

REMS Express

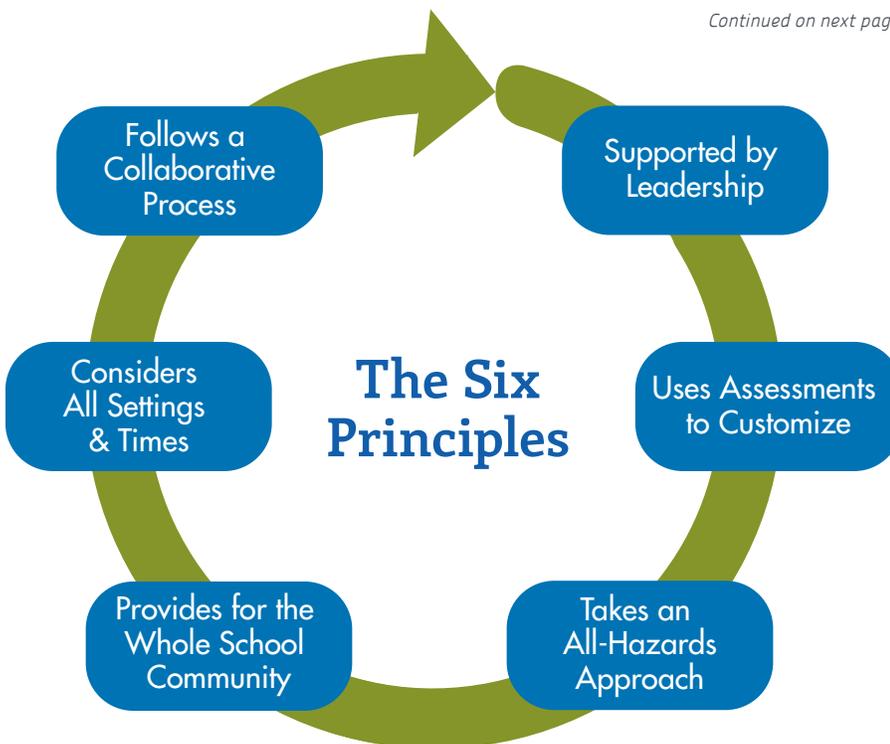
Volume 5, Issue 2, 2014



Principles for Creating a High-Quality School Emergency Operations Plan

As described in the federal *Guide for Developing High-Quality School Emergency Operations Plans (School Guide)*, several key planning principles are foundational to developing a high-quality school emergency operations (EOP) plan and building capacity in preparedness and its five mission areas: Prevention, mitigation, protection, response, and recovery. Incorporating these principles throughout the planning process and during the ongoing implementation of the emergency plan will increase a school's ability to carry out effective preparedness activities and

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The REMS TA Center supports schools, school districts, and institutions of higher education in developing and implementing comprehensive emergency operations plans. For additional information about school and higher education emergency management topics, visit the REMS TA Center at <http://rems.ed.gov>.



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provide efficient responses to a variety of threats and hazards. It also will improve safety for the entire school community. This *REMS Express* edition provides a practitioner's perspective on the *School Guide's* six recommended planning principles and offers practical strategies for implementing them throughout the planning and plan management processes.

Plans Must Be Supported by Leadership

The ongoing and strong support of both senior-level school and district officials is fundamental to producing, implementing, and sustaining high-quality EOPs.

Writing, revising, or strengthening an EOP requires a significant investment of time and resources — precious commodities for which school personnel are often competing. Senior leaders can demonstrate their commitment to and support for this process by providing the resources needed to engage in an effective planning process, making the allocation of time and personnel to this effort a priority.

Senior-level officials involved in the planning process also can provide key guidance based on their broader perspective of the school, district, and community. For example, they can help shape plans that are aligned with school and district policies, union constraints, and state and local laws, and also consider issues of legal liability. As the EOP takes form, planners will identify vulnerabilities and propose strategies for addressing them. Leaders can provide important direction on which ones might be feasible and cost-effective to implement. They also can assess the school and/or district's ability to maintain and sustain whatever plans are put into place. Similarly, they can look at possible short- and long-range goals for safety enhancements and understand how those may relate to other school and district priorities.

In addition, when leaders play an active role in developing the EOP, they demonstrate their buy-in and commitment to the plan, which increases the probability that it will receive staff support and be assimilated into the school culture. With the strong support of senior-level leaders, staff also are

more accountable and more likely to prioritize the ongoing training necessary for effective implementation of the plan in real emergencies. This can be accomplished by setting up a required schedule of training and drills, and establishing a reporting mechanism to track compliance. An example of this type of tool can be found at the REMS TA Center Toolbox at <http://rems.ed.gov/ToolBox.aspx>.

Plans Must Use Assessments Customized to the Building Level

Every school is unique, with distinct characteristics, strengths, and vulnerabilities. Effective planning incorporates comprehensive, ongoing assessments of the school and surrounding community in order to design a highly customized EOP.

There are numerous assessments that the planning team may use to help identify risks, potential issues, and available resources that will factor into the EOP. These include site assessments, culture and climate assessments, behavioral threat assessments, and capacity assessments. Data from these and other assessments provide the basis for customizing EOPs to meet individual school needs. They help the team evaluate the actual physical characteristics of a school through examining floor plans, grounds layouts, traffic flows, student behavior, security, and so forth. Assessments also help illuminate community partners' response capabilities and philosophies, response times, or communications constraints, and how associated strengths or weaknesses might impact, and thus shape, some elements of an EOP. For example, if the school is located in an isolated region and response times for first responders are lengthy, procedures may need to be developed to empower schools to take different or additional protective measures than would be necessary for a school with a police force nearby. Likewise, a school located in the middle of an urban area might have greater vulnerabilities to certain crimes or hazards than a rural school.

It is important for each school to create its own customized EOP. Using a generic plan, or one that is not particular to a specific school site, can potentially impair a school's ability to respond effectively in an emergency because such a plan will usually not meet all the needs of a particular school. Customizing an EOP to each school's unique characteristics is essential to enhancing a school's capability to respond effectively and efficiently to emergencies.

Plans Must Consider All Threats and Hazards

A comprehensive school emergency planning process utilizes an "all-hazards" approach, which takes into account a wide range of possible threats and hazards. It includes those that might take place in the community and surrounding area that could impact the school.

Sometimes schools tend to focus their emergency plans on typical hazards such as fires and weather-related incidents,

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EXAMPLES OF THREATS & HAZARDS

Natural Hazards	Technological Hazards	Biological Hazards	Adversarial, Incidental, and Human-Caused Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Earthquake ▪ Tornado ▪ Lightning ▪ Severe wind ▪ Hurricane ▪ Flood ▪ Wildfire ▪ Extreme temperature ▪ Landslide or mudslide ▪ Tsunami ▪ Dust storm ▪ Volcanic eruption ▪ Winter precipitation ▪ Snowstorm ▪ Other 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Hazardous materials in the community from industrial plants, major highways or railroads ▪ Radiological releases from nuclear power stations ▪ Hazardous materials in the school, such as gas leaks, sewage breaks, or laboratory spills ▪ Infrastructure failure, such as dam, power, water, communications, or technology systems ▪ Other 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Infectious diseases ▪ Contaminated food outbreak ▪ Water contamination ▪ Toxic materials present in schools, such as mold, asbestos, or substances in school science laboratories ▪ Other 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Fire ▪ Medical emergency ▪ <i>Active shooter</i> ▪ Threat of violence ▪ Fights ▪ Gang violence ▪ Bomb threat ▪ Child abuse ▪ Cyber attack ▪ Suicide ▪ Missing student or kidnapping ▪ School bus emergencies ▪ Student demonstration or riot ▪ Dangerous animal ▪ Other

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or high-profile school emergencies such as *active shooter situations*. However, school planning teams need to consider a broad spectrum of hazards and threats — from cybersecurity breaches to flu outbreaks — to determine the level of risk and vulnerability to that particular school, and to ensure there are adequate protective measures.

The EOP planning team can draw on a wealth of existing information to identify the range of threats and hazards the school might face. School personnel will have knowledge of previous emergencies; community partners will know of prevalent threats or hazards in the region; federal, state, and local historical data can be accessed; and school, city, or county surveys or reports can provide valuable information to help the team determine which threats and hazards to address.

Threats and hazards fall into four general categories: (1) natural hazards; (2) technological hazards; (3) biological hazards; and (4) adversarial, incidental, and human-caused

threats. The chart above, while not exhaustive, shows a variety of threats and hazards schools might need to address in their plans. Taking an all-hazards approach to emergency planning increases the capacity of the school to provide for the safety of its students, staff, and visitors in a wide range of potential emergency situations.

Plans Must Provide for the Access and Functional Needs of the Whole School Community

Throughout every step, the planning team should take an inclusive approach to ensure it takes into consideration the whole school community:

- students, staff, families, and visitors;
- children and adults with disabilities;
- persons with access and functional needs (e.g., communication, transportation);
- individuals from religiously, racially, and ethnically diverse backgrounds; and
- people with limited English proficiency.

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For example, a vulnerability assessment might reveal that specific protocols are necessary to provide for the special evacuation needs of infants and toddlers in school-based day cares and preschools. Similarly, it might show that individuals in wheelchairs who cannot physically perform the “duck-cover-hold” protocol during an earthquake need a special plan that provides for alternative protective measures. In other cases, loud noises, bright lights, and high-stress situations can affect some students’ ability to function or to follow instructions.

A culture and climate assessment, or after-action report, which provides recommendations for future response and recovery efforts, might reveal cultural-specific needs. For example, the role of parents and grandparents varies among different cultures, communities, and individual families. Their expectations for communications during emergencies also can vary, and the need for messaging in multiple languages might be required. In addition, individuals and communities, which may include persons of all ages and developmental stages, and survivors of past emergencies or violent acts, will face different hazards. Those in charge of emergency preparedness efforts need to be compassionate with regard to the social-emotional needs of the whole school community.

Assessments might reveal confidential information about students and families. In some cases, information must be shared with planning teams, and in others legal restrictions prevent information from being shared. Planners must be mindful of privacy rights as well when considering what information should be shared. The *Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)* is a good place for school planning teams to start when they are interested in understanding the implications related to information-sharing in the emergency planning process. In some cases, the *Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA)* may also apply.

Schools might consider developing a standardized procedure or tool for developing customized plans for individuals who

need accommodations to accomplish the emergency protocols. An example of this kind of tool can be found at <http://rems.ed.gov/ToolBox.aspx>.

Plans Must Consider All Settings and Times

School EOPs are often designed to empower students and staff to respond effectively to emergencies that occur when class is in session. While this is a good starting place, effective plans also must include procedures for students and staff to follow during non-instructional times. These include arrival, lunch, recess, and dismissal; while on the school bus or in the parking lot; at afterschool and evening activities; during off-campus field and athletic trips; and in virtual teaching and learning environments. For example, procedures for responding to an *active shooter situation* on campus may be very different if students are in an open lunchroom as opposed to a lockable classroom. Likewise, the same situation on a school bus or at an athletic event might require significantly different response protocols. Planning teams will need to address the tension between establishing clearly identified response protocols and teaching students and staff to respond to situations that aren’t clear. This involves learning to (1) assess the emergency situation, (2) be flexible when taking independent action, and (3) adapt responses when life-threatening circumstances are present.

Special protocols also might need to be established for making adequate emergency notifications in instructional areas with high noise levels, such as music rooms and gymnasiums, or in exterior areas such as parking lots or playgrounds. Consider, for example, the implications of a group of students and staff meeting outside for recess when the school is notified by first responders of a dangerous person in the area surrounding the school. What would be required to provide them with timely notification?

The planning team might also consider to what extent groups using school facilities during non-school hours should

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have access to and knowledge of school EOPs and resources. These kinds of considerations will naturally come to light as the planning team considers all settings and times while developing a complete EOP.

Plans Must Follow a Collaborative Process

Developing strong EOPs is best done through collaboration. Districts and schools should assemble a multidisciplinary planning team that includes a variety of district and school professionals as well as community partners.

Everyone has expertise to contribute — from leaders, administrators, facilities managers, educators, and counselors to school psychologists, nurses, students, and families. When combined, these different perspectives can greatly enhance preparedness and strengthen the Six-Step Planning Process recommended in the *School Guide*, which is the subject of *REMS Express*, Vol. 5, Issue 2, 2014. For example, facilities personnel have a wealth of knowledge about the building structure and campus layout, security systems, and heating, ventilation, and air conditioning systems. Their knowledge and participation will benefit multiple assessment efforts and serve as a foundation for the development of critical annexes or supplements to a school EOP. These include lockdown, shelter-in-place, and threat- and hazard-specific annexes that address issues such as how to prepare for and respond to a chemical spill. Furthermore, it is likely that many of these officials will have a role in the response and recovery efforts.

Districts and schools should ensure that their community partners also have clear roles and responsibilities in preparedness efforts, and participate on the team and throughout the Six-Step Planning Process. Partners can include local emergency managers, law enforcement, school resource officers, and safety officials, as well as public and mental health associates. Local government figures and community representatives also should be consulted. Diversity from within the school community, as well as from the greater community, will ensure a broader perspective and increase capacity by adding knowledge, expertise, and resources. An inclusive planning team also will help ensure that planning efforts are aligned and integrated at the community,

regional, and state levels, which facilitates response and recovery efforts.

As the team works through the process of identifying hazards, threats, vulnerabilities, strengths, and responses to various scenarios, perceptions can be challenged and a new understanding of partner roles and responsibilities can emerge. Drawing on the collective wisdom, diverse experiences, and unique perspectives of diverse stakeholders will enhance the collaborative planning process, and result in strong school-community partnerships and a comprehensive EOP that supports the seamless integration of all responders.

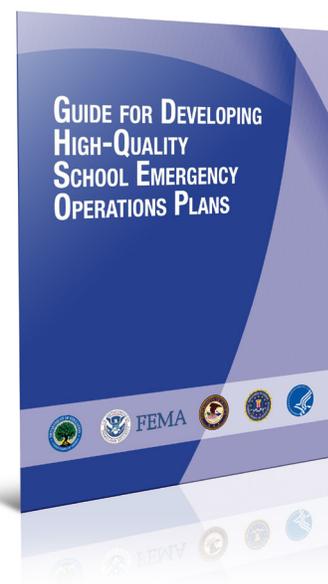
The Goal: A High-Quality School EOP

A well-executed planning process focuses on important outcomes and results for a customized plan that is practical for schools and community partners to implement. By applying the principles throughout the Six-Step Planning Process, the planning team can develop a school EOP that serves the safety, security, and wellness needs of the whole school community before, during, and after an emergency.

Where to Find Additional Resources

Additional information on emergency planning guidance for schools, a downloadable copy of the *School Guide*, fact sheets, EOP development tools, and other resources can be found on the REMS TA Center website at <http://rems.ed.gov>.

Click on the picture to access an at-a-glance version of the *School Guide*, which provides details about the process and principles, as well as plan content, functional annexes, and threat- and hazard-specific annexes.



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This *REMS Express* publication was produced by the REMS TA Center with the assistance of Susan Graves, Safety Coordinator for the Lincoln County School District in Newport, Oregon. This publication was funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Safe and Healthy Students under contract number GS-02F-0022X with Synergy Enterprises, Inc. The contracting officer's representative is Madeline Sullivan. All hyperlinks and URLs were accessed July 2014.

