tabletop drill with a simulated media response in the last year?** ☐ Yes ☐ No
Ideally alongside our existing lockdown, evacuation and reunification drills

15 **Do we have crisis communications counsel on call, with an agreement in place?** ☐ Yes ☐ No
A crisis is the worst possible moment to begin a new relationship with a PR firm

YOUR SCORE

READY
13 to 15 "yes" answers

Your foundation is in place. Keep it current with annual reviews and drills.

EXPOSED
9 to 12 "yes" answers

Each gap is where rumors take hold. Close them before a real crisis tests you.

AT RISK
8 or fewer "yes" answers

Your first message to families would be written under pressure. Bring in crisis support now.

WANT A SECOND SET OF EYES ON YOUR PLAN? REQUEST A SCHOOL CRISIS READINESS REVIEW.

Red Banyan helps school districts, private and independent schools, and their boards prepare for the moments that matter most.

CONTACT RED BANYAN

Go deeper: The Full K-12 Guide | Crisis Resource Center | School Crisis Response Plan Guide

Sources: [1] K-12 School Shooting Database (any gun brandished or fired on school property). [2] CIS and CoSN, The State of K-12 Cybersecurity 2026. [3] U.S. Department of Education, FERPA. [4] Center for Democracy and Technology, 2024 parent survey. For general information only; not legal advice.

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