



Episode 1: Meet the REMS TA Center

#REMSontheAir Podcast Intro (Recorded): [00:00:00] Welcome to the #REMSontheAir Podcast, hosted by your partners at the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Safe and Supportive Schools and its Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools Technical Assistance Center. If you're an old friend, you know us as the REMS TA Center, your national school safety center.

Join us as we chat about key topics in school and campus safety, security, and emergency management with experts and partners from the field.

Janelle Hughes: We are so happy to host the REMS TA Center's first podcast episode. My name is Janelle Hughes, and I've had the privilege of serving the REMS TA Center since 2014. Throughout that time, we have grown in many ways. We face new challenges together, perhaps [00:01:00] no more than we are right now as a nation. And we've created ways of responding and providing key information to stakeholders, such as this podcast.

We have so appreciated the opportunity to share information, training, and resources with you over all these years and to be able to grow and progress the work of the center as the world of school and higher ed safety has changed. Now we have this whole new world of podcasting to help us spread the word, and we are hoping this new #REMSontheAir channel will give you another convenient way to learn about, think about, and talk about the important issues in school and higher ed preparedness that we face today, including, of course, the current COVID-19 pandemic that has presented challenges globally, particularly for our education agencies responsible for caring for the next generation of students.

One thing has remained the same over all these years, and that is the importance of collaboration and the work [00:02:00] that we all do. And that goes not just for the work that we do with you, our practitioner partners, but even everything we do at the center ourselves. For that reason, I'm so pleased to introduce my cohost, the REMS TA Center's Training Manager, Amanda Everett.

Amanda Everett: Thanks, Janelle. You and I have worked together now for nearly eight years, and similarly, we have learned so much through our collaborations with partners at the local, state, national, and Federal levels. Our work since 2020 with our partners at the state, local, and Federal levels to support prevention, protection, mitigation, response, and recovery efforts in the midst of the pandemic really shows that there isn't much that can get done without collaboration.

That is part of the reason I am truly looking forward to using the #REMSontheAir Podcast to continue important conversations and build collaborations. Today you'll hear from just Janelle [00:03:00] and myself, but in the future, we're going to bring in other REMS TA Center team members to join us on the air to share information on the work they do at REMS and participate in the conversations we'll be having with partners in the field.

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Janelle Hughes: It's so true, Amanda. We really want this podcast to help you get to know us and the work that we do better. And we also want to hear from you. We are going to be providing you with multiple ways to get involved with the conversations on in-depth topics we'll be having each week.

Some of you tuning in are familiar with the mission of the REMS TA Center. Our hope is that we also have some new friends joining us. And if you like this podcast, please hit the share button on our page and tell a colleague and help us meet more of you. One of the questions we get most frequently is how what we do relates to the work of the U.S. Department of Education, and we are so happy to clear that up. [00:04:00]

Amanda Everett: It's true. It can be confusing. The REMS TA Center is administered by and works in partnership with the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Safe and Supportive Schools. We work hand in hand with our team, who many of you know also, to carry out the work of the TA Center. Together, our mission is to help education agencies with their community partners manage safety, security, and emergency preparedness programs.

This is done by building the preparedness capacity of schools, school districts, institutions of higher education, and their community partners at the local, state, and Federal levels. For us, preparedness includes prevention, protection, mitigation, response, and recovery. Those are words you'll hear echoed throughout each episode, along with tons of acronyms.

We love acronyms.

Janelle Hughes: We really do. And my absolute favorite thing to tell people about our work is that everything and absolutely everything that we offer and provide is [00:05:00] completely free to education agencies. The Department of Education wants the work that we produce and the services that we offer to be disseminated to anyone in the educational arena who needs them to help make schools safer.

The department established the REMS TA Center in 2004 and we have been going strong, building to become your national school safety center for more than 16 years. And being with the center for many of those years, I have certainly seen the field of higher ed and school preparedness change over the span of time and we have worked hard to ensure that the REMS TA Center has changed and grown with it, staying abreast of emerging issues as well as the technological and informational evolution.

This is no more important than it is today with the landscape of education and safety changing—almost daily.

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Amanda Everett: Yes, to everyone tuning in today, thank you for taking the time to listen. The reality is that we are all [00:06:00] bombarded with information constantly. For those who work in the field of education and emergency management, time is critical, now more than ever.

We recognize that not everyone has time during the day to join a live webinar or participate in a virtual meeting that we may host. That's partly what inspired us to create this podcast. We all need information that we can access, not just at our desk, but also in the car, on a plane, on the way to deployment, or simply while cooking dinner.

So welcome from wherever you are right now.

Janelle Hughes: That's right. This podcast will be another venue that we use to reach more people and to also teach, share, and learn. There will be plenty of opportunities for you to interact with the #REMSontheAir Podcast. That includes through Twitter chats that we'll host and other opportunities for you to ask us topic-based questions that may be featured on future episodes.

And you can email us at info@remstacenter.org at [00:07:00] any time to submit questions or topic ideas to be featured here. We want to hear from you. Over time, we hope to be able to bring you personal stories and lessons learned from our partners who support the field of school safety.

Right now, some people may be wondering who that “you” represents. Who should tune in? Who is this for? Will this podcast be for me?

Amanda Everett: Those are good questions. The answer is anyone with a role or interest in school or higher ed emergency preparedness, which includes safety, security, and emergency management. This podcast is for you. We look at emergency preparedness from an all-hazards and all-threats perspective.

That includes adversarial and human-caused threats (such as an active shooter situation), natural hazards (such as hurricanes or tornadoes), biological hazards (such as the COVID-19 pandemic), and technological hazards (such as exposure to lead). [00:08:00]

Janelle Hughes: If you're still curious about who some of those stakeholders who should tune in are, it includes the whole school community who represent, serve, or live in communities with schools and school districts, including K-12 (public, nonpublic, and private), institutions of higher education—that includes community colleges, universities, technical schools—we also welcome local education agencies, regional education agencies, and state education agencies, as well as community partners (such as law enforcement representatives, fire department, public safety, emergency medical services, as well as health and mental health agencies).

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That also includes other stakeholders in K-12 and higher ed emergency management, including families, nonprofit organizations, and associations. We serve all individuals who play a role in school and higher ed safety. Today's episode is all about introducing ourselves to you, helping to explain what we do at the REMS TA Center and sharing information about the [00:09:00] purpose of this podcast.

But in future episodes, we will be diving deeper into some of the most in-demand topics based on trends in the field, traffic to our Website, requests we receive for support via our help desk, insight from the field, popular webinars, and more. Amanda, what would you say is the most popular webinar we've offered over the past year?

Amanda Everett: Hmm ... I'd have to guess the one on supports for students and families experiencing homelessness during the COVID-19 pandemic at least hit close to the top of the list. We were lucky enough to have Kenya Hanes from the National Center for Homeless Education and Patricia Julianelle from SchoolHouse Connection to join us as our guest speakers.

Janelle shared an overview of data on students and families experiencing homelessness, and of homelessness resources available to students and families. Kenya reviewed some awesome considerations for students [00:10:00] experiencing homelessness that education agencies should address. And Patricia highlighted common challenges faced by education agencies and solutions.

Janelle Hughes: You guessed right, and we had so much interest in that topic. We will definitely be diving into it more in a future episode.

Amanda Everett: How about we play a clip from the webinar with Kenya and Patricia now on the topic?

Kenya Hanes (Recorded): I wanted to begin with setting just a little bit of context, for the conversation that we'll be having for the rest of the call.

I know that right now, our school systems are dealing with a lot of challenges. You're trying to determine what model you'll use to reopen your school building, or *if* to open your—reopen your school building. You're looking at how to keep your students and staff safe. And you're also doing this in a culture that is with a lot of budget cuts.

[00:11:00] And so, with all of those things going on, it can be tempting to look at this population and say, because it's a smaller population, it maybe is not the first priority. And so, what I'd like to do is just spend a quick minute talking about why I think it's really important to focus on this population now more than ever.

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I think one of the things that the pandemic has really highlighted is the systemic inequities that are in our American system, and those people who are on the margins have been hardest hit. People of color, Indigenous people, and those with lower educational attainment have suffered some really great losses, and we want to make sure that our efforts to reenter school don't compound those challenges for our young people experiencing homelessness.

What you have here is some research from Chapin Hall. It's the Voices of Youth Count research study that was done recently. [00:12:00] And they looked at what were some of the experiences that were correlated with the experience of homelessness. And you'll see one of the boxes is highlighted. And it shows that the thing that had the highest correlation with experiencing homelessness was the lack of a high school credential, the lack of a diploma or GED.

And so this idea is that if you are lacking stable housing, it makes it very difficult to attend school and to succeed in school, which then makes it hard to get that credential, which then makes it harder to get work, which allows you to keep your housing and get sustainable housing. And so it's really closely related, and so it's very important that we make sure that our policies and practices aren't pushing out young people who are experiencing homelessness.

Janelle Hughes: We also had the pleasure of having [00:13:00] Dr. Fisher from the University of Georgia join a webinar to provide an overview of adolescent mental health and substance abuse and highlight school-based preventions and intervention. That webinar on opioids, drug related emergencies, and substance abuse prevention before, during, and after the COVID-19 pandemic was actually the one with the highest number of live participants so far in 2020. That tells us that this topic is also an important one in the field. Let's play a clip from that webinar too to give you just a preview of some of the topics we'll cover.

Sycarah Fisher: So what are some school-based prevention programs and interventions that we can use to address some of the substance use that we're seeing in schools?

I will provide some evidence-based approaches and interventions within a multitiered system of support for response to intervention frameworks. So, first here, universal prevention, [00:14:00] information that is provided to the entire student body to prevent the need for extensive intervention. There are three proven approaches to universal prevention.

The first is social skills resistance training, so this is where students are taught to identify students or situations where they may be pressured into using drugs and taught ways to avoid or effectively deal with these situations.

The second is normative education. This attempts to correct any inaccurate perceptions regarding the high prevalence of substance use. So, if the students actually see the number of

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students using is lower than their perception, it can actually reduce the perceptions of social acceptability. You can do this using local or school data if you give a survey, or if your school participates in a survey yearly. Here in Georgia, it's the Georgia Student Health Survey, or you [00:15:00] can use state or national data.

So the data that I presented earlier through the National Institute on Drug Abuse, the Monitoring the Future, you could actually pull data from that. They also have data on attitudes towards drugs, acceptance of drug using behavior, which may also be really helpful in providing some of this normative education.

And then the third is competence enhancement skills training. This is providing students with the tools to problem solve and make decisions. It provides the skills for resisting peer or media influences, for increasing their self-control and self-esteem, and adapting some coping strategies for relieving stress and anxiety through cognitive coping skills or behavioral relaxation.

I think one of the most profound things that I heard while I was doing interviews with substance using teens for one of my research projects is one of the high school students saying that he felt that the [00:16:00] school cared more about his personal wellbeing and less about test scores and homework assignments and all that—all of that.

So really making sure that we're providing some ways that we're letting students know that we have resources available to them to be able to help them deal with high school in particular, we can be very stressful for kids, trying to get into colleges, so counteracting some of that pressure with some skills for coping and behavioral relaxation.

And then lastly, you can teach social skills and assertive skills. Later on in the presentation, I will present a few model programs that encompass all of these approaches.

Amanda Everett: Other topics include understanding the role of SROs, strengthening COOP planning in response to COVID-19, cyber safety considerations for the whole school community, crosswalk of school and higher ed safety [00:17:00] guides, school transportation safety, post-disaster reunification planning, and integrating access and functional needs.

Thanks so much for tuning in today. Remember to follow us on social media and book the #REMSontheAir hashtag to get more information on Twitter chats we host following the release of each podcast episode. Tweet us using the #REMSontheAir hashtag if you're dealing with similar topics.

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Janelle Hughes: If you have any questions on the things we talked about today or want to learn more, send us your questions by email or call us to pose questions that can possibly be featured on the podcast.

If you're wondering how to get in touch with us, you can always visit our Website rems.ed.gov and visit our About Us page where you can find our contact information. Or you can give us a call right now at [00:18:00] 1-855-781-7367. Also, don't forget that you can email us at anytime at info@remstacenter.org to join our mailing list where you'll get up to date information on webinars, Web chats, and other virtual opportunities where you can learn and share.

Thank you so much for tuning in today.