



Episode 4: Pennsylvania's State School Safety Model

#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: Hello and welcome back. My name is Janelle Hughes, Project Director of the Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools Technical Assistance Center, also known as the REMS TA Center. I am joined today by our Director of Information and Product Management, Alison Curtis. Today's [00:01:00] episode of #REMSontheAir is the third part of an ongoing series on state-level school safety partnerships.

If you'd like to hear our previous two episodes on this topic, you can always go back and listen to both under the State School Safety Models series.

Alison Curtis: This has been a great series so far, and I'm excited to be back for this third episode. Today, we'll discuss the importance of maintaining a diverse array of partnerships at the state level.

We have a special guest from the Pennsylvania Department of Education who will explore the partnerships that they maintain and the value and benefits of these collaborative relationships for supporting school safety and emergency preparedness throughout the state of Pennsylvania.

Janelle Hughes: Very exciting to dive into this conversation. Sounds great. Let's get started, Alison.

Alison Curtis: In the first two episodes in the series, we gave an overview of the value of state-level collaborations for supporting [00:02:00] work across the five preparedness system mission areas and for developing and maintaining high-quality emergency operations plans, or EOPs.

We also discussed how these state-level partnerships impact school safety, emergency management, and preparedness at the state, regional, and local levels. Today, we'll be building on these conversations by discussing the value and benefits of state education agencies, or SEAs, maintaining a range of partnerships.

Janelle Hughes: Yes, I think we've learned that it's so important, and thank you so much for that introduction. There are so many potential partners for SEAs, or state education agencies, to collaborate with, including their state's law enforcement, public health, mental and

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behavioral health, public safety, homeland security, and justice departments, just to name a few partners.

Alison Curtis: That's so true, Janelle. SEAs can partner with state-specific bureaus, boards, [00:03:00] and commissions to advance their work. There really are so many different possibilities.

Janelle Hughes: And the reason why it's important to maintain a range of partnerships is that different partnerships can serve different purposes and support unique activities.

States that establish those diverse partnerships can leverage other departments' resources and expertise, which in turn can really enhance the services that the SEA is able to provide throughout the state. A good way to think about it is that each partner brings something different to the table, and when you maintain a range of partnerships, you benefit from that range of perspectives, expertise, as well as resources.

Alison Curtis: Exactly. One example is an SEA that partners with its state's mental or behavioral health department might be able to bolster the training and technical assistance that the SEA provides to local education agencies, or LEAs, on topics such as suicide prevention, [00:04:00] resilience strategies, or school climate.

In another example, an SEA that maintains a collaborative relationship with its state's police or homeland security department may be able to leverage those departments' expertise on topics such as targeted school violence and behavioral threat assessment.

Janelle Hughes: Really great examples. As we've discussed, beyond supporting SEAs with training and technical assistance, state-level partnerships can also support the creation and revision of high-quality EOPs. One example is partnering to enhance site assessment. SEAs that partner with their state's geological survey or department of geology will likely gain specialized insights that can help LEAs plan for natural hazards that are known to affect their communities, like floods or earthquakes.

Alison Curtis: Assessments are great opportunities for involving partners in school safety work, Janelle. Another way to learn on these partnerships for EOP development is to [00:05:00] involve partners in emergency exercises, which are a great way to practice the functions and courses of action in an EOP. And there's a good chance that partnerships with, for example, a state's fire or emergency medical services department would provide helpful perspectives both for conducting exercises and for revising EOPs based on lessons learned.

Janelle Hughes: Thanks, Alison. The last consideration I'll add is that state-level partnerships are also helpful for broadening an SEA's communication networks. Different departments may have

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access to additional points of contact, communication systems, or other initiatives that could help SEAs disseminate critical information to school communities throughout their state.

Alison Curtis: That's a great point, Janelle. We're really only scratching the surface here, but you can already get a sense for how beneficial it is for SEAs to develop and maintain partnerships with a range of other departments and [00:06:00] agencies. These collaborative relationships can really strengthen and deepen the impacts of an SEA's school safety and emergency management work.

Janelle Hughes: Let's pivot now to hear about some successful state-level partnerships in Pennsylvania. We are so excited today to hear from Nicholas Slotterback, a health and physical education advisor within the Pennsylvania Department of Education's Bureau of Curriculum and Assessment and their Division of Instructional Quality.

He will be here to share more about the different partnerships that exist within the Pennsylvania Department of Education, or PDE, and how they maintain them. Nick will share with us four examples of partnerships and discuss the different roles those partners play. First, let's hear about the partnership between PDE and the Center for Safe Schools, starting with the reason why PDE reached out to a partner within the center and how that partnership has impacted LEAs. [00:07:00]

Nicholas Slotterback (Recorded): We brought them on board because they were our closest communication to all LEAs across Pennsylvania. It was easier contacting them because they had a great network of communications to the LEA. So, any resources or trainings that came through the state level, we kind of filtered it off to them to help share it statewide, but, since then, through this process and the statewide system of support, we now have access to all school lead point of contacts around school safety and emergency planning across the state.

So, we've established that through our work here. So now PDE can send out blast emails to everyone through the help of the Center for Safe Schools.

Alison Curtis: This is a great example of our point about partnerships enhancing communication. The PDE's partnership with the Center for Safe Schools opened the door for communication to [00:08:00] flow from the state level through to the local level via the center's communication channels.

The PDE leveraged those channels and has benefited from now being able to easily reach out to individuals at the local level across Pennsylvania.

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Janelle Hughes: Exactly, Alison. And having those open channels of communication, it sounds like has helped PDE disseminate information about state resources and trainings in an easy way.

Let's hear from Nick again now about another partnership the PDE maintains with the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency, or PEMA. In this example, Nick will walk us through how PEMA has helped the PDE with the TRAIN PA program, which includes courses on school safety topics such as the National Incident Management System, also known as NIMS, and which supports local education agencies and their regional or intermediate units and those points of contact.

Nicholas Slotterback (Recorded): They have [00:09:00] helped us integrate the TRAIN PA program, which is free to school administration, school staff, school nurses, and then health practitioners across the state. And we have different categories in TRAIN PA, which one of—one of the training areas is around school safety, and they have a lot of the NIMS training courses available, and then also they promote any virtual or face-to-face training opportunities throughout the state.

So it's kind of our second network of keeping track of who's being trained, what trainings are occurring, and then, thirdly, what type of rollout do they have? Are they consistent with best practices and so forth? And they're all looked at from the FEMA [00:10:00] perspective, from PEMA's perspective, PDE takes a look at these courses and approves upon them for allowance of schools to participate. So they helped initiate the TRAIN PA and educated our LEAs and our intermediate unit point of contacts on how to utilize that tool and receive those training opportunities statewide.

Alison Curtis: It's so great to hear about how these departments work together to support school safety throughout the state of Pennsylvania. PEMA and the PDE worked together to develop, promote, and track trainings. And PEMA provided the technical assistance to help LEAs and intermediate units participate in the TRAIN PA program.

Janelle Hughes: That's right. It's another good example of how partnerships at the state level can really have a ripple effect at the regional and local levels.

We are lucky to have another example here in this [00:11:00] next clip. Nick discusses the main areas of support that the Pennsylvania Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services, which is housed within the state's Department of Human Services, provides to the PDE.

Nicholas Slotterback (Recorded): Twofold. One would be with the threat assessment teams, help supporting them from the mental health aspect and then also recovery. I think those are

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going to be the two—recovery and response are going to be the two major players for our Office for Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services.

Alison Curtis: It's nice to hear how the Pennsylvania Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services can provide school behavioral threat assessment teams with a mental health perspective, because we know that's an important part of behavioral threat assessment. I'd also like to note that if you're interested in hearing more about how state-level partnerships strengthen behavioral threat assessment, the second podcast episode in this [00:12:00] series covers that topic.

Janelle Hughes: Thanks for remembering that, Alison. Let's hear from Nick again now about the partnership between the PDE and the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency, or the PCCD.

Nicholas Slotterback (Recorded): It's a unique partnership with PCCD, the Commission on Crime and Delinquency. So, they helped establish the statewide threat assessment trainings for Pennsylvania.

So that's one aspect of their partnership. The second is with the school resource officers. We have NASRO trainings statewide for our newly hired staff as well as staff that needs retraining, you know, every so often. So they help fund those types of trainings and supports. So that's why that's going to be their basket that they bring to the team.

Alison Curtis: I'm so glad we got to hear about this partnership, Janelle, because it is indeed a unique one. The PCCD has [00:13:00] helped establish, fund, and support statewide trainings on behavioral threat assessment and those trainings for school resource officers made available by the National Association of School Resource Officers, or NASRO, as Nick mentioned.

Janelle Hughes: That's right, Alison. And as you can tell, the Pennsylvania Department of Education has developed and continues to maintain a wide range of partnerships at the state level that both supplement and strengthen the supports that department has been able to provide districts and schools throughout Pennsylvania.

We really hope these examples have shed light on all the benefits of maintaining an array of unique partnerships.

Alison Curtis: Before we sign off, I want to remind our listeners that we have a wealth of resources to offer the field that can be found on our Website. First, we have two webinars that can help further your understanding of how state-level partnerships support emergency management and preparedness. The first is titled *Building State-Level Relationships* [00:14:00] to Support Education Agencies With Disaster Response and Recovery Planning. And the second

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is a deep dive into information sharing and emergency management, which is important for collaborating across agencies.

Janelle Hughes: Thanks, Alison. I'll also add that our interactive state map Web page, titled State Emergency Management Resources, also features examples of state departments and offices that state education agencies can collaborate with to support their school safety work.

Just click on the state on the map that you're interested in and click on the State Contacts and Reports option, and you will be able to find the information that you need there.

Alison Curtis: Lastly, we also host Web pages of full Federal guidance and resources on a range of topics. The best page to extend your learning from this episode is our topic-specific resource page on collaboration.

Janelle Hughes: Thanks so much, Alison, for today's conversation. And that's it for this [00:15:00] episode. Listeners, please tweet us using *#REMSontheAir* hashtag if you are addressing similar topics in your work. And, as always, if you have any questions related to our discussion today or want to learn more, send us your questions via email or call us at 1-855-781-REMS, or 7367. You can pose questions that can possibly be featured on an upcoming podcast. Don't forget that you can always email us 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 to learn and share.

Access additional *#REMSontheAir* Podcast episodes and share this one with your colleagues by visiting the REMS TA Center's podcast page and click the share tabs that appear along the left-hand side of your screen. Our podcast page also provides access, as we mentioned, to other [00:16:00] episodes that focus on state-level relationships.

So we hope that you've enjoyed today's episode, and we look forward to you tuning into another.