COLORADO
School Safety Resource Center
Department of Public Safety
CSSRC

A Quick Guide to School Emergency Planning

School Safety Planning Steps: Realizing how daunting the subject of school safety planning can be, especially for administrators with multiple responsibilities, the Center has developed these suggested steps for districts to take/review as you strive to build your plans. These steps will incorporate best practices and help your district be compliant with the Safe Schools Act.

Step 1: Select and Train your Safety Planning Team

As we get ready to return to school, we need to ask ourselves, are we prepared? Not prepared for the return of all those students or prepared for the fall sports season, but are we prepared for emergencies or incidents on school grounds. One of the best ways to ensure we are ready for an emergency is to train our district safety teams, even those who are highly trained could do with some refresher training from time to time.

Did you know that the Colorado Safe Schools Act (C.R.S 22-32-109.1) requires that all schools, "institutionalize the Incident Command System (ICS)," and the recommended action to accomplish this is to have all Safety Team Members & Backups complete IS 100.C, Introduction to the Incident Command System and that all District Crisis Plan Developers complete IS 100.C, Introduction to the Incident Command System and IS-362.A, Multi-Hazard Emergency Planning for Schools?

FEMA recently revamped the IS 100 course in June of 2018, removing the industry specific versions. So if it's been awhile since you took this course, now might be a good time to brush up on these important topics. If you've never taken these courses and you are on a safety team or have been asked to participate in your school's planning team, please take the time to understand your role and responsibilities through these courses. Courses are online for free.

Step 2: Conduct Building/Grounds Site Assessments

It is imperative for building crisis /planning teams to assess for vulnerabilities within your school environment. Whether you have a new school, an established school or one where improvements have been made, a site assessment can assist in guiding the crisis planning process. Site security/safety assessments can be performed by a small group of school staff familiar with the building.

However, **consider reaching out for assistance from local emergency responders**, district staff or even neighboring district staff who may be able to provide that objective viewpoint of a school's vulnerabilities. Site assessments range from the very formal, with checklists and identified outcomes, to the informal consisting of a simple walk through and a discussion of any findings.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security has recently created a site security assessment guide and survey tool which can be found at: K-12 School Security: A Guide for Preventing and Protecting against

www.Colorado.gov/CSSRC

Gun Violence (2nd ed., 2018) You can also find more information about site assessments at: https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/cssrc/vulnerability-assessment. Remember that Center staff are available to assist with site assessments of your school.

Step 3: Analyze Likely Threats & Hazards

The next step in creating a viable Emergency Operations Plan or refining one you already have is to analyze those hazards. This is done in an effort to determine which threats or hazards pose the most serious risk to our school, which will allow us to focus our emergency planning on these risks. The simplest way to do this is to create a list of all the threats and hazards our school may face, try not to include those that may be outrageous. Once this list is created each threat/hazard should be graded based on three components; the probability that the threat/hazard can happen, the potential consequences or impact on the school and the amount of warning time we may have.

Probability can be ranked on a scale from high to low (the likelihood that the threat or hazard can actually occur, i.e. the difference between a Colorado tsunami and a winter storm), potential consequences are ranked from high (think fatalities and complete loss of buildings) to low consequences (minor injuries and no disruption of academics), warning time can be assigned a rank from no warning to 4+ hours, for example an armed intruder entering the schools vs. a severe storm warning.

Once we have graded each threat/hazard we can identify the most serious of these threat/hazards. At the city and county level, emergency managers will use a mathematical equation to identify high level risks; for our purposes it is enough to determine those that matter the most to our planning team and school community. As we start to create or refine plans, we will start with the most serious threats, as they pose the most immediate danger to our school community.

More on Hazard Analysis can be found here: Guide for Developing High- Quality School Emergency Operations Plans and IS 362

Step 4: Develop Goals and Objectives to Address Identified Threats and Hazards

Now that the planning team has evaluated and ranked which threats, hazards, and vulnerabilities will be addressed in the school EOP, the planning team will need to develop goals and objectives to address those threats, hazards, and vulnerabilities.

Goals are broad, general statements that indicate the desired outcome in response to the threat, hazard, or vulnerability. The goals represent what personnel and other resources are supposed to achieve. An example for the hazard of fire, might be: Protect all persons from injury and property from damage by the fire.

Objectives are more specific and identifiable actions. Objectives lead to achieving goals and determining the actions that must be accomplished. Translating objectives into activities, implementing procedures, or operating procedures is part of planning. Two examples for the goal stated above, might be: Evacuate all persons from the building immediately. And: Account for all persons. Just as with academic goals, school EOP goals and objectives should be measurable, actionable, and have a set timeline for completion.

By establishing goals and objectives for your school EOP, you should be able to:
○ Establish metrics to help measure planning effectiveness.
○ Identify priorities to be addressed by the planning team.
○ Determine resources needed before, during, and after an incident.
○ Identify when elements of the response are complete and when the operation is successful.
All of these will assist the planning team in establishing courses of action and writing the functional and hazard annexes (appendices).

More on developing goals and objectives can be found here: Guide for Developing High- Quality School Emergency Operations Plans and IS 362

Step 5: Identify Courses of Action for Identified Threats and Hazards

The final step before actually writing the base section of your Emergency Operations Plan is identifying courses of action. Courses of action identify for each threat, hazard, or vulnerability, the what, who, when, where, why, and how. Courses of action include criteria for determining how and when each response will be implemented under a variety of circumstances. Subsequently, the planning team develops response protocols to support these efforts.

Courses of action are typically developed by:
● Depicting a scenario based on the threats, hazards, and vulnerabilities. (Set the scene for your planning team.)
● Determining the amount of time available to respond. (Is it mere moments or hours? i.e. an intruder or storm.)
● Identifying decision points that indicate when leaders anticipate making decisions. (Snow closure at 3" or at 12"?)
● Developing courses of action to achieve the goals and objectives by answering the following questions:
○ What is the action? (Call a lockdown?)
○ Who is responsible for the action? (First staff member who observes the intruder?)
○ When does the action take place? (ASAP)
○ How long does the action take and how much time is actually available? (Minutes/zero)
○ What has to happen before? What happens after? (Planning, drilling & awareness. Police response.)
○ What resources are needed to perform the action? (Intercom or panic alarm system.)
○ How will this action affect specific populations? (May have difficulty performing action,

hearing/vision.)
● Selecting the courses of action based on cost and benefit comparison.

Planning for specific populations. Plans must comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act. Among other things, school emergency plans must address the provision of appropriate auxiliary aids and services to ensure effective communication with individuals with disabilities (e.g., interpreters and accessible information technology); ensure individuals with disabilities are not separated from service animals and assistive devices, and can receive disability-related assistance throughout emergencies (e.g., assistance with evacuation, administration of medications); and comply with the law's architectural and other requirements. (Information about the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is available at http://www.ada.gov.)

More on developing courses of action can be found here: Guide for Developing High- Quality School Emergency Operations Plans and IS 362

Step 6: Revise/ Build the Basic Plan

Once the planning team has decided on courses of action that will be used before, during and after a specific incident, the team can begin building or refining the Basic Plan section of the EOP. The Basic Plan as the name implies is the groundwork or base of the plan. This section will be followed by Functional Annexes and Threat and Hazard Specific Annexes, which will be discussed later. All sections of the plan should be created using plain language, as little jargon, codes, organization specific language or acronyms as possible. It is also important to organize the entire plan in such a manner that information is easy to find and thoughtfully organized, a good way to do this by using pictures, icons or other visual cues such as tabbed page dividers where appropriate. The Basic Plan or section provides a general overview of the entire plan to the reader. If an outsider where to assist the school during an emergency, they would be able to read through the Basic Plan and get a solid idea of the school's approach to emergency management. Information included in this section are as follows:
  ➢ *Introductory Material*, which includes a cover page, promulgation document/signature page, approval and implementation page, record of changes, record of distribution, and a table of contents.
  ➢ The *Purpose, Scope, Situation Overview, and Assumptions* section provides a rationale for the school EOP.
  ➢ The *Concept of Operations, (CONOPS),* clarifies the school's overall approach to an emergency and identifies specialized response teams and/or unique resources needed to respond to an incident.
  ➢ The *Organization and Assignment of Responsibilities* section provides an overview of the broad roles and responsibilities of school staff, families, guardians, and community partners.
  ➢ *Direction, Control, and Coordination* describes the framework for all direction, control, and coordination activities between schools, local fire, law enforcement, and emergency managers.
  ➢ *Information Collection, Analysis, and Dissemination* addresses the role of information in the successful implementation of the activities that occur before, during, and after an emergency.

➢ The *Communications* section refers to the internal and external strategies and tools to communicate with stakeholders in the event of an emergency or incident.

➢ *Administration, Finance, and Logistics* covers general support requirements and the availability of services and support for all types of emergencies. Examples of topics in this section include how to manage administrative controls, activity logs, vital records, and maintenance of financial records.

➢ The *Plan Development and Maintenance* section outlines responsibilities for updating and maintaining the school EOP. This section would include a schedule for training, evaluating, reviewing, and updating the EOP.

➢ *Authorities and References* provides the legal basis for emergency operations and activities. When the school EOP is approved, the procedures and policies within the document become legally binding.

More on the Basic Plan can be found here: Guide for Developing High- Quality School Emergency Operations Plans, Sample EOP and IS 362

Step 7: Revise/ Build the Functional Annexes

Once the Basic Plan is completed or while it is being completed, the planning team will undertake to define and write the Functional Annex portion of the EOP. The Functional Annexes cover actions and processes to protect or mitigate the effects of multiple threats or hazards that will be later addressed in the Threat and Hazard Specific Annexes. It may be helpful to think of these Functions as cross-cutting actions, that is they cover many different threats to the school community. For instance, Reunification as a function may be used after a variety of incidents, like a flood, fire, an armed intruder or gas leak to connect students with their parents or guardians.

Another example is the Recovery function, which in some aspect will be used after any incident, perhaps a shortened Recovery cycle and meetings after a small electrical fire and evacuation or a year's long Recovery cycle after a major shooting. These functional annexes, describe to the reader how the school will manage the actions before, during and after an incident. Each Functional Annex, on its own page and tabbed as such, should include at minimum the following:

• Title (of the function, i.e. Evacuation, Recovery or Communications)
• Goal(s)
• Objective(s)
• Courses of Action (Describe the courses of action you developed earlier, in the sequence in which they will occur.)

According to the *Guide for Developing High Quality Emergency Operations Plans*, schools should as a starting point address the following Functional Annexes in their EOP: Communications, Evacuation, Shelter-in-Place, Lockdown, Accounting for All Persons, Reunification, Continuity of Operations (COOP), Security, Recovery and Health/Medical. Other Annexes that have been proposed as best practices include the following: Lockout/Secure Perimeter, Hold all Classes, Transportation, and a Training & Exercises Annex.

While the Functional Annexes may be somewhat broad to encompass as many threats or hazards as possible, they are actions that can be applied in nearly every situation and will be further refined where necessary to fit actual threats in the Threat and Hazard Specific Annexes.

Functional Annexes may be used consecutively, i.e. after a Lockdown, the school may Evacuate, via Transportation to a Reunification site. They may also be used concurrently or at the same time, for instance a school conducting an Evacuation will be Communicating, while at the same time be addressing the Accountability and Medical concerns which caused the Evacuation.

While some Functional Annexes can be formatted as a step by step set of instructions, like an Evacuation, others may not lend themselves to this type of list. Security, Recovery and Training & Exercises Annexes especially, are better suited to the narrative type of format or as a collection point for this information. Remember as you are writing these Annexes that they need to be clear, concise, adaptable to changing situations, compatible with response agencies and all-inclusive of your varying school community population. Always remember to prioritize your responses based on the following order; life safety, incident stabilization and finally, property protection.

More on Functional Annexes can be found here: Guide for Developing High- Quality School Emergency Operations Plans, Sample EOP and IS 362

Step 8: Revise/ Build the Threat and Hazard Specific Annexes

The Threat and Hazard Specific Annexes section of the EOP is where the planning team will start to apply Functions, as discussed above, to specific identified incidents. Taking the list of threats and hazards built earlier the team identifies which Functions would be necessary to manage the incident. For example, a fire may be managed using the Evacuation function, as well as the Accounting, Communication, Medical and Reunification Annexes. A Tornado, may require the school to utilize the Shelter-in-Place function, Accounting, Communication, Transportation, Medical and other functions may be applied as necessary to the evolving situation.

In order to maximize the effectiveness of these Annexes and limit the amount of work necessary to tackle all threats or hazards facing your school, select only those that present unique challenges or require unique procedures not already covered in your Functional Annexes. If a Functional Annex as written, provides for appropriate management of the threat or hazard, the planning team may simply refer the reader to the appropriate Functional Annex on the Threat and Hazard Annex page. Make every effort to avoid repeating information, as this can lead to mistakes and reader burnout. If further clarification or specialized procedures are necessary to ensure the best management strategy, these can be added on a Threat and Hazard Annex page. For instance, an Evacuation for a Fire may be adequately covered in the Evacuation Annex, but an Evacuation after a Hazardous Materials Spill may require additional information to ensure life safety concerns downwind of the event. Threat and Hazard Specific Annexes may be formatted in the same manner as seen above:
- Title (of the threat or hazard, i.e. Fire, Tornado, Armed Intruder or Pandemic Flu)
- Goal(s)

- Objective(s)
- Courses of Action (Utilize as many Functional Annex references as necessary and then include…)
- Specialized Procedures (Example: During a Hazardous Material spill on the highway, students and staff will only Evacuate after Communication with the Fire Department, to the buses which will be staged according to the Transportation Annex.)

More on the Threat and Hazard Specific Annexes can be found here: Guide for Developing High- Quality School Emergency Operations Plans, Sample EOP and IS 362

Step 9: Plan Review

Once you have completed all three pieces of your EOP; the Basic Plan, Functional Annexes and Threat & Hazard Specific Annexes; the planning team should endeavor with local emergency responders or outside agencies to have the plan reviewed. The reviewers of this document should be looking to suggest improvements based on their knowledge of day to day operations as well as the legal mandates of the Colorado Safe Schools Act.
Reviewers should also be instructed to check for the following:

Adequacy: Does the plan identify critical courses of action? Will it accomplish the assigned function? Are all assumptions valid and reasonable?

Feasibility: Does your school have the resources to fulfill the functions and critical tasks?
Does it identify where the school will obtain resources outside of the school's capabilities?

Acceptability: Does it thoroughly address the identified threats, hazards, and vulnerabilities? Is it consistent with legal requirements? Does it meet time and cost limitations?

Completeness: Does it include all the courses of action to be accomplished? Does it integrate the needs of the whole school population? Does it provide a complete picture of what should happen, when, and at whose direction? Does it make time estimates for achieving objectives, with safety remaining the utmost priority? Does it identify success criteria and a desired end state? Is it developed consistently with the planning principles in CPG 101 and Guide for Developing High- Quality School Emergency Operations Plans?

Compliance: Does it comply with State and local requirements to the maximum extent possible?

After this review process the planning team will present the completed EOP to various stakeholders for their official approval which will be documented on the promulgation statement contained within the document. This promulgation statement gives the EOP official status and outlines the authorities provided to school staff. Aim to get the widest acceptance possible of all community partners who may have a role in the EOP. Consider including the following if they are present in your community; emergency managers, state/regional homeland security or school safety personnel, school district officials, school board members, leaders of emergency response agencies, elected officials and public

works. Upon approval the EOP should be shared with necessary and appropriate agencies or personnel who play an active role in the school's incident response.

Step 10: Plan Implementation

Any Emergency Operations Plan or EOP, no matter its size or complexity, is only as good as the implementation of such will allow it to be. In other words, it is more important to use and exercise the plan than to actually write a stellar plan. EOP's that go un-exercised, trained on and improved upon may prove to be a liability to the school and its community. Implementing your EOP through training end exercises, should be undertaken to train emergency responders, staff, students and others on their roles during an emergency; also to assist the planning team in identifying gaps or shortcomings in the plan, as well as the changing threat environment. By implementing the plan in this way, the team can periodically review, revise and maintain the plan in a worthwhile manner.

Consider the following as methods for implementing your school's EOP (list is not all-inclusive, but merely suggestions):
- Developing a quick response guide to provide all staff with the necessary immediate actions for a specific set of high risk threats or hazards.
- Seminars or workshops to define response actions or policy considerations.
- Letters home to parent/guardians on the school's response to incidents.
- Short videos on emergency response for varying populations within the school.
- Short response scenarios for use in staff professional development or student interactions
- Tabletop exercises to assist staff in identifying their roles and responsibilities (can also be used to create new Annexes).
- Drills used to test a specific task or objective within an Annex (i.e. fire drill or communication drill).
- Functional exercises, used to test an entire Functional Annex (i.e. Reunification or Lockdown).
- Full-scale Exercise, used to incorporate and test multiple Functions being used concurrently or consecutively (i.e. a Lockdown into Evacuation and Accounting, which moves into Reunification of students).

Emergency Operations Plans are and should be living documents that are being refined, revised, added to and exercised on a regular basis. If your EOP sits on a shelf and is never used or improved, your school population will be at greater risk to our ever changing school safety environment.

Good luck in this endeavor and please know that staff at the Colorado School Safety Resource Center can provide no-cost consultation and assistance to your staff as you write, revise, review and/or test your emergency operations plans.

Just call us at 303.239.4435 or contact Brad Stiles, Emergency Response Outreach Consultant at 303.239.4321 or brad.stiles@state.co.us.