Training for Local Education Agencies: Best Practices for Providing School Safety Training

READINESS AND EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT FOR SCHOOLS TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE CENTER

Training is a key component of school safety. Schools and districts should train stakeholders on the emergency operations plan (EOP) and their roles and responsibilities, as outlined in Step 6 of the six-step planning process recommended by the _Guide for Developing High-Quality School Emergency Operations Plans_ (_School Guide_) and _The Role of Districts in Developing High-Quality School Emergency Operations Plans: A Companion to the School Guide_ (_District Guide_). Another key aspect of training involves enhancing the safety leadership of individuals and education agencies. This type of training for local education agencies (LEAs) is something that state education agencies (SEAs) and regional education agencies (REAs) can do as part of their ongoing school safety efforts to build the preparedness capacity of schools and school districts. Providing clear and consistent training to LEAs can help keep the whole school community safe in an emergency event.

When developing and delivering training programs to LEAs, education agencies can offer a variety of training modalities, topics, formats, and approaches. SEAs can use training to communicate to LEAs the importance of having a high-quality EOP tailored to their specific locality, illustrate how to develop a high-quality EOP with community partners that addresses a range of threats and hazards, and reinforce key concepts in preparedness. Building the internal capacity of SEAs and REAs to provide trainings to LEAs is critical for achieving these goals.

This publication describes best practices used by SEAs to provide training to LEAs on the development and implementation of high-quality EOPs. It features examples from SEAs participating in the Grants to States for School Emergency Management (GSEM) program, which is designed to expand the capacity of SEAs to provide training and technical assistance (TA) to LEAs for the development and implementation of high-quality school EOPs. The purpose of this planning document is to provide SEAs, other state agencies, and even REAs with considerations and best practices to incorporate into their training programs for LEAs on emergency management planning.

Overview of the GSEM Program

The U.S. Department of Education (ED), Office of Safe and Supportive Schools awarded 11 grantees under the fiscal year 2018 GSEM program. The purpose of the GSEM program is to expand the capacity of SEAs to provide training and TA to LEAs for the development and implementation of high-quality school EOPs. To evaluate the effectiveness of the GSEM program, there are two Government Performance and Results Act performance measures. Measure 1 is the number of training events the GSEM program provides to assist LEAs in the development and implementation of high-quality school EOPs. Measure 2 is the extent to which the GSEM program expands the capacity of the SEAs to provide training and TA to LEAs for the development and implementation of high-quality school EOPs.

GSEM grantees must offer training on best practices for developing and implementing school EOPs, developing or enhancing memoranda of understanding (MOUs) with community partners (e.g., local government, law

enforcement, public safety or emergency management, public health, and mental health agencies), and supporting the implementation of the National Incident Management System (NIMS). Other training topics for SEAs to consider include supporting the implementation of the Incident Command System (ICS); addressing the unique needs of students, staff members, and visitors with disabilities and other access/functional needs (including limited English proficiency); and supporting

the whole school community. Other common training topics include behavioral threat assessment, family reunification, site assessment, and active shooter situations. Grantees are also prompted to keep track of the goal number of trainings to be delivered, actual number of trainings delivered, mode of delivery, duration of training, key personnel trained, number of LEAs trained, number of rural LEAs trained, and average overall evaluation score.

Best Practices

When SEAs and REAs create, review, or enhance their asynchronous and synchronous training programs, there are a variety of training practices they can consider. Each training consideration below is based on the experience of one or more SEAs as a part of their GSEM grant program. These best practices can serve as inspiration for any SEA providing training on high-quality EOP development. Each best practice features stories from the field, spotlighting the training practice in action in individual state/territory contexts. Many of the spotlights illustrate that these best practices can and should be used in tandem with one another.

Leverage Partnerships

Collaboration is a critical element of school safety. Leveraging partnerships can help SEAs to deliver training programs and avoid duplication of effort. Having partnerships in place before an emergency ever happens can help coordinate effective prevention, protection, mitigation, response, and recovery efforts. Other state-level agencies, community partners like institutions of higher education (IHEs), and REAs are some examples of possible partners when determining how to train LEAs on high-quality EOPs; the examples below are not exhaustive, and SEAs should consult a variety of partners to enhance training capacity.

State-Level Partners

SEAs can partner with other state-level agencies to provide training to LEAs as well as streamline TA efforts by creating statewide systems of support. State-level agencies can potentially provide master trainers, training materials, dissemination support, and/or locations that SEAs can utilize. SEAs may also benefit from state-level partners' relationships with and expertise of community partners and/or LEAs.

The **Maryland State Department of Education** works closely with both the Maryland Department of Emergency Management and the Maryland Center for School Safety; this collaboration has formed a triangular partnership. Through this sustained partnership, the agencies have become more organized and familiar with the different types of services they provide, including training and resource opportunities, which helps to avoid duplication of effort and streamlines access to those services for LEAs. Now, when an emergency occurs, LEAs know who to contact and where they can get help. This approach can help ensure that LEAs get the most out of all available state-level trainings, TA, and resource opportunities. These state-level partnerships in Maryland have helped transform school safety into a statewide, community effort.

The **Pennsylvania Department of Education** (PDE) partnered with state agencies and its 29 intermediate units (REAs) to create a Statewide System of Support, a program that provides TA, resources, and trainings to all Pennsylvania schools. PDE partners with state agencies — including the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency, Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency, Pennsylvania State Police, Pennsylvania Governor's Office of Homeland Security, Pennsylvania Department of Human Service's Office
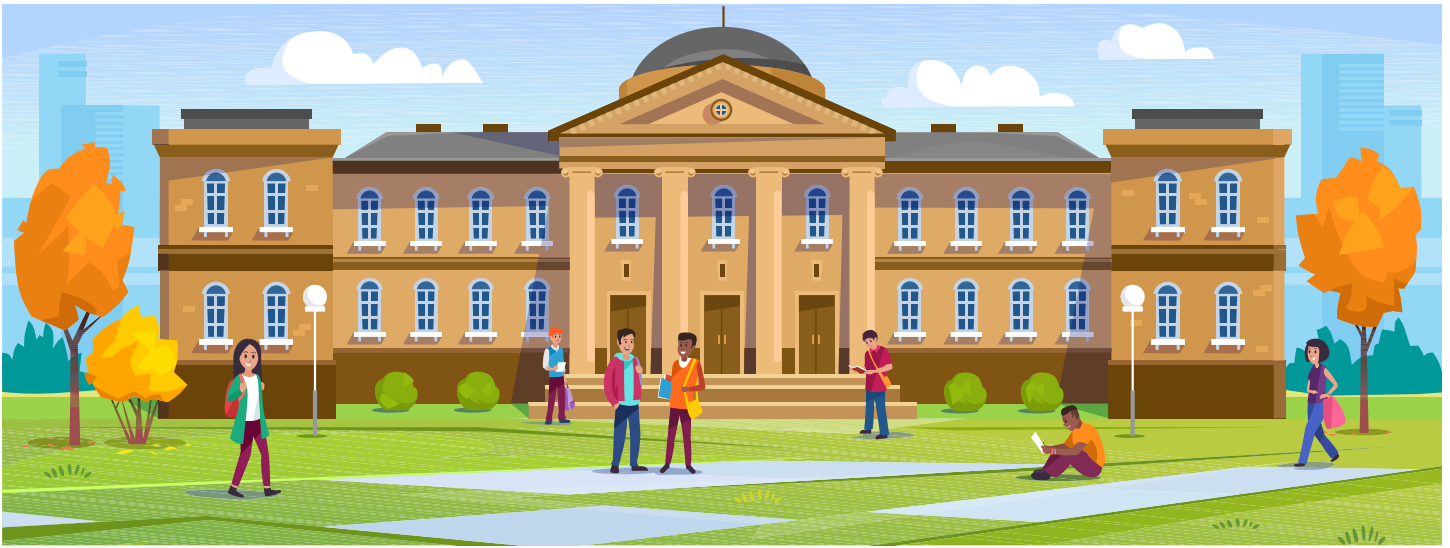
of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services, Pennsylvania Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs, Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection, and the Pennsylvania Department of Health — to discuss resources and support for schools around emergency planning and school safety. The state agencies work with the intermediate units to build a directory of LEA school safety and emergency management coordinator contacts. The Statewide System of Support now also includes higher ed and local agency partners to support training for those populations and creates channels through which PDE and other state agencies can communicate and collaborate with LEAs and partners.

Regional Partners

Another important partnership opportunity for SEAs is with REAs, which either oversee or provide services to multiple LEAs. These partnerships can help the SEA communicate information to LEAs and facilitate training through regional representatives who may have more fine-grained knowledge about local contexts.

The **Oregon Department of Education** (ODE) partnered with five education service districts (REAs) to deliver training to LEAs via a "train-with-a-focus" model. ODE leveraged this partnership to create a regional network of trainers; these regional representatives use an EOP capacity assessment to assess individual school districts on six functional areas related to emergency management and EOP development and support school districts in identifying localized threats, hazards, and concerns

to help LEAs develop individualized EOPs. The train-with-a-focus model guides REAs to provide targeted training and TA based on that assessment to help LEAs address identified gaps in their EOP development process and tangibly improve their capacity. By partnering with its education service districts, ODE can leverage their relationship with the local schools in their region and provide more targeted trainings to more LEAs each year.

Higher Education Partners

SEAs should also consider which community partners in their locality can support school safety and enhance their SEA's internal capacity to provide training on high-quality EOPs. Among the many possible community partners that SEAs can work with, IHEs can serve as effective partners. Not only do they have an infrastructure set up for providing asynchronous and synchronous learning opportunities, but they may also conduct research on school safety topics.

The **Louisiana Department of Education** (LDE) partnered with Louisiana State University's National Center for Biomedical Research and Training/ Academy of Counter-Terrorist Education (LSU NCBRT/ ACE), which has expert trainers who helped LDE develop a course catalogue of eight virtual and in-person trainings. LDE's course catalogue includes topics such as school EOP analysis, developing and enhancing school EOPs, K-12 risk assessments, EOP functional planning, crisis communication planning and implementation, exercise planning, active threats, and active threat plans. While a majority are relative to all

members of a core planning team, the course on active threats is intended for the whole school community, including administrators, staff, faculty, and support personnel. LDE also partners with LSU NCBRT/ACE to provide these trainings statewide to LEAs.

Cultivate Leadership Buy-in

When providing training and TA to LEAs, it is helpful to ensure that the whole school community is on board, including school and district leadership. The involvement of LEA leadership can help signal that emergency management is a priority, and leadership engagement may also lead to greater involvement of teachers and other school-based staff members. Ensuring that school and district leadership understand the goals of school safety training can help facilitate successful training delivery and cultivate relationships that can support future engagement.

The **Nebraska Department of Education** (NDE) leverages a training model that emphasizes "pre-training," which allows NDE to cultivate leadership buy-in and build relationships with LEAs. This top-down approach also makes LEAs aware of NDE's training and TA opportunities. Early in the grant program, NDE contacted each of Nebraska's educational service units (REAs) and presented information about EOPs to superintendents within each region. In addition, NDE conducts 1-hour pre-trainings before every 2-day virtual training by meeting with superintendents and administrators from each school district to communicate the content of the training, the importance of having a high-quality EOP, and the logistics of participating in the training. The goal of these targeted conversations is to build relationships with the LEAs and underscore the value of developing and maintaining a high-quality EOP.

Create Peer Learning Opportunites

When providing training and TA on high-quality EOPs, SEAs can convene opportunities for emergency management staff at LEAs to learn from one another. Peer learning opportunities — in the form of monthly specialist meetings or regional communities of practice — can spark ideas, raise questions, and provide LEAs

with a chance to "train" one another by sharing local challenges and successes. These forums can also create an opportunity for SEAs to partner with other state agencies or community partners to convey timely information to LEAs.

The **South Carolina Department of Education** (SCDE) convenes a monthly virtual peer-to-peer meeting for school safety and security directors at LEAs. These meetings feature open discussions amongst participants, which give LEAs the opportunity to pose questions to their peers, provide lessons learned and successful strategies, and talk about emerging trends. SCDE determines meeting topics based on feedback from LEA participants and then invites guest speakers to provide their expertise and deliver presentations or short trainings. Examples of guest speakers include personnel from the South Carolina Law Enforcement Division, South Carolina Emergency Management Division, and South Carolina Office of State Fire Marshal.

Offer Asynchronous Training

The coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic propelled the offering and use of asynchronous training, especially those opportunities offered online. Recorded videos and Webinars, online courses, and other virtual training modalities offer flexibility for school safety professionals so that they can access materials at times that are more convenient for their busy schedules. When developing an asynchronous training, it is important to consider the intended audience, goals and objectives of the training, how the training materials will be accessed, and any other technology requirements (e.g., will log-in credentials be required?). Once developed and made available, it is critical to share with LEAs how and where the asynchronous training can be accessed.

The **New York State Education Department** (NYSED) partnered with the New York State Center for School Safety (NYSCFSS), a contracted TA center, to create a series of three emergency response training videos. Using materials from the REMS TA Center's Specialized Training Package, NYSCFSS and NYSED recorded presentations on developing and enhancing MOUs with community partners, the ICS for schools, and integrating the needs of students and staff with

disabilities and other access and functional needs. To continue to build upon their training menu, NYSED then created a series of 13 short video modules designed to support LEAs and schools in developing their district-wide school safety plan and their building-level emergency response plan. Furthermore, NYSED partnered with subject matter experts (SMEs) within the state to create a four-part, self-paced training program on lockdown drills 101: preparing for, conducting, and assessing practices, including ensuring they are trauma-informed. These training modules are accessible online from the NYSCFSS site.

Develop a Cadre of Master Trainers

In order to offer high-quality trainings, there needs to be a cadre of trainers. One way to build up this cadre is to invest in the "train-the-trainer" model. Cultivating a group of qualified trainers who can deliver trainings on a range of specialized topics enhances internal capacity at the SEA and creates a pool of expertise within the agency that SEAs can pull from to provide training and TA to LEAs. Consider various offices within the SEA that may not oversee school safety but have expertise in a preparedness topic, such as SEA offices that oversee mental health, transportation, nutrition, facilities, and health.

The **Tennessee Department of Education** (TDE) recruited approximately 10 SMEs from across the state who had previously worked or currently worked in Tennessee school districts. TDE formed the School Safety Mentor Program and trained these personnel in areas such as emergency management planning, behavioral threat assessment, youth mental health first aid, restorative practices, reunification, crime

prevention through environmental design, bus safety, school climate, etc. These safety mentors are deployed by the state to deliver training and TA to LEAs in their region. The mentors also continue to attend other training opportunities to ensure that they remain abreast of current trends. Partnering with these safety mentors has helped build the capacity of TDE's team to provide training on high-quality EOPs and develop additional resources for LEAs.

SCDE trains staff within their Office of Safe Schools in a variety of emergency management topics. SEA personnel then serve as master trainers in restorative practices, adult mental health first aid, youth mental health first aid, and behavioral threat assessment. Additional staff at the SEA have attended these training courses, even if they opted not to be a master trainer. This model has helped build the internal capacity of the SEA by creating a cadre of experts within the agency from which to draw. Furthermore, these master trainers have delivered train-the-trainer sessions to LEAs, which helps build training capacity at the local level.

Offer Certifications for Professional Development

Tying a training opportunity to some form of accreditation or credential can incentivize participation and ensure that participants not only come away from the training with new knowledge but also with tangible recognition of the time they devoted to professional development. Credentialing school safety professionals in the state/territory also builds a network of expertise that can support continuing school safety work in the long run.

The **Oklahoma State Department of Education** (OSDE) offers a micro-credential for education agency personnel who have completed OSDE's 20-hour asynchronous online training course and its related activities and assignments. The school safety team collaborated with fellow SEA personnel responsible for teacher certification to incorporate the School Safety and Security Professional Credentialing Program into the state teacher certification system. This allows educators or school leaders to add "school safety and security professional" to their teaching certificate once they have completed the training. OSDE also offers continuing education

credits to law enforcement officers on this course through the Oklahoma Council on Law Enforcement Education and Training. To reach an additional audience, OSDE partners with Cameron University in Lawton, OK, to provide a portion of its school safety training content to students who are enrolled in master's degree programs in education leadership. Students can later opt to complete the full training to receive the professional development credit. Not only does this micro-credentialing system recognize and incentivize participants' professional development, but it also creates a network of credentialed school safety professionals that builds OSDE's school safety capacity.

Utilize and Localize Existing Open-Source Resources

When developing and delivering training for LEAs, education agencies do not always need to start from scratch. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), ED's REMS TA Center, and other partners offer free resources on the development and maintenance of high-quality EOPs. When using existing resources, it is important to localize them to reflect the unique characteristics of individual states, territories, and regions. This could include incorporating state/territory and local regulations around and resources for school safety and emergency management.

Following the devastation caused by Typhoon Yutu, the **Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands Public School System** (CNMI PSS) realized that additional supports were required to meet student mental/behavioral health needs. In response, CNMI PSS established 20 School Emergency Response Teams (SERTs) with representation from across the school community trained using NIMS ICS training curriculum. The NIMS ICS curriculum is one example of how CNMI PSS enhanced the capacity of its SERT teams to respond to emergency events by leveraging existing training opportunities and resources. CNMI PSS often adapts these trainings and other trainings provided by external partners to reflect threats, hazards, and considerations that are specific to a local, Pacific Islands context. Moreover, the time difference between CNMI PSS and the mainland — where most external training opportunities are delivered — makes it difficult for CNMI PSS staff and personnel to attend. To address this local need, an SEA staff member will attend the virtual training, request any materials, and then deliver the trainings to other staff members on CNMI time, customizing content that is originally developed for mainland audiences to better address emergency management considerations specific to CNMI.

Soliciting feedback from participants and SMEs can be an important way to ensure that training is accessible and understandable for intended audiences. The GSEM program application requires each SEA applicant to describe how the SEA planned to evaluate the quality of training and TA events administered to their LEAs, as well as incorporate feedback from LEAs and other stakeholders (e.g., parents, students, teachers, first responders) on the training. Training providers should consider how they will collect, analyze, and monitor attendee feedback while designing training programs. It is also important to consider how they will adapt and revise training programs once they have been developed based on participant feedback, as needed.

The **Maine School Safety Center** (MSSC) partnered with the Maine Community College System to develop the curriculum for the School Safety Specialist Program, which produces highly trained school staff within LEAs on school emergency management. When designing its training program, MSSC leveraged the insight of an advisory committee to ensure that SME feedback was incorporated into the training development process. The advisory committee included SMEs from county emergency management agencies, schools, law enforcement agencies, fire departments, and other state agencies. A challenge in the development process was making school emergency management understandable and attractive to school staff without prior emergency management expertise. In response to committee feedback, MSSC adjusted the teaching methodology, tailored the content to be concise and impactful, provided an asynchronous format that aligned with staff schedules, and implemented a credentialing system to reward participants with education credits. This feedback helped ensure the self-paced 20- to 25-hour course was accessible to educators and staff with varying levels of emergency management experience.

Conclusion

As SEAs and REAs develop or revise their training programs, these examples of best practices collected from GSEM grantees can help inspire continued training and TA efforts for LEAs. As you develop materials for your training programs, please consider sharing them with your peers via the REMS TA Center Tool Box.

Resources

Training Opportunities — EOP Development

- Developing Emergency Operations Plans (EOPs) K-12 101, Live and Virtual Trainings by Request (REMS TA Center)
- School EOP Planning 101: Creating High-Quality School Emergency Operations Plans That Address All Threats, Hazards, Settings, and Times, Webinar (REMS TA Center)
- Developing Emergency Operations Plans (EOPs) K-12 101, Online Course (REMS TA Center)
- Overview of the Six Step Planning Process, Specialized Training Package (REMS TA Center)

Training Opportunities — Asynchronous

- Online Courses (REMS TA Center)
- Archived Webinars (REMS TA Center)
- Self-Paced Trainings, Online Courses (National Center for School Safety)
- IS-100.C: Introduction to the Incident Command System, Online Course (DHS, FEMA, Emergency Management Institute)
- E-Learning Portal, Online Courses (U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services)
- Bullying Prevention Training Center (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services)
- Incident Response Training (DHS, Cybersecurity & Infrastructure Security Agency [CISA])
- Online Training Modules (ED, Student Privacy Policy Office, Privacy TA Center)
- Addressing Human Trafficking in America's Schools Staff Development Series (ED, National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments [NCSSLE])
- Online Courses (National Center for Missing and Exploited Children)
- Indoor Air Quality in Schools: OnDemand Training Webinars (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency)

Training Opportunities — Synchronous

- [Virtual Trainings by Request](#) (REMS TA Center)
- [Live Trainings by Request](#) (REMS TA Center)
- [Office for Bombing Prevention (OBP) Training Program](#) (DHS, CISA, Office for Bombing Prevention)
- [STOP THE BLEED®](#) (DHS)
- [First Aid for Severe Trauma™ (FAST™), Training Course](#) (American Red Cross)

Training Opportunities — Downloadable Materials

- [Training Packages](#) (REMS TA Center)

- [Training Tools](#) (ED, NCSSLE)
- [Tool Box](#) (REMS TA Center)

Further Reading — Professional Development

- [Live and Virtual Training From the REMS TA Center](#), Video (REMS TA Center)
- [Building Blocks to School Safety: A Toolkit for K-12 Schools and School Districts for Developing High-Quality School Emergency Operations Plans](#), Publication (REMS TA Center)
- [Key Terms in School and Higher Ed Emergency Management Planning](#), Publication (REMS TA Center)
- [EOP ASSESS](#), Interactive Tool (REMS TA Center)

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