

Leveraging Social Media in an Emergency

SCRIPT for Sparkol video – about 6 minutes long

Diane's voice:

Have you noticed how social media is everywhere these days? Students use different social media apps to communicate with their friends and family every day. Perhaps you use social media in your personal or professional life? But how could we use it in an emergency situation?

Social media has the power to reach hundreds and even thousands of people in just a few seconds. In an emergency situation, when phone lines may be jammed, texting or social media posts could be some of the best ways to stay in touch and share information.

What information people share and how they share could make the difference between a clear, comforting message and chaos and panic. Since we know students and staff will likely have personal devices with them in an emergency, we want to help people make wise choices during an emergency situation.

First, how will the district communicate in an emergency situation? In the event of a serious emergency, the district can activate the Emergency Operations Center at the Community Resource Center. This is a location as well as a plan with staff assigned to different roles, depending on the emergency. The Emergency Operations Center includes computers, phones, supplies and many people at the Community Resource Center that can be ready to operate within minutes. It also has the capability for a call-center, when needed, to take incoming calls with questions, reports of missing persons or resources that could help the situation.

In an emergency situation, the district will communicate with students' families through the communication system, which can send text, phone and email messages. The messages can go to staff, too, reaching more than 75,000 phones all together within minutes. The district also posts announcements on the district website and posts on the Everett Public Schools Facebook and Twitter pages.

We partner with Sno-Pac 911 and SNOCOM, the sheriff's department, local police, fire and other emergency responders to stay in contact in an emergency. Many schools have also begun using an emergency app called RAVE 911, which is directly linked to 911 services.

Crystal's voice:

Hi, I'm Crystal Ayco and I am the Operations Coordinator at Sno-Pac 911. This year, we started using a mobile application called RAVE 911 with several schools in your district. Staff can use this button to call us at 911 from their cell phone or call 911 from any landline in the school. When any staff person hits this button on their phone, or calls from a land line, it calls us at 911. Key people in your district THEN get a message that you called us. Depending on the emergency, we can text everyone in your school that has SHARED their cell phone number with Rave 911. The app helps keep everyone in the loop if there is an emergency.

If you have important information about an incident or a report of injured people, call 911 by using the RAVE 911 app or from any phone. However, sometimes in a widespread emergency, the phones lines get jammed quickly. What we learned in the Marysville Pilchuck incident was that several people tried making calls using their cell phones and could not get out. The local cell phone towers were inundated with too many calls at the same time. So keep your phone calls to friends and family to a minimum. Texting and posting to social media may be a better way to let your friends and family know you're ok because they use different lines than phone calls.

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Diane's voice:

Now you know how the district will communicate in an emergency, so how can you help? If there is an emergency and your school is in a lockdown, when and if it is safe to do so,

DO:

Suggest to students that they text their family to say they are ok.

DO NOT:

Have students include details in their texts. Texts should **not** include students' specific locations or information about the incident.

DO:

Suggest that students tell their parents to watch for a message from the district with more information, which might include reunification information or further instructions, if needed.

DO NOT:

Have students arrange their own pick-up location with their parents.

DO:

Let students check in with parents via text or social media from time to time if lockdown continues for a long time.

DO NOT:

Have students take pictures and post them on social media.

DO:

Encourage students to share the district call center number to share or get more information. We'll let you know when that phone number and call center are activated.

DO NOT:

Have students tell their parents to call the school or call the student while in a lockdown.

What else should you know?

Let us help you. If you or your students are approached by the news media, direct them to speak with the district spokesperson, Mary Waggoner. You do not have to make a comment. Please remind students, who might be excited by the media attention, that they don't have to comment either. If they do, they should leave out details about the incident or those who might have been injured. Law enforcement should be the ones to confirm any injuries and to contact the family members of those people.

Now you know how YOU can help prevent social media fires. Instead, plant helpful information and direct students and parents to reliable, knowledgeable sources of information. Thanks for doing your part and helping students use social media wisely in an emergency.