



Episode 33 - Emergency Preparedness for Afterschool Programs

#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.

Katie Barnett: Hi, and welcome to another episode of #REMSontheAir. I'm Katie Barnett, Research Associate at the REMS TA Center, and we've got a great discussion for you today. I'm joined by my wonderful colleague, Shanté Stokes, and a special guest who provided technical assistance to support the [00:01:00] 21st Century Community Learning Center's National Technical Assistance Center, also known as 21st CCLC NTAC, or NTAC for short.

If you've ever wondered how afterschool or out-of-school time programs can increase their emergency preparedness capacity, then this is the episode for you. With NTAC, we'll explore everything from safety considerations to community partnerships and how to train those volunteers who may or may not be in the know on common school safety practices.

Shanté Stokes: Before we dive in, let's learn a little more about NTAC and our guests. In collaboration with the U. S. Department of Education, the goal of NTAC is to empower and build the capacity of 21st CCLC programs. By providing best practices, evidence-based resources, and learning opportunities, NTAC supports 21st CCLC professionals and stakeholders to support [00:02:00] underserved youth and their families.

Some of NTAC's top priorities include addressing the impact of COVID-19 on students, educators, as well as faculty; promoting equity and student access to educational resources and opportunities; meeting students' social, emotional, and academic needs; providing support for 21st CCLC statutory and programmatic requirements; as well as offering support for fiscal compliance of all SEAs [state education agencies] and sub-grantees.

For a complete list of all that they do, you can visit their Website, 21stcclcntac.org. We encourage you to check it out. We'll also include a link to the site in the show notes.

Katie Barnett: Thank you, Shanté. When it comes to afterschool and out-of-school time programs, NTAC provides support to grantees to plan high-quality programs, [00:03:00] refine activities to align with school improvement plans, and develop strategic partnerships. The center strives to meet schools wherever they are in their planning journey by offering effective and exciting learning program support.

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Shanté Stokes: Katie, I remember you also mentioned that NTAC plans to host virtual workshops and webinars this upcoming year on a variety of pertinent topics?

Katie Barnett: Yes, that's correct. And the REMS TA Center plans to join as a partner in some of those efforts. We all look forward to a productive and fruitful time.

Shanté Stokes: Our guest today is Miguel Garcia. He's the director of Fort Worth After School program. Miguel has numerous years of experience in education, serving in his position and providing technical assistance support to NTAC. He brings with him a wealth of experience, and we are so pleased to have him here with us on today.

Katie Barnett: So, without [00:04:00] further ado, let's dive into our discussion about afterschool programs. Miguel, welcome to *#RemsontheAir*. We're delighted to be partnering with you today to talk about this special topic. For starters, can you tell us a little bit about the OST [out-of-school time] programs that you've worked with and your role in supporting those program safety efforts?

Miguel Garcia: Yeah, absolutely. So, for the last 25 years, I've been the director of Fort Worth After School, which is a collaborative effort—out-of-school-time effort—between the Fort Worth ISD (Fort Worth Independent School District) and the City of Fort Worth CCPD—that stands for Crime Control Prevention District.

The Crime Control Prevention District is a TIF [tax increment financing] grant, and anything that you purchase in the city of Fort Worth proper, there's a half cent sales tax levied against any product, service, or anything you purchase within the city of Fort Worth city limits. It generates approximately \$100 million per year, of which approximately 10 million is allocated to juvenile prevention programs and safety [00:05:00] programs. And so, the collaborative effort has been around for 25 years. This will be year 25, and it's been, it's been a great success thus far in addressing juvenile crime.

Katie Barnett: OK. That's awesome. Thank you, and I love those numbers there.

Miguel Garcia: Yeah, I'm always—I always have to temper my enthusiasm for talking about out-of-school time because I know here locally, I feel like we do a really awesome job. We have approximately 90—well, we have 96 sites for the 24–25 school year, and there are so many cool things happening, and it's from third grade all the way to eighth grade.

We used to have high school. We have since made a decision to pull back away from high school because we recognize that there are many other efforts that are taking place at the high school and we don't want to duplicate services, and so we've decided to intentionally pull back from high school, but we feel like we're offering some really evidence-based, intentional-based

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programs that provide outstanding results in school attendance, academics, [00:06:00] behavior, and really just trying to get these young folks to become very productive citizens and help out around the community with service-learning projects.

And so we're really proud of the work we've done here in Fort Worth. We're really proud of the effort of the city of Fort Worth and the Fort Worth ISD. It's been quite a journey, and I think we have plenty more years left in us to provide great results.

Katie Barnett: That is, that is really exciting. I love all of those efforts and thanks so much for sharing that.

Miguel Garcia: Yeah, absolutely. I know that we're here to talk about EOPs and we're talking about assessments, threat assessments and hazard assessments. One of the things that I want to share just with the audience before we really got started and delved into some of the things is that—just kind of give you just kind of a framework of who we are and what we do.

And like I said, there's 96 sites. A third of those or—a third of those are vendor based, which means—some individuals who might be familiar with the YMCA or Campfire or Boys and Girls Club. Those are the [00:07:00] type of vendors that provide approximately a third of the programming here in Fort Worth. The other two-thirds is handled by the school staff. So, they're called site-based sites.

And so, under our umbrella of Fort Worth After School, you're either 21st Century programs or you're what we refer to as general fund. And within those two umbrellas of general fund and 21st Century, you're either site based or vendor based. All the 21st Century sites, by the way, that are operated by the school district are operated by school staff, and so they're all site-based sites, all 10 are site-based sites. And the balance of the schools are—you know, the general fund—it's probably closer to—probably about 25 vendor-based and then the balance are site-based sites.

Shanté Stokes: Thank you so much for providing that explanation about vendor-based and site-based sites. We appreciate that. So how does emergency preparedness planning for afterschool and out-of-school time programs differ from the [00:08:00] preparedness planning for regular school hours?

Miguel Garcia: So, I think intuitively, it should make sense that what we do during the day just continues after school, but sometimes, sometimes folks get their roles confused or don't continue what they were doing in their role during the school day into the afterschool hours. And sometimes, quite frankly, we get a little bit complacent.

Shanté Stokes: Mm-hmm.

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Miguel Garcia: And we don't think about the things that we should be thinking about after school and/or continuing the efforts we were making during the school day. So, we get complacent sometimes and we let our guards down. And so, here in Fort Worth, or in Fort Worth After School, we make absolutely sure that all stakeholders who are involved with our program are aware of our EOP, are aware of our safety procedures, and are trained on them every year, or on an annual basis.

In fact, last week, the Fort Worth After School team just got through with their training, and it involved [00:09:00] the individual who's in charge of the EOP for the school district—Ed McGinley came in. He came out to the training, provided training for all the individuals out there. We did have some new folks. He took them to the side, provided some deeper discussion, some responses to some of their questions, and so he's done a great job providing support for the Fort Worth After School program.

And so, it's just a question of remaining on guard and making sure that you're aware of what's happening at all times to prevent, or at least mitigate, the chances of some kind of threat or hazard occurring during the afterschool times.

Shanté Stokes: Thank you so much for highlighting the importance of continuing practices throughout, as well as the importance of training. That's really great points.

Katie Barnett: Yeah, I agree. Thank you so much.

Miguel Garcia: Yeah, absolutely. You know, in addition to that, we do—I know that we've talked in the past, and I've been a part of [00:10:00] your webinars, the REMS webinars, and I know that I've discussed, at least with Shanté and Katie, I've talked about the importance of drills and the importance also of recognizing that if some kids and parents, some stakeholders, if there's a high level of anxiety in participating in those drills, they're not made to, but we do provide the information to them. So that in the event—in the unlikely event—that something does happen, they're familiar with what we need to do, whether that's sheltering in place, whether that's duck and cover for inclement weather, but we do drill in the fall and in the spring.

And the site coordinators, the individuals (there are five folks here centrally in the central office, and they're all assigned their sites)—they're responsible for going out periodically during the school year and conducting what are referred to as site observations. Part of those site observations includes ensuring that drills are being conducted and that individuals are aware of the safety plans and also aware of [00:11:00] where AEDs [automated external defibrillators], where other first aid supplies might be located in the event of some kind of emergency.

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Katie Barnett: That's a lot of great planning and foresight there and definitely very hot topics and necessary concerns. Kind of along this front and also with anything we've discussed so far, is there recent legislation in the places you've worked that pertain to security procedures for afterschool programs or just school buildings in general, programs held on such grounds?

Miguel Garcia: Sure. So being a part of the CCPD, our school district, Fort Worth ISD, also works with the CCPD, and that's where we get our school resource officers. And so all of our high schools have a school resource officer. Most of our middle schools, almost all of our middle schools have school resource officers. Where we find that we're a little bit thin is the elementary schools.

So, if some folks are listening from Texas, they're aware of House Bill [00:12:00] 3, which requires every school to have an armed person on school premises, and so that's been a little bit of a challenge here locally for the school district to identify folks who are—who meet the criteria for handling a firearm and being on school.

And so, yes, that is—that's been a little bit of a challenge, but House Bill 3 in Texas—and in fact, the exact wording, actually, I can give it to you, and it actually states that “the board must ensure that at least one armed security officer is present during regular school hours at each district campus, and a security officer must be a school district police officer, a school resource officer, or a commissioned peace officer employed as a security personnel.”

And so, we try to make sure that we can meet these guidelines. One of our challenges, of course, in out-of-school time is compensating those individuals for overtime. So that does get to be a challenge, and [00:13:00] so the way we address it in our program is ensuring and working with our campus monitors. So, our campus monitors are really the ones who are first line of defense, if you will. They move around the campus, the perimeter of the campus, during out-of-school time. Rarely are they inside the building, you know, maybe the only time they're really inside the building is—those of you familiar with Texas know, it's about 110 degrees here right now, so being outside is not comfortable, so yes, they do, they do move around the building, but we do work with our campus monitors to ensure that we have that continued presence from the school day to out-of-school time.

And that's really important to note. I know that when we talk about out-of-school time, we're generally talking about afterschool programs, but we do have programs that take place—and when we talk about at school time, we do have programs that take place before school gets started and during the summer. And so, during those time periods, we also ensure that a campus monitor is available. [00:14:00] They're familiar with standard operating procedures. They have access to our NPOs, our neighborhood police officers. As kind of a, an effort here locally, our NPOs do come out to the Fort Worth After School training, they introduce themselves, and so they're readily accessible to the afterschool programs here locally.

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Now of course, an NPO may have at least five or six schools under their umbrella, so it might make it challenging if we have multiple things going on. But the NPOs and the Fort Worth Police Department have been wonderful. They've been exceptional and awesome to work with. I guess there's not enough superlatives to talk about our police department here locally.

They've done a phenomenal job of working with us. Like I said, the NPOs visit, they make themselves known to everyone. They're present at our schools, and if they're not responding to a threat, they're out talking with our students and making sure that students recognize them, and if they need [00:15:00] anything, even when out-of-school time programs end, they can reach out to them and ask them for assistance.

I think we have a lot of cool things happening here and we're trying to make sure that we ensure our students' and our stakeholders' safety during school and during out-of-school time.

Shanté Stokes: That's great. Thank you. So, just curious if you can tell us the specific threats and hazards LEAs [local education agencies], in particular, must be on guard for, regarding out of school settings, and how would LEAs monitor these particular threats?

Miguel Garcia: So, in our case, we are the LEA, the—Fort Worth ISD is the LEA. Where we find a little bit—where we have to pick up—I wouldn't want to say “slack,” but what we want to make sure that the ball doesn't get dropped is with our vendors.

So, I know that I shared that approximately two-thirds of our sites are site-based sites. That means that the teachers, [00:16:00] the paraprofessionals, counselors, anyone who supports the school-day efforts, principals, administrators—they're all familiar. We all have safe-school training. And so, we talk about all kinds of things from bloodborne pathogens to airborne pathogens, hazardous material spills. We talk about safety, and that can be just—I know it might sound a si—a li—a bit silly, but it is a hazard—is when we talk about standing on a chair, as an example, to grab something from a shelf rather than getting a custodian or getting a ladder to grab something from up top. And so, all of our site-based sites are very familiar with all these different topics, different areas.

It's where we work with our vendors that we find that they need to become more familiar with our EOP. You know, a lot of our vendors who work with us also operate licensed daycare facilities, and so they're familiar with and they're aware of the [00:17:00] hyper-vigilance that is required to house and host students, but we also need them on the school district's page, and that's where our challenge comes into play.

We want to make sure they're familiar, they know what we're—what the expectation is and that they're also aware that we have an emergency response team. And if something happens

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then our emergency response team from the school district will respond. If they reach out to their coordinator, their designated coordinator, or myself, and we will put that plan into place.

We can't have someone creating their own plan. And so, we try to make sure that all the vendors are well versed in our emergency operation plans. And so, it's not just, unfortunately, you know, in this day and age, people primarily think of a hazard or a threat, as a gun—gun violence—but many times it's something other than that.

And we just have to be vigilant. We have to remain vigilant and make sure that everybody's on the same page at all times, even when [00:18:00] they bring new staff members on. We need their newest staff members to be aware that an EOP exists and that they're aware of it. And if they have any doubt that they go to their supervisor and they don't just initially start initiating their own EOPs because everything can go sideways from there.

And so that's our biggest challenge is working with our vendors. They've been super cooperative, and it's been, it's been a good symbiotic relationship for the last 25 years. We've never had anybody push back, but we want to make sure that we all remain on the same page and we move forward together.

Katie Barnett: Let's talk LEAs for a minute here. So, two questions: What other factors pertaining to afterschool settings might require special consideration for LEAs? And then also, how should schools initiate program partnerships with LEAs? What resources do LEAs offer to make this happen?

Miguel Garcia: Yeah, I know in Fort Worth we have a point person. Ed McGinley is our point person. So, if [00:19:00] vendors want to become—or different, you know—whether it's a nonprofit, a CBO [community-based organization], or faith-based organization, if they want to become involved with an LEA, they probably should seek out that individual.

And, you know, we are an urban, well, we're an urban school district and so we're a little bit larger, and so we do have a dedicated point person. A challenge might be finding that a rural or an ultra-rural school district may not have an individual who's the point person. And so, they're just going to have to seek out an individual, and that individual who might operate their EOP might be from the local sheriff's department or might be a police officer.

And so, you just have to find out who that point person is first so that we can ensure that “OK, I'm aware of the EOP. I know how to put it in motion. I know what the requirements are and what my role is.” And so, they need to become familiar with that.

And then the first part of the question you asked about other threats. Was that correct?
[00:20:00]

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Katie Barnett: Yes. So, it was how can schools initiate partnerships with LEAs along these lines.

Miguel Garcia: So, kind of the same thing, along the same lines. I think it's just important there that the lines of communication are open and people, you know, I think one of the biggest things for the LEAs is that they're thinking about academic progress, attendance, behavior. Sometimes the EOP becomes a secondary thing, and it really needs to be front and center.

It needs to—folks need to think about, you know, OK, so what happens in the building is supremely important, but let's talk about entering the building. Are there magnetic locks on the building? Are the doors properly marked so in the event of an emergency, our emergency services, our emergency response teams know which doors to enter and where to get to individuals more quickly than others? Do they know the layout of the building? And so, [00:21:00] I think it's really important that the LEAs and the vendors and even if it's a site-based site, everybody is on the same page all the time. It is just, I can't emphasize how important it is.

And you know, I think what happens is we, sometimes we—we're prone to becoming complacent because something hasn't happened. You know, there's been, "Well, we haven't had that happen in five years." And we start thinking, and it's just natural as human beings, we start thinking, "OK, well, let me put that on the back burner, and if I bring it up, it'll really stoke people's anxiety." No, I think what stokes people's anxiety is not knowing that their plan exists or presenting that plan.

In the event that your student might ha—this might happen to your student, these are the processes we have in place to address that situation, and parents want to know that. Parents want to know that you're prepared. Parents want to know that when—if something were to happen, you would know how to address the situation in a very pragmatic, [00:22:00] logical, methodical manner, and that we would make sure that things got addressed quickly and properly.

Shanté Stokes: Great. So how would you say afterschool program providers can actually integrate the six-step planning process into afterschool security planning?

Miguel Garcia: I think that's a great question, Shanté. I think one of the things is that I would venture to say that the majority of vendors in LEAs—and some LEAs—might not be familiar with the six-step process.

Shanté Stokes: Mm-hmm.

Miguel Garcia: So, I think familiarizing themselves with the six-step process is really important. That goes without saying. But I think, you know, when we talk about the six-step process, I know we talk about forming a collaborative planning team. And that really takes someone to

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head that effort up. Now, whether it's the LEA or the vendor—I think for the vendor, and even for our state-based teams, you cannot be shy about asking [00:23:00] questions about whether an EOP exists, or if one doesn't exist, how are we, how are we going to address the situation. But forming a collaborative planning team is number one. You have to make sure that the right people are at the table.

An example would be, sometimes we've had the CEO of a local nonprofit organization want to be on that planning team, but the fact of the matter is that CEO is not accessible immediately. They're not on the front line. And so, yeah, we might need to have the person in between the CEO and the frontline person be on that team because that individual is probably more familiar with the day-to-day processes at that location, whereas the CEO is not.

And so, the CEO can be on the collaborative team, just so he or she is in the know, they're familiar with the processes, but we really need some of those frontline individuals [00:24:00] on the collaborative planning team so that everybody knows exactly what they need to do.

And, you know, I know step two (and I won't go through all the steps, and I'll just stop at step two) is understanding the situation: specific roles for individuals on the team—individuals at the school who are on the team and then if you have supervisors who, you know, oversee multiple sites—so that they understand what their role is.

I think one of the, you know, as—being a part of the emergency response team here in the school district, I have a very specific role. Part of my role is reunification with the parents and students. I'm not going to go outside of that role. That's not what we do. I'm not the soundboard for media. I'm not to do that. I understand that. I think when supervisors get involved, they have to understand their roles, so they don't come into the school and start ordering staff, you know, "OK, do this: step one, step two" when staff has already initiated the plan. They just have to know what their roles are. And I [00:25:00] think that's one of the things is that we understand the situation and how to address the situation.

And part of that includes understanding the lexicon of an emergency response plan so everybody's on the same page. You know, we don't want to speak in acronyms that people are not aware of. We don't want to speak in terms that people are not aware of. You know, I know when we talk about the AED, most folks know what an AED is now. And so, you know, at first people wouldn't know. They didn't know what an AED was, how to operate it. And I think one of the things that has been really beneficial for us is that we walk, we purposely walk to the AED, we put our hands or our eyes on the AED, know where it's physically located in the building in the event that we have to actually use it.

And so, I think forming a collaborative planning team is supremely important. And understanding the situation, step two, is important. But making sure that you follow the—all six

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steps so that everybody's on the same page is really where we need to be at with [00:26:00] out-of-school time programs.

Katie Barnett: Well, speaking of getting everybody on the same page, when should afterschool program providers seek to formalize collaborations with community partners through memoranda of understanding?

Miguel Garcia: Right. So, if we use basically a basic school year, here in Texas, most of our schools begin in August. I know that in some parts of the States, sometimes they begin after Labor Day, before—and I'm just using this as context—and they end in late May or June. So, the time to be preparing an MOU is not in August or September, October. It's in the January, probably January, February, the preceding school year.

For us here locally, we post a bid online for anybody to respond to. But in that bid, there's language, very clear language about an EOP. There's also very clear language about our health and safety procedures. So, our bid for out-of-school time [00:27:00] programs here locally, it's approximately 110 pages. It's long, but a lot of it is individuals who are responding to the bid, simply acknowledging and checking boxes (yes, they still have to physically check a box and then put their initials) that they have, that they have read over *most of* the EOP.

And I say most of because the whole entire EOP is not located in the bid, but there is a lot of language included in there, so they understand the very basic premise of our EOP. But it's—after that, here locally, we take it to our school board in May, and they approve it and that's when the MOU is drawn up and MOUs are executed by June. And so, you have all of July and most of August and—where individuals can be trained in the EOP.

But it's right off the bat, right off the start, recognizing that, OK, we do have one. And if you don't have one, then you should consider, we need to figure out different resources. And that's what NTAC is doing. We're trying to create a resource where [00:28:00] we can help smaller school districts create their own EOPs.

And so that's what we're going to try to do as the NTAC, is create EOPs, or at least get a clearinghouse or repository of several different ones from different school districts that people can emulate. You know, where it's not intellectual proprietary information, or intellectual information, but we're going to make sure that individuals have an opportunity to reach out and grab those, whatever size of a school district they are, whatever size of an LEA they are. And so they have an opportunity to utilize EOPs from other places of similar sizes.

Shanté Stokes: Thank you so much for sharing that valuable information on afterschool programs and school safety. So, before we wrap up today, is there anything else you'd like to

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add to this discussion? You've shared so much, but we still want to ask if there's something else you'd like to add.

Miguel Garcia: Yeah, I just, you know, one of the things that we talk about here locally is that threats and hazards can [00:29:00] present themselves in many different forms.

Shanté Stokes: Mm-hmm.

Miguel Garcia: Believe it or not, our biggest threat, if you will, has—or hazard—has come in the form of child custody issues. And we have individuals who will come onto our campus and say, "I am allowed to retrieve my child from your program." And we make sure that when we register our students here locally, that we address that right off the bat.

So, whoever's registering their student for our program, they have to indicate are there any custodial issues that we need to be aware of. And if there are, who are the authorized individuals who can retrieve their child? Short of that, if there are two people listed on there, whether it be mom or dad and another aunt or uncle, if there's only two people listed, those are the only two individuals who are allowed to retrieve that child. We don't allow anyone else—and yes, it has caused some chaos because individuals who might come, grandma or grandpa, get irate, but we still [00:30:00] do not release. We do not acquiesce. We do not allow them to retrieve the child because we want to make sure we're absolutely on the same page as the individual who has the custodial rights to that child. And so, that has been our biggest threat.

But I think when you think of threats, you have to think of all those different things, whether it's bloodborne pathogens, airborne pathogens, child custodial issues, inclement weather—here in Texas, of course, we have to think about tornadoes, straight-line winds, things of that nature, hail. When kids are being released to walk home, if threat of hail is imminent, then we do not, we don't release the children, and sometimes parents get really mad at us, but we'd rather have them in the building than walking home and hail obviously not coming down. We'd rather have them in the building and safe.

And so, I think everyone just needs to look at all threats from all the way around. And I know one of the other things we've talked about is cyberbullying. It's a big threat, and that is contained in our EOP: how to handle that, how to address it, what are next steps. And so, we know that there's a mental health crisis [00:31:00] among adolescents, and we know that, you know, strong bonds and protective relationships with adults are essential to addressing these issues, and we want to make sure we're there for the students, ultimately. We're there for our student participants, and we provide them a safe place to be and enjoy afterschool activities or out-of-school activities without the threat of anything from outside hindering that—their experience.

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Shanté Stokes: That was great. Thank you so much, Miguel.

Miguel Garcia: Thanks, Shanté. Thanks, Katie.

Shanté Stokes: Well, this has been an eye-opening and very productive time. Wouldn't you agree, Katie?

Katie Barnett: Yes, Shanté, definitely. Miguel really provided a lot of ground regarding OST programs, safety considerations, and the importance of collaboration also.

Speaking of which, I'm really looking forward to what we mentioned at the start, where REMS TA Center is going to partner with NTAC for upcoming workshop and webinar offerings this year. Listeners, be sure to check the NTAC Website as well as the REMS TA [00:32:00] Center's calendar page for more information about these opportunities.

Shanté Stokes: I agree. In the meantime, check the show notes for resources pertaining to today's episode. We also have a variety of ways in which you can connect more directly with the REMS TA Center on this and other emergency topics. Follow us on X at #remstacenter and bookmark the #REMSontheAir hashtag. You can also join our mailing list on our Website to be the first to learn of webinars, Web chats, and other virtual opportunities to learn and share.

Katie Barnett: You can also check out our other podcast episodes by visiting our podcast page. There's even a share button there on the screen if you want to pass it along to your colleagues. And if you ever have any questions or want to connect with us more directly, we'd love to hear from you. Just email info@remstacenter.org or give us a call at 1-855-781-7367. [00:33:00]

Shanté Stokes: That's also a great way to let us know of topics you'd like to hear about on future episodes. Who knows, you might be the inspiration for one of our next discussions.

Katie Barnett: Thanks so much for joining us today. And we continue to be honored to come alongside you as you work to keep America's schools safe. Have a great day, everyone.