SUMMARY
School administrators should consider identifying and training staff members to serve as substitutes for primary assignees to incident command system (ICS) positions. These staff members can help ensure continuity of operations during an incident at a school.

DESCRIPTION
On May 31, 2006, the University of Washington in Seattle held a tabletop exercise simulating the effect of a worldwide pandemic influenza outbreak on its Seattle, Bothell, and Tacoma campuses. The purpose of the exercise was to test the adequacy of the university’s emergency response and management plan (ERMP) during all phases of a pandemic disease outbreak. The exercise included 56 participants, representing University of Washington administrators, unit leaders, and departments as well as the local and state emergency management community.

Exercise evaluators raised concerns that during a pandemic influenza outbreak school staff members assigned to the university’s emergency operations center may be unable to fulfill their assigned ICS roles. Although the university’s ERMP identified two substitutes for each ICS role, emergency planners questioned whether this would be sufficient for a large-scale disaster.

School administrators should consider identifying and training several alternative staff members to serve as substitutes for primary assignees to ICS positions. The assignment of trained alternatives will help ensure continuity of operations if some or all primary assignees are unable to fulfill their duties during an incident at a school.

CITATION
Charvat, Steven. Emergency Management Director, University of Washington. Interview with Lessons Learned Information Sharing, 21 Dec 2006.
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