

Families and Caregivers as Partners in School Emergency Management

READINESS AND EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT FOR SCHOOLS TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE CENTER

Why Should Schools Involve Families and Caregivers in School Emergency Management?

Including family members and caregivers in school safety, security, emergency management, and preparedness activities can foster positive collaborative relationships in advance of an emergency and thereby strengthen school emergency operations plans (EOPs). This fact sheet provides strategies for forming partnerships and communicating with families and guardians, and for including them in efforts to develop, enhance, and maintain high-quality school EOPs.

Families and caregivers are powerful partners for schools. They can help

- Contribute to school safety programs;
- Advocate for the needs, health, and well-being of their students and other students within the whole school community;
- Participate in or consult on district- and building-level emergency management planning teams;
- Play a part in the [National Incident Management System's Incident Command System](#); and
- Support efforts to carry out the [National Preparedness System's mission areas](#) of [prevention](#), [protection](#), [mitigation](#), [response](#), and [recovery](#).

This fact sheet provides strategies that K-12 school and school district administrators, teachers, and staff can use when partnering with families and caregivers to build school emergency management capacity and offers guidance for families and caregivers on their roles and responsibilities throughout the five National Preparedness System mission areas—prevention, protection, mitigation, response, and recovery.



Form Emergency Preparedness Partnerships With Families and Caregivers

Communicating with families before, during, and after an incident can help to strengthen whole school community safety partnerships. Further, family involvement in school emergency preparedness planning will help reinforce a positive, safe, and healthy learning environment while also increasing the emergency management capacity of the whole school community. There are many strategies that education agencies can use to engage families and caregivers as emergency preparedness partners before, during, and after an emergency.

Before

- Provide a clear mechanism for caregivers to communicate directly with education agency leaders.
- Encourage caregivers to attend school safety forums, trainings, and information sessions that describe protocols, plans, and procedures.
- Request input from caregivers on issues related to school safety via surveys that aim to help schools and school districts understand the situation in their schools or school community.
- Create parent camps or workshops during which caregivers can share their voice with school leaders and planning teams and community partners.
- Reinforce the role of caregivers as key school safety partners by inviting them to join planning teams.
- Communicate with caregivers continually regarding any changes to EOPs and request their input on revisions to portions of the plan.
- Create a schoolwide awareness activity featuring the school district's or school's emergency management efforts.
- Ensure that safety is on the agenda at parent association meetings and present pertinent information during student registration and parent orientation events.

- Participate in community fairs with exhibits showing what families can do to help.

During

- Share clear and consistent information via multiple platforms to support communications and warning, even if to say there is no update.
- Continually remind them about their role and responsibility in carrying out the plan, which may include following family reunification guidelines.
- Request that families and caregivers limit social media communications regarding events to help limit the spread of misinformation and to protect the safety of students.

After

- Provide a summary of the courses of action the school or school district completed to respond to an emergency.
- Request their feedback on the school or school district's response to emergencies and consider how to integrate that feedback into EOP updates.
- Engage families in the healing process by providing guidance for supporting children exposed to trauma, assistance in continuing the teaching and learning process at home, and opportunities to participate in the physical recovery of the campus.

Including families increases the likelihood of an effective and coordinated response to an emergency, enhances children's well-being, and assures families that the school district and school are taking steps to protect their children. The more information families receive before, during, and after an incident, the more likely they will facilitate an effective response and be able to safely reunite with their child.

Establish a Plan to Communicate With Families About Emergency Management

Communication with families is one important component of a comprehensive school EOP. When creating a family communication plan, it is critical that schools account for language and technology barriers, recognizing that not all families have the same linguistic capabilities or access to technology. The communication plan should be developed collaboratively with partners, schools, the district, and families and caregivers, and be approved by the school public information officer. Communication activities should focus on promoting the district's and school's programs and informing families of their roles and responsibilities. The plan should give directives for activating all communications systems, including family notification of emergencies. Also, take steps to ensure that parents and families know which platform(s) the school and/or school district will use to disseminate information before, during, and after an emergency incident, and that their contact information is up to date.

Maintain Emergency Cards and Student Release Forms

No matter the type of emergency, it is critical for schools to maintain current emergency information cards for each student. Cards should have contact information, including cell phone numbers, for parents and legal guardians and for at least two additional emergency contacts. They may also include medical information, which should be reviewed by general counsel before being disseminated and may need to be made available in multiple languages. This information needs to be updated frequently and at least annually and is often incorporated into back-to-school activities at the beginning of the school year. The legal or authorized guardian(s) must be clearly documented to ensure that the child is released safely in an emergency. Additionally, emergency cards should note medical issues requiring immediate attention.

Emergency cards are typically stored in a school's main office. During an emergency, school personnel will take the cards to the reunification site. Some schools also store a copy of the emergency cards in a teacher's emergency go-kit to ensure that all students are accounted for and their medical needs understood. School staff will be permitted to release a student only to the authorized individual(s) listed on the card.

Parents and guardians picking up students will be required to show proper identification and sign a release form before leaving with their child. School districts should work with their general counsel to create release forms that protect students' safety. The form should state who is authorized to retrieve the child, the names of and information on each sibling within a family, and updated information on students' emergency contacts. Schools should be considerate of families' language needs in this area as well.

BACKPACK EMERGENCY CARD

It is important to have your emergency contact information with you in case of an emergency. Complete the cards below, cut them out around the dotted line, fold in half, and keep the Child's Card in your child's backpack and the Guardian's Card in your wallet. Make this card part of an emergency planning family night! Fill this card out with your school-aged children and explore more emergency planning recommendations here: <https://www.cdc.gov/childrenindisasters/before-during-after.html>.

Child's Card

Cut Along Dashed Line

Fold Along Solid Line

BACKPACK EMERGENCY CARD		EMERGENCY CONTACTS	
Child's Name:	Date of Birth:	Contact 1 Name:	Cell Phone:
Home Address:		Relationship:	Cell Phone:
School:		Contact 2 Name:	
Teacher:	School Phone:	Relationship:	Cell Phone:
Special Needs, Medical Conditions, Allergies, Important Information:		Emergency Pickup Address:	
		Pediatrician Name:	Phone:
DIAL 911 FOR EMERGENCIES.		DIAL 911 FOR EMERGENCIES.	

Guardian's Card

Cut Along Dashed Line

Fold Along Solid Line

WALLET EMERGENCY CARD		WALLET EMERGENCY CARD	
Child's Name:	Date of Birth:	Contact 1 Name:	Cell Phone:
Home Address:		Contact 2 Name:	Cell Phone:
School:		Emergency Pickup Address:	
Teacher:	School Phone:	Child's Pediatrician:	
Special Needs, Medical Conditions, Allergies, Important Information:		Child's Healthcare Specialist:	
DIAL 911 FOR EMERGENCIES.		DIAL 911 FOR EMERGENCIES.	



Source: U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention



Integrating Families and Caregivers Into the Six-Step Planning Process

The [Guide for Developing High-Quality School Emergency Operations Plans](#) and [The Role of Districts in Developing High-Quality School Emergency Operations Plans](#) define a six-step planning process for EOP development that education agencies may consider when collaborating to create tailored and comprehensive goals, objectives, and courses of action to respond to emergency incidents.

Step 1: Form a Collaborative Planning Team

Strong school district and school emergency management teams represent and plan for the safety of the whole school community and all stakeholders. As task forces and working groups are developed, families should be identified and included in all planning activities. Just as law enforcement and fire personnel are experts in response, families are experts about the individual and collective needs of children. Furthermore, families are pivotal in building buy-in for school and school district emergency management efforts, promoting emergency management program sustainability and ensuring a coordinated response. As school districts and schools empower family members to help ensure school safety, families will reinforce the message that schools are one of the safest places in the community. The National Center for Education Statistics reports that [79% of public elementary schools have an advisory group or policy council that includes parents](#). Use those groups and councils as a starting point to source potential leaders and stewards that can be represented on the planning team and included in efforts to develop, update, or enhance EOPs.

Step 2: Understand the Situation

Effective emergency management planning depends on a consistent analysis and comparison of the threats and hazards a particular school faces. This is typically performed through a threat and hazard identification and risk assessment process that collects information about threats and hazards and assigns values to risk for the purposes of deciding which threats or hazards the plan should prioritize and subsequently address. The planning team may recruit and involve families and caregivers in efforts to develop a list of possible threats and hazards and to evaluate risks and vulnerabilities of threats and hazards. Families and caregivers may also contribute to other assessments that the planning team may use, including site assessments, culture and climate assessments, school behavioral threat assessments, and capacity assessments that aim to help them not only evaluate risks and vulnerabilities, but also identify resources and issues that the plan may need to address.

Step 3: Determine Goals and Objectives

School EOPs should outline multiple goals and numerous objectives for each of the hazards and threats identified as a part of Step 2. Parents and families may have a key role in carrying out those goals and objectives. Planning teams need to consider the before, during, and after aspects of an emergency when creating goals and objectives. Think carefully about how the school or school district will respond to each hazard and threat identified in the prioritized list and the role of families and caregivers in supporting not only response, but also prevention, protection, mitigation, and recovery. As planning teams develop goals and objectives for prioritized threats and hazards, they will likely identify cross-cutting functions, or emergency management activities that apply to more than one threat or hazard. Examples of functions that are important to consider with parents and

families include family reunification, communications and warning, continuity of operations, and recovery.

Step 4: Plan Development (Identifying Courses of Action)

In Step 4, the planning team develops courses of action for accomplishing each of the objectives identified in Step 3 (for threats, hazards, and functions). Courses of action address the what, who, when, where, why, and how for each threat, hazard, and function. There will be various courses of action that families and caregivers will need to carry out in the event of an emergency. Scenario-based planning is a tool that planning teams can use to work with partners, including families and caregivers, to solidify courses of action for each threat, hazard, and function.

Family reunification in the event of an emergency is one example of a key emergency management function that requires the involvement of families and caregivers and clearly outlined courses of action. Directions and announcements regarding reunification procedures should be made available in all applicable languages, using a variety of accessible methods and outlets. These include school district and school Websites, social media, e-mail, parent association meetings, letters, community fairs, and the local media. Many K-12 education agencies also work with community and faith-based organizations to help deliver messages. In the event of an emergency, school staff should activate all communication measures to advise parents of the on-campus and off-campus evacuation site locations and reunification procedures.

Directions and announcements regarding reunification procedures should be made available in all applicable languages, using a variety of accessible methods and outlets.

Step 5: Plan Preparation, Review, and Approval

In Step 5, the planning team develops a draft of the school EOP using the courses of action developed in Step 4. In addition, the planning team reviews the plan and obtains official approval, in concert with its community partners who have the responsibilities in the plan. Portions of the plan may be shared with families and caregivers as well, particularly those annexes, such as Family Reunification, Recovery, and Continuity of Operations, that require their involvement to support implementation.

Remember that planners must be careful not to share every part of the plan. Planning team members need to determine what should and should not be shared with families and caregivers to ensure the safety of the whole school community and to help maintain the integrity of the plan.

Step 6: Plan Implementation and Maintenance

Practicing the plan takes place during this step. Families should receive training tailored to address their unique roles and responsibilities during various types of incidents. Training should be accompanied by fact sheets or checklists that outline the key roles and responsibilities of families and caregivers in an emergency. Together, the school district, school, and partner personnel should design, conduct, and evaluate a variety of emergency exercises. Families may be invited to role play during exercises and later provide feedback from their perspective during a debriefing. For example, if the scenario prompts a lockdown, families could make attempts to enter campus or a building, testing the incident management team’s ability to secure the campus.

Gaining family perspectives on the exercise’s successes, challenges, and lessons learned will enhance the impact of the exercise, after-action report, and related modifications to the general plan.

FAMILY REUNIFICATION / REUNIFICACIÓN FAMILIAR
Lincoln County School District / Distrito Escolar del Condado de Lincoln

Parent/Guardian: Please complete section 1 of this form. Then go to the *Parent Check-In* area, get in line according to your student’s last name and turn in this form. You will need to show your photo ID twice: when you check in and when you are reunited with your student. Thank you for your patience as we work to safely reunite you with your student.

Padres/Guardianes: Por favor complete esa seccion1 de esta forma. Y vaya ala área de registraciones de padres, únase a la línea de acuerdo al apellido de su alumno y entregue esta forma. Usted tiene que mostrar su identificación dos veces: cuando usted se presenta y cuando usted se reúne con su alumno/estudiante. Gracias por su paciencia mientras trabajamos con seguridad para reunir a usted y a su estudiante.

PARENTS – COMPLETE SECTION 1 PADRES – COMPLETA LA SECCIÓN 1

PARENT/GUARDIAN SECTION/ SECCIÓN DE PADRES		
Please Print/por favor escriba		
<p>1</p> <p>Name of Student: Nombre del Estudiante: _____</p> <p>Name of Person Requesting Student: Nombre de la persona solicitando al estudiante: _____</p> <p>Relationship to Student: Relación con el estudiante: _____</p>	<p>Grade: Grado : _____</p>	<p>Teacher Name: Nombre del maestro: _____</p>

Source: Lincoln County School District

PLEASE NOTE: The tools and resources identified in this document are not intended as endorsements and are merely offered as examples that you may consider in your own planning efforts.

Resources

Further Reading – REMS TA Center Resources

- Family Reunification Annex Development
 - [Integrating Family Reunification Planning Before, During, and After an Emergency into the School Emergency Operations Plan \(EOP\)](#), Fact Sheet
 - [Planning for Family Reunification Before, During, and After an Emergency](#), Virtual Training by Request
 - [Conducting a Secure, Safe, and Successful K-12 Family Reunification Process](#), Webinar
 - [Family Reunification Planning Module](#), Specialized Training Package
 - [Sample Family Reunification Annex](#), Publication
 - [Tool Box](#), Web page

- Collaborating With Parents and Families
 - [Sharing Plan Sections with Parents](#), Community of Practice forum
 - [Understanding the Role of Families and Parents in Supporting School Safety Before, During, and After an Emergency](#), Webinar

Further Reading – Family Preparedness

- [Ready Kids: Families](#), Web page (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Federal Emergency Management Agency)
- [Disasters and Children](#), Web page (American Academy of Pediatrics)

Further Reading – Family Engagement

- [Statewide Family Engagement Centers Program](#), Website (U.S. Department of Education)
- [Statewide Family Engagement Center](#), Website (National Association for Family, School, and Community Engagement)

