READINESS AND EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT FOR SCHOOLS
REMS
TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE CENTER

School District Planning and Response Teams: Developing and Enhancing the School Emergency Operations Plan

School districts play a critical district in supporting schools with the creation of comprehensive emergency operations plans (EOPs) that address all hazards, all settings and all times and that focus on the five preparedness mission areas — prevention, protection, mitigation, response and recovery. This plan can be one of a school's most powerful tools for dealing with emergency incidents; ensuring the security and preparedness of the campus community; and addressing the safety needs of all students, staff, and visitors, including those with access and functional needs. To better clarify how districts can support schools in the design and implementation of EOPs, the U.S. Federal government published in 2019 _The Role of Districts in Developing High-Quality School Emergency Operations Plans_, representing a joint effort between the U.S. Departments of Education, Justice, Health and Human Services and Homeland Security. Also known as the _District Guide_, it complements the earlier-released _Guide for Developing High-Quality School Emergency Operations Plans_ (_School Guide_) and assists district-level administrators and staff in understanding their roles and responsibilities before, during, and after emergency incidents and in supporting schools create and continually enhance their EOPs. create and continually enhance their EOPs.

Creating and Revising EOPs Using a Six-Step Planning Process

The _District Guide_ outlines the six-step planning process also found in the _School Guide_ for creating and continually enhancing school EOPs. This federally recommended process may be used by districts as they support schools in planning for a range of hazards and threats that may occur in all settings and at any time in local school communities, as well as districtwide.

Using This Checklist

The following checklist can assist school districts as they support schools in developing a new EOP or refreshing an existing plan. This checklist summarizes key elements that will help district-level core planning teams, with their school-specific teams and community partners, develop or enhance a school EOP. To use the checklist, consider the extent to which your district core planning team has undertaken or included in the school's EOP each of the activities listed and check the appropriate box.

THE PLANNING PROCESS

1	2	3	4	5	6
Form a Collaborative Planning Team	Understand the Situation	Determine Goals and Objectives	Plan Development (Identifying Courses of Action)	Plan Preparation, Review, and Approval	Plan Implementation and Maintenance

STEP 1: HELP SCHOOLS FORM COLLABORATIVE PLANNING TEAMS

To begin the process of assisting schools with developing and maintaining an EOP, a district core planning should be assembled. These multidisciplinary planning teams develop districtwide policies and procedures and should work closely with school core planning teams as well as local emergency response teams to develop school EOPs and related annexes.

- ☐ **Form a School Core Planning Team**
  - ☐ Establish a district-level core planning team to support the work of individual school core planning teams
    - ☐ Administrators
    - ☐ Instructional and support staff
    - ☐ Food services personnel
    - ☐ Maintenance, building, and grounds staff
    - ☐ Community partners
    - ☐ Community organizations
    - ☐ Parents and guardians
  - ☐ Develop policies and procedures to guide schools in forming their teams

- ☐ **Develop a Common Framework**
  - ☐ Work with the school core planning teams to help ensure that members learn each other's vocabulary, command structure, and culture

- ☐ **Define and Assign Roles and Responsibilities**
  - ☐ Develop policies and procedures to ensure that each person involved in developing and refining the school EOP knows his or her roles and responsibilities

- ☐ **Determine a Regular Schedule of Meetings**
  - ☐ Set districtwide expectations for holding regular but flexible planning meetings within each school
  - ☐ Develop policies and procedures that will assist school core planning teams in scheduling and conducting their meetings

STEP 2: HELP SCHOOLS UNDERSTAND THE SITUATION

Insight from the district core planning team will be critical as school EOPs are developed and continually enhanced. Team members are uniquely positioned to help schools ensure their EOPs address the threats and hazards the district, and its individual schools, may face because of their historical knowledge as well as their understanding of the culture and climate within the whole school community.

☐ **Identify Threats and Hazards**

    ☐ Develop a districtwide master list and share with schools
    ☐ Develop policies to guide schools in identifying site-specific threats and hazards
    ☐ Confirm which assessments are required/optional
    ☐ Determine which assessments will be used
    ☐ Collaborate with schools to conduct assessments that can identify site-specific threats and hazards

☐ **Evaluate Risks Poses by Threats and Hazards**

    ☐ Guide schools in evaluating risks posed by threats and hazards

☐ **Prioritize Threats and Hazards**

    ☐ Help schools categorize each threat and hazard as posing a high, medium, or low risk — as determined by the evaluation of risks and hazards

STEP 3: HELP SCHOOLS DETERMINE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

EOPs are designed to provide defined specific actions that planning and response team members can take in the event of an emergency. Goals and objectives that are based on threats, hazards, and common emergency management functions can help ensure that everyone has a clear understanding of why specific protocols and policies are included within the EOP.

☐ **Select Threats and Hazards to Address in School EOPs**

    ☐ Guide schools in deciding which threats and hazards identified, evaluated, and prioritized in Step 2 to include in their EOPs

☐ **Develop Goals and Objectives**

    ☐ Create a list of goals and objectives for each threat and hazard on the district's master list

☐ **Identify Cross-Cutting Functions**

    ☐ Develop policies and procedures to identify cross-cutting functions

☐ **Develop Goals and Objectives for Cross-Cutting Functions**

    ☐ Develop at least three goals to indicate the desired outcome before, during, and after each function has been executed

STEP 4: HELP SCHOOLS DEVELOP PLANS (IDENTIFYING COURSES OF ACTION)

Goals and objectives define the "what and why," but courses of action combine the "who" and "how" in emergency management planning. Who will be responsible for carrying out certain actions, and how will they accomplish those actions? Districts can play an important role in helping schools understand and identify courses of action.

☐ **Develop Courses of Action**

- ☐ Support schools in their development of customized, site-specific courses of action that address goals and objectives selected from the district's master list of threats and hazards

☐ **Select Preferred Courses of Action**

- ☐ Develop policies to guide schools in selecting courses of action
- ☐ Work with schools to match resources to requirements
- ☐ Assist school core planning teams with the acquisition, storage, and distribution of the resources, materials, and equipment needed to complete the courses of action selected by the school
- ☐ Assist schools in establishing official partnerships and partnership agreements, such as memoranda of understanding or memoranda of agreement

☐ **Finalize and Format Functional and Threat- and Hazard-Specific Annexes**

- ☐ Provide a recommended format that school core planning teams can use to create the Functional Annexes section of their EOP
- ☐ Provide a recommended format that school core planning teams can use to create the Threat- and Hazard-Specific Annexes section of their EOP

STEP 5: HELP SCHOOLS PREPARE, REVIEW, AND APPROVE PLANS

In step five, districts should support schools with developing programs and processes for exercising and reviewing their EOPs, as well as support with formatting and sharing the plan. Goals, objectives, and courses of action will serve as the foundation for an EOP, which can be formatted using the outline recommended in the *District Guide* and *School Guide*. Once the EOP is formatted and revised, the district core planning team should work with school core planning teams to review the plan for quality, approve it, and determine with whom the entire EOP or portions of it should be shared.

☐ **Develop the Basic Plan**

Work With Schools to Create an Exercise Program

- ☐ Recommend to schools that they involve community partners (including law enforcement, emergency medical services practitioners, and fire department personnel) and local emergency management staff
- ☐ Encourage schools to communicate information in advance of drill/exercise dates to avoid confusion and concern
- ☐ Suggest conducting exercises under different and nonideal conditions
- ☐ Work with school community partners to ensure consistency with common emergency management terminology
- ☐ Recommend that schools debrief and develop an after-action report that evaluates results, identifies gaps or shortfalls, and documents lessons learned

Work With Schools to Establish a Process for Plan Review and Revision

- ☐ Discuss with schools how their EOPs and related procedures will be modified, if needed, and specify who is responsible for reviews and revisions
- ☐ Work with schools to establish a process for reviewing and revising plans using state and local requirements as a guide
- ☐ Work with schools to review and revise a portion of their EOP each month, or at a natural break in the calendar, as opposed to reviewing the entire plan at once
- ☐ Consider providing guidance or requirements to schools on the way in which and how often school EOPs should be developed and updated

☐ Format the Plan

- ☐ Work with schools and community partners to determine a common school EOP format for use districtwide

☐ Revise the Formatted Draft

- ☐ Work with schools to insert the plan content developed thus far into each appropriate section, and revise the formatted plan according to writing conventions, adding necessary tables, charts, and other supporting graphics
- ☐ Provide comments on the draft, and help facilitate connections between school core planning teams and stakeholders, including those with a responsibility for implementing the plan

☐ Review the Plan for Quality

- ☐ Develop a framework for reviewing and approving the plan

☐ Approve and Share the Plan

- ☐ Develop a framework outlining the process for officially approving school EOPs
- ☐ Approve the EOP
- ☐ Work with schools to share the plan with community partners and additional stakeholders who have a responsibility for or a role in the EOP
- ☐ Work with schools to protect their plans from those unauthorized to have them
- ☐ Establish a system for sharing secure documents electronically
- ☐ Work with schools to maintain a record of people and organizations that receive a copy of the plan

STEP 6: HELP SCHOOLS IMPLEMENT AND MAINTAIN THE PLAN

Once created, an EOP should be continually updated and enhanced based on lessons learned from emergencies, exercises conducted, and insight from district and school communities. District core planning teams should work with school core planning teams to exercise, review and revise the plan to ensure compliance with local, state or Federal legislation and that roles and responsibilities remain clearly outlined.

☐ Train and Inform Stakeholders

- ☐ Train and inform stakeholders on the plan and their roles and responsibilities in it

☐ Exercise the Plan

- ☐ Establish policies and procedures for conducting exercises of the plan
- ☐ Help schools coordinate drills and exercises

☐ Encourage schools to conduct exercises under different and nonideal conditions
☐ Work with schools to develop an exercise schedule
☐ Work with schools to evaluate and improve exercises

☐ **Review, Revise, and Maintain the Plan**
☐ Ensure that school core planning teams review, revise, and maintain their EOPs according to, at a minimum, the district's approved cycle

Once the EOP is complete, school districts and/or schools can use the REMS TA Center's EOP EVALUATE Web application to evaluate and update school EOPs based on the guidelines set forth in the *School Guide*. Upon completion of EOP EVALUATE, responses will result in a customized downloadable report containing a variety of additional resources and information. District core planning teams may use this tool to review all school EOPs in their school district or may work collaboratively with each school core planning team to review the school EOP using this tool and then make subsequent updates.

Evaluate Your School Plan Using REMS TA Center's EOP EVALUATE Tool

The REMS TA Center's Web application helps planning teams evaluate their existing EOP against the guidelines set forth in the *School Guide*. Users are prompted through the federally recommended six-step planning process to determine whether there are areas where an existing EOP can be improved. Upon completing EOP EVALUATE, responses will result in a customized downloadable report containing a variety of additional information and resources on enhancing areas of your school's EOP. Access additional information on the REMS TA Center Website: https://rems.ed.gov/EOPinteractivetools.aspx.

PLAN CONTENT

As Step 5 of the *District Guide* and *School Guide* suggests, each plan contains three main sections — the Basic Plan, Functional Annexes, and Threat- and Hazard-Specific Annexes. Each section of the plan supports the other sections, and, together, they create a comprehensive, high-quality EOP. The following portion of the checklist outlines the contents of each EOP section in detail and can guide districts in helping schools develop a new EOP or evaluate their existing EOP against Federal guidance.

The Basic Plan

☐ **Introductory Material**

    ☐ Cover Page
    ☐ Promulgation Document and Signatures
    ☐ Approval and Implementation
    ☐ Record of Changes
    ☐ Record of Distribution
    ☐ Table of Contents

☐ **Purpose, Scope, Situation Overview, and Assumptions**

    ☐ Purpose
    ☐ Scope
    ☐ Situation Overview
    ☐ Planning Assumptions

☐ **Concept of Operations**

☐ **Organization and Assignment of Responsibilities**

☐ **Direction, Control, and Coordination**

☐ **Information Collection, Analysis, and Dissemination**

☐ **Training and Exercises**

☐ **Administration, Finance, and Logistics**

☐ **Plan Development and Maintenance**

☐ **Authorities and References**

Functional Annexes

☐ **Evacuation Annex**

☐ **Lockdown Annex**

☐ **Shelter-in-Place Annex**

☐ **Accounting for All Persons Annex**

☐ **Communications and Warning Annex**

☐ **Family Reunification Annex**

☐ **Continuity of Operations (COOP) Annex**
- ☐ Continuity of Teaching and Learning
- ☐ Continuity of Feeding and Food Distribution
- ☐ Continuity of Business Services
- ☐ Continuity of Essential Services

☐ **Recovery Annex**
- ☐ Academic Recovery
- ☐ Physical and Structural Recovery
- ☐ Business Services Recovery
- ☐ Health, Social, Emotional, and Behavioral Recovery

☐ **Public Health, Medical, and Mental Health Annex**
- ☐ Public Health
- ☐ Medical
- ☐ Mental Health

☐ **Security Annex**

Threat- and Hazard-Specific Annexes

☐ **Natural Hazards** (animals, earthquakes, extreme temperatures, floods, hurricanes/typhoons, landslides or mudslides, lightning, severe wind, tornadoes, tsunamis, volcanic eruptions, wildfires, winter precipitation, etc.)

☐ **Technological Hazards** (accidental release of hazardous materials from within the school, dam failure, explosions or accidental release of toxins from industrial plants, hazardous materials from major highways and railroads, lead exposure or poisoning, power failure, radiological releases from nuclear power stations, water failure, etc.)

☐ **Biological Hazards** (contaminated food outbreaks, infectious diseases, toxic materials present in school laboratories, etc.)

☐ **Adversarial, Incidental, and Human-Caused Threats** (active shooters, adult sexual misconduct, bomb threats, bullying and cyberbullying, criminal threats or actions, cybersecurity and cyber safety, domestic violence or abuse, fire, gang violence, human trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation, kidnapping, opioid overdoses and drug-related emergencies, protests and walkout demonstrations, sextortion, sexual violence or assault, suicide, violent extremism, etc.)
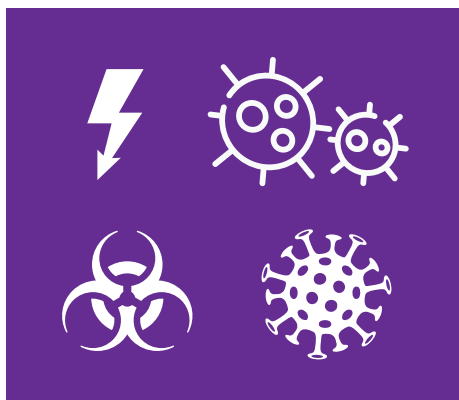
EOP REVIEW

As Step 6 of the *District Guide* and *School Guide* outlines, it is important for the district core planning team to work with school core planning teams to carefully review the EOP before sharing it with members of the school community to ensure that it clearly outlines goals, objectives, and courses of action and to ensure that schools remain in compliance with local, state, and Federal laws. Efforts to practice the plan may reveal areas of improvement that can help ensure plan effectiveness and efficiency. Find tips below to support your EOP review efforts.

Plan Writing Practices

☐ Summarizes important information with checklists/visual aids

☐ Uses clear writing, plain language, short sentences, and active voice; avoids jargon, qualifiers, and vague wording

☐ Uses a logical and consistent structure

☐ Provides enough detail to convey the plan/specific actions clearly

☐ Effectively communicates the plan to diverse audiences with appropriate auxiliary aids and services

Plan Effectiveness and Efficiency

☐ Incorporates all courses of action to be accomplished for the selected threats and hazards and identified functions

☐ Integrates the needs of the whole school community

☐ Provides a complete picture of what should happen, when, and at whose direction

☐ Estimates time for achieving objectives, keeping safety first

☐ Identifies success criteria and a desired end state

☐ Conforms to the planning principles outlined in the *District Guide* and *School Guide*

Plan Compliance

☐ Complies with applicable Federal, state, and local requirements
   ☐ *Americans with Disabilities Act*
   ☐ *Title IV* of the *Civil Rights Act of 1964*
   ☐ *Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act*
   ☐ *Health Insurance and Portability and Accountability Act of 1996*