



Episode 5: Maryland'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 here at the REMS TA Center, and I'm joined by our Director of Information and Product Management, Alison Curtis. Today's episode of #REMSontheAir is the fourth part of an ongoing series on state-level school safety [00:01:00] partnerships. If you'd like to hear our previous three episodes on this topic, you can always go back and listen to them under the State School Safety Model series on our Podcast landing page.

Alison Curtis: It's a pleasure to be back here with you today, Janelle. We've heard a lot about state-level partnerships in this series so far, including some insights from New York, Oklahoma, and Pennsylvania. We've discussed their value and how they support the National Preparedness System mission areas; emergency operations plan development; and school safety, security, emergency management, and preparedness programs at the state, regional, and local levels.

Today, we're discussing and going into a deep dive into the impacts of state-level collaboration on local education agencies, or LEAs. And we'll share some tips with you on how state education agencies can effectively collaborate and strengthen these impacts. We're also [00:02:00] excited to have two more special guests today from the Maryland State Department of Education and the Maryland Center for School Safety, who will provide us with insight into their partnerships and how they maintain them, how they approach their collaboration, and how their partnerships benefit local education agencies throughout Maryland.

Janelle Hughes: Maryland is my home state, so I'm really excited about this episode, so let's dive in.

Alison Curtis: As we've discussed in the first three episodes in this series, it's important for state education agencies to develop and maintain collaborative relationships with a range of partners.

These state-level relationships provide support for education agencies at the local level by broadening networks and facilitating communication; building capacity for local school safety, security, emergency management, and preparedness programs; and providing specialized training and technical assistance.

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Janelle Hughes: That's right, Alison. And for state education agencies, including SEAs, to [00:03:00] effectively support LEAs in all those ways, they must work together on an ongoing basis to coordinate staff, services, and communications to those local education agencies. For example, an SEA that does not maintain a range of state-level partnerships and that is hoping to provide school districts with training on trauma-informed practices might not realize that their state's department of mental health or behavioral health already conducts trainings on those topics that could easily be modified for school staff.

Alison Curtis: Absolutely. A great consideration, Janelle. SEAs can really improve upon the services that they offer to LEAs by partnering with other state-level agencies. But these relationships must be forged and maintained, not just existing between a few select people or for the purposes of a single project.

Janelle Hughes: That's so true. And let's think about this from the perspective of a school district superintendent. Their school [00:04:00] district might have numerous different programs being implemented in collaboration with different partners. However, if they have questions about anything related to school safety or emergency management, preparedness, security, they should know who they can call and for what types of support.

Meeting the need in this example would really require that those state agencies compile their contact information and their program specifics in collaboration, and then disseminate them to the LEAs throughout the state.

Alison Curtis: That's a great example, Janelle. I can imagine that having a state contact network mapped out for LEAs would be a big help.

And that brings us to our next point, which is that state-level partnerships can support LEAs through coordinated communication efforts. Like we mentioned earlier, there is likely some overlap between various state agencies' missions, projects, the topics covered in their work, and the stakeholders they aim to reach. [00:05:00]

Instead of multiple agencies approaching LEAs with similar messages or about similar topics, state partners can first convene to align their message and then choose communication platforms and dissemination methods together. This may help them to reach their intended audiences more effectively and to reduce confusion.

Janelle Hughes: That is very on target. And one way to establish these types of sustainable partnerships—because that's what it's really about is the sustainability in those partnerships that support LEAs—is to conduct an initial meeting to establish the partnership, where team members actually get to know each other, share their work, and identify opportunities for collaboration.

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That meeting will help team members from the different agencies understand each other's roles and some of the current efforts in place throughout the state.

Alison Curtis: Thanks for the tip, Janelle. To ensure these state-level partnerships are maintained long term, staff [00:06:00] members can also set up recurring meetings between departments to keep each other apprised of one another's work and to plan future initiatives.

Janelle Hughes: Yes, that's so important. The first meeting is really the stepping stone, but, you know, those conversations have to continue.

Alison Curtis: Absolutely, Janelle. Let's shift gears now about state-level partnerships in Maryland. We're excited to hear from Kimberly Buckheit today, Section Chief of School Climate and Safety within the Maryland State Department of Education's Division of Student Support, Academic Enrichment, and Educational Policy.

She'll share more about the partnerships that the Maryland State Department of Education maintains, as well as their philosophy for establishing these partnerships. So first, let's hear from Kim about their partnership with the Maryland Department of Emergency Management and about the role it plays in supporting school safety efforts in Maryland.

Kimberly Buckheit (Recorded): What MDEM [Maryland Department of Emergency Management] brings to the table is that [00:07:00] emergency operation, you know, larger command center, those larger logistical things that allow a response to be organized and effective when it needs to happen.

Janelle Hughes: It's so great to hear that the state Department of Education in Maryland has established its partnerships, and it sounds like they really benefit from the logistical support that the Maryland Department of Emergency Management, which they referred to as MEMA [when it was the Maryland Emergency Management Agency], is able to provide in response to an emergency.

You and I, Alison, we know that partnerships play a big role in managing the before, during, and after time frames of an emergency incident. Emergencies are, by nature, unpredictable and can be highly stressful. It helps to have these partnerships in place before an emergency ever happens to be able to coordinate effective response and recovery efforts when needed, especially in the case of a large-scale incident. [00:08:00]

It's really refreshing to have that peace of mind that state education agencies don't have to do this work alone.

Alison Curtis: That is so true. And I'd like to remind our listeners that we have a great webinar on this topic, titled *Building State-Level Relationships to Support Education Agencies With*

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Disaster Response and Recovery Planning. This webinar has been archived on our site for viewing at any time.

Janelle Hughes: Thanks for that reminder, Alison. It's such a great connection. Next, let's hear from Kim about the partnership between the Maryland State Department of Education, and the Maryland Center for School Safety, or as Kim refers to it, the Center.

Kimberly Buckheit (Recorded): The Center is focused more on events that occur from a student side, right? So a student, not a natural disaster, not a natural emergency, but a human-based emergency event. [00:09:00] And they are, I think, almost first responders then in terms of processing the—what occurred to be able to identify safety gaps.

Alison Curtis: This is a really great example, Janelle. You can tell that the Maryland State Department of Education has held ongoing partnership meetings, like we mentioned, because they have a clear understanding of the role of each of their partners.

In this case, they know they can engage the Maryland Center for School Safety for support with any human-caused threats or for identifying potential gaps or shortfalls in emergency operations plans.

Janelle Hughes: That's right, Alison. It's clear that they have engaged in a sustained effort to maintain their partnerships and that these efforts go a long way in supporting LEAs in their state.

Now, let's take a step back for a moment and hear about the Maryland State Department of Education's [00:10:00] philosophy behind their partnerships, as Kim gives us the why behind the how.

Kimberly Buckheit (Recorded): The local school folks are having to engage multiple individuals, multiple agencies and organizations when any emergency occurs. So I think what we've really been striving to do in the last, maybe, 6 months, more than other time, is to be more organized ourselves as agencies, state agencies, around what types of services we each provide to avoid duplication.

Alison Curtis: Kim makes an important point that I would like to emphasize. In the event of an emergency, LEAs must engage with many different partners as they activate the various emergency management functions of their EOP [emergency operations plan] and as they move through the during and after time frames of an [00:11:00] emergency incident.

It can be a lot to manage. From the LEA's perspective, it's a big help if the state agencies that support them are already on the same page with the services they provide.

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Janelle Hughes: I was thinking the same thing, Alison, and I love how they continue to make a clear connection between their partnerships and the ways that LEAs experience them.

You can tell that a lot of thought has gone into how to make LEAs' experiences easier and more straightforward through the activation of these partnerships. I also really appreciated how Kim mentioned that MSDE [Maryland State Department of Education] tries not to duplicate efforts. Like we mentioned, if you don't maintain a range of partnerships at the state level, you may not realize that someone else is working on the same thing that you are.

Alison Curtis: Exactly. We're lucky to be able to hear from another one of the Maryland State Department of Education's partners now. Let's pivot and hear from Jeyan Jebaraj, [00:12:00] business solutions and data manager with the Maryland Center for School Safety, about how communications are streamlined within this triangle of partnerships between the state Department of Education, the Maryland Department of Emergency Management, and the Center.

Jeyan Jebaraj (Recorded): There's three of us. All three of us represent three different agencies. But our mission kind of focuses towards the same stakeholders as well as the same achievement goal. So that's kind of how we operate. We are making a priority to make sure that we collaborate and we convey our message properly within these agencies, whether it's Maryland Department of Education or Maryland Department of Emergency Management or Maryland Center for School Safety.

We are all trying to work towards the same goal, and we also don't want to create silos and approach it from different angles.

Janelle Hughes: I appreciate how he describes the overlap between the work of these three agencies and the initiatives happening in Maryland to ensure that [00:13:00] these state agencies are on the same page with their communications and their services to LEAs.

I imagine that that organization makes a big difference to the local education agencies.

Alison Curtis: I absolutely agree. We have one final word now from Kim about these partnerships that we'd like to share with our listeners. Let's listen as she explains how the state Department of Education thinks about school safety efforts in Maryland.

Kimberly Buckheit (Recorded): The interesting and the really great thing that is happening in Maryland is school safety isn't just about school, right, and isn't just about the school personnel—that school safety really has become a statewide community effort.

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Janelle Hughes: Love that mentality, Alison. This is a great way to approach partnerships—with the idea that school safety and emergency preparedness aren't just jobs for schools, school districts, and state education agencies.

Building that statewide system [00:14:00] of support with a range of partners at the state level helps contribute to the idea that everyone in the community has a part to play in school safety.

Alison Curtis: That's so true, Janelle. And that's exactly how we think about school safety here at the REMS TA Center, as well. Before we sign off, I want to remind our listeners that we have an abundance 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. One we already mentioned focuses on the importance of building relationships at the state level to support education agencies with disaster and emergency response and recovery planning.

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

Janelle Hughes: Thanks, Alison. I'll add that our interactive state map Web page titled, State Emergency Management Resources, [00:15:00] also features examples of state departments and offices that state education agencies can collaborate with to support their school safety work. Just click on a state on the map, and then click on State Contacts and Reports.

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

Janelle Hughes: Thanks, Alison, and thank you to all of our listeners.

That is it for this episode. Remember that you can always tweet us using the *#REMSontheAir* hashtag if you are addressing similar topics in your work or have school safety models that you would like to share. And, as always, if you have any questions related to our discussion today, or just want to learn more, send us your questions via email to info@remstacenter.org or give us a call at 1-855-781-7367.

You may also access [00:16:00] additional *#REMSontheAir* Podcast episodes and share this one with your colleagues by visiting the REMS TA Center's podcast page and clicking the share tabs that appear along the left-hand side of your screen. Thanks so much for tuning in.