



REMS EXPRESS

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HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE FIELD

Since 2003, the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools has administered the Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools (REMS) grant program (formerly known as the Emergency Response and Crisis Management [ERCM] grant program).¹ These funding streams are earmarked to help school districts improve and strengthen emergency management plans. Districts can use grant monies to train school personnel or students in emergency management; communicate emergency policies and procedures to parents; coordinate with local emergency responders, including fire, EMS, and police; develop written infectious disease plans; purchase equipment; and coordinate with community organizations on response and recovery issues, such as public or mental health departments.

Since 2003, over 600 REMS grants have been awarded to local education agencies (LEAs) across 47 U.S. states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico (see table 1). With individual awards ranging from less than \$100,000 to over \$1 million, REMS grants have gone towards improving emergency management in LEAs representing a vast array of geographic sizes, localities, cultures, and populations.

The influx of this funding to schools and districts for emergency preparedness often garners local attention, typically from initial announcement of the award recipient to activities, events, or changes that are a result of work done under the auspices of the grant. Many noteworthy grant activities are reported in local newspapers or online media sources, discussed in school newsletters

¹ For the purposes of this publication, all Emergency Response and Crisis Management (ERCM) grants will be referred to as Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools (REMS) grants unless referencing a specific ERCM grant.

or brochures sent home to parents, or profiled in emergency management or school safety publications.

Though notoriety for REMS grant activities is useful for bringing about awareness of school and community partner engagement in emergency planning efforts, perhaps even more important is the fact that this spotlight helps garner awareness and sustain interest in emergency management planning. In other words, attention given to emergency planning efforts helps spur additional emergency planning efforts and thus helps satisfy one of the primary goals of the grant—the ongoing sustainability and continuous improvement of emergency management plans.

By looking at the attention given school safety by past and current REMS grantees through various media outlets, the REMS Technical Assistance (TA) Center showcases here the many varied ways emergency management preparedness efforts are being implemented in districts across the nation. However, these profiles are intended not only to draw attention to grant activities, but also to provide LEAs nationwide with various emergency management preparedness strategies to implement in their own schools or districts.

Table 1. Number of REMS grants awarded: FY 2003–FY 2008

<i>Fiscal Year</i>	<i>Number</i>
<i>FY 2003</i>	134
<i>FY 2004</i>	109
<i>FY 2005</i>	93
<i>FY 2006</i>	77
<i>FY 2007</i>	98
<i>FY 2008</i>	92
<i>Total</i>	603

In response to a May 2008 request made to the field of past and current (FY2003–07) REMS grantees, the TA Center received multiple announcements, articles, notices, and stories relaying the important work done by LEAs during and resulting from their grants. Often recognized areas of achievement for past and current grantees included:

- **Acquisition of supplies and equipment;**
- **Execution of drills and exercises;**
- **Staffing and collaborating with partners; and**
- **Training.**

This newsletter showcases many examples of these “success stories” and highlights the numerous ways REMS grantees have used their funding to implement important emergency management efforts in their communities, both during the grant period and beyond.

School emergency management plans should include:

- *All four phases of emergency management: Prevention-Mitigation, Preparedness, Response, and Recovery;*
- *An all-hazards approach;*
- *A district plan as well as a plan for each individual school building within the district;*
- *Agreements to coordinate among education, local government, law enforcement, public safety, public health, and mental health in the strengthening and improvement of the plan;*
- *Coordination with the state or local homeland security plan and support of the National Incident Management System;*
- *Plans for vulnerable populations including students with disabilities;*
- *Plans for infectious diseases including pandemic influenza;*
- *Preestablished roles for faculty, staff, parents, students, and first responders;*
- *Training programs for staff, teachers, and crisis response team members, and drills and exercises for staff and students; and*
- *Needed emergency equipment and technology.*

Supplies, Equipment and Technology
“Emergency buckets part of evacuation”

Grantee Highlight
Pasadena Independent School District, Pasadena, Texas
FY07 REMS recipient

—*South Belt-Ellington Leader*, March 13, 2008

A newspaper release marked the first implementation of plans for the REMS 2007 grant in Pasadena Independent School District (ISD) in Pasadena, Texas. In March 2008 the local paper, *South Belt-Ellington Leader*, profiled the equipping of classrooms across Pasadena ISD with “Emergency Preparedness Buckets.” These buckets contain equipment that may be needed by classroom members in an emergency, such as water, first aid kits, hand sanitizer, and flashlights. Class rosters and emergency plan flip charts also are included in these emergency containers. Teachers are instructed to carry the buckets with them if they evacuate the classroom under a drill or emergency situation or to use them in the classroom in a lockdown setting.

The REMS grant funding also has allowed for other emergency preparedness efforts in Pasadena ISD. “With the funds provided,” said Tom Swan, executive director of special projects, “we have already been able to provide the emergency flip charts for our staff and send out newsletters to parents with information concerning the various drills that we do and what parents should do during an emergency. We want to do everything possible to keep our students and staff safe in case of an emergency.”

“Equipped just in time”

Grantee Highlight
Stuttgart School District, Stuttgart, Ariz.
FY03 ERCM recipient

—E-mail to ERCM Federal Project Officer, June 30, 2008

For one 2003 ERCM grant recipient, the supplies and equipment purchased with grant funds were received none too soon. “When (the grant) was written and implemented, no disaster had ever impacted our schools,” wrote Lynne Dardenne, assistant superintendent for Stuttgart School District, to her grant federal project officer. “That has changed now and the funds we received and the equipment we purchased were used. On May 10, 2008, an F3 tornado tore our small community apart,” she explained. “No deaths,

few injuries, but much devastation to property. Two schools were damaged, one beyond use. Because we had been allowed to purchase a generator with ERCM funds, we could operate our gas tanks, fuel busses, and help in the evacuation of elderly patients in the care facility located by the school. Our grab-and-go emergency kits were worth a mint and the training that staff had received came in handy. Our crisis plan helped us to approach the situation calmly and with resolve. Thank you.”

“New service alerts parents of closings and other school-related emergencies”

Grantee Highlight
Iroquois-Kankakee Regional
Office of Education #32,
Kankakee, Ill.
FY06 ERCM recipient

—*The Parent Page*,
Publication of the
Iroquois-Kankakee
Regional Office of
Education, Winter 2008

The Iroquois-Kankakee Regional Office of Education used a district newsletter, such as this *Parent Page* publication from Winter 2008, to disseminate information via local newspapers and school district publications regarding new technological advancements in emergency management preparedness brought about by their 2006 ERCM grant. One significant grant accomplishment for the school community was the establishment of a text message and e-mail alert system where parents can be notified of school closings and school-related emergencies. Through a partnership with the Kankakee County Sheriff’s Department, the I-Kan Regional Office of Education created “School Alert” as a component of “Sheriff Alert,” the Kankakee County Sheriff Department’s Mass Notification System.

By using grant funds to purchase licenses, any public or private school in the area is allowed to link in to the system—and they have. “Ninety percent of our public school districts and many nonpublic schools have opted to participate,” reported Gregg Murphy, assistant to the regional superintendent of schools. Registering for the alert system is user friendly and free, and subscribers can hand select which types of messages and alerts they wish to receive.

The alert system is designed to help alleviate phone traffic in a crisis situation. “A deluge of calls during a

crisis can overload communication systems—making voice calls on cell phones or landlines virtually impossible. But because text messaging requires fewer network resources, the system isn’t prone to overloading and the communication is much more likely to be received,” explained Murphy. “During a crisis or emergency situation, communication between the schools and parents is critical.” In the I-Kan Office of Education regional area, this communication is now a bit more feasible.

Execution of Drills and Exercises “School holds gas leak drill”

Grantee Highlight
Cullman County Schools,
Cullman, Ala.
FY03, FY05 ERCM recipient

—*The Cullman Times*, May
12, 2008

Communitywide emergency management drills in Cold Springs, Ala., began under Cullman County Schools’ 2003 and 2005 ERCM grant programs and continued due to ongoing funding from the school district. On May 12, 2008, Cold Springs High School (Bremen, Ala.) was evacuated due to a mock gas leak. After making their way a safe distance from the school, students were picked up in buses and transported to a nearby church—the predesignated emergency evacuation site. Teachers accompanied students with their emergency “go-kit,” which is stocked in every classroom in the county and contains such important supplies as flashlights, first aid kits, and weather protection, as well as special equipment for diabetic students. Students performed so successfully during the drill that they were let out of school early that day in recognition of their achievement. “[Students] evacuated both buildings in under two minutes,” reported Hank Allen, Cullman County Schools superintendent.

The drill also involved collaboration with multiple county agencies, including the sheriff’s department, roads department, area fire departments, the emergency management agency and the Red Cross. Agency representatives planned to meet to debrief on the drill’s execution and what can be done in the future to improve the evacuation process.

Joey H. Eddy, coordinator of school safety and security for Cullman County Schools, explained in an e-mail to the TA Center how the focus on emergency management, along with the equipment, procedures,

and partnerships now in place, were the result of ERCM grant funding. “Cullman County Schools has continued to financially support and make a priority the safety program, which was enhanced by the prior grants. My current position with the school system is another example of the commitment of our system to school safety. I am now working full-time as the coordinator of school safety and security, which is a newly created position that is the direct result of a need highlighted by our prior grants.”

“Relax! This is only a test!”

Grantee Highlight
The Akron City School District, Akron, Ohio
FY04 ERCM recipient

—*The Akron Beacon Journal*,
Aug. 21, 2007

Akron Public Schools was awarded an ERCM grant in 2004; in 2007—three years later—they were staging a full-scale lockdown drill complete with 150 students and 200 staff—some in full theatrical makeup—10 Akron police SWAT team members, 50 Akron fire and police personnel, and 34 police recruits played various roles. Hosted by the Akron Police Department and the City of Akron Fire Department, in conjunction with Akron Public Schools, the four-hour drill involved four mock shooters, students acting as shooting victims, and multiple parents, principals, assistant principals, and staff members serving as individuals in need of rescue. At the end, the effort was deemed worthwhile. “We’re better prepared to handle several situations than we were before this session,” said Akron Public Schools superintendent Sylvester Small. “We learned a lot about things we thought we already had covered. We also were able to work out a lot of things and see what went right and what went wrong. We had as many scenarios available as possible to help prepare us to deal with as many different types of problems that could arise during the school year.”

The first responders involved agreed. “This is just part of our ongoing training,” said Sergeant Michael Yohe of the Akron Police Department. “The board of education called and asked us to participate, and any time we have an opportunity to train in an environment like this, we really enjoy it.” Yohe added, “It really helps to make us better prepared to handle these situations.” Superintendent Small echoed his thoughts. “Our primary goal is to make everyone in every building as safe as possible, and in order to do that we have to have everyone as prepared

as possible—from the superintendent to the bus drivers—to deal with whatever incident could come up.”

“Schools, rescue practice emergency drill”

Grantee Highlight
Southgate Community Schools, Southgate, Mich.
FY06 ERCM recipient

—*Ile Camera Newspaper*,
Jan. 11, 2008

Grosse Ile Township Schools, one of three districts in the Southgate Community Schools consortium that was awarded an ERCM 2006 grant, executed a mock chemical spill full-scale drill exercise on Jan. 11, 2008. The students’ response to the drill was deemed a success by Karen Roth, curriculum director for the Grosse Ile Township Schools district, one of the three districts in the Southgate Community Schools consortium that was awarded an FY06 ERCM grant. “Our kids performed just so well,” she said. However, the true success in the drill might be the overall execution and follow-up conducted on the part of the district and their collaborative partners. This full-scale drill exercise was two years in the making, including emergency management training of teachers and principals and equipping of classrooms with response handbooks. These efforts were achieved through the combined work of the three ERCM grant consortium members and a communitywide emergency response committee that met every two to three months. These committee members—including township officials, school officials, school department heads, and the fire and police departments—all participated in the drill.

The drill scenario began with the assumption of a train derailment that caused a chemical spill, which plumed and started to spread towards Grosse Ile. The entire Grosse Ile Township School District proceeded to initiate shelter-in-place procedures across all school buildings and the district’s central office. In a mid-exercise surprise, the fire chief decided that Park Lane Elementary School needed instead to be evacuated, and students were to be bused to Meridian Elementary School. As a result, the 400 Park Lane students relocated to the transportation spot for evacuation. Plans for a press conference, release of a press announcement about the chemical spill, and a debriefing were also included in the drill.

In a follow-up, all parties involved analyzed the drill for strengths and weaknesses in execution, including the procedures of the fire and police departments. Issues noted included the failure of communication between buildings in the district and the incident command center. The district's liaison to the public safety employees in the township was not able to go to the public safety building in order to communicate with the district because leaving the building in the face of a chemical spill would have endangered her life. As a result, communication with the incident commander was cut off and schools were not able to directly connect with rescue workers. However, such issues that arise in a drill setting are exactly the purpose of executing a vast array of drill situations. "It gave us a checklist, if you will, of things we need to fix," said Roth, "so that in case of a real-life emergency, systems are in place and ready to go." After each district in the consortium stages a different type of large-scale emergency response drill, the community emergency response committee plans to organize a yearly drill to test response processes.

"Skeels evacuated for 'bomb threat'"

Grantee Highlight
Clare-Gladwin Regional Educational Service District, Clare, Mich.
 FY05 ERCM recipient

—*Gladwin County Record*, May 22, 2007

Clare-Gladwin Regional Educational Service District received a 2005

ERCM grant and used the funds to help engage private school partners in emergency planning efforts. Skeels Christian School was profiled in the *Gladwin County Record* for holding a three-hour drill that focused on parent-child reunification processes. "If we don't practice reunification, the biggest snafu to any potential disaster will be the loving parents who come to the school and demand their kids," said Skeels Administrator Pastor Rick Lopez.

After a fake bomb threat initiated the drill, the school was placed under lockdown. Once the explosives had been "located," students were evacuated to the secured front of the school and counted. Once accounted for, students were led to a designated safe location at the church across the street (which had been closed for the sake of the exercise thanks to the Michigan Department of Transportation). Next, parents were notified that their children

could be picked up by the individual(s) previously designated. Once parents began arriving at the safe site, students were led up from the basement of the building, linked with their photo-identified parents or designee, and allowed to exit through a tunnel.

Following the event, a debriefing occurred among staff and emergency management. "I would have liked to [have seen] a bottleneck of students," Lopez remarked. "It really seemed to go too well." According to Emergency Management Director Bob Duby, this parent reunification drill may have been the first of its kind in Michigan.

Staffing and Collaboration With Partners
"Districts band together in safety"

Grantee Highlight
Hampden-Wilbraham Regional School District (Collaborative), Wilbraham, Mass.
 FY06 ERCM recipient

—*remindersonline*, March 3, 2008

Collaboration was a major theme for one 2006 ERCM grant. A coalition of seven Pioneer Valley school

districts in western Massachusetts came together under the auspices of the Lower Pioneer Valley Educational Collaborative to improve emergency management in their schools and communities. This "Region on Call" collaborative received ERCM funds to provide training for building teams to conduct routine resource, hazard, and vulnerability assessments and to develop safety plans and crisis response protocols coordinated with public safety procedures. Together, these districts were able to strengthen their emergency preparedness efforts. For example, one collaborative meeting brought together representatives from the seven districts, along with school administrators, municipal chiefs, and public health officials from nine different communities for a tabletop exercise that was facilitated by Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency and was hosted by Smith & Wesson.

"I think there is sufficient motivation and energy in each of the districts [to sustain emergency management planning efforts independently]," observed ERCM project director and Hampden-Wilbraham Regional School District risk prevention services coordinator Gina S. Kahn. "Safety is such a priority for each of these districts. Some ...

sustainability is going to come from the integration of those procedures and policies and good practices. ... Some of these things are just basic good practice and can be folded into routine practice so that the initiative continues.” The sustainability is already in place, and collaboration once again is key: Longmeadow Public School District was approved \$300,000 at a Town Meeting to implement security measures in their district; Southwick-Tolland Regional School District was able to secure \$30,000 of security equipment from a corporate partnership.

“Interagency Collaboration: Breaking Barriers Between Educators and First Responders”

Grantee Highlight
Glastonbury School District,
Hartford, Conn.
FY07 REMS recipient

—The DEMHS Advisor,
Connecticut Department of
Emergency Management and
Homeland Security, April 2,
2008

Lawrence Nocera, security coordinator and project director for the 2007 REMS grant to Glastonbury School District, wrote for the Connecticut Department of Emergency Management and Homeland Security’s newsletter on interagency collaboration between schools and first responders. Highlighting the achievements of Glastonbury Public Schools in this area, Nocera attributes their district’s strong and successful relationship with first responders to the establishment of “relationships between and among individuals based on a proven, mutual trust and commitment to each other, whether during a crisis or on a day-to-day basis. The trust becomes the foundation for interagency collaboration and cooperation for all future interactions.” Nocera recommends building this trust through combined professional development release and training time, the sharing of issues, and the maintenance of informal communication and relationships among agency personnel.

Alleviating the barriers that impede collaboration (which typically include money, staffing, time to meet, and time to complete tasks), Nocera notes, is the responsibility of dedicated agencies and individuals on both sides of the table. “Clearly it is incumbent on both municipal and school entities to maintain a regular, ongoing dialogue not solely limited to active emergency situations. Extending invitations for brief, quarterly meetings, such as part

of an interagency advisory council, are icebreakers and offer opportunities for greater personal connections.”

“APS wins \$496,000 grant to strengthen school safety and emergency preparedness plans”

Grantee Highlight
Atlanta Public Schools,
Atlanta, Ga.
FY06 ERCM recipient

—Press Release, Atlanta
Public Schools, Jan. 8,
2007

From the outset of their grant award, Atlanta Public Schools (APS) announced that a significant component of their grant award would involve collaboration with other agencies, and in a press release specifically cited the fact that “APS external partners will be involved at every level.” These partners were to include:

- Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA);
- Georgia Emergency Management Agency (GEMA);
- Atlanta Police Department;
- City of Atlanta Fire and Rescue;
- Atlanta Mayor Shirley Franklin’s office;
- Fulton County Department of Health & Wellness, Office of Emergency Preparedness;
- Atlanta-Fulton County Emergency Management Agency;
- Emergency Medical Services; and
- Georgia Department of Education.

This 2006 ERCM grantee anticipated using a “train-the-trainer” approach to build educational capacity throughout the district, according to Chief Marquenta A. Sands, APS director of security and the ERCM project director. “We want to ensure we are establishing a strong foundation to withstand any crisis or emergency that could occur in our school system. Working closely with our partners will ensure that protocols are developed using an all-hazards approach.”

Training “Students take safety bill to Boston”

Grantee Highlight
Hampden-Wilbraham
Regional School District,
Wilbraham, Mass.
FY05 ERCM recipient

—reminderonline, June 4,
2007

Students from ERCM
2005 grantee Hampden-
Wilbraham Regional

School District in Wilbraham, Mass., traveled to Boston on May 16, 2007, to testify in support of Senate Bill No. 305, “An Act Relative to Student Safety” to the state legislature’s Joint Committee on Public Safety and Homeland Security. The effect of the bill would be to mandate every Massachusetts school district to collaborate with local first responders to implement school safety drills, such as lockdowns, for response to such emergencies as terrorist attacks, chemical spills, and extreme weather. With the backing of State Senator Gale Canderas and her staff, the Hampden-Wilbraham Model Congress students drafted the bill over two years of work, including months strategizing and planning for their testimony. “It is extremely rare for high school kids to file a piece of legislature and make it to testifying in front of the committee,” said Bill Metzger, Senator Canderas’ legislative director.

Following the students’ testimony, the bill moved to an executive session and was later discharged for study in 2008, along with several other bills related to public safety and homeland security. The bill has not yet been approved but will likely be resubmitted in 2008. Nonetheless, “It was a pretty powerful experience to see our government in action and to sense the potential of the students’ voices in being part of that process,” remarked Gina S. Kahn, risk prevention services coordinator and ERCM grant project director. “The students were well prepared for the many uncertainties that would accompany this process, including the long duration between the conceptualization of a law and the distant chance of ultimate enactment. In fact, three graduating classes of Model Congress students have now had their imprint on this bill—and the story continues. This has been a parallel learning experience, as much about the process of civic engagement as about the initial motivation of improved school safety.”

“285 bus drivers trained in the event of an intruder on their school bus”

*Grantee Highlight
Hanover County Public
Schools, Ashland, Va.
FY07 REMS recipient*

—Press Release, Hanover County Public Schools, June 5, 2008

Since receiving their REMS award in the fall of 2007, Hanover County Public Schools has brought a significant influx of training instruction to the district. One of the first grant

activities involved the formation of a task force and core team that would oversee four major teams for the grant, including: planning and fulfillment, communication, training, and implementation. Next, all principals and lead staff members were trained in drills relating to school intruders, and a reporting schedule was developed for schools to follow up drills with debriefing conferences.

At a Jan. 9, 2008, kickoff meeting, the REMS grant initiatives were communicated to over 100 representatives from law enforcement; fire; EMS; mental health; social and medical services; court services; school administration; and central office staff, including transportation, custodial and maintenance team leaders; parents; and community members. Also, classroom-based training in FEMA’s IS-700 (National Incident Management System, An Introduction) and IS-100 (Introduction to Incident Command) began that month through a partnership with the Hanover Sheriff’s Office, fire department and EMS. To date, over 365 Hanover principals, custodians, lead maintenance service workers, lead teachers, cafeteria managers, and school nurses have been trained in IS-700, or IS-800 (National Response Framework, An Introduction), or IS-100, or IS-200 (ICS for Single Resources and Initial Action Incidents), or IS-300 (Intermediate ICS for Expanding Incidents) or IS-400 (Advanced ICS Command and General Staff—Complex Incidents), or a combination of these courses, in the classroom or online.

In February 2008, school board staff and the Hanover County Sheriff’s Office held a SWAT team demonstration and workshop for 285 bus drivers and trained them on how to respond and communicate with authorities in the event of an intruder on their school bus while children are on board. In addition, an overview of the National Incident Management System (NIMS), Incident Command System (ICS), and both the all-hazard and four phases of emergency management planning approaches were provided to bus drivers in anticipation of IS-700 training to be delivered in the fall of 2008.

Future grant plans include task force team-building sessions and training to ensure all staff members are familiar with the school’s safety procedures and protocols. Trainings will be conducted by members of the training team and will include practices of

plans through review and tabletop exercises. In addition, safety and emergency planning information will be presented at back-to-school nights in the fall, to PTA and parent groups on an ongoing basis, and communicated through the student handbook and periodic newsletters. Informational videos and materials also have been or will be developed, including “Pandemic Prevention,” a video produced by the school division’s student interns for the K–12 population, and “School District Safety Initiatives,” a video project by one high school senior including interviews with the REMS project director and coordinator, school resource officers, representatives of the Hanover County Sheriff’s Office, fire department and EMS, along with footage from the SWAT team’s bus entry demonstration (described above). The video is intended for parents and community members.

Hanover hopes to create sustainability of their efforts through a Blackboard Web site where all interested persons can stay involved and up-to-date on grant activities. The site hosts online meetings, documents for collaboration, and discussion boards for ideas and comments related to the grant. Videos and photos relating to grant activities also can be viewed.

As evidenced by these—and the many more—grant activities in Hanover County Public Schools, emergency management preparedness and training is a top priority. As William Sadler, project director, explained, “We continue to be dedicated to the enhancement and sustainability of our many initiatives designed to provide a safer learning environment for our children.”

Conclusion

As the highlights from the field discussed here show, there are varied, creative, and extensive ways REMS grantees can fulfill the mandate of their funding. Perhaps even more significant, there are dedicated professionals making groundbreaking changes in their respective districts and schools by bringing awareness and education, creating pertinent relationships and collaborations, acquiring needed materials and equipment, and effecting new policies and procedures to create safer schools not only for the duration of the grant, but beyond.

The U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools’ (OSDFS) REMS TA Center authored this publication, and would like to thank the numerous REMS and ERCM grantees who provided information on the accomplishments of their grant programs for the foundation of this newsletter. The center supports schools and school districts in developing and implementing comprehensive emergency management plans by providing technical assistance via trainings, publications and individualized responses to requests.

REMS Newsletters provides a quick overview of school emergency management topics that are frequently the subject of inquiries. For information about the Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools grant program, contact Elizabeth Argeris (elizabeth.argeris@ed.gov), Tara Hill (tara.hill@ed.gov), Michelle Sinkgraven (michelle.sinkgraven@ed.gov) or Sara Strizzi (sara.strizzi@ed.gov).

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