



K-12 School Planning and Response Teams: Developing and Enhancing the School Emergency Operations Plan

To ensure the safety of students, educators, administrators, and staff, schools can take steps to plan and effectively respond to potential threats and hazards by developing a high-quality emergency operations plan (EOP) in collaboration with their local government and community partners. High-quality EOPs reflect our national approach to preparedness by incorporating the five preparedness mission areas — prevention, protection, mitigation, response, and recovery. This plan can be one of a school’s most powerful tools for dealing with emergency incidents; ensuring the security and preparedness of the school community; and addressing the safety needs of all students, staff, and visitors, including those with access and functional needs. To support the creation of a comprehensive, high-quality school EOP, in 2013 the U.S. Federal government published the *Guide for Developing High-Quality School Emergency Operations Plans*, representing the first joint product of the U.S. Departments of Education, Justice, led by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Health and Human Services, and Homeland Security, led by the Federal Emergency Management Agency, on this topic. Also known as the *School Guide*, this resource assists school emergency planning teams, as well as members of the whole school community, in understanding their roles and responsibilities before, during, and after emergency incidents and in supporting the school EOP design and enhancement.

Creating and Revising EOPs Using a Six-Step Planning Process

The *School Guide* outlines a six-step planning process for creating and continually enhancing a school EOP. This federally recommended process may be used by K-12 public, nonpublic, charter, rural, urban, and suburban schools to plan for a range of hazards and threats that may occur in all settings and at any time in their local communities.

Using This Checklist

The following checklist can assist schools in developing a new EOP or refreshing their existing plan. This checklist summarizes key elements that will help school personnel (administrators, educators, and staff), with their community partners, develop a school EOP. To use the checklist, consider the extent to which your planning team has undertaken or included in the school’s EOP each of the activities listed and check the appropriate box.

THE PLANNING PROCESS



STEP 1: FORM A COLLABORATIVE PLANNING TEAM

To begin the process of developing and maintaining an EOP, a school planning team should be assembled. These multidisciplinary planning teams should work closely with local emergency response teams to develop school EOPs and related annexes.

Identify Core Planning Team

- School district or local education agency (if applicable)
 - Superintendent
 - District law enforcement, safety, security, and emergency management staff
 - School board representatives
 - District-level policymakers
 - Representatives from other schools within the school district
- School community
 - School administrators
 - Administrators
 - School psychologists
 - School social workers
 - School counselors
 - School nurses
 - Facility managers, maintenance personnel, and custodial staff
 - Transportation managers
 - Food management and cafeteria staff
 - Family services representatives
 - Families
 - School Resource Officers and school-based safety and security officers
 - Students
 - Information Technology specialists
 - Community engagement specialists
- Individuals and organizations representing the diverse interests of the whole school community
 - People with disabilities or access/functional needs
 - People who are racial or ethnic minorities
 - People who belong to religious organizations
 - People with limited English proficiency
- Local community partners with a responsibility in school emergency management and with information on the community
 - Emergency Management
 - Law Enforcement
 - Fire
 - Emergency Medical Services
 - Public Health
 - Mental/Behavioral Health
 - Youth-serving organizations
 - Nonpublic and public schools

- State department of education or state education agency
- State community partners
- Additional partners with a role in school emergency management

Form a Common Framework

- Take time to learn each other’s vocabulary, command structure, and culture to facilitate effective planning

Define and Assign Roles and Responsibilities

- Ensure that each member of the planning team knows his or her roles and responsibilities in developing and refining the school EOP

Determine a Regular Schedule of Meetings

- Set campus-wide expectations for holding regular but flexible planning meetings within each campus building and establish a regular schedule to facilitate collaboration, coordination, and communication



STEP 2: UNDERSTAND THE SITUATION

Insight from the school emergency planning and response team will be critical as EOPs are developed and continually enhanced. The team members can help ensure that EOPs address the threats and hazards the school, and its individual school buildings, may face because of their historical knowledge as well as their understanding of the culture and climate within the whole school community.

Develop a Comprehensive List of Possible Threats and Hazards

- Data from school and school district assessments
 - Site assessment
 - Culture and climate assessment
 - Behavioral threat assessment
 - Capacity assessment
- Information from local, state, and Federal partners
- Information from the school community

Evaluate Risks and Vulnerabilities

- Consolidate the information obtained into a format that is usable for comparing the risks and vulnerabilities posed by the identified threats and hazards

Prioritize Threats and Hazards

- Use the evaluation data to compare and prioritize threats and hazards that will be addressed directly in the EOP



STEP 3: DETERMINE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

EOPs are designed to provide defined specific actions that planning and response team members can take in the event of an emergency. Goals and objectives that are based on threats, hazards, and common emergency management functions can help ensure that everyone has a clear understanding of why specific protocols and policies are included within the EOP.

- Select Threats and Hazards to Address in the EOP**
- Develop Goals and Objectives for Threats and Hazards**
 - Develop goals (before, during, after phases)
 - Develop corresponding objectives
 - Identify cross-cutting functions
- Develop Goals and Objectives for Functions**
 - Develop goals (before, during, after phases)
 - Develop corresponding objectives



STEP 4: IDENTIFY COURSES OF ACTION

Goals and objectives define the “what and why,” but courses of action combine the “who” and “how” in emergency management planning. Who will be responsible for carrying out certain actions, and how will they accomplish those actions?

- Use Scenario-Based Planning**
 - Depict the scenario
 - Determine the amount of time available to respond
 - Identify decision points
 - Develop courses of action
- Develop Courses of Action for Threats and Hazards**
- Develop Courses of Action for Functions**



STEP 5: PREPARE, REVIEW, AND APPROVE PLANS

Goals, objectives, and courses of action will serve as the foundation for an EOP, which can be formatted using the outline recommended in the *School Guide* or in a format that best suits the needs of the school. Once the EOP is formatted and revised, the school planning team should review the plan for quality, approve it, and determine with whom the entire EOP or portions of it should be shared.

- Prepare the Draft EOP**
 - Edit and format the Threat- and Hazard-Specific Annexes
 - Edit and format the Functional Annexes
 - Write the Basic Plan

Review, Approve, and Share the Plan

- Develop a framework outlining the process for officially approving the school EOP
- Approve the EOP
- Share the plan with community partners and additional stakeholders who have a responsibility for or a role in the EOP
- Protect the EOP from those unauthorized to have them
- Establish a system for sharing secure documents electronically
- Maintain a record of people and organizations that receive a copy of the plan

STEP 6: IMPLEMENT AND MAINTAIN THE PLAN

Once created, an EOP should be continually updated and enhanced based on lessons learned from school emergencies, exercises conducted, and insight from the whole school community. School planning and response teams should meet on a recurring basis to exercise the plan, as well as review and revise it to ensure compliance with local, state, or Federal legislation and that roles and responsibilities remain clearly outlined.

Train Stakeholders

- Hold a meeting
- Visit evacuation sites
- Give involved parties appropriate and relevant literature on the plan, policies, and procedures
- Post key information throughout the building
- Familiarize students and staff with the plan and community partners
- Train staff in the necessary skills to fulfill their roles

Exercise the Plan

- Tabletop exercises
- Drills
- Functional exercises
- Full-scale exercises

Review, Revise, and Maintain the Plan

- Set a schedule for exercising the plan
- Set a schedule for updating the plan
- Set a schedule for reviewing and updating who has access to the plan

Once the EOP is complete, school planning teams can use the REMS TA Center's EOP EVALUATE Web application to evaluate and update their EOP based on the guidelines set forth in the *School Guide*. Upon completion of EOP EVALUATE, responses will result in a customized downloadable report containing a variety of additional resources and information.



Evaluate Your Plan Using REMS TA Center's EOP EVALUATE Tool

The REMS TA Center's Web application helps planning teams evaluate their EOP against the guidelines set forth in the *School Guide*. Users are prompted through the federally recommended six-step planning process to determine whether there are areas where an existing EOP can be improved. Upon completing EOP EVALUATE, responses will result in a customized downloadable report containing a variety of additional information and resources on enhancing areas of your School's EOP. Access additional information on the REMS TA Center Website: <https://rems.ed.gov/EOPEvalTool/K12IHEvalTool.aspx>.

PLAN CONTENT

As Step 5 of the *School Guide* suggests, each plan contains three main sections — the Basic Plan, Functional Annexes, and Threat- and Hazard-Specific Annexes. Each section of the plan supports other sections and, together, they create a comprehensive, high-quality school EOP. The following portion of the checklist outlines the contents of each EOP section in detail and can assist schools in developing a new EOP or in evaluating their existing EOP against Federal guidance.

The Basic Plan

- Introductory Material**
 - Cover Page
 - Promulgation Document and Signatures
 - Approval and Implementation
 - Record of Changes
 - Record of Distribution
 - Table of Contents
- Purpose, Scope, Situation Overview, and Assumptions**
 - Purpose
 - Scope
 - Situation Overview
 - Planning Assumptions
- Concept of Operations**
- Organization and Assignment of Responsibilities**
- Direction, Control, and Coordination**
- Information Collection, Analysis, and Dissemination**
- Training and Exercises**
- Administration, Finance, and Logistics**

- Plan Development and Maintenance
- Authorities and References

Functional Annexes

- Evacuation Annex
- Lockdown Annex
- Shelter-in-Place Annex
- Accounting for All Persons Annex
- Communications and Warning Annex
- Family Reunification Annex
- Continuity of Operations (COOP) Annex
 - Continuity of Teaching and Learning
 - Continuity of Feeding and Food Distribution
 - Continuity of Business Services
 - Continuity of Essential Services
- Recovery Annex
 - Academic Recovery
 - Physical and Structural Recovery
 - Business Services Recovery
 - Health, Social, Emotional, and Behavioral Recovery
- Public Health, Medical, and Mental Health Annex
 - Public Health
 - Medical
 - Mental Health
- Security Annex

Threat- and Hazard-Specific Annexes

- Natural Hazards** (animals, earthquakes, extreme temperatures, floods, hurricanes/typhoons, landslides or mudslides, lightning, severe wind, tornadoes, tsunamis, volcanic eruptions, wildfires, winter precipitation, etc.)
- Technological Hazards** (accidental release of hazardous materials from within the school, dam failure, explosions or accidental release of toxins from industrial plants, hazardous materials from major highways and railroads, lead exposure or poisoning, power failure, radiological releases from nuclear power stations, water failure, etc.)
- Biological Hazards** (contaminated food outbreaks, infectious diseases, toxic materials present in school laboratories, etc.)
- Adversarial, Incidental, and Human-Caused Threats** (active shooters, adult sexual misconduct, bomb threats, bullying and cyberbullying, criminal threats or actions, cybersecurity and cyber safety, domestic violence or abuse, fire, gang violence, human trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation, kidnapping, opioid overdoses and drug-related emergencies, protests and walkout demonstrations, sextortion, sexual violence or assault, suicide, violent extremism, etc.)

EOP REVIEW

As Step 6 of the *School Guide* outlines, it is important for school planning team members to carefully review the EOP before sharing it with members of the school community to ensure that it clearly outlines goals, objectives, and courses of action and to ensure that the school remains in compliance with local, state, and Federal laws. Efforts to practice the plan may reveal areas of improvement that can help ensure plan effectiveness and efficiency. Find tips below to support your EOP review efforts.

Plan Writing Practices

- Summarizes important information with checklists/visual aids
- Uses clear writing, plain language, short sentences, and active voice; avoids jargon, qualifiers, and vague wording
- Uses a logical and consistent structure
- Provides enough detail to convey the plan/specific actions clearly
- Effectively communicates the plan to diverse audiences with appropriate auxiliary aids and services

Plan Effectiveness and Efficiency

- Incorporates all courses of action to be accomplished for the selected threats and hazards and identified functions
- Integrates the needs of the whole school community
- Provides a complete picture of what should happen, when, and at whose direction
- Estimates time for achieving objectives, keeping safety first
- Identifies success criteria and a desired end state
- Conforms to the planning principles outlined in the *School Guide*

Plan Compliance

- Complies with applicable Federal, state, and local requirements
 - Americans with Disabilities Act*
 - Title IV of the Civil Rights Act of 1964*
 - Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act*
 - Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996*

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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