



Emergency Operations Plan Maintenance: Reviewing, Updating, and Strengthening Plans

READINESS AND EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT FOR SCHOOLS TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE CENTER

Developing, implementing, and maintaining high-quality emergency operations plans (EOPs) are ongoing processes that must be continually evaluated and enhanced. The [Guide for Developing High-Quality School Emergency Operations Plans \(School Guide\)](#), [The Role of Districts in Developing High-Quality School Emergency Operations Plans \(District Guide\)](#), and the [Guide for Developing High-Quality Emergency Operations Plans for Institutions of Higher Education \(IHE Guide\)](#) each outline a six-step planning process for creating and maintaining EOPs. Step 6 in that process involves EOP implementation and maintenance. Although an EOP may have been carefully designed, it needs to be regularly reviewed, practiced, and updated. Modifications based on building depreciation, resource allocation changes, population changes, staff changes, school-/campus-based policy changes, and the lessons learned from exercises and their related after-action reports can all impact an EOP. Additionally, the specific threats and hazards facing a school or higher ed community may change over time. Routinely testing and renewing the EOP's basic plan, functional annexes, and threat- and hazard-specific annexes can help ensure a high-quality EOP remains up to date, while also building broader support for emergency preparedness efforts and supporting efforts to sustain and enhance portions of the plan over time.

School, school district, and institution of higher education (IHE) planning teams should work with community partners on an ongoing basis to develop and update their EOPs to ensure the safety and security of the whole school/campus community, as well as continuity of operations in the face of a variety of threats and hazards. Opportunities for reviewing, updating, and strengthening EOPs can be found in the implementation of the following elements.

Conducting Emergency Exercises

Emergency exercises are powerful tools for assessing a school, school district, or IHE's level of emergency preparedness and EOP strengths and weaknesses. Further, exercises help train staff and stakeholders so that everyone with a role in the plan can act in a swift, coordinated way before, during, and after an emergency incident to mitigate the impact on the school or IHE community. There are two main types of emergency exercises: discussion-based exercises such as tabletop exercises, and operations-based exercises such as drills, functional exercises, and full-scale exercises. While discussion-based exercises are

meant to familiarize team members informally with current plans, processes, and procedures, operations-based exercises are simulated emergency scenarios that provide a realistic environment in which school-/campus- and community-based participants may practice their roles and responsibilities. All exercises should be conducted in close collaboration with community partners (e.g., fire, police, emergency medical services, public health, mental/behavioral health). Emergency exercises offer valuable opportunities to

- Activate the Incident Command System (ICS);
- Initiate appropriate response protocols;
- Assess needed resources, including emergency equipment and supplies;

- Test the [Communications Annex](#) with community partners, staff, students, and parents or guardians;
- Activate Functional and Threat- or Hazard-Specific Annexes;
- Identify strengths and weaknesses in the current EOP and ensure they are clearly outlined in after-action reports;
- Modify the plan based on lessons learned; and
- Practice using the [National Incident Management System](#) (NIMS).

Schools, school districts, and IHEs should create an exercise program and schedule that is responsive to the needs of their community, carefully evaluating the costs and benefits of each exercise type, as well as any local or state requirements.

Collaborating With Community Partners

Schools, school districts, and IHEs should promote ongoing collaboration with community partners to establish and maintain strong relationships before an emergency incident occurs. To maintain community support and collaboration, schools, school districts, and IHEs may

- Develop [memoranda of understanding](#) with key community partners for services or information sharing that may be necessary before, during, or after an emergency incident, such as mental health providers or law enforcement;
- Ensure that first responders have been introduced to key school, school district, or IHE emergency management staff and are familiar with school- or IHE-specific facilities, policies, and procedures;

- Convene regular school, school district, or campuswide emergency management planning meetings with all community partners;
- Share select components of school, school district, or higher ed EOPs as well as relevant information at community fairs, awareness days, and school-community meetings;
- Distribute up-to-date information on school, school district, or campus preparedness efforts to the community through social media, podcasts, local newspapers, radio, and television programs; and
- Give advance notice to the public of drills and exercises so that the community can prepare for any potential related inconveniences such as traffic congestion.

Focusing on Sustainability

The most effective EOPs provide clear direction and support to the whole school or campus community and are continuously reviewed and enhanced through activities that build the capacity of the school, school district, or IHE to prevent, protect against, mitigate, respond to, and recover from emergency incidents. To increase the capacity of a school, school district, or IHE to maintain its focus on preparedness, administrators, faculty, and staff can

- Center training sessions around key issues such as preparedness and emergency management activities for students and staff with access or functional needs and creating a school-based ICS;
- Regularly meet with community partners and the whole school/campus community throughout the year;



- Ensure that backup staff are identified for each key position section within the ICS;
- Seek resources and support from community businesses by working directly with the businesses or the media; and
- Support the annual NIMS compliance activities of local community partners.

Conducting Evaluations Consistently

Routinely evaluating an EOP will add credibility and public trust to the plan, as well as in those who implement the plan. Planning teams should continually review and revise their school or higher ed EOP to

- Document performance and growth in preparedness;
- Demonstrate the usefulness of planned procedures in responding to actual and simulated emergency incidents;
- Track resources and training over time; and
- Determine what changes need to be made to ensure the EOP is current and comprehensive.

Although developing an EOP is a critical task, updating and maintaining the plan is equally as critical. Ongoing efforts and activities framed by the five [National Preparedness System mission areas](#), coupled with NIMS compliance, will allow schools, school districts, and IHEs to continually strengthen their capacities to effectively maintain the safety and security of their school/campus and local communities.

Resources

Further Reading—REMS TA Center

- [EOP EVALUATE](#), Web Application
- [K-12 School Planning and Response Teams: Developing and Enhancing the School Emergency Operations Plan](#), Checklist
- [Institution of Higher Education Planning and Response Teams: Developing and Enhancing the Higher ed Emergency Operations Plan](#), Checklist
- [School District Planning and Response Teams: Developing and Enhancing the School Emergency Operations Plan](#), Checklist

Although developing an EOP is a critical task, updating and maintaining the plan is equally as critical.

- [EOP ASSIST](#), Software Application
- [EOP ASSIST Interactive Workbook](#), Publication
- [Tool Box](#), Web page
- [Emergency Exercises: An Effective Way to Practice and Validate Emergency Operations Plans](#), Fact Sheet

Training Opportunities—REMS TA Center

- [School EOP Planning 101: Creating High-Quality School Emergency Operations Plans That Address All Threats, Hazards, Settings, and Times](#), Webinar
- [School EOP Planning 101: Modifying Exercises and Drills in Response to the Pandemic](#), Webinar
- [Emergency Exercises Package](#), Supplemental Exercise and Training Package

Further Reading—U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Office of Academic Engagement

- [Campus Resilience Program Exercise Starter Kits \(ESKs\)](#), Web page



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