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# Schools change emergency response codes to avoid confusion, ambiguity

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In Charleston County schools, "Code Red" is officially out for describing an emergency.

Instead, the district is ditching its color-coded emergency system for a set of plain language cues designed to minimize confusion and ambiguity.

The old method, used since 2006 and based on red, green and yellow alerts, would sometimes lead to more questions than answers from concerned parents.

The new labeling uses "clear, precise language and action items that schools can put into place," said Michael Reidenbach, the district's director of security and emergency management.

"Hopefully, this system is more intuitive," he said, adding it is more easily understandable for anyone who could be on a school campus.

The system went into practice Tuesday.

The five different responses in the new Standard Response Protocol are: lockout, lockdown, evacuate, shelter and hold.

The categories cover:

- **Lockout:** Get inside. Lock outside doors. (Called when there is a threat or hazard outside of the school building.)
- **Lockdown:** Locks, lights,

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**Michael Reidenbach,**  
Charleston County School District's  
director of security and emergency management

out of sight. (Called when there is a serious threat inside or immediately outside the building.)

■ **Evacuate:** To the announced location. (This is used when there is a need to move students from one location to another, away from danger.)

■ **Shelter:** Hazard and safety strategy. (Called when the need for personal protection is necessary, such as during a tornado or earthquake.)

■ **Hold:** In your classroom, clear the halls. (There may be situations which require students to stay in their classroom.)

Each has its own set of instructions for students and teachers to follow, but the actual response procedures have not been changed, district spokesman Andy Pruitt said.

"It simplifies things a lot better, so there's less of an anxiety and concern from the parents in the community about what's happening to school if they can better understand how we're putting out our response," Pruitt said.

Reidenbach agreed.

"Having the five options definitely gives us the ability to be more deliberate about the response and what's needed for that particular situation," he said.

The new program was made available by The "I Love U Guys" Foundation, a nonprofit aimed at improving school safety and security. It was founded in the wake of a deadly 2006 Colorado high school shooting in which a gunman took hostages, killed a student and shot himself in a standoff.

"You see districts right now having their own systems, kind of homegrown systems that are put into place to meet the needs of that particular district, and there is no national standard," Reidenbach said. "So this protocol fills one of those needs in that it does create a national standard that has been implemented at tens of thousands of schools across the country."

The program is offered at no cost to school districts.

District employees have been trained on the new protocol over the past several weeks, but Reidenbach's team has been working for more than a year to officially implement the new system.

Since the new standard uses plain language and clear instructions, it will be easier to understand for those who have not been through security training, such as campus visitors, Reidenbach said.

Patrick Martin, the co-founder of The Safe School Project, commended the district's decision to update its emergency response program.

"We applaud all these efforts that the district is putting into place to make our safety systems more practical, more common sense and more accessible," Martin said.

The change has also been endorsed by Board Member Todd Garrett.

"You've got so many things that can go on inside a school," he said. "(The program) is simpler and says clearly what we're doing and what people need to do, and the intent is just to find the best, quickest way to keep people safe."

More information about the new program can be found at [www.ccsdschools.com/srp](http://www.ccsdschools.com/srp).

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