



U.S. Department of Education  
Office of Safe and Healthy Students



# Continuity of Operations (COOP) Planning



# Presentation Goals

1. Define a Continuity of Operations (COOP) Plan
2. Highlight COOP-planning considerations
3. Connect a COOP plan to the four phases of emergency management
4. Overview of Continuity Planning Team Development
5. Describe the ten elements of a viable COOP plan
6. Conduct a tabletop exercise
7. Present challenges in implementing COOP
8. Provide resources for further planning





# Definition: Continuity of Operations (COOP) Plan

The U.S. Department of Education views a COOP plan as a program that:

- **Ensures continued performance** of essential functions across a full range of potential emergencies, be they natural or man-made.
- **Provides guidance and establishes responsibilities and procedures** to ensure that business resilience is developed and maintained.

COOP is **not the same** as an Emergency Operations Plan but rather supplements it, in the event normal facility or human resources are not available.





# Define Continuity of Operations (COOP) Plan (Cont'd.)

## **A COOP Plan ensures:**

- Emergency delegation of authority and a line of succession;
- Safekeeping of essential personnel, resources, facilities, and vital records;
- Emergency acquisition of resources necessary for business resumption; and
- The capability to perform critical functions remotely until resumption of normal operations.





# Disaster Scenario

- Over the weekend, a hurricane/tornado/fire moves through Central County destroying multiple homes, schools, the school administrative center, and much of your school division's transportation resources.
- The governor and local political leader have declared a state of emergency.
- There are multiple injuries and deaths throughout the area.
- It does not appear that the school division will be able to provide normal education operations.



# Questions to Consider

1. What essential functions will be needed?
2. Who is responsible when regular leadership is unavailable?
3. How does non-regular leadership know the span of their authority?
4. The district office is unsafe to reopen. Some of its occupants are displaced and unavailable. How do you perform essential functions?
5. Payroll is scheduled to be disbursed on the 30<sup>th</sup>. How can this deadline still be met? DELETE SLIDE



# Highlight COOP-planning Considerations

## **A school district's COOP plan should:**

- Allow for its implementation anytime, with or without warning, during duty and non-duty hours;
- Provide full operational capability for essential functions no later than 12 hours after activation; and
- Sustain essential functions for up to 30 days or until normal operations can be resumed.





# COOP Planning Considerations (Cont'd.)

## A COOP plan is utilized when:

- An incident impacts the ability to carry out essential functions (e.g., employee safety, equipment, records and other assets protection) and missions via normal operations; and
- Facilities and human resources are compromised (e.g., administrative building is damaged/destroyed or personnel are unavailable for duty during a pandemic event).

NOTE: Incidents may require full COOP plan implementation in which essential functions are carried out at a remote site or incidents may best be addressed through a modified COOP on-site.





# Highlight COOP-planning Considerations (Cont'd.)

## **Key leadership and personnel in a COOP must:**

- Know the key business functions
- Be familiar with their assigned essential functions
- Be aware of COOP capabilities
- Be able to make a decision or recommendation for implementing the COOP plan





# Highlight COOP-planning Considerations (Cont'd.)

## Effective continuity planning minimizes:

- Disrupted lines of direction and control
- Confusion over who is in charge
- Disrupted operations for brief or extended periods of time
- Compromised security of students and staff
- Disruption of normal communication links and methods
- Disruption to supply chain
- Concern about financial and human capital policy implications
- Instructional delivery measures that may affect general and special education requirements





# Connection to the Four Phases of Emergency Management

## COOP-planning:

- Can **Prevent or Mitigate** loss of essential functions;
- Helps **Prepare** a district or individual school to adapt to operational requirements in an emergency or crisis;
- Provides the ability to **Respond** to a wide range of functional impacts; and
- Defines a process to **Recover** and return to normal operations and restore the learning environment.





# Connection to the Four Phases of Emergency Management (Cont'd.)

- Good COOP planning allows a school district to continue to perform their essential functions during an emergency despite a reduction in normal resources.
- COOP emphasis is on internal and external issues that affect the ability for schools to function normally.





# Connection to the Four Phases of Emergency Management (Cont'd.)

## Some examples of hazards include:

- Fire
- Earthquake
- Flood
- Extreme Heat or Cold
- Hurricane
- Landslide
- Active Shooter
- Threat
- Tornado
- Wind
- Volcano
- Infectious Disease outbreaks and/or pandemic





# Connection to the Four Phases of Emergency Management (Cont'd.)

## **Pandemic Influenza defined:**

- A pandemic is a global disease outbreak.
- A flu pandemic occurs when a new influenza virus emerges for which people have little or no immunity, and for which there is no vaccine.
- The disease spreads easily person-to-person, causes serious illness, and can sweep across the nation and around the world in a very short time.
- The 1918 influenza virus was the deadliest in recent history, infecting approximately 30 percent of the world's population and killing up to 40 million individuals, particularly young people.
- 2009 H1N1 Flu: The new virus was first detected in the US in mid-April and was declared a Phase 6 Pandemic by WHO on June 11, 2009. Contrary to initial thoughts, based on the first identified cases being seen out of Mexico, the H1N1 flu was not a severe strain.





# Connection to the Four Phases of Emergency Management (Cont'd.)

## **Influenza pandemic may affect schools and their communities to include:**

- Potentially substantial absenteeism
- Significant impact on a schools' capacity to stay open
- Potentially many deaths
- Significant impact on our current public health and medical care capabilities





# Connection to the Four Phases of Emergency Management (Cont'd.)

## **Additional continuity planning considerations for pandemic include:**

- Performance of essential functions during increased student and staff absenteeism and school dismissal.
- Ability to extend continuity capability beyond traditional 30 day guidance.
- Ability to provide for the continuity of learning using a variety of technological and non-technological methods that also includes assessments.
- Capability to access vital records electronically.
- Continued coordination with Federal, State, and local health officials to mitigate the spread of virus (i.e. social distancing strategies).
- Cleaning methods or sanitation procedures.
- Limiting or canceling extracurricular activities.
- Impact to interdependencies (e.g., vendors).

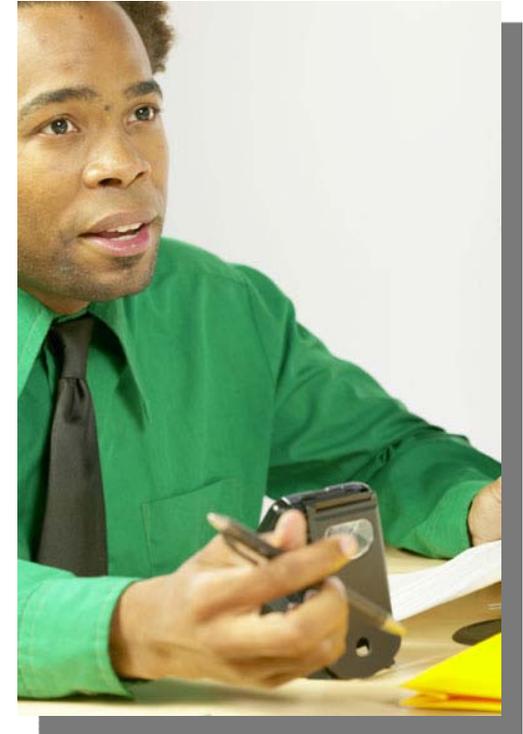




# Overview of Continuity Planning Team Development

## The Continuity Planner:

- Manages day-to-day continuity plan development and maintenance
- Coordinates with the planning team
- Oversees tests, training, and exercises; corrective action planning; and long-term planning efforts





# Overview of Continuity Planning Team Development (Cont'd.)

## Continuity Planning Team members should be:

- Selected based on their expertise in specific areas related to the school's or district's essential functions
- Assigned specific portions of the continuity plan to research and develop
- Able to work collaboratively with other team members





# Overview of Continuity Planning Team Development (Cont'd.)

## Steps to forming the Continuity Planning Team and establishing the Continuity Plan:

- Identify team members
- Define member roles
- Determine planning team alternates
- Develop continuity plan
- Research available and potential resources
- Update and maintain plan
- Test, Train, & Exercise





# Overview of Continuity Planning Team Development (Cont'd.)

## Potential Continuity Planning Team members:

- School Superintendent
- School Board Member
- Principals and Assistant Principals
- Educators
- School Nurse
- Local Law Enforcement and/or Local Emergency Management Official
- Local Government Official
- Food service Coordinator
- Transportation Coordinator
- Facilities Managers and Custodians
- Legal Counsel and Collective Bargaining Unit Representatives
- Parent-Teacher Association Representative





# Elements of a Viable COOP Plan

1. Essential Functions
2. Orders of Succession
3. Delegations of Authority
4. Continuity Facilities
5. Continuity Communications
6. Vital Records Management
7. Human Capital
8. Testing, Training and Exercise Program
9. Devolution of Control and Direction
10. Reconstitution Operations





# Element 1: Essential Functions

- Identification of essential functions is the initial stage of COOP-planning.
- Essential functions must be determined before other COOP processes.
- Essential functions are based on the unique district and school community, its needs and resources, as well as its supporting emergency management roles.
- Identification of nonessential functions allows for recognition of which services will cease in an emergency situation.





**What are some examples of essential functions for your school or district?**





# Element 1: Essential Functions (Cont'd.)

## Examples of essential functions:

- Transportation—of students or evacuees
- Communications—internal and external audiences
- Facility use—accessible main buildings or alternative locations
- Continuity of learning





# Element 1: Essential Functions (Cont'd.)

- Consider essential functions during different operational scenarios.
- Essential functions may be different when schools are open versus when schools are closed.
- Schools should identify and recognize their role in emergency support functions related to the local community Emergency Operations Plan.
  - Schools as emergency shelters
  - School buses used for evacuation





# Element 1: Essential Functions (Cont'd.)

## **Those functions that must continue with no or minimal disruption include:**

- Provision of health, safety and security;
- Facilitation of emergency response operations;
- Provision of educational and critical support services; and
- Restoration of normal operations and the learning environment.





# How do you notify personnel of key personnel absences?



# Element 2: Orders of Succession

## Orders of Succession

- Provides for the assumption of senior leadership during an emergency when the incumbents are unable or unavailable to execute their duties
- Allows for an orderly and predefined transition of authority





## Element 3: Delegations of Authority

**Review process to reflect roles and responsibilities when the COOP plan is activated.**

**Specify who is authorized to make decisions or act on behalf of:**

- The Superintendent and other district leadership including board members;
- School Principal and Assistant Principals;
- Other key individuals associated with essential functions performance; and
- District and school leadership.





# Element 3: Delegations of Authority

## **Delegations of authority should:**

- Be predetermined;
- Be documented in writing;
- Specify at least two alternate authorities;
- Address training and/or certification requirements; and
- Address limitations on the delegated authority.





# Element 3: Delegations of Authority (Cont'd.)

## **Delegations of authority have several purposes:**

- Approving emergency policy changes
- Approving changes of Standard Operating Procedures
- Empowering designee(s) to act on behalf of district in interagency response
- Making personnel management decisions
- Approving commitment of resources
- Signing contracts and authorizing procurement





## Element 3: Delegations of Authority (Cont'd.)

- Legal counsel should review delegations of authority to identify possible legal restrictions.
- State laws may impact school board issues (e.g., during an emergency, school officials should know who has the authority to close schools - mayors, governors, superintendents, etc.)





# Element 4: Continuity Facilities

## **Schools should identify alternative locations other than their normal facilities to carry out essential functions.**

- Establish any necessary Memorandums of Agreement (MOA)/Memorandums of Understanding (MOU) and partner agreements in advance.
- Determine if relocation within the district is feasible.
- Provide for reliable logistical support, services and infrastructure systems
- Ability to sustain operations for 30 days or until normal operations can be resumed
- Prepositioning assets and resources at alternate facility
- Determine which essential functions and services can be conducted from a remote location





## Element 4: Continuity Facilities (Cont'd.)

- Determine if relocation within the district is feasible.
- Provide for reliable logistical support, services and infrastructure systems
- Ability to sustain operations for 30 days or until normal operations can be resumed
- Prepositioning assets and resources at alternate facility
- Determine which essential functions and services can be conducted from a remote location





# Element 5: Continuity Communications

## **Continuity facilities must provide communications in order to:**

- Communicate internally with continuity planning team, leadership and key personnel
- Communicate with community partners
- Communicate with the school community –students, staff, and families
- Ensure connectivity if primary means of communication fails





**What interoperable communications capabilities do you currently have?**





# Element 5: Continuity Communications (Cont'd.)

## **Districts should establish and maintain Emergency Notification System (ENS):**

- with available and up-to-date call-down rosters.
- with alternate means, creating redundancy.

## **For alternative means of communicating, districts should consider:**

- Access to county and state radio frequency; and
- Access to satellite phones.





# Element 6: Vital Records Management

- Electronic and hard copy documents, references and records needed to support essential functions.
- Two types of vital records:
  - Static records - change little or not at all over time
  - Active records - change constantly with circumstances or as work is completed
- Examples of vital records include emergency operating records, legal/financial records, and student educational records





# Element 6: Vital Records Management (Cont'd.)

## Emergency Operating Records:

- Emergency operations plans and directives
- Orders of succession
- Delegations of authority
- References for those who perform which essential functions
- Staff contact information





# Element 6: Vital Records Management (Cont'd.)

## Legal and Financial Records:

- Personnel Records
- Social Security Records
- Payroll Records
- Retirement Records
- Insurance Records
- Contract Records
- Student Education Records





# How does your school store vital records?





# Element 7: Human Capital

## Considerations when assigning staff to essential operations:

- Talent, energy, knowledge, and enthusiasm that people invest in their work
- Most qualified people in the right jobs to perform essential functions most effectively
- Considers reassignment of personnel from nonessential functions relative to collective bargaining units and agreements





# Element 7: Human Capital (Cont'd.)

## **Expectations when the COOP plan is activated:**

- Employees have a clear understanding of what they are supposed to do in an emergency.
- Students and families have a clear understanding for the continuity of learning expectations.
- Identifying and providing needed accommodations and modifications to employees with disabilities and special needs.
- Identifying and providing students with IEPs necessary services during prolonged school dismissal.
- Providing those eligible students with continued medical and food services.





# Element 7: Human Capital (Cont'd.)

## **COOP management and expectations:**

- Ensure staff with “Essential Functions” responsibilities are trained in advance and continually informed during;
- Keep all staff informed during a COOP event regarding expectations for work; and
- Leadership must account for all staff .





**What type of exercises, drills, and training events do you currently perform?**



# Element 8: Test, Training and Exercise Program

## **The Test, Training and Exercise Program ensures COOP readiness and validates:**

- Essential functions are supported.
- All equipment and systems work as required.
- Timeliness of deployment is appropriate.
- Continuity facility supplies and capabilities are adequate.
- Employees understand their roles.
- Interdependencies, supply chain issues and infrastructure capabilities are addressed.
- Deficiencies and vulnerabilities have been identified.





# Element 9: Devolution of Control and Direction

## **Devolution of Control and Direction is:**

- The capability to transfer statutory authority and responsibility for essential functions.
- A way of ensuring a COOP capability in the event COOP personnel are unable to perform their mission or if the continuity facility is unavailable to support it.





## Element 9: Devolution of Control and Direction (Cont'd.)

### **Devolution of Control and Direction planning should:**

- Identify likely triggers and authorities.
- Describe how and when devolution will occur.
- Identify the resources that will be required, including the availability of other districts and schools to assist.





# Element 10: Reconstitution Operations

## Reconstitution Operations is:

- The process by which teachers, staff and, ultimately, students resume normal operations and restore the learning environment.





# Element 10: Reconstitution Operations (Cont'd.)

- Reconstitution may be complex.
- Recognition of minimum requirements required to return to normal operations and restore the learning environment.
  - Sufficient number of students and staff
  - Adequate number of safe and healthy facilities
  - Sufficient business and financial systems operating
- Districts may need to appoint a reconstitution manager to handle reconstitution operations.





# Tabletop Exercise





- The governor appoints state educational commissioner who oversees all county school districts.
- One superintendent and school board per county.
- There are 16 high schools, 32 middle schools and 64 elementary public schools in Central County.
- Total enrollment in Central County is 96,000 students.





# Scenario

- On Sunday, the 21st of the month a 7.0 earthquake occurs in Central County.
- Between 300-500 homes are damaged.
- Between 2000-3000 people are homeless. Among them teachers, students and other district personnel.
- Several district staff injured. One teacher is killed.
- One high school, 3 elementary schools and the administrative offices are too damaged to open.





# Questions to Consider

- Whose needs will determine essential functions?
- Identify essential functions needed in this scenario.
- In the two hours after the initial quake what would you communicate to staff and parents?





# Possible Responses

## Whose needs will determine essential functions?

- Obligations under the local Emergency Operations Plan have to be met, such as shelter sites.
- In addition, the needs of employees will also determine essential functions, (e.g., payroll disbursement, supporting access to employee benefits, timely and regular communication with employees.)
- Other essential functions are determined by the school district, given their current status of being open or closed.





# Possible Responses

## Identify essential functions needed in this scenario.

- Interoperable communication between school district, employees, students and other county and state agencies.
- Facilities that function as shelters, points of distribution (PODs) and an emergency operations center.
- School district IT system and vital records and databases.
- School district business services, (e.g. payroll/benefits).
- School district maintenance and operations, (e.g. continuity of education, communications, etc.).





# Possible Responses

## In the two hours after the initial quake what would you communicate to staff and parents?

- Report of initial incident assessment and possible response action such as entire or partial school closures.
- Summons for essential school employees to report to work.
- Which schools opened as shelters and PODS.
- Alternative sources of school status information if phone and electrical service is disrupted.





# Inject One

- Electrical power and phone service are lost after a 6.0 aftershock 2 hours after initial quake. Gradual restoration expected to begin in 3 – 5 days.
- Water lines to several communities and 6 schools are disrupted. Gradual restoration to begin in 5 – 7 days.
- Two of the three main highways in and out of the county are closed due to damage. Gradual reopening expected to begin in 5 – 7 days.





# Questions to Consider

- The superintendent is unable to communicate with all school principals after 2 hours. What can empower a principal to make decisions for their site?
- How will you continue to update staff and parents until phone service is restored?
- What ensures that all employees know what to do before, during and after an incident?





# Possible Responses

**The superintendent is unable to communicate with all school principals after 2 hours. What can empower a principal to make decisions for their site?**

- Pre-determined delegation of authority that addresses items such as:
  - Authority to open school as a shelter and points of distribution.
  - Announce closure of their particular school.
  - Pre-determined procurement limit.
  - Authority to require employees to work beyond normal workday.





# Possible Responses

## What ensures that all employees know what to do before, during and after an incident?

- Support from leadership for continual training, exercising and testing.





# Inject Two

The local government requests the school district to assist with the emergency by fulfilling its obligations under the local emergency operations plan by providing the following:

- Opening of multiple shelters at schools that are not damaged;
- Food collection, storage and production for distribution;
- Assist with damage assessment and debris removal;
- Transportation to/from the shelters; and
- Utilization of warehouse facilities for distribution of incoming medical supplies.





# Questions to Consider

**Identify essential functions needed in this scenario.**





# Possible Responses

## Identify essential functions needed in this scenario.

- Interoperable communication between school district, employees, students and other county and state agencies.
- Facilities that function as shelters, points of distribution and an emergency operations center.





# Inject Three

- Teachers Union has inquired about uninterrupted payroll, health and retirement benefits.
- Payroll is scheduled to be disbursed on the 30th of the month.
- Many employees don't have payroll directly deposited.





# Questions to Consider

- **How could you still meet the payroll deadline?**
- **How will you safeguard check disbursement?**





# Possible Responses

## How could you still meet the payroll deadline?

- Establish an out of area location for vital records storage.
- Establish daily, automated update of vital records.
- Identify essential staff needed to process payroll from remote location.
- Establish procedures for out of area processing of payroll.
- Pre-arrange with printing services to prepare checks.
- Promote organizational campaign for direct deposit.





# Possible Responses

## How will you safeguard check disbursement?

- Pre-arrange with staff from payroll to support disbursement of payroll.
- Provide security to support payroll disbursement.





# Inject Four

- Shelter operations will cease in one week.
- Damage assessments of the school buildings indicate that you can reopen in two weeks.
- The primary administrative facility is destroyed.
- Many of the employees are displaced and unavailable.
- Reconstitution will be complex and is estimated to last one year. It will be a full time job.





# Questions to Consider

- **How will you provide continuity of education to 2000 high school students and 1500 elementary students displaced from their schools?**
- **What determines who performs essential functions?**
- **How can essential functions continue?**
- **Suggest how reconstitution will be accomplished.**





# Possible Responses

## How will you provide continued education 2000 high school students and 1500 elementary students displaced from their schools?

- Divide up students to be served at multiple alternate school sites.
- Consider capacity issues and split schedules.
- Consider instruction at non-school facilities, e.g., local community centers, churches, libraries, colleges, universities and neighboring inter-district schools.
- Consider combining direct and on-line instruction.





# Possible Responses

## What determines who performs essential functions?

- Individuals who are most qualified to perform essential functions.
- Individuals cross-trained to perform essential functions.
- Individuals reassigned from non-essential to essential functions.





# Possible Responses

## How can essential functions continue?

- Establish devolution plan. Transfer of statutory authority and responsibilities to a pre-determined alternate facility and staff.
- Establish policy for authorization of devolution.
- Make COOP plan and resources available for distribution to devolution staff.
- Identify incidents likely to trigger devolution.





# Possible Responses

## **Suggest how reconstitution will be accomplished.**

- Consider assigning a full-time reconstitution manager.
- Consider minimum staffing needed to facilitate reconstitution and return to normal operations.





# Challenges Implementing COOP

- 1. Maintaining sustainability**
- 2. Staff turnover**
- 3. Updating COOP Plans consistently**
- 4. Reserving time to conduct periodic training**



# Addressing Challenges to Implementation

## 1. Maintain Sustainability

- Schedule reviews, updates and training around:
  - Related State and district school emergency management planning events and deadlines
  - Related emergency management planning events and deadlines with community partners
- Share lessons learned and recent achievements with:
  - District and state education officials
  - Community partners





# Addressing Challenges to Implementation

## 2. Staff Turnover

- Require new employees to complete Incident Command System (ICS) and COOP online trainings as part of the hiring process.
- ICS and COOP online trainings are free and self-paced, and include certificates.
  - Emergency Management Institute  
[www.training.fema.gov/EMICourses/](http://www.training.fema.gov/EMICourses/)





# Addressing Challenges to Implementation

## 3. Continually review and update COOP plans

- Align review and update of COOP Plans with state required review and update of school emergency management plans



# Addressing Challenges to Implementation

## 4. Schedule times to test and conduct periodic exercises

- Align tabletop exercises with state mandated drills and district drills.
  - At least semi-annually
- Conduct annual collaborative tabletop exercises with local first responders.
- Debrief to identify next steps addressing:
  - Identify what went well
  - Identify what can be done differently
  - Schedule next exercise date





# Summary

- **Provide definition of COOP and when it is used.**
- **Discuss the ten basic elements of a COOP plan.**
- **Understand some of the potential impacts and challenges of implementing a COOP plan.**





# Presentation Credits

## Thank you to the following persons for their role as initial authors of this presentation:

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The REMS TA Center was established in October 2007 by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Safe and Healthy Students.

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.

For additional information about school emergency management topics, visit the REMS TA Center at <http://rems.ed.gov> or call 1-866-540-REMS (7367). For information about the REMS grant program, contact Tara Hill ([tara.hill@ed.gov](mailto:tara.hill@ed.gov)).

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