

### Response for Schools and School Districts

School preparedness is strengthened by prevention, protection, mitigation, response, and recovery activities (also known as the five preparedness mission areas—see the text box to the right).<sup>1</sup> This fact sheet describes what response is, how response is connected to the other preparedness missions, what response efforts planning teams may want to consider, and how response activities can be integrated into planning efforts; additional resources are provided, as well.<sup>2</sup>

Schools (public or nonpublic) respond to emergencies all the time. Most of these events are small and affect only a handful of people, such as providing first aid to a staff member injured in a kitchen fire. In some cases, the incident can be a lot larger and can affect the whole school community, the local area, and beyond, such as a wildfire that requires a community-wide evacuation. No matter how small or large the incident, however, a response can be faster and more effective through pre-planning.

Schools are not alone when it comes to responding to emergencies—or planning for them. While community partners, such as the fire department and law enforcement, may be the most visible when they are responding to an emergency, these same groups have roles and responsibilities in supporting planning efforts at a school or within a school district to help ensure any response is as quick and effective as possible.

One key resource used in a response is an emergency operations plan (EOP), which describes how the school or school district and community partners will respond together

#### MISSION AREA DEFINITIONS

- **Prevention** is the action schools and school districts take to prevent a threatened or actual incident from occurring.
- **Protection** is the ongoing actions schools and school districts take to safeguard the school, students, and staff from an emergency event.
- **Mitigation** focuses on actions schools and school districts take to eliminate or reduce the loss of life, injuries, and property damage from an emergency event.
- **Response** is putting the school's and school district's plans into place to effectively respond to an emergency event, and provide for the immediate needs of students and staff.
- **Recovery** is teaming with community partners to restore educational programming; the physical environment; business operations; and social, emotional, and behavioral health.

<sup>1</sup> *School* refers to all types, including private and public, and all grade levels for the purposes of this fact sheet.

<sup>2</sup> Fact sheets on the other four areas of *prevention*, *protection*, *mitigation*, and *recovery* can be found on the REMS TA Center's Website at <https://rems.ed.gov>.

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to a variety of hazards and threats and cross-cutting functions that may be needed in most emergency incidents (e.g., evacuation, communication).

Everyone in the school community needs to be trained on their roles and responsibilities described in the EOP. Exercises also need to be conducted to ensure the procedures and training are effective; people know what to do in an emergency; gaps and redundancies are identified; and to build confidence in the school community's ability to respond. More information on this process is described in the next section.

### Response as a Component of Preparedness

The five mission areas of prevention, protection, mitigation, response, and recovery are all connected and directly contribute to preparedness. A quick and effective **response** can help



**prevent** cascading or secondary emergencies from occurring, such as ensuring students calmly evacuate a building on fire so none are injured in the process, and **mitigate** the effects of the event. To facilitate the **response**, ongoing **protection** activities such as fire drills can be conducted throughout the year. **Response** actions can also reduce or limit the **recovery**



needed after an incident. For example, teachers can immediately provide Psychological First Aid to students and colleagues in an emergency event, which can help with long-term social, emotional, and behavioral **recovery** (see <http://www.nctsn.org/content/psychological-first-aid-schoolspfa> for more information).

### Examples of Response Activities

The team may want to consider planning for the following safety, security, and emergency management activities—which together comprise preparedness—when responding to an incident:

- **Notify the school and provide directives for taking immediate personal protective actions.** For example, if a building fire occurred, people in that room would immediately move to

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another room and alert others to the danger. Those trained in how to use a fire extinguisher could use it to put out a small fire if it was safe to do so.

- **Assess the situation and determine what general response needs to take place**—this typically involves a shelter-in-place, lockdown, or evacuation of the school. For a building fire, the whole school community would likely evacuate to an outside area.
- **Notify first responders** about the incident, if needed. Depending on the scale of the emergency, first responders may be notified via 9-1-1 or other previously established methods (e.g., via radio to dispatch).
- **Activate internal response teams**, such as the school’s response team and a trained Teen Community Emergency Response Team (CERT). Teen CERT training covers nine topics, such as how to conduct light search and rescue, and helps to empower students to respond safely to an emergency and assist victims without endangering the students or others. See the Key Resources section below for more information.
- **Activate the EOP**, including any appropriate hazard- or threat-specific annexes or functional annexes (e.g., evacuation, communication) that address cross-cutting activities. Once the school has evacuated in response to a building fire, the response team will likely follow next steps described in a Building Fire Annex of the EOP.
- **Implement the Incident Command System (ICS)** to help coordinate the internal response and work with external partners, such as first responders. ICS is a standardized approach to responding to emergencies that is used by all levels of government, schools, and other organizations. Free online trainings are provided by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)—again, see the Key Resources section below for more information.
- **Triage and provide medical treatment to any wounded students, teachers, staff members, or visitors** until first responders arrive.
- **Communicate regularly** about what is happening internally with groups such as the school district, staff members, teachers, students, and families, and externally with first responders and the media.
- **Document what actions were taken** by the school and community partners who assisted in the response. This record keeping can help later when analyzing how the school responded and can help with reimbursement of costs associated with the incident.
- **Ensure the whole school community is cared for**, including those with disabilities or access and functional needs and visitors. In a building fire, those with limited mobility may need extra help from caregivers to evacuate.
- **Transition efforts to recovery**. Depending on the extent of the incident, the school can immediately begin academics; physical and structural; business functions; and social, emotional, and behavioral recovery.

### Integrating Response Efforts Into Emergency Planning

An understanding of what actions may be needed in a response—and in all five mission areas—can help generate ideas for what needs to be included in the school district’s or school’s EOP. To aid in the creation, review, or revision of these EOPs—or a part(s) of the EOP—the “Guide for Developing High-Quality School Emergency Operations Plans” (*School Guide*; [http://rems.ed.gov/docs/REMS\\_K-12\\_Guide\\_508.pdf](http://rems.ed.gov/docs/REMS_K-12_Guide_508.pdf)) recommends a six step planning process that is flexible, adaptable, and customizable to the building level.

Using the example of preparing for a building fire, the planning process could be utilized as follows:

**Step 1: Form a collaborative planning team.** The planning team will likely comprise a core planning team, school personnel, and a school district representative. Representatives of community partners are also an essential part of the planning team. For example, the local fire department and municipality’s building department can provide valuable insight into preparing for a building fire.

**Step 2: Understand the situation.** Here, the planning teams identifies threats and hazards to the school—such as a building fire—and surrounding community using a variety of assessment tools, assesses those risks, and prioritizes them for inclusion in the EOP.

One assessment tool that can be especially useful in response planning is a Capacity Assessment, which examines the capabilities of students, teachers, and staff members as well as the services and material resources of community partners. For example, some members of the school community may also be part of the locality’s volunteer fire department or CERT. Their training and experience will likely help before, during, and after a building fire.

**Step 3: Determine goals and objectives** and **Step 4: Plan development (identify courses of action).** After assessing the level of risk posed by threats and hazards, the planning team would work to determine goals and objectives to achieve the best outcome for before, during, and after an incident. Then, courses of action would be developed that describe the who, what, when, and how to meet those objectives. For example:

- A possible *goal* for *during* a building fire could be the following: Keep the whole school community safe.
- One response-oriented *objective* to meet that goal could be the following: Notify first responders of the fire.
- Some *courses of action* could include who will notify the first responders and how (e.g., by dialing 9-1-1 or via radio).

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The planning team should develop goals, objectives, and courses of action for emergencies at the school as well as other places students may be, such as on a school bus, at a sporting event, on a field trip, and/or studying abroad.

**Step 5: Plan preparation, review, and approval.** Now the planning team creates a draft of the EOP, circulates the draft to obtain feedback from the school's or school district's senior leadership and those responsible for implementing the plan, makes edits based on those comments, and obtains approval from the administration. Goals, objectives, and courses of action can be included in appropriate annexes, such as a Building Fire Annex to address a building fire.

**Step 6: Plan implementation and maintenance.** Here, the plan is maintained via regular reviews and revised when needed. Further, individuals with roles outlined in the EOP are trained in their responsibilities and tested through exercises.

### Key Resources

Resources available to support response efforts include the following:

- **National Response Framework (NRF), U.S. Department of Homeland Security.** NRF is one of the five National Planning Frameworks and describes how the nation works together to respond to a disaster. The framework provides scalable, flexible, and adaptable concepts identified in the National Incident Management System and describes the principles, roles and responsibilities, and coordinating structures for a response.  
<https://www.fema.gov/media-library/assets/documents/117791>
- **Using the Five Preparedness Missions to Help Ready Your District and School for Emergencies Webinar, REMS TA Center.** In this Webinar, presenters discussed how schools and school districts can take a more comprehensive approach to emergency preparedness by addressing the five mission areas of prevention, protection, mitigation, response, and recovery. Using examples from frequently asked questions about topics including threat assessments, earthquake preparedness, and adult sexual misconduct, the presenters discussed strategies to build capacity in critical functions and highlighted key courses of action.  
<http://rem.ed.gov/PreparednessMissionsForSchoolEmerg.aspx>
- **Addressing Access and Functional Needs (AFN) in School and Higher Education Emergency Operations Plans (EOPs) Webinar.** This archived Webinar provides an overview of AFN integration within schools and Institutions of Higher Education (IHEs), as well as specific information on and examples of inclusive preparedness planning in schools and IHEs. Also

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included on this Web page is a Resource List that provides links to general resources, laws and regulations, tools and trainings, alerts and notifications, and special topics, and a Fact Sheet, which provides examples of inclusive planning in a variety of areas and additional resources.

<http://rems.ed.gov/AFN2016Webinar.aspx>

- **Independent Study Courses, FEMA.** Numerous free online courses are available to schools and school districts on emergency preparedness, including “IS-100.SCA: Introduction to the Incident Command System for Schools” (<https://training.fema.gov/is/courseoverview.aspx?code=is-100.sca>). Participants can browse through the full course list or search for courses with keywords or a course code. <https://training.fema.gov/is/crslist.aspx>
- **Developing Emergency Operations Plans (EOPs) K-12 TBR, REMS TA Center.** This training, available in both a Train-the-Educator and Train-the-Trainer format, teaches participants how schools, in collaboration with their local government and community partners, can take steps to plan for potential emergencies through the creation of a high-quality EOP using the six-step planning process. [http://rems.ed.gov/TA\\_TrainingsByRequest.aspx](http://rems.ed.gov/TA_TrainingsByRequest.aspx)
- **National Incident Management System (NIMS) Web Page, REMS TA Center.** This page gives an overview of NIMS and provides resources, including lists of activities for schools, key personnel and training, and frequently asked questions. Links to additional FEMA resources, such as the ICS Resource Center, are also provided. <http://rems.ed.gov/K12NIMSImplementation.aspx>
- **Teen CERT: Enhancing School Emergency Management Through Youth Engagement and Preparedness Webinar, REMS TA Center.** This webinar provides an overview of FEMA’s Teen CERT program as well as information about how schools and school districts are using Teen CERT to support their overall school preparedness efforts. The presenters also provide additional Teen CERT resources. <http://rems.ed.gov/TeenCertEnhancingSchoolEmergMgrment.aspx>