



Implementing the National Incident Management System (NIMS): Practitioner-Oriented Strategies for Education Agencies

READINESS AND EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT FOR SCHOOLS TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE CENTER

Every day, school safety practitioners across the country respond to a variety of threats and hazards that necessitate collaboration and coordination with Federal, national, state, and local partners. The [National Incident Management System \(NIMS\)](#) is part of the [National Preparedness System](#) and supports the [National Response Framework](#). NIMS puts forth a systematic approach to collaborating across disciplines and all levels of government to prevent, protect against, mitigate, respond to, and recover from threats and hazards that impact the community. NIMS uses a core set of concepts, principles, procedures, processes, standards, and terminology that all may be integrated with school emergency operations plans (EOPs) and school emergency management practices.

This fact sheet provides an overview of NIMS; explores the important role it plays in school safety, security, emergency management, and preparedness (school safety); discusses how it can be integrated with planning; and offers practitioners tips for supporting its implementation with community partners.

An Overview of NIMS

NIMS is the United States' single, comprehensive system for managing domestic incidents and is suitable for *all* schools, institutions of higher education, and the educational agencies supporting them. NIMS can be implemented across disciplines and at all levels of government with nongovernmental organizations, and it is applicable to all kinds of possible emergency events, no matter how complex. An emergency event may impact an individual school, or it may impact the whole community, causing various jurisdictions, organizations, and entities to respond. NIMS provides key concepts for collaboration and integration as well as the guiding principles (Flexibility, Standardization, and Unity of Effort) for planning, response, and recovery that facilitate collaboration, communication, and coordination between partners with shared responsibilities before, during, and after a potential emergency. In addition, NIMS

- Allows for the seamless integration of facilities, equipment, personnel, procedures, and communications operating within a common organizational structure;
- Establishes common terminology as well as processes for planning and managing resources;
- Enables a coordinated response among various jurisdictions and disciplines, both public and private; and
- Promotes continual improvement based on real-world incidents, exercises, and training.

The guiding principles can be applied to the three components outlined in the NIMS framework: (1) Resource Management, (2) Command and Coordination, and (3) Communications and Information Management. Furthermore, the [NIMS implementation objectives](#) help clarify the framework and its components while providing intended outcomes that schools, school districts, and regional and state education agencies can consider when supporting the implementation of NIMS with their partners. In total, 14 implementation objectives support the integration of NIMS.

NIMS and School Safety Planning

Just as NIMS applies to all types of emergency incidents, it is flexible and suitable for all types of schools, school systems, and education agencies. While education agencies will be able to fully implement some of the 14 implementation objectives and corresponding activities outlined in the NIMS approach, other objectives may be done in collaboration with community partners. Supporting the implementation of NIMS helps schools, districts, and education agencies ensure effective response by aligning planning efforts with those of their partners at the local, state, and Federal levels.

School safety planners can use the six-step planning process to incorporate NIMS implementation activities into their school EOP as well as their training and exercise plans. Consistent with Step 6, the planning team can familiarize key personnel and general personnel with NIMS through training and exercises as the school helps prepare the whole school community to respond to a possible emergency in collaboration with community partners. Familiarizing the school response team with NIMS helps ensure that schools and their response partners share a common language, organizational structures, and processes should an emergency occur.

Practitioner-Oriented NIMS Implementation Tips for Education Agencies

The following are tips and strategies supporting the implementation of NIMS:

- ✓ **Understand “Chain of Command” and “Unity of Command” and where your education agency fits into local response efforts.**
In the event of a disaster, NIMS helps connect your entity’s response to the joint response efforts of local, state, and Federal community response, facilitating coordination. Know how your education agency fits into the larger network of agencies and response bodies. Familiarize yourself with those chains of command before an event occurs.
- ✓ **Ensure that education has a seat at the planning table with community partners.**
Schools serve as key partners in the community they serve. It is critical for education representatives to have an active role in the emergency planning at the state and local levels. Similarly, it is critical for education representatives to invite these partners to their planning table. This mutual collaboration approach will enhance communication, coordination, and integration while continually increasing preparedness.



- ✓ **Designate personnel for emergency management planning.**
Having personnel responsible for emergency management planning allows an education agency to focus its efforts throughout the iterative process. Personnel with training and experience can assist with NIMS implementation.
- ✓ **Encourage relationship building between schools and community partners.**
When school safety stakeholders can interact with community partners, such as local law enforcement, they can develop key relationships and build trust. If stakeholders know their community partners and can see emergency management processes in action, they may be more willing to work with approaches like NIMS.
- ✓ **Make the language and concepts accessible for the whole school community.**
Providing information and resources on NIMS in a user-friendly format with familiar language allows stakeholders to digest unfamiliar concepts. Connecting NIMS to a more holistic school safety approach can create common ground between emergency planners and those from the school community who will carry out the plan. A common strategy is to apply the NIMS concepts and principles to common school events such as

graduation, sporting events, and dances. Not only does it support effective management of the events, but it also provides real-world practice.

- ✓ **Incorporate NIMS and its key concepts into training opportunities.**
Integrating NIMS into training and exercise opportunities can help stakeholders become more familiar with the language, processes, and structures that undergird NIMS as well as their role in response.

Related Resources

For more information about NIMS, see the following resources from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the REMS TA Center:

- [National Incident Management System Website](#), FEMA
- [NIMS Implementation Objectives for Local, State, Tribal, and Territorial Jurisdictions](#), FEMA
- [National Incident Management System \(NIMS\) Web Page](#), REMS TA Center

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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