

Inclusive Emergency Planning: Strategies and Resources for K-12 Schools and School Districts

Prepare for emergency events through activities and exercises that incorporate the needs of the entire school community.

Effective emergency planning and preparation is an essential component of school safety and includes key actions schools can take to prevent emergency events from occurring or minimize their impact when they do occur. Elements of emergency planning include:

- Establishing a diverse emergency planning team consisting of school personnel with varied expertise to meet the safety needs of the entire school community
- Developing an Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) outlining the actions students, teachers, and school staff should take before, during, and after emergency events
- Collaborating with community partners including local emergency management staff, first responders, law enforcement, and public and mental health officials
- Accounting for special events and accommodating all disabilities, regardless of whether that accommodation is a current necessity
- Planning for the various forms of recovery following a potential crisis



Schools should plan to regularly review and, if needed, update their emergency plans and response procedures. These efforts are especially important if there are modifications to the school environment or student needs.

The Value of Training, Exercises, and Drills

Conducting training, exercises, and developmentally appropriate drills is a key part of school emergency planning. By practicing emergency scenarios and identifying areas for improvement, schools can familiarize stakeholders with procedures, evaluate specific actions, and refine plans and response capabilities. Planning teams can also use insights from exercises and drills to inform and implement updates to the EOP, including refinements to incorporate the unique needs of individual students or staff members.

Exercises and drills should be tailored to account for the specific features and characteristics of the school community, including students' developmental levels and physical abilities, and balanced with issues related to school culture and climate. When applicable, these activities should also be conducted in coordination with community partners to validate and integrate school plans with local emergency preparation and response practices and actions.

Related Resources

- ✓ [Best Practice Considerations for Armed Assailant Drills in Schools](#): This resource provides guidance on factors schools should take into account when conducting armed assailant drills and reflects unique considerations within the school environment, including protecting both the physical and psychological safety of students and staff.
- ✓ [Emergency Exercises: An Effective Way to Practice and Validate Emergency Operations Plans](#): This fact sheet provides information on the types and benefits of emergency exercises, developing an effective emergency exercise program, post-exercise evaluations, obtaining stakeholder buy-in, and resources for emergency exercises.



Emergency Planning for Individuals with Access and Functional Needs

Emergency planning should be inclusive and consider the diverse needs of the entire school community, including individuals with disabilities; students and staff requiring special accommodations; individuals from religiously, racially, and ethnically diverse backgrounds; and those with limited English proficiency. Each person with an access or functional need is unique and requires individual consideration. Involving parents, legal guardians, educators, disability specialists, and other stakeholders in the planning process can help schools develop and implement emergency plans that are tailored to the specific needs of these students. This includes equal access to safety measures and assistance during an emergency event.

The emergency planning team should identify the specific and special needs of individuals, along with potential gaps in EOPs for supporting these accommodations. This process should [consider the variety and range of potential needs](#) and vulnerabilities of these individuals, including those that are visual, communication, mobility, cognitive, attentional, and emotional-related. Once these needs and any accompanying strategies, trainings, tactics, and tools are identified, schools can incorporate these considerations into broader emergency planning policies and processes. Through this process, schools can identify the appropriate personnel, equipment, and supplies that may be needed to support those with access and functional needs during potential emergency scenarios.

Emergency and individual safety plans should also be shared with all school community members who engage with individuals with access or functional needs so they can properly support these students before, during, and after a potential crisis.



Disability specialists can inform a core planning team about the extra barriers to mobility and communication that students with special needs may encounter during an emergency.

Some ways schools can incorporate emergency planning [accommodations](#) to address individuals with access and functional needs may include:

- ✓ Practicing evacuation routes for individuals in wheelchairs
- ✓ Notifying families and students about planned exercises and drills
- ✓ Creating a buddy system for students
- ✓ Preparing go-kits with necessary medication, comfort items, or other supplies to support individual safety plans
- ✓ Including instructions in the primary languages of the school community and providing preparedness guidelines in multiple forms
- ✓ Accounting for sensory needs during trainings and emergency events
- ✓ Providing one-to-one supervision during transitions
- ✓ Anticipating for unique supports following a drill or emergency event, including transitioning back to typical school activities and routines

Sources: [Best Practice Considerations for Armed Assailant Drills in Schools](#) | [Emergency Exercises: An Effective Way to Practice and Validate Emergency Operations Plans](#) | [Especially Safe: An Inclusive Approach to Safety Preparedness in Educational Settings - Planning and Preparation Guide](#) | [Guide for Developing High-Quality School Emergency Operations Plans](#) | [Integrating K-12 Students with Disabilities into School Emergency Management Planning](#) | [School Safety Drills and Exercises for Students With Autism Spectrum Disorder: Tips and Resources for Educators](#) | [SchoolSafety.gov Emergency Planning Strategies and Resources](#) | [Training for School Personnel to Prevent, Prepare, and Respond to School Safety Incidents](#)

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Resources

SchoolSafety.gov features resources schools and districts can use to adopt emergency preparedness strategies and support the safety needs of the whole school community. These include:

Guides, Reports, and Fact Sheets

- ✓ **[Especially Safe: An Inclusive Approach to Safety Preparedness in Educational Settings Planning & Preparation Guide:](#)** This guide helps safety planning teams identify resources, develop strategies, and solve challenges to meet the diverse safety needs of all stakeholders within the educational community.
- ✓ **[Especially Safe: An Inclusive Approach to Safety Preparedness in Educational Settings Teaching & Training Guide:](#)** This guide provides an instructional framework to support educators in teaching essential concepts of safety preparedness to students/individuals with special needs, as well as key considerations for conducting subsequent training activities, such as emergency drills and exercises, safely and effectively.
- ✓ **[Families and Caregivers as Partners in School Emergency Management:](#)** This fact sheet provides strategies for forming partnerships and communicating with families and guardians as stakeholders to include them in efforts to develop, enhance, and maintain high-quality school emergency operations plans.
- ✓ **[Guide for Developing High-Quality School Emergency Operations Plans:](#)** This guidance provides information to school administrators on school emergency management planning. It includes a process for developing, implementing, and refining a school emergency operations plan with community partners.
- ✓ **[Integrating K-12 Students with Disabilities into School Emergency Management Planning:](#)** This fact sheet provides guidance on taking an inclusive and equitable approach to emergency management planning by considering and including the needs of students with disabilities.
- ✓ **[Integrating Neurodivergent K-12 Students and Staff Into School Emergency Management Planning:](#)** This fact sheet provides core planning teams with suggestions for developing emergency operations plans that consider the needs of their neurodivergent population.
- ✓ **[School Safety Drills and Exercises for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder \(ASD\): Tips and Resources for Educators:](#)** This resource provides considerations on school safety drills and exercises for students with ASD. It includes advocacy guidance for educators and offers school safety drill and exercise ideas for students with ASD.
- ✓ **[The Role of Districts in Developing High-Quality School Emergency Operations Plans:](#)** This guide provides information that can assist school districts in fulfilling both their individual and shared emergency planning responsibilities.

Trainings, Toolkits, and Websites

- ✓ **[Exercise Starter Kits and Tabletop Exercises:](#)** These self-conducted tabletop exercises, tailored for the academic community, include a set of scalable tools aimed to test existing emergency plans, protocols, and procedures, while also strengthening preparedness, response, and recovery capabilities. [Tabletop exercise packages](#) are also available on a variety of physical security scenarios geared towards specific facilities, including schools.
- ✓ **[HHS Child and Adolescent Health Emergency Planning Toolkit: Guidance for Addressing the Needs of Children and Youth with Special Health Care Needs:](#)** This toolkit provides information to address the needs of children and youth with special health care needs in emergency preparedness, response, recovery, mitigation, and community resilience activities.
- ✓ **[Straight-A Safety Toolkits:](#)** These toolkits can help schools assess, act, and audit school safety efforts and include insights and practical guidance, conversation starters, prompts for discussion, and activities.

Learn more and find additional resources on SchoolSafety.gov's [emergency planning page](#).



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