



# Building Youth Preparedness and School Safety Capacity by Integrating Educational Initiatives

READINESS AND EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT FOR SCHOOLS TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE CENTER

FACT SHEET

## Introduction to Youth Preparedness

Youth make up a quarter of the population of the United States. Therefore, including youth in school safety, security, emergency management, and preparedness is an essential part of engaging the entire community. Training and teaching youth to empower, educate, and build their resilience strengthen the community's capacity for preparedness in response to a variety of threats and hazards.

As schools and educational settings prepare for, respond to, and recover from disasters, they can build upon the unique strengths of youth via a variety of programs and strategies, including participation in Teen Community Emergency Response Team programs. Doing so helps to increase school safety capacity, and helps youth be more confident during an emergency because they have less anxiety, know what to expect, and are prepared for various outcomes.

Integrating youth preparedness into various aspects of the school setting is a powerful strategy for building school safety capacity. One of the keys to building capacity is understanding the role of youth in family and community preparedness. Youth can be positive influencers, bringing preparedness messages learned in educational settings back to their homes and the community, thus expanding the community's preparedness. Youth can also become leaders in preparedness.

Youth preparedness is all about teaching and training children and youth those skills that help them to be actively engaged in school safety every day and to be

ready to jump in during and after emergencies. This [Ready.gov article](#) highlights several instances of how teens involved in Youth Preparedness Councils across the country stepped up to support their families, school communities, and communities. Some examples include youth developing and facilitating a Webinar on vaccines, conducting [Stop the Bleed](#) and cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) classes for the community, creating preparedness trainings for students with disabilities, and establishing a nonprofit that provided study guides in exchange for donations to help people affected by coronavirus disease 2019.

## Introduction to Integrating Youth Preparedness Into Educational Activities

Youth are known as a "[vulnerable group](#)." Vulnerable groups can be more prone to loss, suffering, injury, and death in the event of a disaster. While everyone's vulnerability may vary, in general, youth are susceptible to psychological, physical, and educational impacts when faced with a traumatic event. To combat this, engaging in youth preparedness programs can help to educate and empower students, particularly in the context of school safety planning.

One of the ways for school safety practitioners to support these efforts is to encourage their educational colleagues to integrate youth preparedness into educational activities. Such integration provides opportunities for students to engage with the topic, while enhancing learning with real-world applications

## BENEFITS TO INTEGRATING YOUTH PREPAREDNESS

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and assisting educators in making those connections. Schools and other educational settings provide an ideal environment to implement youth preparedness programs as part of school preparedness activities since it simultaneously benefits the individual students as well as the whole school community. For example, youth preparedness specifically lends itself to topic areas such as science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) or STEAM with the additional consideration of the arts, as well as career and technical education (CTE) initiatives. Educators are already involved in or familiar with many of these initiatives and academic settings; integrating preparedness-focused activities will help them feel more comfortable with the topic and when emergencies arise.

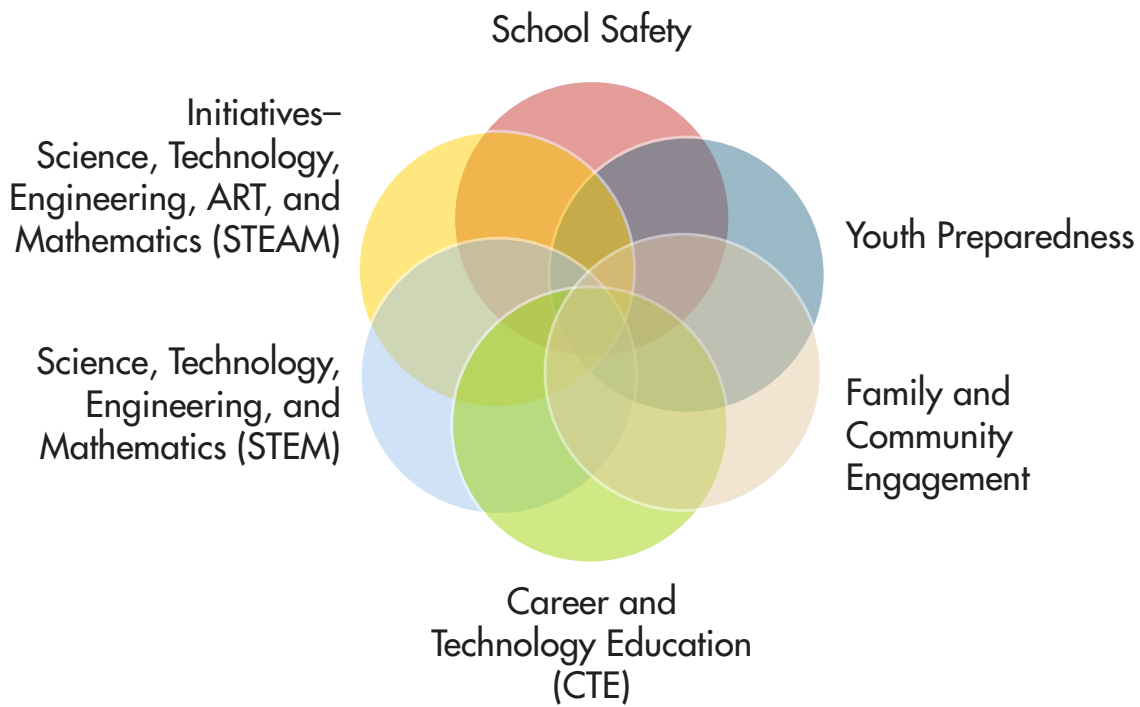
In the school setting, this can include teaching and training students critical, lifelong, career skills that contribute to preparedness and its individual missions: protection, prevention, mitigation, response, and recovery. Building preparedness capacity in youth at school in the academic and non-academic settings not only benefits the students but also helps to build school and community preparedness capacity at the same time.



There are many benefits to integrating youth preparedness into the school environment and educational activities.

1. First, youth become empowered when learning about and understanding risks and knowing preventative or protective actions to take when an emergency or disaster occurs, and, in turn, this empowerment builds capacity in school safety. Through explicit instruction, practice, and engagement with preparedness programs, youth begin to feel more comfortable learning about various emergencies and the role they can play before, during, and after incidents. As a result, prepared youth will feel more confident during an actual event.
2. Second, training, educating, and including youth in preparedness activities to prepare them for those roles through integrating youth preparedness with educational initiatives provide benefits resulting in increased program and curricular effectiveness, maximized resources, and improved outcomes.
3. Third, empowered youth can help engage their families, peers, and communities in disaster readiness. Youth can help spread important messages about preparedness, thereby helping spread the message throughout their community and build intent and capacity.
4. Fourth, youth preparedness in schools provides additional opportunities for youth to become leaders and excel in areas beyond the traditional school subject areas, such as connecting youth with local and community resources, which helps to give students real-world experiences engaging with adults and other community members. By using this multidisciplinary approach, there is a greater likelihood of youth making connections, retaining the information, and applying new knowledge.

Preparing youth today will create tomorrow's prepared adults. Developing knowledge and skills at a young age often leads to individuals carrying that knowledge into adulthood, creating a more stable, secure, and prepared community.



## Integrating Youth Preparedness

Following the curriculum and incorporating preparedness training are not mutually exclusive. An effective strategy to facilitating youth preparedness in educational settings is to integrate it into existing educational initiatives.

Educational initiatives like school safety, youth preparedness, family and community engagement, CTE, STEM, and STEAM intersect with one another, and it is at this intersection that professionals can work together to strengthen outcomes for youth as well as for the school community. Youth preparedness is a bridge to better connecting schools and their community partners.

These initiatives share common best practices and effective strategies, such as

- working with local and regional partners;
- identifying and addressing gaps in the community; and
- building from existing resources.

Effective practice for each initiative begins with building from the needs of the local community, including the local government and business communities; working

together to share resources; collaborating to raise awareness; and promoting opportunities to work together to address the gaps through CTE, STEM, STEAM, and preparedness (for the school and the community it serves). These are enhanced by the school, family, and community engagement activities. For example, community preparedness, as it relates to response and recovery, is reliant upon a myriad of professions (e.g., emergency services, architecture, construction, electrical engineering, plumbing, social services, medical services), which are informed by STEM and STEAM initiatives. Furthermore, through collaboration, implementing some of the critical CTE activities (e.g., career awareness, apprenticeship), schools and communities can work together to help fill these gaps. These and additional preparedness topics, such as weather, may be used as a focus area or concept for lessons in the education setting, which are enhanced when done with partner groups or organizations during field experience with youth preparedness programs.

No matter the subject area or initiative, youth are the future workforce, and by working with them on youth preparedness, we can immediately increase school and community preparedness while strengthening their postsecondary outcomes.

## Tips

When you embark on integrating youth preparedness into educational settings and activities, here are some tips for where to begin:

- **Complete a curriculum audit.**
- **Assemble a team of stakeholders to review the curriculum and determine if there are ideal areas where preparedness can be integrated. For example:**
  - Include preparedness training with the established curriculum, such as the science curriculum.
  - Use preparedness examples to help make real-world connections when selecting or developing lesson activities.
  - Invite community preparedness team members and partners to contribute by reviewing content, recommending activities, or serving as guest speakers in the classroom setting.
- **Include developmentally appropriate activities.**

Plan to integrate preparedness programs and preparedness activities that are developmentally appropriate for the age level of the youth. For example:

  - Primary and elementary students may work on understanding the role of 911, practice dialing the number, and learn what information they need to give to the dispatcher and what to expect when emergency service providers arrive to help them.
  - High school students may learn about how different chemicals in fire extinguishers put out several types of fires during a chemistry lab.
- **Promote activities that include youth, families, and the community.**

When multiple stakeholder groups are represented and present, relationships form, and bonds are made. Encourage activities that get stakeholders from different groups to interact and converse with each other. This may include orientations, professional development workshops for the whole school community, listening sessions for students and families, and more. Activities such as these will facilitate connections organically, setting the stage for future collaboration.

## Youth Preparedness in Action

The following section includes examples of youth preparedness in action in the curriculum. For more information and resources, see the next section on Programs, Curricula, Resources, and Activities to Support Preparedness Integration.

### STEM, STEAM, AND PROJECT-BASED LEARNING (PBL) INITIATIVES

#### Preparedness Examples

Preparedness activities can be easily incorporated into STEM or STEAM activities. For example, preparedness can be a focus for STEM activities addressing health where students must work together to provide first aid, CPR, and other triage support in the event of a real-life emergency. Engaging with connections to the real world gives students the opportunity to get a taste of the work of emergency medical professionals and first responders, while fulfilling STEM requirements.

Preparedness topics may also lend themselves to PBL. Robots and machinery are increasingly being used in emergency responses. Expand the PBL experience by researching and identifying any competitions that might be applicable to the topic, such as practical uses for robotics and machinery in supporting students, staff, and visitors with access and functional needs. Competitions are often a great way to reach students who are often uninterested in traditional lecture-based learning or lessons but are motivated by competition or working in groups.

### CTE INITIATIVES

#### Preparedness Examples

Careers in preparedness can attract students, as well. Including representatives from a variety of professions and highlighting roles in emergency preparedness in events such as Career Day are great ways to provide students with initial exposure to careers that may have previously been unknown to them. There are numerous vocations and even more jobs within those vocations and sectors that support preparedness, including but not limited to, environmental health specialists, emergency medical services practitioners, facilities managers, social workers, geographic information systems specialists, and more.

Schools can work with community partners to offer programs like the [Teen Community Emergency Response Team \(CERT\)](#), which provides youth with training and certification in emergency response as part of the school day or with after-school, extracurricular clubs. At the conclusion of the training, students are eligible to earn professional certification, which helps prepare them for a career as a first responder or for further studies. Some schools integrate components of Teen CERT into applicable high school classes, such as fire and emergency medical services training and first aid and CPR.

Finally, consider including opportunities for field experiences, expeditions, apprenticeships, and internships in preparedness fields and organizations. There are even some programs throughout the country that offer monetary compensation to students as they complete their work experiences.

## **COMMUNITY PREPAREDNESS INITIATIVES**

### **Preparedness Examples**

One of the outcomes of integrating youth preparedness with school safety, security, emergency management, and preparedness is strengthened relationships with community partners, which helps to build school, community, and youth preparedness alike. To connect youth, families, schools, and community groups, offer to hold events such as Fire Prevention Day activities at your school or campus. Schools can invite families and the community and organize activities that facilitate interaction between the stakeholder groups.

Some partners and preparedness agencies host community events or programs like Citizen's Police Academies or Citizen Fire Camps. Many students and families are also interested in receiving training and certification in preparedness topics like CPR, first aid, or fire extinguisher training. Work with the agencies to enroll interested students and families, and determine if there is a way to host them in a school or community facility.

Finally, consider inviting trained students, families, or community members to provide prevention training on threat and accident prevention before events such as sports or school-sponsored dances. Through a partnership between youth and community partners,



these opportunities can be expanded to provide outreach and raise awareness of preparedness activities before or at similar events.

## **SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL INITIATIVES**

### **Preparedness Examples**

Youth are a vulnerable group, susceptible to psychological, physical, and educational vulnerability. Preparedness training can provide a lower-stress, lower-stakes environment to practice skills such as emergency drills and include an opportunity to discuss the drills and students' emotional states following an event, further reducing threatening feelings and vulnerability.

Including preparedness in other special programs like awareness assemblies, small-group discussion or therapy, or student safety officer programs helps to increase students' confidence and allows them to share in a space that is both physically and emotionally safe.

Collaborate and work with other professionals familiar with school climate activities such as school district safety staff, school psychologists, guidance counselors, and social workers to integrate prevention and preparedness into some of the programs, activities, and events they currently organize. One example of these, Student Assistance Programs, is a systematic team process used to mobilize school resources to remove barriers to learning.

## Programs, Curricula, Resources, and Activities to Support Preparedness Integration

There are several programs, curricula, lesson plans, activities, and resources to support preparedness integration in the school setting that are research- and evidence-based. See the list below for a small sample of quality resources to assist with preparedness integration.

### PROGRAMS

- [Ready Kids](#) | U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)
- [SciJinks](#) | U.S. Department of Commerce, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)
- [SKYWARN Storm Spotter Program](#) | National Weather Service (NWS), NOAA
- [Owlie's Weather-Ready Educational Activity](#) | NWS NOAA

### SCHOOL PROGRAMS AND CURRICULA

- [Student Tools for Emergency Planning \(STEP\)](#) | FEMA
- [Teen CERT](#) | DHS FEMA
- [Teen CERT Toolkit](#) | REMS TA Center
- [Teen CERT Credit Course](#) | REMS TA Center
- Examples of state education agencies, like [California](#) and [Texas](#), incorporating emergency preparedness and management-focused programs into CTE programs.

### LESSON PLANS AND CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

- [Earth & Environment Classroom Resources](#) | National Science Foundation
- [Educators & Organizations](#) | Ready.gov
- [Prepare With Pedro](#) | Ready.gov

### RESOURCES, LINKS, AND ACTIVITIES

- [Educational Resources](#) | U.S. Geological Survey
- [Kids Resource Library](#) | DHS FEMA
- [Engaging Students in Emergency Management](#) | REMS TA Center
- [Emergency Management Planning for After-School Programs](#) | REMS TA Center
- [Working With the Whole Community to Manage Emergency Incidents That May Impact Education Agencies](#) | REMS TA Center
- [Social and Emotional Learning and School Safety Resources](#) | Center to Improve Social and Emotional Learning and School Safety
- [Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports \(PBIS\)](#) | Center on PBIS
- [National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments](#) | U.S. Department of Education

## Conclusion and Key Takeaways

There are many benefits to integrating youth preparedness into educational and academic settings and overall school safety, security, emergency management, and preparedness efforts. It should not be incorporated in isolation, but integrated into current activities to provide a seamless, student-centered experience. All programs benefit from collaboration across the community, and by focusing on strengthening the preparedness capacity of youth, the capacity of the community is strengthened as a whole, preparing the next generation's adults for future prevention and mitigation of emergency incidents.



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