Recovery for Schools and School Districts

School preparedness is strengthened by prevention, protection, mitigation, response, and recovery activities (also known as the five preparedness mission areas—see the text box to the right).[1] This fact sheet describes what recovery is, how recovery is connected to the other preparedness missions, what recovery efforts planning teams may want to consider, and how recovery activities can be integrated into planning efforts; additional resources are provided, as well.[2]

Schools (public or nonpublic) are continually recovering from emergencies. Most incidents are small, such as a burst water pipe that floods a room, and the recovery is usually quick. Some events are a lot larger, such as regional flooding that impacts the entire school, and the recovery can take a lot longer. Fortunately, schools and school districts can plan on how they would recover from these types of emergencies before they even occur, which can make the recovery process more effective and quicker.

Recovery efforts involve expanding existing internal services and support, such as mental/behavioral health help, that are provided throughout the school year. And, when additional support is needed, schools and school districts can look to community partners (e.g., the local emergency management office), nongovernmental organizations, the private sector, and others.

Four Components of Recovery

Recovery in schools and school districts comprises four components:

MISSION AREA DEFINITIONS

- **Prevention** is the action schools and school districts take to prevent a threatened or actual incident from occurring.
- **Protection** is the ongoing actions schools and school districts take to safeguard the school, students, and staff from an emergency event.
- **Mitigation** focuses on actions schools and school districts take to eliminate or reduce the loss of life, injuries, and property damage from an emergency event.
- **Response** is putting the school's and school district's plans into place to effectively respond to an emergency event, and provide for the immediate needs of students and staff.
- **Recovery** is teaming with community partners to restore educational programming; the physical environment; business operations; and social, emotional and behavioral health.

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[1] *School* refers to all types, including private and public, and all grade levels for the purposes of this fact sheet.

[2] Fact sheets on the other four areas of *prevention*, *protection*, *mitigation*, and *response* can be found on the REMS TA Center's Website at https://rems.ed.gov.

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1. **Academics recovery.** Learning is the primary purpose of schools, and the ability to resume academic activities is essential to a school's recovery. The resumption of teaching and learning begins to restore normalcy to the school environment through routines, which can be very important in the psychological and emotional health of students, teachers, and staff.

2. **Physical and structural recovery.** This type of recovery is needed to support education and involves the restoration of the school's buildings, equipment, and supplies.

3. **Business functions recovery.** The school's or school district's business operations that also serve as a support function to education, such as payroll and contracts, need to be fully restored if impacted by an emergency.

4. **Social, emotional, and behavioral recovery.** Even though academics, physical and structural, and business functions recovery may have ended, the social, emotional, and behavioral recovery of students, teachers, and staff may continue long after. For students, the emergency event may have led to a lack of engagement, poor attendance, tardiness, incomplete assignments, antisocial behavior, and withdrawal.
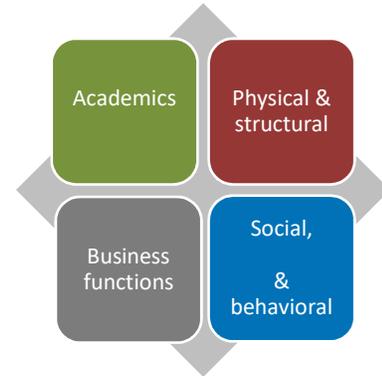
Timeframes of Recovery

The type and breadth of recovery needed after an event will likely depend on the size and scope of the emergency. When conducting recovery activities, it can help to consider activities that occur in the hours after an emergency (immediate recovery); those that takes days to weeks (short-term recovery); and those that can take weeks, months, or even years (long-term recovery).

These timeframes, and the activities conducted in them, can overlap. So, for example, short-term and long-term activities may begin during immediate recovery. Also, the four recovery components may progress at different rates. For some events, physical and structural recovery may only take a few days after an event, but social, emotional, and behavioral recovery may take months or years.

After the recovery process, the environment may appear to be the same as before the incident. For example, a classroom could be cleaned or repaired after a burst water pipe so that it looks the same as before the incident. Or, the environment can be based on new agreed-upon standards, such as a new school that is built after flooding that looks different from the original school.

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Recovery as a Component of Preparedness

The five mission areas of prevention, protection, mitigation, response, and recovery are all connected and directly contribute to preparedness. During recovery from an incident, a school can identify where prevention efforts need to be assessed, conducted, or enhanced. For example, the physical and structural recovery from flooding may indicate that more needs to be done to stop electrical items from getting wet. Recovery may also identify that additional ongoing protection actions are needed, such as training in Psychological First Aid to help with social, emotional, and behavioral recovery. During recovery, mitigation activities can be conducted such as rebuilding a flooded building on higher ground to reduce its likelihood of being flooded again. Finally, recovery activities can also occur at the same time as response activities. A rapid and effective response to an incident can help reduce the amount of recovery efforts needed. For example, a quick response to a burst water pipe can reduce the amount of cleanup and repairs needed.

Examples of Recovery Activities

To facilitate recovery, schools and school districts can plan ahead and consider what activities may need to be conducted after an emergency. Planning teams—in collaboration with community partners—should consider identifying how the school or school district would conduct the following activities under each component of recovery and integrate them into the emergency operations plan (EOP). While these resources are listed under the recovery mission area, they may apply to other areas, too.

1. Academics recovery
   - Share classrooms or use other school buildings—such as the gymnasium—or other facilities for instruction.
   - Adjust the class schedule so that, for example, students attend classes either in the morning (starting earlier) or in the afternoon (finishing later).
   - Re-evaluate the curriculum.
   - Integrate students into other school districts.

- Use distance or blended learning through both traditional and information technology (IT)–based instruction, student work, and assessment.

2. Physical and structural recovery
   - Assess and repair structural and physical damage.
   - Clean the facility(ies).
   - Remove health and safety hazards.
   - Coordinate donations and volunteers.
   - Restore equipment and processes, such as IT equipment, software, books, and instructional materials.
   - Resume other school support, such as full transportation and food services.

3. Business functions recovery
   - Create agreements for prioritized services during and after an emergency.
   - Ask for resources via mutual aid agreements to help with immediate needs.
   - Access backup IT and business services.
   - Restore business services, such as payroll, accounting systems, and personnel records.
   - Register displaced students in other school districts.
   - Securely share relevant education records with school districts receiving students displaced by the emergency.
   - Request emergency funding to pay for immediate cleanup and repair.
   - Access long-term recovery funding through loans, community grants, or Federal support.

4. Social, emotional, and behavioral recovery
   - Provide Psychological First Aid for Schools (PFA-S).
   - Conduct ongoing assessment/monitoring of students', teachers', and staff's mental/behavioral health.
   - Monitor attendance, grades, and counselor's visits.
   - Ensure that staff and teachers have access to Employee Assistance Programs.
   - Make individual and group crisis counseling available.
   - Refer students, teachers, and staff to long-term interventions, if needed.
   - Provide trauma- and grief-focused school-based mental/behavioral health programs.
   - Provide support to caregivers to help prevent or reduce compassion fatigue.

Integrating Recovery Efforts Into Emergency Planning

To aid in the creation, review, or revision of the EOP—or a part(s) of the EOP—the *Guide for Developing High-Quality School Emergency Operations Plans* (*School Guide*; http://rems.ed.gov/docs/REMS_K-12_Guide_508.pdf) recommends a six-step planning process

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that is flexible, adaptable, and customizable to the building level. An understanding of the activities that can be conducted in the recovery mission area—and all five mission areas—can help generate ideas for what needs to be included in the EOP as planning teams progress through these steps.

Step 1: Form a collaborative planning team. The planning team, which will comprise a core planning team, school personnel, community partners, and a school district representative, would benefit from getting input from individuals who would play a role in the four components of a school's recovery. These individuals could include educators, a facilities manager, business office personnel, and a school psychologist or counselor.

Step 2: Understand the situation. Here, the planning team uses a variety of assessments to identify possible threats and hazards to the school, and assesses the risk and vulnerabilities posed by them.

Step 3: Determine goals and objectives and **Step 4: Plan development (identify courses of action).** After assessing the level of risk posed by threats and hazards, the planning team would work to determine goals and objectives to achieve the best outcome for before, during, and after an incident. Then, courses of action would be developed that describe the who, what, when, and how to meet those objectives. Mitigation goals, objectives, and courses of action can be identified during both steps.

- A possible *before goal* for academics recovery could be the following: Ensure that processes are in place to address academics recovery.
- One recovery-focused *objective* to meet the goal could be the following: Identify how teaching and learning would continue for weeks or months after a major disaster without the use of school facilities.
- Some *courses of action* could be the following: Teachers, in coordination with the principal and support staff, will submit lesson plans that detail how instruction and learning would continue if students need to work from home.

Step 5: Plan preparation, review, and approval. After a draft of the EOP—including annexes such as a Recovery Annex—is written, the draft is reviewed by senior leadership and others who play a role in implementing the plan and approved (or edited as needed).

The school's and school district's recovery activities and plans should be coordinated and integrated with those of the local municipality, which in turn will be integrated with those at the state and Federal levels as described in the National Disaster Recovery Framework (NDRF), to ensure a more comprehensive recovery with the support of local government departments (see the Key Resources section below for more information on the NDRF). The local emergency management office can help with this coordination.

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Step 6: Plan implementation and maintenance. Finally, the plan is implemented, which includes providing training to teachers and staff on their roles and responsibilities in an emergency and conducting exercises to test the school's response.

Key Resources

Resources available to support recovery planning efforts include:

- Using the Five Preparedness Missions to Help Ready Your District and School for Emergencies Webinar, REMS TA Center. In this Webinar, presenters discussed how schools and school districts can take a more comprehensive approach to emergency preparedness by addressing the five mission areas. Using examples from frequently asked questions about topics including threat assessments, earthquake preparedness, and adult sexual misconduct, the presenters discussed highlighted key courses of action. http://rems.ed.gov/PreparednessMissionsForSchoolEmerg.aspx

- National Disaster Recovery Framework (NDRF), U.S. Department of Homeland Security. The NDRF is one of the five National Planning Frameworks and provides guidance to disaster-impacted states, tribes, and territorial and local jurisdictions to enable a more effective recovery. The guide provides a scalable, flexible, and adaptable structure for recovery managers to collaborate and describes how communities can be restored, and revitalized. https://www.fema.gov/national-disaster-recovery-framework

- Recovery Annex Web page, REMS TA Center. Planning teams are provided a list of activities on this page that could be included in a school or school district EOP. In the Related Resources pop-up, additional resources are provided on the topics of social, emotional, and behavioral recovery and business functions recovery. http://rems.ed.gov/K12RecoveryAnnex.aspx

- Supporting Continuity of Teaching and Learning During an Emergency fact sheet, REMS TA Center. This resource describes aspects and activities that the school's and school district's planning teams may want to consider as they plan for continuity of learning in the event of a school closure or student absence. Included is a summary of tools to support continuity of learning and additional resources. http://rems.ed.gov/Docs/Supporting_Continuity_of_Learning_and_Education.pdf

- Disaster Distress Helpline, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. This toll-free, multilingual, and confidential crisis support service provides year-round immediate crisis counseling for people who are experiencing emotional distress related to any natural or human-caused disaster. https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/disaster-distress-helpline

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