



The U.S. Department of Education's Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools (OSDFS) sponsors *Emergency Management for Schools* training to provide support to school staff and administrators interested in enhancing their preparedness efforts. Emphasis for the *Emergency Management for Schools* training is placed on emergency management plan development within the framework of the four phases of emergency management: Prevention-Mitigation, Preparedness, Response, and Recovery. Training sessions present an excellent opportunity for school-based staff and administrators from local education agencies (LEAs) or nonpublic schools to acquire requisite knowledge to help develop effective, all-hazards emergency management plans. In 2007, OSDFS filmed one of the *Emergency Management for Schools* training meetings so that it could be archived and made available to school personnel across the country.

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# HELPFUL HINTS

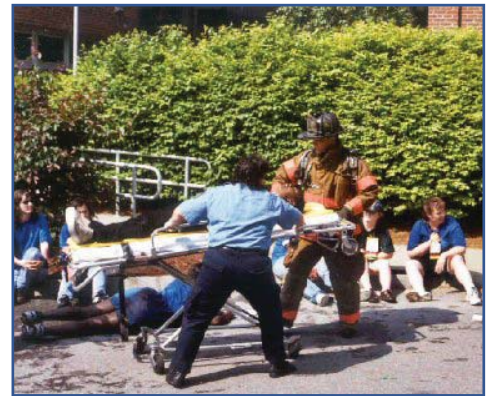
## FOR SCHOOL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

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### ENGAGING ADMINISTRATORS IN SCHOOL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

In the last decades school administrators at all levels—district superintendents, school principals and assistant principals—have experienced diverse crises, including, but not limited to: floods, hurricanes, school shootings, chemical spills, and infectious disease outbreaks. School districts and schools across the country are struggling with ways to effectively engage administrators in emergency management planning. Engagement of school administrators is crucial because their involvement is essential to elevating emergency management to a high priority at every level of the school system, in every administrative department, and in every school building. Administrator engagement also will lead to great involvement of teacher and other school-based staff.

Emergency management in the schools involves a greater interdependence between school and community leaders such as fire, police, emergency medical



services (EMS) and mental health personnel. This collaboration helps to create a dynamic and interactive environment in which the school-based administrators' authority can be transformed and shared through a single voice and a collective message about emergency management priorities and actions. Depending on the scope of the crisis, this may mean that administrators may be called upon to share responsibility in decision-making with local responders, hand control over to the key incident commander from first responding agencies, or possibly maintain their autonomy in an emergency situation.

This issue of *Helpful Hints* provides strategies for engaging school administrators in ongoing emergency management activities to reduce threat and security risks, and to prepare for managing and recovering from a crisis.

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Four one hour webcasts, each featuring one of the four phases of emergency management can be accessed at [www.connectlive.com/events/depteduphilly0207/](http://www.connectlive.com/events/depteduphilly0207/). These webcasts can be played in conjunction with the PowerPoint presentations made available at the following Web sites. It is OSDFS' hope that these materials will assist schools, and school personnel, in improving their overall preparedness efforts.

For additional information on emergency management resources for schools, please visit the Department of Education's Emergency Planning Web site at [www.ed.gov/emergencyplan](http://www.ed.gov/emergencyplan) and the Department of Education-funded Emergency Response and Crisis Management Technical Assistance Center available at [www.ercm.org](http://www.ercm.org).

District and school-based administrators' actions in advance of emergency situations are critical to the success of emergency management efforts at all levels of the school community. For example, administrators can articulate support by providing the fiscal resources and time needed to plan for emergencies and to train all district personnel. Engaging school administrators in proactive emergency management planning is also the key to helping the entire school community—students, staff, parents and visitors—prepare for, respond to, and recover from a crisis or emergency of any size or magnitude. School administrator collaboration with a broad spectrum of professionals and agencies will help to develop and maintain a common vision for emergency management and develop long-term commitment to implement, practice, sustain, and update emergency management plans.

Ongoing collaboration, cooperation and communication are all critical to school emergency management.

Effective school administrators are well-versed in the benefits of establishing personal relationships with key people in community organizations to supplement and enhance program support available for families and students. Administrators can capitalize on these relationships and use similar strategies to protect the school community. School administrators' active involvement in school emergency management helps schools to:

- Promote emergency preparedness as a high priority within the district, schools, and classroom and equal in importance to increasing academic achievement;
- Articulate the key components and critical activities of the four phases of emergency management—prevention-mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery;
- Work with community partners, build from their expertise and collaboratively develop, implement and sustain emergency



management plans based on the unique characteristics of each school that can support the whole school community (including people with disabilities and special needs);

- Help first responders and other community partners understand the unique characteristics of the school building, school grounds, students and families; and
- Understand that managing a crisis or emergency should be done within the context of the National Incident Management System (NIMS), a unified, standardized national system for managing domestic incidents that is suitable for schools nationwide to use during all phases of emergency management to facilitate local decision-making and improvement.



## **Strategy #1: Help Administrators Understand that Collaboration with Community Partners Will Help Manage a Crisis**

District and school-based administrators sometimes have misperceptions about the extent to which they are prepared to manage a crisis of any magnitude at any time. For example, administrators may erroneously believe that they must assume total responsibility for managing an emergency, should a crisis occur. This can be overwhelming because of the amount of chaos that may result from a crisis on campus. The capacity of the administrator to handle an emergency is compounded by all the extra individuals (e.g., responders, parents, guardians, and media representatives) on the campus that need information from the administrator and the confusion that ensues following an emergency. It can also be overwhelming for administrators to understand what resources are needed to manage a crisis.

It is important for administrators to realize that 1) they can help mitigate the impacts of a crisis by planning in advance and 2) they would not be faced with resolving a crisis by themselves should one occur. First, school officials can invite the district public information officer and legal counsel to speak to school administrators about



potential scenarios that may occur if they are not involved in all phases of the emergency management process. Second, administrators can view media tapes and newspaper clips of continued media coverage to observe that, in a crisis, a response requires involvement in not only planning the response, but in preventing and mitigating potential crises and emergencies. It is important to emphasize to both district and school-based administrators that past crises such as Columbine, 9-11, Hurricane Katrina and other events magnify the need to have an emergency management plan. Third, administrators should understand that all emergency management plans are not “one size fits all” and should focus on all hazards. Administrators should work with community partners to focus and prioritize the hazards unique to their school building, school grounds and surrounding

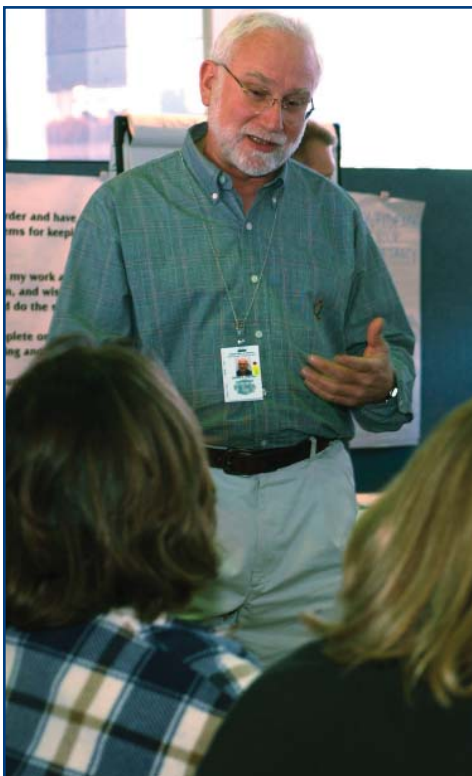
environment. For example, a school near an airport faces different hazards than one located near a busy highway that is used by large trucks carrying chemicals and gas. Additionally, a three-story school will require a different evacuation plan than a one-story building. To help administrators understand that collaboration with community partners is essential, a former school principal suggests conducting a walk-through of the building and campus with the school incident management team and first responders. This will help administrators assess threats unique to a school and the surrounding geographic areas. During a walk-through, the school incident management team and first responders can identify potential common and unique threats and develop strategies for eliminating or mitigating the threats.



### **Strategy #2: Help Administrators Understand the Benefits of School Emergency Management**

Harold Dodge, superintendent, Mobile County Public Schools, advised administrators: “Don’t worry—nothing will be OK.” Helping administrators understand that if they plan to be involved in any aspect of responding to crises or emergencies, they must be involved in emergency management planning before the crisis occurs. For most incidents that occur in the schools, the school administrator assumes the role of the first responder. Rapid response by the school administration and staff to an emergency situation can prevent injuries, save lives and allow for a more rapid return to normal school operations. Emergencies and crises develop more quickly than one may imagine and it is unlikely that emergency

responders are located next to schools. Therefore, schools must develop the capability to be self-reliant until first responders arrive. Understanding how to respond properly to a crisis or emergency is important if first responders must be called to the school. Said one district administrator: “The buck stops with the school principal. Principals must be involved in emergency management planning. If not, others will take over for them and the administrator loses all control of the situation.” It is also important for law enforcement, fire departments, and other community partners to understand the principal’s role in assuring a safe environment. Developing a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with community partners will increase mutual understanding and respect of the administrators’ role and will facilitate preparing, responding to, and recovering from an emergency or crisis.



One-way to help both district and school based administrators understand the benefits of school emergency management is to familiarize them with the rationale and concepts of the National Incident Management System (NIMS) and the Incident Command System (ICS). NIMS and the ICS establish a centralized command, outline various roles during a crisis or emergency and include standard terminology for responding to events. The ICS structure can be used to establish a school-based incident management team that can be activated for either small or large crises or emergencies. The school-based incident management team may include community partners and school-based personnel such as facilities managers, transportation managers, cafeteria managers, nurses, disability specialists, counselors, and teachers. Providing school-based administrators with a template to establish this team will help to ensure that all ICS functions are covered. Because administrators are often out of the school building, they may wish to delegate each ICS role to three people to make certain that there is adequate and continuous coverage of each function.

Administrators can use the ICS framework to work with their community partners to establish criteria in which agencies are activated and command is transferred. For example, when a bomb threat is called in to a school,

the predetermined agreements most often designate the fire department or police department officials as incident commanders. If principals understand that ICS dictates that they transfer command to someone else, they will view their primary role and responsibility as assisting first responders to ensure that students and staff are safe, not as having their authority reduced or diminished.

### **Strategy #3: Help Administrators Define Their Roles Before, During, and After an Emergency**

Most principals are familiar with the process of collaboration in providing academic and mental health services to students; therefore, being part of a district or school-based incident management team will not be something entirely new. Just as police and fire personnel have expertise and experience in their fields so do administrators; administrators know their school communities—the campus, the

buildings and the people. Together, administrators and first responders can identify and define roles for each agency. As administrators take guidance from first responders, community partners also need to recognize principals' contributions, problem-solving skills and knowledge of the school for several reasons:

1. Administrators at the school building level are involved in all crises and emergencies (physical and emotional) that occur at their school. Therefore school administrators and community personnel need to collaborate so that community partners can be informed of a school's unique characteristics before a crisis;
2. Roles and responsibilities must be agreed upon in advance and be articulated in the plan ahead of time. Administrators can better prepare for an emergency if they have a prescribed set of responsibilities; and



3. Schools are an integral part of the community and often one of the most valuable resources for shelters, evacuation sites, and transportation centers. They may also help keep track of students and families. First responders often rely on schools for support during a crisis or emergency. Engaging first responders and other community partners before a crisis will help to maximize the use of school buildings and facilitate restoring the learning environment after an emergency.

#### **Strategy #4: Provide School-based Administrators Support to Engage in Emergency Management**

It is important that district-based administrators support school-based administrators by providing the leadership, access to training, resources, time, and processes needed for creating well-integrated emergency management plans. These activities should address how to design, implement, evaluate, and consistently update the plans. District administrators should raise awareness and show support through on-going dialogue. Emergency management planning is as important as student achievement and should be a high-priority. Additional resources may be needed for training staff and



students about the plans and disseminating information to families about emergency management and student-parent reunification procedures.

District administrators play a key role in integrating school emergency management efforts. District-based administrators should encourage each school to incorporate the unique needs of the school and integrate the school's plan with the district's emergency management plan. Conversely, the district-based administrators should help to ensure that the unique needs of each individual school in the district are incorporated into the district's emergency management plan. Furthermore, the district must ensure all plans are aligned with the community agencies' plans. This continuity of effort will help to ensure that the plans are based on the unique characteristics of the school within the context of the four phases of emergency management—prevention-mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery.

#### **Strategy #5: Establish Emergency Management Objectives and Schedules for School Administrators**

Many school-based administrators underestimate the time it takes to: (1) develop an emergency management plan and (2) assemble community partners in developing the plan. Timing is integral to engaging administrators. Summer provides a natural “down time” within the context of administrators' responsibilities to plan for the upcoming school year. District security chiefs and safety coordinators should provide structured schedules and objectives guiding administrators in their efforts and also offer meeting, collaborating, and debriefing opportunities.

District administrators can begin the emergency management process by sending all principals and assistant principals an e-mail in late April or May announcing the general goals for emergency management for the upcoming year. Principals can identify the school's incident management team and begin reviewing the plan. Also, they can identify the training needs of incident management team members so the district can design and schedule appropriate training with community partners. The district should also schedule follow-up meetings with representatives from the district office and first responders. Having both district

administrators and first responders attend this meeting helps to provide objectivity for determining what aspects of the plans should be updated and the appropriateness of procedures. Dividing the tasks of updating the plans and attending training into segments will help principals see that each segment is not only possible but also can be completed within a specific timeframe.

### **Strategy #6: Focus Trainings for Administrators on Real Events**

Transforming school emergency management training for school administrators' meetings into "authentic" experiences is the best way to raise awareness, increase learning and emphasize collaboration. A table-top exercise is a simulation or a scenario that tests how critical school staff and first responders would respond to an emergency and assesses the feasibility of an emergency management plan. Table-top exercises with realistic emergency scenarios provide opportunities for school administrators to test new knowledge regarding emergency protocols for their school building, student body and staff. Conducting collaborative table-tops also allows stress-free environments for problem-solving scenarios with first responders and

other stakeholders before an emergency. Table-top exercises will nurture relationships and create collaborative networks between all community partners. Additionally, collaborative table-top exercises will help school administrators become more



familiar and comfortable with emergency management while community partners become more familiar with the unique nature of a school community.

Inviting first responders and other community partners also will help to identify and break down differences in philosophy, terminology, and procedures. Other valuable participants are the lawyers retained by the school district and community agencies who can discuss the potential legal implications for having first responders serve

as site commanders during a school-based emergency. Lawyers can emphasize the importance of ensuring that everyone assumes the roles and responsibilities outlined in NIMS and ICS so that nothing will interfere with potential investigations and future litigation.

All training should incorporate the principles of adult learning, that respect the wealth of experiences that administrators possess. The training should include goal-oriented, relevant and practical sessions where administrators can integrate new knowledge and skills in emergency management with their existing experiences and skills. Information presented in administrator trainings and exercises should always be relevant to schools and include realistic school-based examples.

### **Conclusion**

Today's school administrators are faced with external pressures for academic improvement, which is closely linked with school safety. Students and staff must feel safe from intruders, violent students, or natural disasters. This sense of security is integral for supporting the school learning environment, ensuring high staff and student morale, and establishing school safety. School administrators

experience day-to-day crises and emergencies—some of which can be dealt with quickly and without the need to call first responders and other agencies. However, events in

the past decade have proven that proactive school emergency management planning is essential for guiding school administrators and first responders through an established and predetermined

set of responses and procedures for their school community. Collaboration between district and school-based administrators should take place before, rather than during or after, an emergency or crisis.

## RESOURCES

### Multi-Hazard Emergency Planning for Schools

This short, Web-based course is part of FEMA's Independent Study Program, a component of its Emergency Management Institute. The one-day class specifically addresses hazard assessment, plan development, emergency management operations and the roles and responsibilities of school incident management team members. School-based professionals with emergency management responsibilities, as well as individuals with an interest in school preparedness, are encouraged to take the course. Additional information is accessible at <http://training.fema.gov/EMIWeb/IS/is362.asp>.

### School Safety for Administrators

The U.S. Department of Education provides information to help school administrators plan for any emergency, including natural disasters, violent incidents, and terrorist acts. The information can be accessed at <http://www.ed.gov/admins/lead/safety/edpicks.jhtml?src=rt>.



The Emergency Response and Crisis Management (ERCM) Technical Assistance (TA) Center and the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools (OSDFS) would like to thank Rhonda Waltman, former assistant superintendent of student services for Mobile, Ala., County Public Schools and Jon Akers, executive director, Kentucky Center for School Safety for their assistance in preparing this publication. The ERCM TA Center was established in October 2004 by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools (OSDFS). The center supports schools and school districts in developing and implementing comprehensive emergency and crisis response plans by providing technical assistance via trainings, publications and individualized responses to requests. *Helpful Hints* provides a quick overview of school emergency preparedness topics that are frequently the subject of inquiries. For additional information about conducting exercises or any other emergency management related topic, visit the ERCM TA Center at <http://www.ercm.org> or call 1-888-991-3726. For information about the Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools grant program, contact Tara Hill ([tara.hill@ed.gov](mailto:tara.hill@ed.gov)), Michelle Sinkgraven ([michelle.sinkgraven@ed.gov](mailto:michelle.sinkgraven@ed.gov)) or Sara Strizzi ([sara.strizzi@ed.gov](mailto:sara.strizzi@ed.gov)).

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