

Colorado School Safety Resource Center
Needs Assessment Survey Results: Emergency Operation Plans
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COLORADO
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Background

The Colorado School Safety Resource Center (CSSRC) was created by Senate Bill 08-001 (C.R.S. Section 24-33.5-1801, et seq.) in 2008. Their mission is to assist local schools and communities in creating safe and positive school environments for Colorado students. CSSRC supports schools and local agencies in the five missions of school safety preparedness: prevention, mitigation, protection, response, and recovery.

Purpose

The mission of CDPS is to keep Colorado communities safe, and the CSSRC has a wildly important goal in FY 20 to support this mission by increasing schools' preparedness for emergencies. In conjunction with the Colorado Department of Education (CDE), the CSSRC surveyed schools statewide in order to establish a baseline of schools with exercised emergency operations plans (EOP), and facilitate a plan to increase the number of schools engaged in emergency operational planning at the local level.

According to FEMA, an EOP is an ongoing plan for responding to a wide variety of potential hazards. It describes how people and property will be protected; details who is responsible for carrying out specific actions; identifies the personnel, equipment, facilities, supplies, and other resources available; and outlines how all actions will be coordinated.

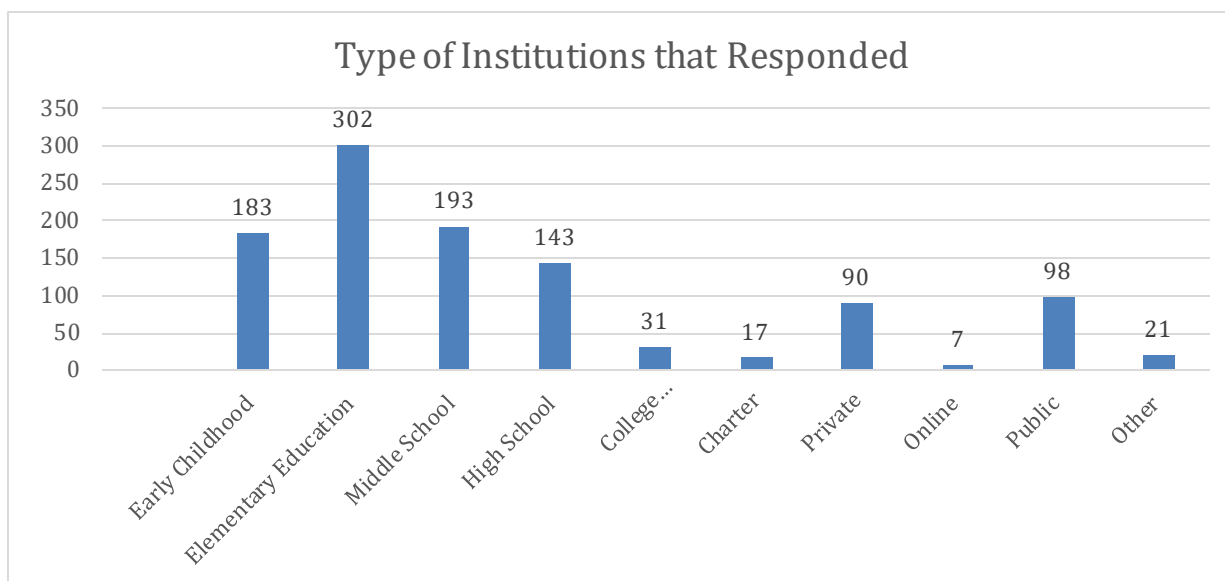
Survey Results

At this time, there is no mechanism in place to identify an accurate accounting of all schools across Colorado. Based on contact information from the Colorado Department of Education and the Colorado Department of Higher Education, we estimate there are a total of 2,366 schools across 178 school districts: 1,901 public schools, 418 non-public schools, 47 higher education institutions. The CSSRC distributed a voluntary Needs Assessment Survey statewide to identified school districts across Colorado on July 30, 2019, via list-serves, direct mailings and newsletters. Districts were asked to share the survey link in an effort to reach as many schools as possible. Follow-up phone calls were made to schools within specific counties which did not initially respond to the survey. This was completed in order to obtain a statewide representation which included at least one survey response from each county.

CSSRC received 549 total responses, representing 869 schools in the state. CSSRC received responses from 94 (53%) of the 178 school districts. Five districts answered for all the schools within their district.

Survey results included at least one response from schools representing 59 of the 64 (92%) Colorado counties. SurveyMonkey allows respondents to skip questions, therefore the data provided is based on the number of responses for each question.

CSSRC received responses from various levels and types of institutions. As displayed in the chart below, the highest number of responses were from elementary schools (302 responses) followed by middle schools (193 responses) and then early childhood (183 responses). These responses covered various areas of the state including metro, urban, suburban, outlying city, outlying town, and rural.

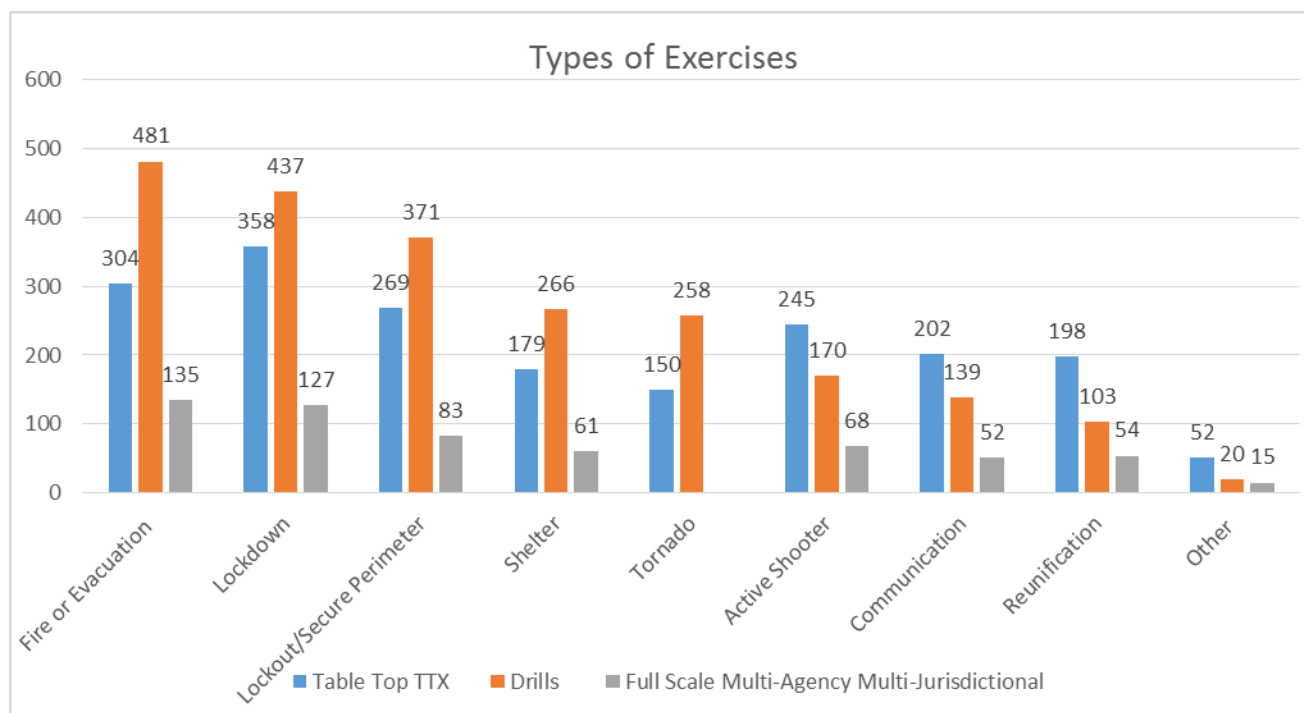


The Colorado Revised Statutes 22-32-109.1 require each school district to adopt and implement a safe schools plan for the Colorado Safe Schools Act. An Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) is part of this plan. When asked whether the survey respondent had an EOP, 508 (96%) responded they do have an EOP, and 20 (4%) responded no, they do not have one in place. Of note, 468 (89%) of the respondents indicated their EOPs had been updated within the last two years and 60 (11%) of respondents indicated that their EOPs had not been updated.

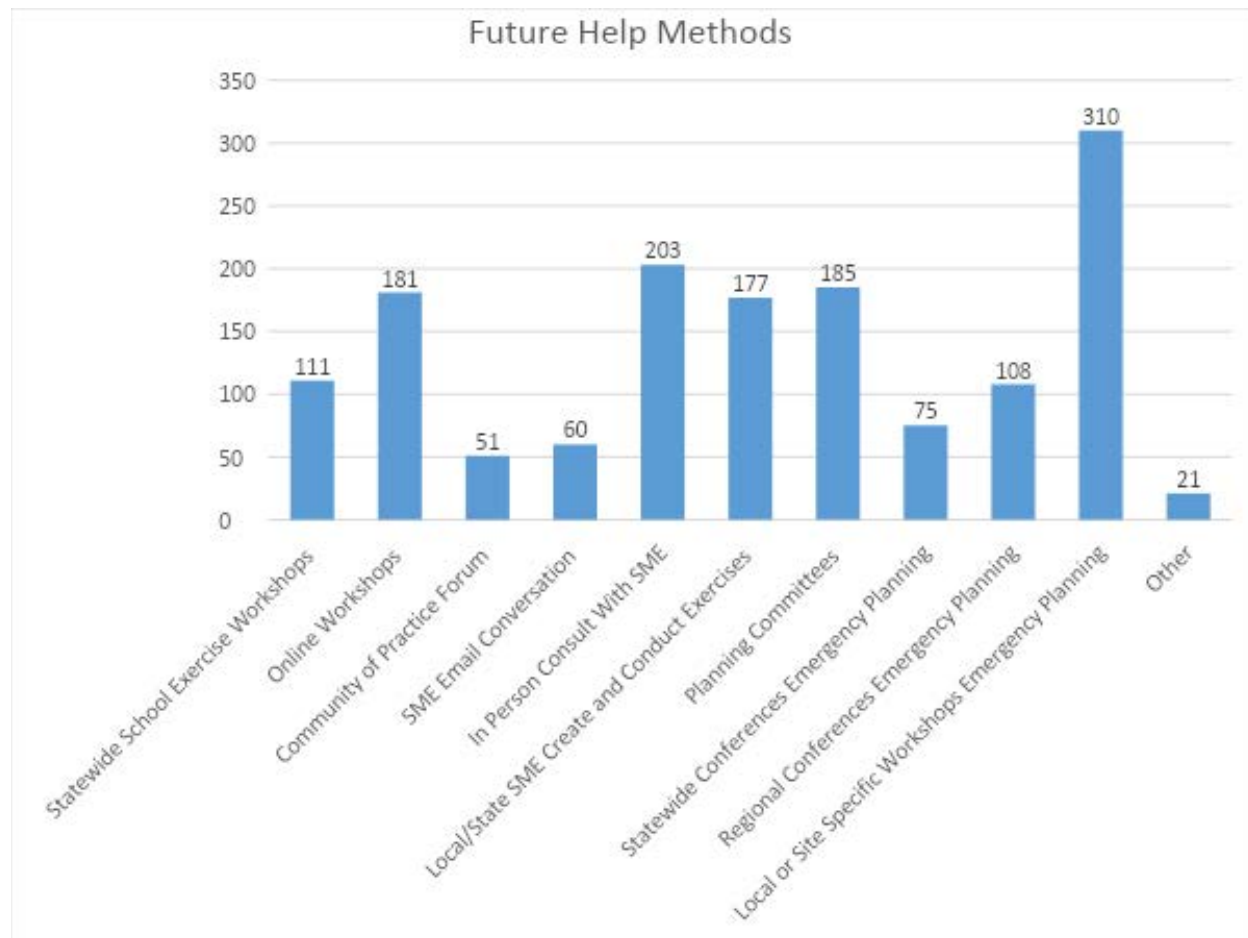
Institutions were also asked about various exercises they performed within the past year. These included tabletop, drills, functional exercises, and full-scale multi-agency multi-jurisdictional exercises. Overall, 459 (87%) responded positively that exercises have been performed in the previous year and 70 (13%) responded no. Drills were performed by 500 (98%) of the 509 that responded. The most common drill performed was fire or evacuation (481). Table Top (TTX) exercises or discussions were completed in 418 (82%) of 507 responses with lockdown drills (358) being the highest TTX type. TTX is a

discussion-based exercise intended to stimulate discussion of various issues regarding a hypothetical situation. Tabletop exercises can be used to assess plans, policies, and procedures, or to assess types of systems needed to guide the prevention of, response to, or recovery from a defined incident. TTX's are typically aimed at facilitating the understanding of concepts, identifying strengths and shortfalls, and/or achieving a change in attitude. Participants are encouraged to discuss issues in depth and develop decisions through slow-paced problem-solving rather than the rapid, spontaneous decision-making that occurs under actual or simulated emergency conditions. TTX's can be breakout (i.e., groups split into functional areas) or plenary (i.e., one large group).

Full-scale multi-agency multi-jurisdictional exercises were conducted by 198 (40%) of 497 responses with the highest number being fire or evacuation (135). A multi-agency, multi-jurisdictional operations-based exercise involves actual deployment of resources in a coordinated response as if a real incident had occurred. A full-scale exercise tests many components of one or more capabilities within emergency response and recovery, and is typically used to assess plans and procedures under crisis conditions, and assess coordinated response under crisis conditions. Characteristics of a Full Scale Exercise include mobilized units, personnel, and equipment; a stressful, realistic environment; and scripted exercise scenarios. The chart below shows responses for the different types of exercises.



As part of this survey, CSSRC also asked about methods in which they can assist organizations with building exercise programs and/or completing scheduled exercises in the future. As shown in the chart below, local or site-specific workshops on emergency planning and exercises received the highest number of responses with 310 (65%). In-person consultation with a subject matter expert to create and conduct exercises was the second highest with 203 (43%) responses. Planning committees with local, county or municipal emergency management agencies was third with 185 (39%) responses.



The survey asked schools to prioritize their needs for assistance. Weighted averages were calculated on these responses. The highest needs for each question is listed below.

Assistance with prevention: (452 responses)

1. Assistance with comprehensive school health and psychological services
2. Assistance selecting evidence-based prevention programs
3. Assistance developing a safe school planning team

Assistance with conducting assessments and strategic planning: (446 responses)

1. School building and campus physical safety assessments
2. Threat Assessments
3. Suicide assessments and using best practices to address needs-based data

Assistance with implementing safety and preparedness plans: (442 responses)

1. Review of current plans
2. Assistance with multi-agency coordination of preparedness plans
3. Assistance to develop interagency multi-hazard plans or EOP's

Assistance establishing best practice strategies and procedures to respond to emergencies and crises: (444 responses)

1. Use of National Incident Management System (NIMS) / introduction to Incident Command System (ICS) principles for school district response
2. Strategies for working with media
3. Use of National Incident Management System (NIMS) / introduction to Incident Command System (ICS) principles for school crises team response

Assistance with establishing best practice strategies and procedures to recover from emergencies and crises: (441 responses)

1. Assistance in creating a safety plan for management and supervision of juveniles convicted of sexual offenses
2. Assistance with creating Continuity of Operations Plans (COOP) to ensure the long-term viability of the organization
3. Assistance with creating protocols to help students re-enter school after an absence or hospitalization

Assistance with resources or training: (442 responses)

1. Gangs
2. Effective gang prevention programs and intervention strategies
3. Human trafficking
4. Teen dating violence

5. Weapons on campus
6. Freedom of speech

The Colorado School Safety Resource Center will be using these survey results and data to create a baseline on the number of schools with an exercised emergency operations plan. In addition, this survey informs content areas of where to focus the technical assistance that CSSRC provides to schools.

Challenges in establishing an initial baseline are due, in large part, to several factors. The first one is there is no accurate listing of all schools, regardless of institutional type, across Colorado. The second is the voluntary nature of this survey and how it was distributed. This survey allowed districts to answer for all their schools on one survey response. Additionally, responding to the survey was voluntary, which ultimately impacted the overall response rate. Finally, there is a need to identify what level of an “exercised” EOP is adequate. There are many ways an EOP is exercised, but currently, there is no identified standard for schools to adhere to. These factors, although not all inclusive, impacted the ability to gain specific information from each school on their operational planning at the local level.

With all this in mind, of the schools that responded to the survey, 459 (89%) responded that they have exercised their emergency operations plan in the past year. However, the survey respondents represent only 19% of the estimated 2,366 schools in Colorado. Therefore, while the compliance rate of those who responded is high, there is a significant gap in our assessment of readiness of Colorado’s schools. Without their responses, we cannot determine their level of preparedness for critical incidents.