

School Crisis Management: A Challenge of School Principals' Leadership

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"By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail."
- Benjamin Franklin

STUDENTS, the main body of school members, typically have the issues of immature mental development and relatively low self-protection ability. Despite numerous crisis prevention efforts made by educational authorities, schools, and third-sector organizations, on-campus crisis incidents continue to occur (Sokol et al., 2021). The principal, as the school leader, is held accountable for the safety of the campus, teachers, and students. The crises they need to tackle are associated with multiple factors, including social media, diversity of values, the complex parent-school relationship, and education policy and legislation. The scope of campus crises is continuously expanding, and their occurrence is increasingly random and abrupt. Powered by the internet, their impact even extends beyond the campus boundaries, disrupting the normal order of society.

School crises, according to the nature of their victims, are traditionally categorized into crises suffered by individual school members, crises afflicting the school population at large, and environmentally induced crises (Liang et al., 2021; Yang, 2023). The first category refers to damaging incidents that concerns a certain school member or a small number of teachers or students, such as student psychological crises (e.g., severe depression, anxiety, self-harm tendency), extreme acts triggered by major illnesses or family misfortunes, violent threats against teachers, and serious conflicts between school members. The second category involves a larger group of teachers and students, provoking collective emotional or behavioral responses. Examples include schoolwide health incidents (e.g., food poisoning and outbreaks of infectious diseases), group misbehavior (e.g., large-scale bullying perpetration, fights, and class boycotts), major safety accidents (e.g., fires and stampedes), and external violence intrusions (non-school members entering the campus with weapons to cause harm). An environmentally induced school crisis is a crisis triggered by external factors which are beyond the school's control and affect the entire school or even the entire community, such as a natural disaster (e.g., the earthquake,

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flood, typhoon), public event (e.g., a large-scale pandemic), the ripples of social unrest, and impact from major policy shifts. These school crises occur primarily within the physical environment of the school with relatively definite scope of impact, for most of which there are established management mechanisms

Nevertheless, as the use of social media grows in everyday life, the contexts of school crises have extended from physical to virtual spaces. School crises associated with digital and mobile technology use include but are not limited to the malicious spread of false information online regarding school management or the conduct of teachers and students, cyberbullying targeting individual school members, and devastating online sentiment triggered by severe campus incidents. Cyber-crises like these typically have three distinct characteristics. First, they may happen instantaneously, and information about them, powered by the internet, can spread rapidly, which renders it difficult for the school to make prompt reactions. Second, the spread of information on a cyber crisis is almost boundaryless, exposing it directly to the scrutiny of the public and inflicting overwhelming pressure on the school leaders, whereas the perpetrator of the crisis is not easy to trace. Third, online sentiment may instigate real-world actions, such as parents gathering to protest or journalists swarming outside the school gate, further escalating the situation and making it more difficult to manage.

As the contexts of school crises become increasingly complicated, requirements for school leaders' crisis management capabilities have also heightened. Today, relying solely on personal experience and intuition is far from sufficient for principals to successfully prevent and cope with school crises. There is a pressing need for a systematic and scientific framework of school crisis management capabilities to inform decision-making and guide action.

Crises in Schools and Crisis Management Skills of Principals in this issue, based on a review of relevant literature published between 2015 and 2025, explore the main types of crises school principals are likely to encounter in educational settings and identify the competencies they need possess to deal with them (ŞAHİN, 2026). A pronounced inadequacy of the study is that it treats "school principals" as a collective concept without accommodating factors like the education level, school type, and school size. Given the significant differences in crisis types, crisis prevention and intervention resources available, and legal responsibilities in crisis management between primary, secondary, and vocational schools, the principal crisis management competency framework advanced in the article has its limitations in practical application across different educational contexts despite its being theoretically grounded in a certain sense.

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