



JACKSON COUNTY
SCHOOLS

Learn Today, Lead Tomorrow

Cardiac Emergency Response Plan (CERP)

For Jackson County Schools

Date of Issue: September 10, 2025

Contents

Acknowledgements	3
Introduction	4
Model Cardiac Emergency Response Plan (CERP)	5
Purpose	5
List of Abbreviations	6
Definition of Sudden Cardiac Arrest (SCA)	5
Forming a Cardiac Emergency Response Team (CERT)	6
Automated External Defibrillator (AED) Equipment	7
Communication of the Cardiac Emergency Response Plan (CERP)	8
Training for CPR and AED Use	8
Integration of Local Emergency Medical Services (EMS) with the School Plan	8
Practice Drill for Cardiac Emergency Response	8
Annual Review of the Plan	9
CPR and AED Instruction for Secondary Students	9
Legal References	9
Additional References	9
Appendix	10
Resources for Schools	10

Acknowledgements

The Alabama Department of Education is grateful to the following partners for their contributions to the development, input, and review of this model plan.

Alabama State Department of Education
John Wesley Foster Act/ Act Number 2024-392
Senator Tim Melson Act/ Amended Code of Alabama 1975 § 16-40-8

American Heart Association - Alabama
North AL Team
RegionalAlabama@heart.org
(205) 510-1500

Project ADAM Alabama
Alabama LifeStart / Children's of Alabama
Julia Farmer, Program Coordinator
Austin Kane, MD, Co-Medical Director
Khalisa Syeda, DO, Co-Medical Director

Jackson County Board of Education
(256) 259 – 9500
Superintendent Jason Davidson
President Chad Gorham
Vice President Robert King
Member Angela Guess
Member Chris Knight
Member Mike Matthews

Introduction

The American Heart Association (AHA) reports more than 350,000 cardiac arrests occurring each year outside of the hospital settingⁱ. For children and adolescents under the age of 18 years old, an estimated 7,000 to 23,000 deaths occur each year due to a sudden cardiac arrest (SCA), with SCA becoming the leading medical cause of death in student athletes^{ii, iii}. Evidence has shown survival rates for a SCA event more than doubles with rapid initiation of cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and automated external defibrillation^{iv}.

In accordance with Alabama Act Number 2024-392, the John Wesley Foster Act, the Jackson County Board of Education has developed this model cardiac emergency response plan to support each individual school in adopting a written protocol for the preparation of and response to cardiac emergencies within schools and school sponsored events. This plan provides general guidance and best practices and can be adopted for use with a building-specific crisis management plan for emergency medical response.

This model CERP is the result of a collaborative effort between Alabama State Department Board of Education, Jackson County Board of Education, the American Heart Association of North Alabama, and Project ADAM Alabama/ Alabama LifeStart/ Children's of Alabama.

Alabama Act Number 2024-392, the John Wesley Foster Act, was signed by Governor Kay Ivey on August 19, 2024, stating public and nonpublic schools are required to develop and implement a cardiac emergency response plan. The cardiac emergency response plan must establish a cardiac emergency response team (CERT) to address a potential SCA event on school grounds and during school sponsored events. It is recommended that the plan be developed cooperatively with school administrators, school nurses, athletic director/trainer, teachers, students, legal guardians, community members, emergency medical responders, and any other appropriate persons or organizations. The Jackson County Board of Education should ensure that local emergency responders have access to the school district's building-specific crisis management plans which includes each individual school's CERP for responding to a SCA event. Each school will have an emergency medical response team and provide CERP training to school district staff, so they are prepared to assist in the event of a SCA.

The following plan procedures provide detailed guidance to schools for responding to a SCA through a CERP. The plan outlines key considerations to ensure a timely response that is comprehensive and includes forming a cardiac emergency response team (CERT); AED procurement, maintenance, and registry; CERP protocol; and recommendations for staff training and certification.

Definition of Sudden Cardiac Arrest (SCA)

The American Heart Association (AHA) defines sudden cardiac arrest (SCA) as a sudden and unexpected loss of heart function where the heart stops beating due to an irregular heart rhythm in persons who may or may not have been diagnosed with a heart condition. When the heart beats abnormally it affects its ability to pump blood which may lead to cardiac arrestⁱ. Without immediate response and treatment, the person may lose consciousness and collapse, leading to death within minutes.

Signs of sudden cardiac arrest may include one or more of the following:

- Not moving, unresponsive, or unconscious
- Not breathing normally (e.g. may have irregular breathing patterns, gasping or gurgling, or may not be breathing at all)
- Seizure or convulsion-like movements

It is important to note that SCA may also occur when a person collapses shortly following a firm, sudden, direct hit to the chest.

Model Cardiac Emergency Response Plan (CERP)

Jackson County Board of Education

(Date) Adopted by Jackson County Board of Education

(Date) Revised

Purpose

The model cardiac emergency response plan (CERP) was developed to provide Jackson County Schools with a comprehensive strategy for the preparation of and response to sudden cardiac arrest (SCA) in the school setting in accordance with Alabama Act Number 2024-392, the John Wesley Foster Act.

This adopted CERP should be included in a building level crisis management plan under crisis-specific procedures. Procedures for responding to cardiac emergencies may be adopted through the model CERP. After approval by the school board, an adopted plan will become an addendum to the crisis management policy.

List of Abbreviations

Abbreviations	Definitions
AED	automated external defibrillator
CERP	cardiac emergency response plan
CERT	cardiac emergency response team
CPR	cardiopulmonary resuscitation
EMS	emergency medical services
SCA	sudden cardiac arrest

Forming a Cardiac Emergency Response Team (CERT)

The school administrator in each building will select a cardiac emergency response team (CERT) that will be trained to respond to emergency medical situations. CERT members should be available and willing adults who have current CPR/AED certification from a nationally recognized organization. This team is responsible for developing, implementing, and annually reviewing the school's adopted CERP.

School administrators may consider including school nurses, physical

education teachers, athletic directors/trainers, coaches, staff overseeing recess, and any other staff who are present before, during, or after the school day. This team leads the emergency medical response, but it is important that all school staff are familiar with the CERP and their role in responding to a cardiac emergency. As an example, any staff member who witnesses a person unexpectedly collapse should know how to initiate a building's emergency medical response, call 9-1-1 to activate emergency medical services (EMS), and initiate hands-only CPR to an unresponsive person who is not breathing until a CPR-certified team member arrives at the scene.

Additional Considerations

To ensure a timely response, it is recommended that schools consider building CERTs with enough staff members to account for periodic absences and staff turnover. CERT members will be required to step away from their regular job duties to assist in a cardiac emergency and consideration should be given for classroom coverage in those instances. (Best practice recommendations suggest that a minimum of 10% of overall school staff, 50% of coaches, and 50% of physical educators should hold current CPR/AED certification.)

In addition to establishing team roles and responsibilities, communication is a critical component in the team's efficient emergency response. CERTs should determine a communication plan that includes two-way communication covering all areas of the school's campus, both inside and outside the facility. The communication plan should clearly state how staff members activate the CERT and EMS.

Automated External Defibrillator (AED) Equipment

Automated external defibrillators (AEDs) are devices used to analyze the heart's rhythm and, if necessary, deliver an electrical shock, to restore a normal rhythm. AEDs are lifesaving devices designed to be easy to use with visual and audio guidance.

Procurement

When school districts look to procure AEDs, several options may be considered to best meet the school's needs and budget. Options may include, but are not limited to, the following: direct purchase from manufacturers, medical supply distributors, government grants and funding, partnerships with local hospitals or health organizations, fundraising and community donations, nonprofit organizations, bulk purchasing through education cooperatives or consortiums, or online retailers.

Placement

AEDs should be stored in an unlocked case and installed in easily accessible areas of the school building like cafeterias and gymnasiums with the device's readiness indicator facing outward and visible. AEDs should have visible signage that clearly indicates the location of the device. AHA recommends that schools consider placing AEDs in accessible locations throughout the campus to allow for retrieval and delivery to the scene within 3 minutes^v.

Strong consideration should be given for AED availability at athletic practices and events. For larger campuses, schools may consider climate-controlled AEDs to be mounted outside near athletic fields. Schools may also consider including a site map with AED locations within the CERP.

It is best practice for schools to have adult and pediatric pads available in each case for use if needed. Considerations should also be given for including additional items like latex-free gloves, razor, scissors, and a CPR barrier mask.

Maintenance

Schools should consult with their district's health and safety or facilities team to determine best practices for proper installation and maintenance of AEDs, including a process for documenting regular safety checks to verify expiration dates for the device's pads and batteries and to ensure the device is functioning properly.

Registry

In the state of Alabama, registration of an acquired AED is not required; however, it is highly encouraged.

Communication of the Cardiac Emergency Response Plan (CERP)

The school's adopted CERP should be distributed broadly as a part of the building's overall crisis management plan to all staff and relevant local emergency responders at the start of each school year. School administrators may designate a CERT member as the person responsible for the updating and distribution of the CERP.

AHA recommends that the CERP protocol be posted near the AEDs and in classrooms, cafeterias, gymnasiums, restrooms, health offices, breakroom spaces, and in main offices ^{i, v}.

Training for CPR and AED Use

To implement the CERP, enough school staff should be trained in CPR and AED use by a nationally recognized organization to ensure timely response and minimally fulfill the CERT roles of CPR initiation, AED retrieval, and 911 notification. Certification for these team members should be renewed at least every two years. Strong consideration should also be given to training of coaching staff for school athletics.

Nationally recognized organizations like the American Heart Association, the American Red Cross, among others, provide training opportunities in a traditional classroom setting as well as blended instruction through online learning and hands-on, in-person practice and testing.

Best practice recommendations state that all school staff and coaches should annually review the school's CERP to increase understanding of how to recognize and respond to a cardiac arrest ^{i, v}.

Integration of Local Emergency Medical Services (EMS) with the School Plan

School administrators and CERT members should develop and implement the CERP in cooperation with relevant local emergency responders, school district health and safety officials, school nurses, athletic staff, and other members of the school or community medical team. The adopted CERP with locations of onsite AEDs should be provided, along with facility diagrams and site plans to first responders, as requested.

Practice Drill for Cardiac Emergency Response

The development and implementation of a CERP for schools is critical to saving lives, and research provides evidence that creating a CERP and conducting practice drills increases a person's chance of survival by 70% compared to less than 10% for those without ^{vi}.

For schools to be fully prepared to respond to a cardiac emergency, it is recommended that an annual drill at the start of the school year be incorporated into the CERP ^{iii, v, vii}. This allows the response team time to practice key elements of the response including effective communication, availability of CPR/AED certified responders, identification of roles and responsibilities, access to AEDs, and coordination with onsite and community medical responders.

CPR and AED Instruction for Secondary Students

The amended 1975 Alabama Code § 16-40-8, mandates public school districts must provide cardiopulmonary resuscitation and automatic external defibrillator instruction as part of their grade 9 to 12 curriculum for all students. Beginning with the 2025-2026 school year, instruction shall include the psychomotor skills necessary to perform CPR and use an AED. For the purposes of this section, the term “psychomotor skills” means the use of hands-on practice to support cognitive learning. This term does not include cognitive-only training

Annual Review of the Plan

Schools are encouraged to conduct an annual evaluation of the CERP, focusing on ways to improve the process for an appropriate and timely response. This evaluation may include post-event feedback from after-action reviews. At least annually, schools should review and update the CERP based on current evidence-based best practices for responding to a cardiac emergency.

Legal References

Alabama Statutes, Code § 6-5-332 ([The Good Samaritan Law](#))

Alabama Statutes, Code § 16-40-8 ([CPR/AED Instruction](#))

Alabama Statutes, Code § 6-5-332.3 ([Use of AED](#))

Alabama Statutes, Code 16-1-45 ([AED Requirements](#))

Alabama Act Number 2024-392 ([John Wesley Foster Act](#))

Additional References

1. Graham, R., McCoy, M. A., & Schultz, A. M., & Committee on the Treatment of Cardiac Arrest: Current Status Future Directions Board on Health Sciences Policy Institute of Medicine. (Eds.). (2015). *Strategies to improve cardiac arrest survival: A time to act*. National Academies Press.

Appendix

Resources for Schools

Table 1: Available resources for schools implementing a cardiac emergency response plan.

Organization	Provided Resource	Web Address
American Heart Association	Implementation guide to assist with developing action plans, practice drills, and evaluation materials including a school checklist	https://cpr.heart.org/en/training-programs/cardiac-emergency-response-plan-cerp
Project ADAM Alabama Lifestart	Free assistance in creation and implementation of a practiced CERP	https://www.childrensal.org/services/pediatric-cardiovascular-services/about-joseph-s-bruno-pediatric-heart-center/alabama
Parent Heart Watch	Toolkit templates and trainings for school and athletic staff, and programs providing AEDs to schools	https://parentheartwatch.org/resources/scaprevention/cardiac-emergency-response-plan/ https://parentheartwatch.org/programs/getcharged-up/
Sudden Cardiac Arrest Foundation	National funding resources for AEDs and school-based CPR/AED education programs	https://www.sca-aware.org/campus/fundingsources-for-schools

ⁱ American Heart Association. (2023). *Cardiac emergency response planning for schools: A policy statement 2023*. <https://www.heart.org/-/media/Files/About-Us/Policy-Research/Policy-Positions/CPR-and-AED/Cardiac-EmergencyPlanning-for-Schools.pdf> ⁱⁱ Harmon, K. G., Asif, I. M., Maleszewski, J. J., Owens, D. S., Prutkin, J. M., Salerno, J. C., Zigman, M. L., Ellenbogen, R., Rao, A. L., Ackerman, M. J., & Drezner, J. A. (2015). Incidence, cause, and comparative frequency of sudden cardiac death in National Collegiate Athletic Association athletes: A decade in review. *Circulation*, 132(1), 10-19. <https://doi.org/10.1161/CIRCULATIONAHA.115.015431> ⁱⁱⁱ Parent Heart Watch. (2023). *Out-of-hospital cardiac arrest in youth. Estimated from various sources*. <https://parentheartwatch.org/resources/incidence-of-sca-in-youth/>

^{iv} Sasson, C., Rogers, M. A., Dahl, J., Kellermann, A. L. (2010). Predictors of survival from out-of-hospital cardiac arrest: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Circ Cardiovasc Qual Outcomes*, 3(1):63-81. <https://doi.org/10.1161/circoutcomes.109.889576> ^v American Heart Association. (n.d.). *Cardiac emergency response plan-Schools*. <https://cpr.heart.org/en/trainingprograms/nation-of-heartsavers/cardiac-emergency-response-plan>

^{vi} Perkins, G. D., Travers, A. H., Berg, R. A., Castren, M., Considine, J., Escalante, R., ... & Yeung, J. (2015). Part 3: Adult basic life support and automated external defibrillation: 2015 international consensus on cardiopulmonary resuscitation and emergency

cardiovascular care science with treatment recommendations. *Resuscitation*, 95, e43-e69. ^{vii} Evans S, Legg M. (2024). Cardiac emergency response plan: Is your school prepared?