



# RESOURCE: How State Leaders Can Help Respond to Incidents of School-Based Gun Violence and Support Recovery in School Communities

State Education Agencies (SEA) have a critical role in supporting school district recovery efforts following school shooting events. Although district teams generally play the lead role in recovery coordination, the SEA can provide essential just-in-time resources to help stabilize the environment and support the safe re-opening of schools. Additionally, recovery from school-based gun violence is a long-term process and most districts will require some level of sustained guidance and support for several years or on an ongoing basis. This support can be enhanced through coordination at the state level, drawing on a range of available resources and diverse perspectives, to help carry out rapid response and recovery activities.

This brief shares considerations for organizing a state-level response to support schools and districts in recovery from school-based gun violence. This brief will provide considerations for (1) organizing and preparing coordination and response teams, (2)

defining the response scope, (3) identifying and vetting additional personnel, (4) planning and implementing the response, (5) supporting communications, and (6) reviewing the state-level response for areas of improvement and providing ongoing support.

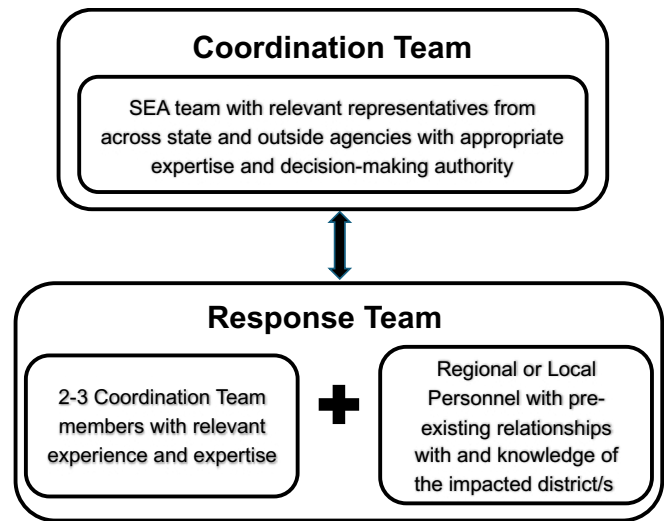
## A Resource for Gun Violence Prevention, Preparedness, Response, and Recovery



## 1. Organizing and Preparing Coordination and Response Teams

SEA emergency response efforts should be organized to maximize efficiency, transparency, and collaboration. This organization will vary significantly by state size, existing organizational structures, and resources. For clarity in this document, we refer to two levels of teams: the “coordination team” and the “response team”.

The **coordination team** should be responsible for the overall development and implementation of state prevention, response, and recovery efforts, and should manage collaboration across state agencies and the distribution of state resources. In contrast, the **response team** provides on-site direct immediate support, side by side with local and school district leaders, and helps provide consultation and ongoing support to schools and districts across recovery phases. The response team typically includes a subset of coordination team members who have experiences and expertise most aligned with the specific needs and circumstances



of the incident. This sub-set of coordination team members is then augmented with individuals with existing knowledge of and relationships with the impacted school or district. These teams engage in active and ongoing two-way communication throughout the response and recovery phases. This teaming structure facilitates recovery by building from existing relationships to develop a deep understanding of the local context, capacity, and expertise.

**Table 1. Team Membership Considerations and Key Preparation and Response Responsibilities**

	Coordination Team	Response Team
Membership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ SEA convened team including representatives from across key state agencies (e.g., state departments of Justice, Health and Human Services, Governor’s Office), as well federal agencies if applicable</li> <li>▶ Representatives from hospitals, trauma and/or grief centers, and behavioral health providers that are engaged with this work across the state</li> <li>▶ Personnel with school safety, emergency preparedness, mental health, and trauma recovery expertise, as well as state law enforcement</li> <li>▶ Individuals with decision-making authority related to relevant state resources and policies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Regional or local personnel (e.g., local mental health providers, instructional or school climate coaches) with expertise in gun violence and trauma recovery, mental health, grief and bereavement, and direct knowledge of the district</li> <li>▶ Key representatives of coordination team with unique experiences and expertise aligned with incident specific needs</li> </ul>
Key Responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Coordinate state efforts during all phases (prevention, response, recovery)</li> <li>▶ Coordinate across state agencies and with federal agencies or law enforcement investigation if applicable</li> <li>▶ Review relevant policy (e.g., information sharing across agencies, conditions for state attendance or academic testing waivers)</li> <li>▶ Identify and make available state resources (e.g., funding or personnel that could be re-allocated to meet immediate needs or funding that could support longer term staff retention incentives)</li> <li>▶ Facilitate partnership and planning between law enforcement, trauma or grief centers or hospitals, and school districts</li> <li>▶ Train, coordinate, and support response team members on trauma informed practices for supporting safe school re-opening, what to expect across phases of recovery, and strategies for facilitating district recovery planning</li> <li>▶ Facilitate ongoing supports for students or staff who may leave the impacted district.</li> <li>▶ Clearly communicate the role of the SEA in crisis response and procedures for accessing support</li> <li>▶ Provide technical and emotional support for response team members across phases of recovery</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Develop familiarity with district emergency response plans and local resources (resources for developing district emergency operation plans can be found at <a href="https://rems.ed.gov/eopinteractivetools.aspx">rems.ed.gov/eopinteractivetools.aspx</a>)</li> <li>▶ Provide support for district communication personnel and district leaders to ensure clear and consistent communication across phases of recovery</li> <li>▶ Support district leadership in prioritizing key actions within each phase of recovery. (See table below and <a href="https://pbis.org/crisis-recovery">pbis.org/crisis-recovery</a> for more information about each recovery phase and suggested response team actions by phase)</li> <li>▶ Facilitate the development and implementation of a district recovery plan</li> </ul>

In addition, efforts should be made to limit the number of new individuals present on site in the immediate response phase when re-establishing stability and a sense of safety is critical.

SEAs should consider the most efficient way to allocate key responsibilities. For example, in a state with a robust intermediate or regional support structure, some of the coordination team responsibilities may be handled within the existing regional support structures. Conversely in an area with limited local resources, more of the response team responsibilities may be carried out directly by coordination team members. Efforts and responsibilities across teams should be integrated within existing team structures whenever possible rather than developing new teams. Table 1 details team membership considerations and key preparation and response responsibilities.

## 2. Defining the Response Scope

To support district emergency response planning, coordination teams should clearly spell out the types of events the response team will support and the types of events that districts are expected to handle without direct SEA support. The range of specific events supported by response teams will vary by state and local resources and conditions, as well as the scale and scope of the incident itself. In general, coordination teams should consider providing supplemental support in situations where local resources are overrun or less developed, or the local impact is so widespread that local response efforts are compromised.

For example, coordination teams may consider planning to provide supplemental support for district teams in the case of the following events or events of similar magnitude:

- ▶ Mass shooting or a shooting resulting in serious injury or fatalities on school grounds or at a school-sponsored event;
- ▶ Mass shooting events in the community that significantly disrupt the learning environment (e.g., multiple students and families impacted by the shooting attend the same school or cluster of schools);

- ▶ Cluster suicide events (i.e., two or more suicides or attempts that occur in close proximity of time and location) involving school community members.

Coordination teams may clarify that some community violence events that do not significantly disrupt school operations (e.g., require temporary school closure), or a shooting event with limited injuries or fatalities, may be outside of the scope of SEA support. Because it is impossible to predict the specifics of a crisis event, teams must consider flexible options for response efforts for events that fall outside these definitions but have a widespread impact on the school community and significantly disrupt the learning environment and where existing local support may be limited.

## 3. Identifying and Vetting Additional Personnel

Following a school shooting event, districts may require a range of external support to meet immediate needs. For example, many districts access external crisis or grief counselors to provide triage and initial psychological first-aid support to students, staff, and families. Similarly, many districts employ long-term substitutes to provide additional classroom and school-based support during the initial and intermediate recovery phases.

SEA leadership teams can prepare for an incident by establishing a database of relevant and pre-vetted local, regional or virtual resources that may be called upon for both educational and therapeutic support needs in the case of an incident. This means having personnel ready, with relevant background checks and credentialing reviews completed and aligned with local and/or state policies, who can spring into action in the event of a traumatic event. Pre-vetting relevant support personnel will facilitate a rapid response and reduce the burden on the district for conducting personnel reviews during the initial response period. For example, a state may identify paid or volunteer mental health providers who are trained, vetted, and available to support district crisis response efforts. District leaders may need to ensure that district policy allows for the emergency use of SEA identified and vetted

resources. Coordination teams can also evaluate this database to identify potential areas of need and work to fill those gaps ahead of an incident, including increasing the diversity of providers and ensuring the availability of language accessible services. For example, a state team may notice that mental health providers are not easily accessible in rural areas and could identify and pre-vet supplemental tele-health or virtual supports that could supplement local resources if needed.

#### 4. Planning and Implementing Response Action Steps

Upon request from a district or after notification of a crisis event, the coordination team deploys the response team to provide direct support. The level and type of support needed will vary by incident impact and change across phases of recovery. Response teams should work closely with the district leaders to periodically re-assess the level and types of required SEA support and the plan for providing ongoing support throughout the recovery process as outside resources and support diminish over time. Long-term and sustainable recovery efforts must be owned and driven by the local community; therefore, response teams should primarily

provide the support needed to stabilize and restore the learning environment following an event and should prioritize investing in internal district capacity whenever possible so that local leaders can chart their path towards recovery. SEA support and ongoing communication are critical for high impact incidents that may require state level policy changes or state or federal waivers of activities such as state testing or data reporting requirements. Specific resources for states, districts, schools, and families by phase of recovery are available at [pbis.org/crisis-recovery](https://pbis.org/crisis-recovery). Table 2 details typical response team action steps by phase of recovery.

#### 5. Supporting Communications

The key to an effective response is clear and consistent communication. The best time to communicate and plan for available support is prior to an incident. Coordination teams can facilitate this planning by clearly communicating the (a) types of incidents the SEA supports; (b) the range of response team actions that are available across phases of recovery; (c) specifically who the people are in each role, and if there are people in a back-up role; and (d) procedures for requesting support from the SEA. Coordination

**Table 2. Suggested Response Team Action Steps by Recovery Phase**

Recovery Phase	Action Steps
Immediate Response	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Provide on-site immediate support to aid in reunification, triage and trauma treatment, communication, and resource distribution efforts as directed by the district. More information about trauma treatment including Psychological First Aid and Skills for Psychological Recovery can be found at the <a href="https://www.nctsn.org/">National Child Traumatic Stress Network (Nctsn.org)</a>.</li> <li>▶ Assist in a safe and structured school re-opening</li> </ul>
Initial Recovery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Provide on-demand, language and disability accessible support for students and staff as needed, transition to internal district resources when possible</li> <li>▶ Support district allocation of resources and supports to prioritize access for those most directly impacted by the incident and those with pre-existing needs.</li> <li>▶ Support organization of supplemental or temporary personnel to support recovery (e.g., long term substitutes, community based mental health providers)</li> <li>▶ Support district organization for recovery including adequate FTE for recovery coordination</li> <li>▶ Support the development of a written district recovery plan (e.g., <a href="#">Sample District Recovery Plan Template</a>)</li> </ul>
Intermediate Recovery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Provide ongoing support for the district recovery coordinator and district leaders as external supports begin to fade</li> <li>▶ Support the use of multiple sources of data to guide recovery efforts</li> <li>▶ Use data to ensure equitable recovery across different subgroups (subgroups of survivors, by race, gender, disability status, grade levels)</li> <li>▶ Facilitate open and ongoing communication between the district, students, caregivers, and community members</li> <li>▶ Support a flexible and differentiated restoration of balance between social emotional support and academic rigor</li> <li>▶ Provide onsite support as needed to meet specific identified needs (e.g., academic needs, referrals to special education, staff retention)</li> </ul>
Long Term Recovery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Support internal district capacity-building efforts (e.g., prioritize building skills and knowledge for existing district employees over hiring outside temporary support personnel)</li> <li>▶ Continue to anticipate and adjust support to meet needs as memorial events, other school violence incidents, or other reminders of school violence arise</li> </ul>

teams should consider communicating procedures to district administration, school staff, and students, families, and community members so that all potentially impacted groups are aware of the SEA role in supporting recovery. In their communications, schools must take steps to ensure that they effectively communicate with individuals with disabilities, including by providing auxiliary aids and services where necessary.

During and following a crisis event, districts can become overwhelmed with communications from outside agencies, the press, families and community members, and others seeking information or offering support. Response teams can support district communication by organizing temporary communication support for the district communication point person, facilitating the development of one clear and regular source of district updates (e.g., district website, or regular district email or text update) that are language and disability accessible, developing talking points for district leaders with key information and messages, and facilitating communication across involved groups (e.g., school board, community, SEA coordination team).

## 6. Review for Continuous Improvement and Ongoing Support

Any time crisis support is requested from a district and following any response team actions in support of district requests, the coordination team should meet to review and evaluate procedures and supports and identify areas of improvement or additional need. The team may consider the following questions:

- ▶ What was requested?
- ▶ What was provided?
- ▶ How accessible were the supports provided? Were there any barriers (e.g., language, cost)?
- ▶ How effective were provided supports?
- ▶ What are the ongoing needs and how will costs be covered?
- ▶ What areas of confusion were identified?

Any areas of needed improvement should be immediately incorporated into SEA response plans and appropriate adjustments to policy and clearly communicated. This review is best conducted after the immediate supports are established but before details of the incident are lost or forgotten (e.g., 1-3 months following an incident).

Similarly, response team members should facilitate this ongoing iterative process for district leadership based on current and changing conditions to develop and inform district intermediate and long-term recovery plans. Examples of these review questions to guide planning are included in this [sample district recovery plan template](#).

## Conclusion

School-based gun violence incidents have the potential to easily overrun a school district's emergency response capacity. SEAs can support district led response and recovery efforts by developing coordination and response teams and procedures that can be used to supplement district capacity and facilitate short and long-term recovery efforts. While every incident is unique the considerations provided here will support SEA planning related to organizing teams, defining the response scope, identifying additional personnel, planning, and implementing key actions across recovery phases, supporting communication, and engaging in continuous learning and improvement. Recovery is a long-term process, and states play a critical role in recovery by both providing immediate support and ensuring the availability and stability of needed supports over time.

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These resources are provided to assist states, districts and schools in their gun violence prevention, preparation, response, and recovery to gun violence incidents. These resources are providing information based on published findings from past school incidents, experiences of state, local, and school-based personnel, families, and students, and emerging and promising practices.

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