State Education Agency Roles in School Safety

READINESS AND EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT FOR SCHOOLS TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE CENTER

State education agencies (SEAs) play a unique and essential role in supporting schools and school districts as they develop prevention, protection, mitigation, response, and recovery protocols for their emergency operations plans (EOPs). With input from a broad array of stakeholders and experts, SEAs are positioned to aid schools and school districts by aggregating data, providing resources and tools, highlighting promising practices, identifying and anticipating challenges facing schools and school districts, and convening stakeholders to share ideas and address EOP elements. This fact sheet provides information on how SEAs can support schools and school districts with the development and refinement of school EOPs.

Support Schools and School Districts With Planning Basics and Principles

SEAs can assist schools and school districts with designing and implementing essential planning basics and principles, which can support their efforts to create and maintain a positive school climate for safe, supportive, and healthy schools, by offering technical assistance, guidance, and training.

- **All-Hazards and All-Threats Approach**: Assist in the development of EOPs and other school safety processes and procedures to ensure that they consider all threats (adversarial and human-caused) and hazards (natural, technological, and biological).

- **EOP Development and Planning Process**: Develop tabletop exercises that test EOPs and identify strengths and weaknesses.

- **Collaboration**: Reinforce school and school district collaboration with local agencies, county and city departments, businesses, faith entities, and nonprofits to secure support in developing and implementing EOPs.

- **Whole Community Planning**: Encourage school and school district participation in initiatives for healthy schools and healthy communities to enhance both school and community safety.

- **Assessments**: Offer tools and systems that schools and school districts can use to conduct site assessments as well as culture and climate assessments. Utilize research-based methods and effective strategies (e.g., Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports) in school climate, school safety, and EOP development work.

- **All Settings and All Times**: Share sample strategies that schools and school districts can use, as well as partners they can engage, as they work to ensure safety and emergency preparedness within all settings (online, hybrid in-person, field trips, athletic events, extracurricular activities, etc.) and during all times (before, during, and after school).

- **School Safety Leadership**: Help schools and school districts understand state legislation on school safety and seek grants to fund EOP development and improvement efforts.

Provide Updates on State School Safety Legislation

SEAs should work closely with schools and school districts to identify legislation that may impact school safety and EOPs at the state or local level. SEAs can communicate and interact with their state legislatures to review and analyze proposed statutes with direct or indirect implications for school safety and EOPs. SEAs with partner state agencies and other experts can provide legislators feedback and consultation on advantages and disadvantages of legislation and respond to the legislature with written recommendations and testimony. SEAs could also work with legislators on possible legislation that could enhance school safety and EOP development. Working with legislators gives SEAs a significant voice and role in policy and statutory development. SEAs could provide updates to schools and school districts on pending legislation throughout the legislative session via emails, newsletters, and/or podcasts.

State Emergency Management Resources

The REMS TA Center Website features an interactive map of state contacts and reports, mandates, offices of Federal and national partners, and grantees. Use this map to find school safety mandates for your state. If you have any additions, please send them to the REMS TA Center via info@remstacenter.org.

Share Statewide Incident Data

SEAs collect school- and school district–level data in numerous categories, including, for example, student discipline data. In addition to and beyond student discipline data, SEAs in partnership with state agencies can receive and collate school incident data involving serious incidents such as emergency evacuations, bomb or other types of violent threats to schools, threats to schools on social media, community disasters that impact schools, manmade and natural

environmental incidents, and other information. These data can provide the SEA with an overview of threats and hazards facing schools and school districts in their state and inform the training and technical assistance that they provide on emergency management planning. Furthermore, the SEA core planning team can develop annexes for these threats and hazards in the SEA EOP.

From statewide data and incident reports, SEAs can identify and track school safety trends and trajectories to inform the development and modification of school and school district EOPs and school safety training sessions. SEAs could acquire data in the aggregate to share with schools and school districts, which would provide them with a broader vision of the school safety landscape at the state and local levels. These data of historical threats and hazards can be particularly helpful to school and school district core planning teams as they engage in Step 2 of the six-step planning process.

Lead State-Level Collaborative Work in Specialized Areas

SEAs can work with state agencies on specific topics to address preparedness across several dimensions that affect schools and school districts, such as

- Department of Public Health

  - on statewide pandemic and epidemic annexes and how schools and school districts can respond to periodic outbreaks of other communicable diseases (e.g., tuberculosis).

  - on communications protocols to ensure that schools and school districts receive public health press releases and public advisories on issues such as heat advisories, flu outbreaks, water contamination, etc.

- Department of Agriculture

  - on food security issues and initiatives to prevent food contamination and to alert schools and school districts about food recalls and food-related disease outbreaks.

- to provide training sessions and podcasts on food safety, food security, and food preparation.

- Department of Transportation

  - to develop a protocol when local school system fuel supplies are in jeopardy and to address emergency situations where fuel supplies have been contaminated (Note: In some states, the Department of Agriculture is responsible for fuel supplies.)

- Department of Public Safety

  - to share data and training opportunities for school bus drivers and discuss situations when school buses may be essential in evacuating citizens.

  - to develop and review road evacuation routes and family reunification sites for schools and school districts in the event of a widespread crisis.

- State Emergency Management Agency

  - to establish a protocol to review school and school district EOPs and provide feedback.

  - to schedule on-site school visits.

SEAs can also partner with institutions of higher education (IHEs) on school safety work. For example, the Georgia Department of Education worked with the Georgia Tech Supply Chain and Logistics Institute (SCL)

SEA Partnerships

The REMS TA Center has published the State-Level Partnerships for School Safety, a planning document that provides examples of state-level partnerships and collaborations with other state entities to provide training and technical assistance to local education agencies (LEAs) in the development and implementation of high-quality EOPs. Also included are examples of formal and informal partnerships that can help improve and strengthen SEA relationships.

to determine how a pandemic would spread across the state, including a virus spread timeline. The model predicted that the virus would be in every county in the state within 9 weeks. Additionally, SCL provided a county-to-county spread map. This allowed the SEA to inform schools and school districts to aid in the development of their EOP — specific to standing up school-based vaccination clinics, deployment of school nurses, and collaboration with local departments of public health.

Coordinate Statewide to Provide Access to Resources

It is recommended that SEAs coordinate and work with other state agencies to identify resources and how they can assist and support schools and school districts as they develop and refine EOPs and explore approaches around all mission areas—prevention, protection, mitigation, response, and recovery. It is critical for SEAs to communicate with departments within other state agencies and secure emergency contact names and cellphone numbers. The most effective process for interagency contact and resource allocation access is through participation in the state's Emergency Support Function (ESF) process. The ESF structure does not

Emergency Support Functions

ESFs include transportation; communications; public works and engineering; firefighting; information and planning; mass care (emergency assistance, housing, and human services); logistics; public health and medical services; search and rescue; hazardous materials; agriculture and natural resources; public safety and security; business and infrastructure; and external affairs.

specify education; however, it is considered in some states to be a support annex, and the SEA's EOP can be critical in situations such as, for example, the need for school buses to evacuate citizens during a crisis, which is a Transportation ESF. Additionally, the SEA's EOP can fill in crisis response gaps by connecting local and regional resources to the ESF.

Every function within the ESF structure is critically important in an emergency involving schools. SEA participation in ESF meetings undergirds its status as another resource within the constellation of essential state support functions and ensures that the voice and concerns of the education community are included in state planning, response protocol meetings, and during and following an emergency.

Reinforce the Importance of Diverse Training Partnerships

With most states housing school safety centers in the SEA, collaboration with other state assets to create ongoing EOP training opportunities for schools and school districts is an essential SEA function. SEAs should work with the state emergency management agency to schedule training and technical assistance opportunities for schools and school districts to use as they develop and modify their EOP. Ideally, training modalities should vary in format (online, in person, synchronous, asynchronous, etc.) and include offers to provide technical assistance to schools and school districts on EOP issues. These sessions and technical assistance can be augmented by participation of other state and local agencies, IHEs, and professional

SEA Training Best Practices

The REMS TA Center has published [Training for Local Education Agencies: Best Practices for Providing School Safety Training](#), a planning document that aids SEAs in planning, creating, and delivering training events to assist LEAs in the development and implementation of high-quality EOPs. It features examples from SEAs and offers considerations and best practices to incorporate into SEA training programs for LEAs on emergency management planning.

associations (e.g., school resource officer, school psychologist, school nurse). In some states, the SEA developed a school safety center internally, in conjunction with an IHE, or jointly with the state emergency management agency. Regardless of a state's school safety operational form, SEAs can play a pivotal role as a partner in school safety training and response.

SEAs can take the lead in identifying training opportunities from partners on specific issues. Some state emergency management agencies also provide free training on specific topics such as bullying in

schools, gang prevention and mitigation, safe routes to school, etc. One SEA in conjunction with a local fire department and non-profit created a fire safety video for deaf and hard of hearing students.

SEAs can create a school safety training resource Web page to list school safety–related training opportunities from many sources that are available to schools and school districts at no cost. Some SEAs send a list of resources and/or a link to resources on their SEA Website at the beginning of the school year as part of a "back-to-school" information package and add links to other [back-to-school resources](#).

Create Emergency Response and Core Planning Teams

An essential function of SEAs is addressing potential and active EOP problems at the school and school district levels by establishing a coordinated response to support schools and school districts before, during, and after an emergency. Response and recovery are key mission areas in which SEAs can offer support. They have a "bird's eye view" of a variety of incident types that can and that have taken place within school districts and schools across the state.

SEAs can create an Emergency Response Team (ERT) with SEA staff members who have experience working in schools and school districts and expertise in supporting specific types of threats and hazards. The ERT can be dispatched to schools or school districts for support during and after a crisis that causes significant disruption and/or injuries. Although it may be referred to as the ERT, staff members assigned can be used to support both response and recovery.

ERT members should establish a response protocol as a guideline for determining when deployment is appropriate and necessary to support schools and districts, which includes how the ERT will contact the state emergency agency and schools and districts during and after a crisis as well as a means for them to contact the ERT for assistance.

If an SEA has limited staff, there are other methods of establishing an ERT-type response:

- The SEA assigns one staff member as the contact for schools, school districts, and the state emergency management agency during and after a crisis.
- The SEA partners with regional education service agencies to establish an ERT.
- The SEA creates an ERT using volunteer staff from schools, school districts, and regional education service agencies who are strategically located in the state. This ERT could also serve as an advisory group for the SEA's school safety work and support immediate, short-term, and long-term recovery efforts following an emergency.

Regardless of the type of ERT, it is recommended that SEAs help schools and school districts develop a common language and that the ERT develop and follow consistent emergency response protocols that can be measured, assessed, and customized, when necessary. For example, before dispatching the ERT, clearance should be received by the state's emergency management agency to get situational awareness and ensure that conditions at the school and in the community are safe for the ERT and to determine where the ERT can be assigned to assist schools and school districts. In some states, SEAs may need multiple ERTs to quickly respond due to logistical challenges, such as remote locations of the state. When possible, SEAs should try to link with regional education service agencies to reach out to and respond to schools and school districts in the most effective ways, which can be accomplished through the SEA core planning team.

The SEA core planning team should establish and direct the preparation of the SEA's overall EOP, including response and recovery strategies and training initiatives inside the agency and in collaboration with other state agencies, schools, and school districts. Members of the SEA core planning team should consist of an immediately accessible core group of staff members who have knowledge and skills to plan for and act during a crisis and who have established communication protocols with state and community resources. The SEA core planning team should do the following:

- Provide input to SEA leadership and direct the development of a comprehensive crisis plan.

- Identify potential, imminent, and active crisis threats and serve as the ERT's conduit to SEA leadership during a crisis, which can serve as the mechanism for the SEA to react effectively and quickly to specific circumstances of a crisis.

- Be available to ensure comprehensive and equitable response and recovery via ESFs in the event of a widescale crisis that impacts multiple schools or school districts throughout the state. For example, if a school district suffers widespread damage and injuries from a weather-related disaster, the ERT could be deployed to assist the school or school district efforts to identify the needs of students, staff members, and families. If there have been injuries and/or deaths and widespread damage to schools and homes, the school district may need assistance with post-traumatic stress issues of students and staff when they return to school.

Engage in Continuity of Operations Planning

For SEAs to remain operational and able to assist schools and school districts, they must be prepared themselves for an emergency that could impact SEA functions. The SEA core planning team can develop a Continuity of Operations (COOP) Annex for the SEA, which includes the roles of the SEA in school and school district EOP development and response to incidents. A comprehensive approach for the SEA core planning team should include a strong emphasis

Shelter-in-Place

An SEA received several comments from parents as well as phone calls from news media reporters about hundreds of students who were required to remain overnight in schools due to an unexpectedly severe storm that closed roads and highways. Each school in the area had a comprehensive EOP that included a Shelter-in-Place (SIP) Annex. However, implementation of the SIP Annex proved difficult for one of the schools. When the inclement weather cut off the power supply to the school, the backup generator did not activate. Access to food was limited because almost all the food had to be prepared with no power, and the food was not available. The emergency light system provided only dim lighting, and some areas of the school had no lighting because the emergency lights did not work. There were not enough blankets and other ways to keep children and staff warm during the night. The staff had not been trained or prepared on how to manage students in SIP situations. Parents were not kept informed through the afternoon and night about the condition of their children because staff member cellphones could not be charged.

The SEA consulted with experts on SIP and created training sessions for schools and school districts on how to develop and/or improve SIP Annexes. The training included a review of school and school district SIP Annexes by experts with immediate feedback on strengths and weaknesses.

on prevention and managing a crisis that could impair the SEA's capabilities to continue operations and jeopardize its ability to provide support to schools and school districts.

The COOP Annex needs to include secondary operations sites in the event the main site(s) is not available to continue SEA operations, and it should include strategies focused on SEA infrastructure such as human resources, financial resources, and information technology (IT) resources. Special emphasis should be placed on IT since most of the SEA

functions are linked in various ways to technology. SEA IT staff should serve on the core planning team and be heavily involved in developing and revising the IT section of the COOP Annex. The core planning team can also consider soliciting recommendations from external IT experts to strengthen the procedures.

The SEA core planning team should meet regularly and establish a communication and information network among the SEA's field staff members across the state to instruct them on the details of the COOP Annex and how SEA operations will proceed when the COOP Annex is activated. The most important element for SEA field staff is a reliable communications protocol and system with backup protocols in the event primary communications methods are inoperable and/or unavailable. Some SEAs establish a communications protocol with the state's emergency management agency as part of the state's ESF protocol, which allows the emergency agency to mobilize communications between schools and school districts with the SEA.

Help Schools and School Districts Identify and Prepare for the Unexpected

Schools and school district EOPs are comprehensive and include prevention, protection, mitigation, response, and recovery protocols. However, occasionally there are incidents and events that overwhelm even the most comprehensive EOPs. SEAs can inform and prepare schools and school districts for such situations by developing an incident case inventory that highlights incidents, the response, what worked and what did not work in the EOP, and how an EOP can be modified to strengthen its effectiveness. The case studies can serve as valuable, effective, and practical resources for schools and school districts. To ensure that the essential elements of EOP case studies are captured and to ensure that case studies are viewed consistently, SEAs may develop a case study process; for example

- Choose the situation on which to write and why it was unique and/or potentially lethal for students, staff members, and/or the community.
- Gather as much information as possible about the situation from a variety of resources.

- Analyze the elements surrounding the incident and pinpoint turning points, decision points, reactions, and circumstances.
- Gather information, opinions, and other insight about what worked and what did not work and why.
- Create newsletters, articles, and training sessions based on case studies to share with schools and school districts.

SEAs should keep in mind that most schools and districts have not faced many of the most taxing or dangerous school safety scenarios, and it is only by learning from experience or the experiences of others that they can be fully prepared for what they may encounter during a crisis and during the aftermath of a crisis. The SEA can play a major role in preparing schools and districts by studying, collecting, collating, and cataloguing school crisis case studies. This can also be a way for the SEA to detect trends that may require widespread training provided by experts.

Resources

Further Reading — REMS TA Center

- Building Blocks to School Safety: A Toolkit for K-12 Schools and School Districts for Developing High-Quality School Emergency Operations Plans, Publication
- LEA School-Based Emergency Management Contact List, Planning Document
- State-Level Partnerships for School Safety, Publication
- Training for Local Education Agencies: Best Practices for Providing School Safety Training, Publication
- State Emergency Management Resources, Web Page
- National Incident Management System, Web Page
- Implementing the National Incident Management System (NIMS): Practitioner-Oriented Strategies forEducation Agencies, Fact Sheet
- EOP Interactive Tools, Mobile and Web Applications

Training Opportunities — REMS TA Center

- [Building State-Level Relationships to Support Education Agencies With Disaster Response and Recovery Planning](#), Webinar
- [REMSontheAir: A Look at State School Safety Models](#), Podcast
- [REMSontheAir: Managing Recovery Through Planning and Partnerships](#), Podcast
- [Continuity of Operations (COOP) Planning and Developing a COOP Annex](#), Webinar

Further Reading — School Discipline

- [Guiding Principles and Best Practices in School Discipline to Support Students' Social, Emotional, Behavioral, and Academic Needs](#), Web Page (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, Office of Safe and Supportive Schools Technical Assistance Centers)

READINESS AND EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT FOR SCHOOLS

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PLEASE NOTE: The tools and resources identified in this document are not intended as endorsements and are merely offered as examples that you may consider in your own planning efforts.