

Benchmark – Adverse Situation

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EAD-536: Strategic Leadership and Management in the Principalship

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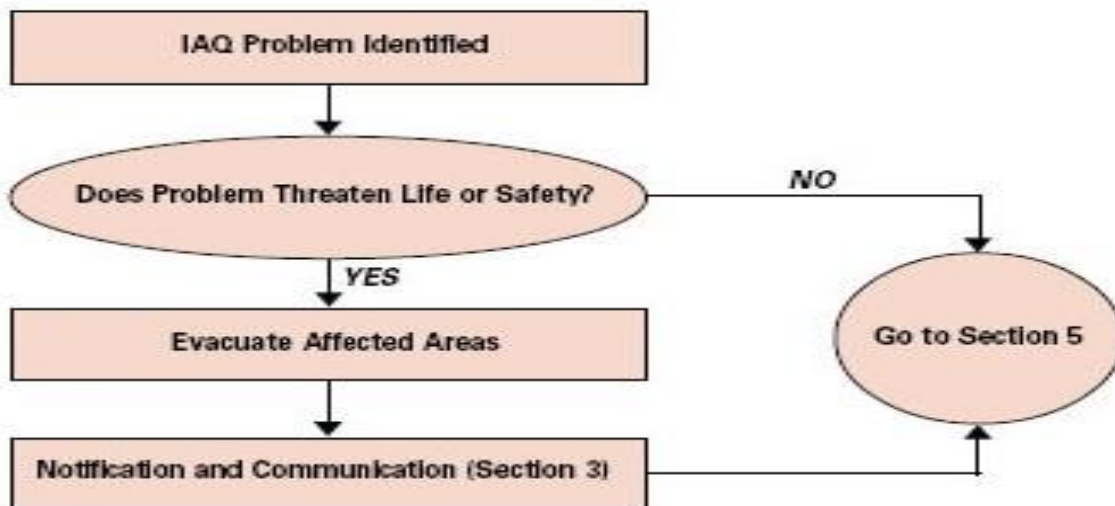
Due date: July 5, 2023

Management and Operational Systems

- **Identify the main decisions that must be made.**

Before a school leader can make any good decision, he/she needs solid information.

The first step that must be taken is to find out how severe the air conditioning problem is and how long the outage may last. The United States Environmental Protection Agency says the initial assessment in any situation that threatens IAQ (internal air quality) is if it's serious enough to require an emergency response (USEPA, 2023). While the IAQ typically refers to types of inside air pollution in schools, a scenario such as this one involving rising temperatures and lack of ventilation would certainly apply. See the responses to an IAQ problem outlined in the chart below:



“Some IAQ incidents require an immediate response,” like a chemical spill or high carbon monoxide levels. Others can be addressed by an in-house team which is covered in Section 5 of the EPA manual.

I would gather my leadership team for a briefing in either case. If this is an issue that can be repaired quickly, in the next 30 minutes or so for instance, there is no need to take any additional steps beyond making an announcement that the air conditioning is off temporarily but is being repaired and that things should be back to normal very soon. However, if this is a more serious issue with the HVAC, then action needs to be taken right away to first, inform the district of the issue and get its feedback on how they would like to proceed. If this is a situation that requires school to be dismissed, then I would gather my school leadership team and go over what I hope has been a pre-planned scenario to allow students to go home early. If the district says this is a situation that needs to be managed internally until the end of the day, I will still gather my school leadership team, but our discussions would center on how to communicate to the faculty, staff and students a plan to stay open and stay cool for the remainder of the day.

- **Identify additional information needed to inform your decision.**

This situation calls for working closely with the facilities manager on the exact problem, who can fix it and how long that fix will take. As noted above, a brief outage (30 minutes or less) can be tolerated even in Arizona’s blistering heat with relatively few accommodations. Anything longer than that would require more extreme changes in the schedule, up to and including early dismissal if approved by the district.

Human, Fiscal, and Technological Resources

- **Organize staff to ensure the safety of students and consistency of response.**

For the sake of this assignment, I am going to assume that the HVAC fix cannot be done immediately, and repairs might take the rest of the day, or several days or more. As a forward-looking leader in California, a state known for its high temperatures, I would have first checked with my facilities supervisor to make sure preventative maintenance was done on the units and everything was working correctly before the start of school. Some of this maintenance could include what a district in Texas does, making sure filters are changed three times a year to reduce the number of airborne contaminants but also help units run smoother, longer (Gibbons, 2022).

I would also have portable HVAC systems, or “spot coolers” that could be deployed to parts of the campus that need it most. For example, classrooms that are in trailers or those with outward facing windows. I would ask my assistant principal to do a “safety check” of the building to determine which classrooms need service the most and have the equipment deployed to those classrooms. I will instruct my office secretary to prepare an email to send to staff advising them of the situation, and what is being done to resolve it. It would also ask them to notify me if any students or staff are suffering from specific heat-related issues. The email would also advise teachers of any changes in brunch or lunch service, for example, students would be allowed to eat inside the gym where the HVAC system might still be operational. I would also prepare an email to send out to parents apprising them of the situation and what is being done to resolve it. The email may include instructions on picking up students if that is an option that meets the district’s approval.

- **Identify additional resources needed to ensure the safety of students and staff.**

Because this is a district in Phoenix, it has undoubtedly confronted issues revolving the malfunction of air conditioning systems before and has a plan to address them. Again, after consulting from the district for their approval, I would certainly arrange for misting stations to be used outside at recess, coordinate a shipment of fans to classrooms, and bottled water to the campus to be given out to any student or staff member that needed it free of charge. It is also important to respond to this as a community with resilience and humor. As a principal in any Arizona school, I would hope to have the forethought of making bandanas that could be soaked in water and worn that say something like, “Jaguars (or the school’s mascot) can beat the heat!” and pass them out to students and staff as a show of solidarity in challenging times.

Safety and Welfare of Students and Staff

- **Identify legal rulings regarding the safety and welfare of students and staff to consider in making a decision.**

According to the United Federation of Teachers, “there are currently no temperature guidelines requiring schools to use air conditioning” and temperature complaints are addressed on a case-by-case basis (UFT, 2023). The state of New Jersey tried to address the issue by marshaling support for a bill that would require all schools to have temperature-controlled classrooms (Walker, 2018). The fact that no state has temperature guidelines for classrooms certainly doesn’t absolve school leadership of addressing the issue because student safety and well-being should always be our top concern and research confirms that hot weather can have a direct impact on how many students learn and perform on standardized tests (Barnum, 2017)

- **Identify district policy regarding the safety and welfare of students and staff that might affect a decision.**

Orinda Union School District has a short three sentence directive that addresses the loss or failure of utilities. The directive gives complete authority to the administrator or designee to “initiate appropriate actions, which may include Sheltering-In-Place or evacuating the building (OUSD, 2019-20).

Collaboration with Faculty and Community

- **Identify possible stakeholders involved in the decision-making and/or affected by the recommended solution.**

Should the air conditioning issue become severe enough, the impacts would affect everyone on campus, the parents and neighbors around the facility should buses have to run early routes to pick up students if classes are dismissed. Stakeholders include the district, the school administration, students, faculty, and staff, as well as other district personnel including the superintendent and members of the maintenance and facilities department.

Solution and Rationale

- **Explain your solutions for addressing the situation.**

Assuming the temperatures are unbearably hot, and with the district’s permission, I believe the safest strategy is to end the day with an early dismissal until the campus HVAC problem can be resolved. This would include a school wide alert, an impromptu staff meeting, calls, and emails to parents, all with the approval of the district.

- **List action steps you would take to implement the solutions, including a timeline for implementing them.**

Steps to implementing an early heat release day:

1. 9:30-9:45am

Consult with facilities manager on the extent of the problem after personally surveying the classrooms and noticing dramatic spike in temperatures. When notified HVAC will need a thorough repair, call the leadership team, and inform them of the plan. Make sure that one assistant principal is in charge of fans and water distribution, another is charged with making sure the student dismissal from campus proceeds in an orderly fashion. I would have one school leader (AP) in the student/parent parking lot and assign a head counselor to station themselves at the bus stop to make sure students that early bus pickups go smoothly as well.

2. 10:15-10:30am

Call a school-wide staff meeting during mid-morning brunch and layout the problem, what's being done to rectify it and how the administration in consultation with the school district has decided to proceed. The faculty will need to know in detail how the procedure will be undertaken, including how each student will be accounted for before they are released from campus.

3. 10:30-10:45am

Notify parents/guardians in robocalls and emails that school will be let out early, preferably before lunch but maybe as late as 1pm. The email should have detailed plans

of how and where students will be able to be picked up during the early release and to monitor all communications from the school and the district as to how it will proceed with repairs and school restarting.

4. 12:30-1:00pm

Commence early release from school.

- **Provide a rationale for your proposed solutions. Explain how the solution protects the welfare and safety of students and staff, complies with laws, rights, and policies, and involves appropriate stakeholders.**

Even in mid-May temperatures in Phoenix can be scorching, and in fact, dangerous to people's health. Half-measures, like bringing in fans and bottles of water are only providing temporary relief and may not be helpful at all when the mercury rises during the hottest part of the day (1pm-3pm) There is no reason to jeopardize the welfare and safety of students and staff. Although in my research I was unable to find any specific ordinance or rule that addresses temperatures in classrooms, having grown up in Phoenix I know that temperatures become unbearable quickly which would make any effort to learn, or even concentrate on lessons virtually useless since all anyone would be thinking about was when the day would end.

References

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