

Emergency Planning Strategies and Resources

Prepare for emergency events and know how to respond and recover.

Whether faced with severe weather or natural disasters, an act of targeted violence, or an unfortunate accident, thoughtful and thorough emergency planning and preparation are critical actions schools can take to stop an emergency event from happening or reduce the impact of an incident that does occur. Emergency planning is a key component of school safety that can include large-scale actions or everyday activities to build a safe school environment.

Although schools are not traditional response organizations, when a school-based emergency occurs, school personnel respond immediately. Emergency planning can empower school staff and local first responders to understand and manage their responsibilities, help identify and address gaps in school procedures or processes, and prepare personnel so they are ready to respond in crisis situations.



By having emergency plans and procedures in place, practicing these plans through exercises and drills, and collaborating with local partners, schools can take a variety of preventative and protective measures to help keep students and educators safe.



Developing a School Emergency Operations Plan

A key component of emergency planning is creating a comprehensive school Emergency Operations Plan (EOP), a document that describes the actions students, teachers, and school staff should take before, during, and after emergency events. Elements of an EOP include the Basic Plan section, which addresses the overarching activities a school undertakes, as well as functional and hazard or threat-specific annexes.

Developing an EOP should be a collaborative process that includes a planning team comprised of a range of school personnel, such as administrators, teachers, and school mental health professionals. It is also critical that schools work with community partners, including local emergency management staff, first responders, law enforcement, and public and mental health officials, as they can provide critical expertise and guidance and ensure the school EOP is integrated with community and regional plans. Schools should plan to review, evaluate, and update their EOP on a regular basis.

Training and Exercises

Training and exercises are an essential component of school emergency preparedness. Training teaches staff and faculty about the policies, procedures, roles, and responsibilities in their school's EOP and gives them the information they need to train their students on emergency procedures. Simulations of emergency situations, or emergency exercises, offer opportunities to practice courses of action outlined in the EOP and examine and strengthen capacities for mitigating, responding to, and recovering from various hazards and threats.



Schools can also conduct developmentally appropriate drills to provide everyone with the chance to practice the actions they would take before, during, and after an emergency. Activities may range from fire and shelter-in-place drills to full-scale exercises that realistically portray the actual conditions of a crisis. It is recommended that education agencies start with simple exercises and work their way toward the most complex. Districts and schools are also encouraged to adapt training programs and exercises to specific audiences and settings; consider the developmental, cultural, and educational characteristics of their school communities; and balance exercises and drills with issues such as school climate.



Planning for Recovery

Planning for how to recover from incidents before they occur can make the recovery process quicker and more effective and put in place key protective measures for potential future incidents. Districts and schools should have an overall strategy and plan to support the academic, physical, fiscal, and emotional recovery of the school community following an emergency.

To address the wide range of needs that are linked to the aftermath of a school incident, safety teams should consider issues such as family reunification, a critical function that reunites children with verified and authorized family members after any critical or emergency incident. Recovery from emergencies should also address issues involving authority and personnel to close and reopen the school, as well as the short- and long-term counseling needs of students, staff, and families.

To further emergency planning efforts, schools and districts can become educated on the different grants and federal resources available to implement emergency planning initiatives, including funding available to support a school's recovery following a school tragedy. Federal school safety grants can be found on SchoolSafety.gov's [Grants Finder Tool](#).

Resources

SchoolSafety.gov features a range of resources schools and districts can use to support the implementation of emergency planning initiatives. These include:

Guides and Fact Sheets

- [Best Practice Considerations for Armed Assailant Drills in Schools](#): This document provides guidance on factors schools must take into account when conducting armed assailant drills and reflects unique considerations within the school environment, including protecting both the physical and psychological safety of students and staff.
- [Emergency Exercises: An Effective Way to Practice and Validate Emergency Operations Plans](#): This fact sheet provides information on the types and benefits of emergency exercises, developing an effective emergency exercise program, post-exercise evaluations, obtaining stakeholder buy-in, and resources for emergency exercises. It also includes a case study on emergency exercises.
- [Guide for Developing High-Quality School Emergency Operations Plans](#): This interagency guidance provides information to school administrators on school emergency management planning. It includes a process for developing, implementing, and refining a school EOP with community partners.
- [Hierarchy of Education & Training Activities](#): This toolkit provides examples of the forms and methods to educate and train students and staff to respond in an emergency. It includes examples of several models that begin with the most basic activities and progress to the most advanced.
- [Resources After a School Tragedy](#): This guide provides resources and information to help schools better support students and families in the aftermath of violence and trauma.



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- [Sample School Emergency Operations Plan](#): This document outlines a sample school EOP and is intended to be used for training purposes.
- [The NASSP Principal Recovery Network Guide to Recovery](#): This downloadable guide is a collection of personal best practices and practical advice from principals and assistant principals who led schools in recovery after a shooting.
- [The Role of Districts in Developing High-Quality School Emergency Operations Plans](#): This guide serves as a complement to the “Guide for Developing High-Quality School Emergency Operations Plans” and provides information that can assist school districts in fulfilling both their individual and shared emergency planning responsibilities.
- [The Standard Reunification Method \(Volume 2\)](#): This guidance provides school and district safety teams with proven methods for planning, practicing, and achieving a successful reunification in the event of a school crisis or emergency.

Tools and Training Programs

- [EOP Interactive Tools](#): This suite of tools can be used to help K-12 practitioners develop and revise EOPs and align emergency planning practices with those at the national, state, and local levels.
- [Exercise Starter Kits and Tabletop Exercises](#): These self-conducted tabletop exercises, tailored for the academic community, include a set of scalable tools aimed to test existing emergency plans, protocols, and procedures, while also strengthening preparedness, response, and recovery capabilities in the event of an active shooter situation. [Tabletop exercise packages](#) are also available on a variety of physical security scenarios geared towards specific facilities, including schools.
- [Preparing for Emergencies: What School Staff Need to Know](#): This course provides school staff with the knowledge, skills, and tools needed to prepare for school emergencies before, during, and after an incident.

Websites and Webinars

- [Creating, Practicing, and Implementing Plans for Family Reunification Before, During, and After an Emergency](#): This webpage provides resources to help schools create a Family Reunification Annex as a part of a school EOP in order to detail actions to take before, during, and after an emergency to ensure students are reunited with their families.
- [Multi-hazard Emergency Planning for Schools](#): These resources are designed to help schools and districts conduct training, plan, and prepare for a wide range of hazards including public health emergencies, natural disasters, and school violence.
- [Planning to Recover from Emergencies at Districts and Schools](#): This webinar explains how K-12 schools and districts can better plan to recover from emergency events and be ready for a range of threats and hazards.
- [Ready Kids](#): This website provides emergency preparedness resources, tools, activities, and information to help children and adolescents prepare for disasters.

Sources: rems.ed.gov/docs/School_Guide_508C.pdf | oese.ed.gov/offices/office-of-formula-grants/safe-supportive-schools/project-serv-school-emergency-response-to-violence/ | nc2s.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/School-Safety-Communications-Planning-Guide.pdf | schoolsafety.gov/EmergencyPlanningResources.pdf | schoolsafety.gov/emergency-planning | rems.ed.gov/docs/EmergencyExercisesFactSheet_508C.pdf | mhttnetwork.org/sites/mhttc/files/2019-05/After%20a%20School%20Tragedy_FINAL050919.pdf | rems.ed.gov/docs/FamilyReunificationFactSheet_508C.pdf | safeandsoundschools.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Straight-A-Safety-Toolkits-ACT-5-Hierarchy-of-Education.pdf | rems.ed.gov/K12RecoveryAnnex.aspx

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