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BEST PRACTICE

School Emergency Management Planning: Incident Management Teams

PURPOSE

Provides an overview of planning concepts for establishing a school incident management team (IMT).

SUMMARY

An IMT is an organized group of faculty and staff members trained in the implementation of a school's emergency response protocols. IMTs provide administrators with immediate access to trained teams to assist in the management of incidents at schools. IMTs should be organized according to the principles of the incident command system (ICS) in order to facilitate coordination with emergency responders. IMTs should meet regularly to review response protocols, to receive training, and to participate in school crisis drills.

School districts sometimes identify these teams by different names, including Crisis Intervention Teams, Disaster Response Teams, and Emergency Management Teams. The U.S. Department of Education uses the term IMT.

In some areas, IMTs perform a narrower role than described in this document. In New England, for example, IMTs are primarily employed during the recovery phase after an incident.

DESCRIPTION

Safety experts recommend that school administrators establish an IMT to assist with incident management. An IMT is an organized group of personnel who have been trained in the implementation of the response protocols established in the school's emergency operations plan (EOP). School personnel, who are frequently the first at a school incident site, can assist with emergency management before, during, and after emergency responders arrive. An IMT can provide a timely and coordinated response that may reduce harm and prevent loss of life during incidents at schools.

Emergency Operations Plans

Effective response to an incident at a school requires the development of a written response procedure. An EOP provides easy-to-read directions for school personnel to follow in response to an emergency. For additional information on school EOPs, please refer to the *Lessons Learned Information Sharing (LLIS.gov)* Best Practice document: *School Emergency Management Planning: Emergency Operations Plans* (forthcoming).

This Best Practice provides school administrators with an overview of planning concepts for organizing an effective IMT. The document consists of four components:

- Team Organization
- Team Composition
- Incident Command System

- Meetings

Team Organization

IMTs are typically organized so that they can assist in the management of incidents that may occur at an individual school. However, many incidents can overwhelm the capability and resources of an individual school. For this reason, many jurisdictions also maintain IMTs at the school district level.

Individual School IMT

An IMT formed at the individual school level is comprised of faculty and staff members based at the school building. These teams are responsible for assisting in the management of incidents that occur at or impact their individual schools. These events may or may not require intervention from school district personnel or local emergency response personnel.

An incident at one school may precipitate preventive actions at other nearby schools in the form of lock-downs, evacuations, modified bus schedules, or sheltering of evacuees. Any of these scenarios may require the activation of an IMT.

District IMT

An IMT formed at the district level is comprised of school district personnel. District IMTs have a broader jurisdiction and may respond to major incidents at any school in the district or to incidents that impact more than one school. District IMTs may include additional resources and specialized personnel, such as professional therapists, which may not be available to an individual school IMT.

Safety experts recommend that school administrators work to establish IMTs at both the individual school and the district level. While individual school IMTs are able to respond sooner to incidents, district IMTs typically have access to more resources. Additionally, the emergency management plans of some jurisdictions require the school district to provide support in response to local emergencies that may not affect any schools. Jurisdictions that have both types of IMTs are better prepared to respond to incidents that may occur in and around their schools.

Multiple Incident Management Teams

The Fairfax County, VA, School District maintains an IMT to manage large-scale incidents. Individual schools in the district still maintain their own IMTs to manage localized incidents.

Team Composition

There are no formal standards for the number of members that should be on the team. IMT composition varies among jurisdictions and depends on the size and type of school, the expertise of the members, and the expected threats. However, the school principal or district superintendent is typically responsible for organizing and leading an individual school or district IMT, respectively. The vice principal or equivalent district personnel can assume this role if the principal or superintendent is unable to participate.

Incident Management Team Size

The School Police Department in the District of Palm Beach County, FL, recommends that IMTs (which they refer to as Crisis Intervention Teams) in their jurisdiction include at least ten school personnel. They also recommend that teams include an additional two members for every 500 students above 1,000.

IMT members are generally chosen based upon their expertise and ability to assist during an emergency. All members should be reliable, capable of giving directions in a clear

manner, and able to keep calm in an emergency. IMT team members are typically selected from school faculty and/or staff.

Faculty

As the primary caretakers of students while they are at school, faculty will likely be called upon to implement response protocols during an emergency. Faculty representation on the IMT can help ensure that emergency procedures address their concerns. Additionally, faculty may possess discipline-related expertise that could prove helpful in the event of an emergency. Some faculty representatives who team leaders should consider for their IMTs include:

- **Biology teachers:** Biology teachers may have knowledge of protective actions to take in response to biological hazards. Some biology teachers may be able to assist in the identification of health hazards.
- **Chemistry teachers:** Chemistry teachers may have knowledge of general chemical safety procedures that could be of use during a hazardous material spill. Chemistry teachers may also have access to material safety data sheets that provide safety information for specific chemicals.
- **Coaches:** Coaches have knowledge of the athletic fields that may become evacuation sites. Additionally, coaches are often trained in first-aid, Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR), and Automated External Defibrillator (AED) procedures.
- **Foreign language instructors:** Foreign language instructors can assist in communicating with students and parents who have limited English proficiency.
- **Physical education instructors:** Physical education instructors may have experience dealing with injuries and might possess first-aid and CPR training.
- **Special education instructors:** Special education instructors can provide insights on requirements for the safety of students with disabilities or special needs.

Staff

School staff may have technical, medical, or other specific expertise that could be useful during an emergency. Staff also may possess information on day-to-day school operations that could be of assistance to emergency responders. Team leaders should consider including the following staff on their IMTs:

- **Administrative Assistants:** Administrative assistants can help answer phones and identify those who do not belong in the school. Administrative assistants may also be helpful in preserving essential school records and documents during an evacuation.

Students with Disabilities

For additional information on accounting for students with disabilities or special needs in emergency planning, school administrators can refer to the Department of Education's Emergency Response and Crisis Management (ERCM) Technical Assistance Center newsletter, [ERCM Express, Volume 2, Issue 1: Integrating Students with Special Needs and Disabilities into Emergency Response and Crisis Planning](#).

School Resource Officers

A school resource officer (SRO) is a law enforcement official specially assigned to an individual school or district. SROs may have knowledge of local law enforcement procedures and can assist an IMT in coordinating with police. However, during an incident at school, an SRO may have responsibilities that will take precedence over any commitments to an IMT. For this reason, many schools utilize their SROs to help with emergency planning, but do not include them on the IMT. For additional information on SROs, please see the Department of Justice's [A Guide to Developing, Maintaining, and Succeeding with Your School Resource Officer Program](#).

- **Bus drivers:** Bus drivers may have knowledge of transportation hazards and can help plan evacuation routes. Bus drivers can also assist in coordinating the transportation of students and school personnel during an emergency.
- **Cafeteria workers:** Cafeteria workers may be able to identify food-borne illnesses and can help develop safe food-handling procedures. Cafeteria workers can also help distribute food and water during an extended emergency.
- **Custodians and maintenance workers:** Custodians and maintenance workers may have knowledge of chemicals, mechanical equipment, and other supplies stored in the building. They also can provide information on building specifications and the operation of the school's fire alarm, sprinkler, ventilation, and utility systems.
- **School counselors:** School counselors can provide psychological counseling for students and staff during and after an incident. School counselors may also have knowledge of stress management techniques that could be of assistance during an emergency.
- **School nurses:** School nurses can provide emergency medical assistance and may be helpful in identifying health hazards.

Team Rosters

School personnel assigned to the IMT should be recorded in a team roster in the EOP. The team roster should provide the name, contact information, designated role, and skills of IMT members. Team rosters can assist in the formation of the IMT if the team leader is incapacitated or otherwise unable to perform his duties.

Team Roster Worksheets

The Montgomery County, MD, public school system developed an [emergency/crisis plan template](#) that provides worksheets for keeping track of crisis response team members. These templates can be adapted for use by other jurisdictions.

Incident Command System

Schools that receive federal emergency preparedness funds are required to implement the ICS as part of their NIMS compliance. Schools that are not required to be NIMS compliant should still consider utilizing the ICS to organize their IMTs. Adoption of the ICS provides an effective method of assigning emergency response duties and ensures that all aspects of incident management are carried out in an organized manner. The ICS also provides a common terminology that enables better communication and cooperation with emergency responders. Some core principles of the ICS include:

NIMS for Schools Resource

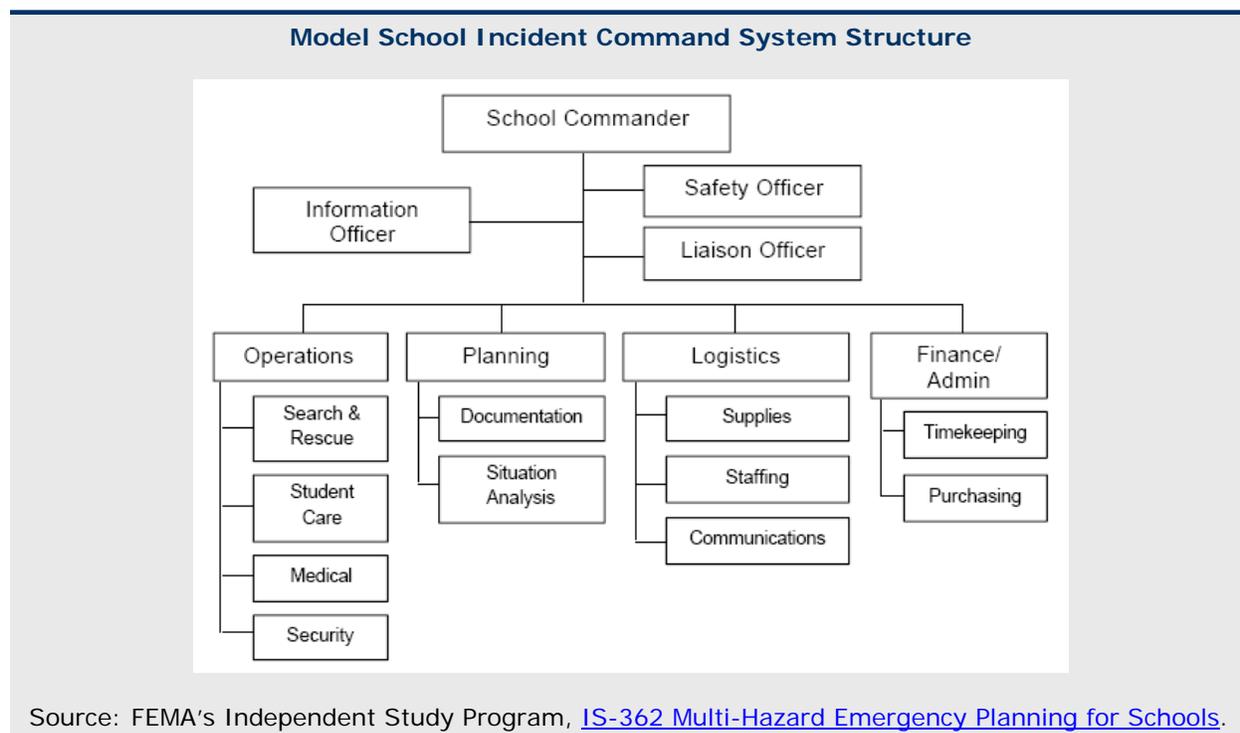
In the spring of 2006, the Georgia Emergency Management Agency released a film entitled "Education For Disaster." This free resource explains NIMS in a school context and addresses how a school would fit in to an overall incident response. For a copy of the film, please visit www.gema.state.ga.us.

- **Nature of the incident determines level of activation and response:** IMT leaders can utilize the ICS to activate roles according to the school's needs. For very small incidents, the team leader may perform all the roles of the ICS structure. However, if an incident grows, the team leader can activate additional personnel.
- **No one reports to more than one person:** IMTs that utilize the ICS will have a clearly defined chain of command. This will ensure that each member only reports to one supervisor, which will increase overall efficiency.
- **Span of supervisory control does not exceed seven subordinates:** IMT leaders and supervisors who utilize the ICS will never be responsible for managing more than seven subordinates. Having a limited span of control helps prevent supervisors from becoming overburdened and improves overall communication.

For additional information on the history, features, principles, and organizational structure of the ICS, please see the online course [Introduction to the Incident Command System \(IS-100\)](#). For an ICS course tailored to school personnel, please visit [Introduction to the Incident Command System, I-100, for Schools](#). Both courses are provided by the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) [Emergency Management Institute \(EMI\)](#).

Incident Command Roles

ICS provides school administrators with a command structure that can be used to assign roles and duties to the IMT during an incident. These roles mirror those used by emergency response agencies. Typical school ICS roles and associated duties include those listed below.



Source: FEMA's Independent Study Program, [IS-362 Multi-Hazard Emergency Planning for Schools](#).

- **School commander/incident commander:** The school commander/incident commander is responsible for organizing and directing the school's response to an emergency. The incident commander assembles the IMT, assesses the situation, determines the appropriate response protocols, assigns critical duties, monitors the response, and ensures proper documentation of the incident. The incident commander is typically the school principal or district superintendent.
- **Public information officer:** The public information officer is responsible for establishing communications with public officials, controlling and coordinating the release of information to the media, controlling rumors, and providing accurate and timely status reports to the incident commander. IMT members with media or public relations experience should be considered for the role of public information officer.
- **Safety officer:** The safety officer is responsible for ensuring the safety of school personnel, students, and other IMT members. The safety officer provides accurate information on safety-related issues to the incident commander and works directly with emergency responders if a public safety response is required. IMT members with law enforcement backgrounds should be considered for the role of safety officer.

- **Liaison officer:** The liaison officer acts as the direct contact between the incident commander and emergency responders. The liaison officer also acts as the point of contact between the incident commander and community groups, including parent-teacher associations, businesses, industry, and others that may be impacted by the incident. IMT members with community affiliations or who have worked with emergency responders should be considered for the role of liaison officer.
- **Operations:** The operations team assists the incident commander in implementing the school's emergency response protocols. The operations team also is responsible for organizing any necessary searches, supervising student release at the evacuation site or the reunification center, coordinating medical support for the injured, and securing the incident site. IMT members with emergency response experience (volunteer firefighters, for example) are commonly assigned to the operations team.
- **Planning:** The planning team is responsible for assisting the incident commander in developing an incident action plan to resolve the emergency. The planning team also is responsible for the collection, documentation, and review of all information pertaining to the incident.
- **Logistics:** The logistics team is responsible for ensuring that facilities, services, personnel, equipment, and materials are provided to support the response to an incident. Maintenance workers, custodians, or other IMT members with knowledge of school resources are commonly assigned to the logistics team.
- **Finance and administration:** The finance and administration team is responsible for tracking expenditures and for recording hours of labor related to the incident. Administrative assistants should be considered for the finance and administration team.

Each ICS role, including that of school commander/incident commander, should be assigned two or three substitutes in case the primary IMT member is not available or is unable to fulfill his or her duty. This will help to ensure continuity of school operations during an incident.

Emergency Responders and Incident Command

When an incident necessitates the response of local or state response agencies, IMTs still have a role to play in incident management after emergency responders arrive and should continue to operate to fulfill their responsibilities. These responsibilities depend on prior agreements and may include accounting for school personnel and students, contacting parents and guardians, and/or relocating students to pre-determined assembly points. IMTs also can be of assistance to emergency responders and should be prepared to provide any information, supplies, or personnel as needed.

Unified Command

Emergency responders may establish a unified command post when responding to an incident at school. Under a unified command, the commanders of all the organizations involved in the incident are stationed in the same location. The unified

For additional information on the need to assign alternative personnel to ICS roles, please see the *LLIS.gov* Lesson Learned document: [Continuity of School Operations: Identifying and Training Substitute Personnel for Incident Command Roles](#).

Memorandum of Understanding

A memorandum of understanding (MOU) can be established between schools and local emergency response agencies in order to outline roles and responsibilities during an emergency. For additional information on MOUs, please refer to the *LLIS.gov* Best Practice document: [Mutual Aid Agreements: Overview](#).

The Need for a Unified Command

For additional information on the need to establish a unified command during an incident involving multiple agencies, please see the *LLIS.gov* Lesson Learned document: [Incident Command: Failure to Establish a Unified Command Structure](#).

command helps commanders to coordinate emergency management efforts while at the same time carrying out their own jurisdictional responsibilities. IMT leaders may be requested to join the unified command in order to provide information and to better coordinate emergency response agency efforts with IMT teams.

Incident Command Post

The school commander/incident commander should establish an incident command post (ICP) whenever there is an emergency. The ICP may be established near the scene of the incident or at a pre-determined location. School IMTs should consider coordinating with public safety personnel on the location of the ICP. The ICP acts as the central location to which all IMT members will report, and all information and updates will be reported and where all response activities will be organized. Because a public safety response may require relocating the ICP in order to join a unified command system, school IMTs should be prepared to move the school ICP to a different location, including outdoor locations.

The principal's office offers several advantages as an ICP, including that faculty and staff usually know its location, that it is typically in a central location, and that important information and paperwork is readily accessible.

Additional Assignments

The school commander/incident commander may assign additional duties to IMT members depending on the nature of the school emergency. These duties are not specifically designated to any one ICS role and should be delegated to whoever is most qualified. Some common assignments include:

- **Accompany students and staff to the hospital:** IMT members may be assigned to accompany any faculty, staff, or students that are transported to a hospital. These members keep the incident commander updated on the medical condition of those they accompany.
- **Account for all students, staff, and visitors:** IMT members may be called on to ensure that all students, staff and visitors are accounted for.
- **Assess mental health needs of students and staff:** Properly trained IMT members may be assigned to make initial assessments of the psychological needs of faculty, staff, and students during and immediately after an emergency.
- **Assist students and staff with special needs:** IMT members may be given the responsibility of ensuring that students and staff with special needs receive additional assistance during an evacuation or when required to relocate.
- **Monitor evacuation routes and assembly areas:** IMT members may be assigned to check designated routes and assembly areas in advance of an evacuation to ensure that they are free of suspicious packages or other unsafe conditions.
- **Monitor indoor areas:** IMT members may be asked to check restrooms, the library, the gym, and other indoor locations to search for faculty, staff, and students and to escort them to a safe location.
- **Monitor outdoor areas:** IMT members may be asked to check playgrounds, sports fields, parking lots, and other outdoor locations for faculty, staff, and students and to escort them to a safe location.
- **Obtain information records:** IMT members may be required to retrieve emergency contact information, student attendance records, and visitor records.
- **Provide medical assistance:** IMT members may be called upon to obtain student medical information, medications, and first-aid kits. Members with CPR training may be called upon to provide medical treatment of injured faculty, staff, and students.

- **Schedule a debriefing:** IMT members may be assigned the duty of organizing an incident debriefing for school faculty and staff members. This debriefing is an opportunity to discuss what went well in the response and what could be improved for the future.
- **Search evacuation site:** IMT members may be asked to do a pre-evacuation search of the area to which students and school personnel will be evacuated. Faculty and staff members with knowledge of the area (e.g. coaches with knowledge of athletic fields) should be used for this task.

Meetings

School safety experts recommend that team leaders hold formal IMT meetings to establish or renew membership at the start of each school year. Regular meetings (every 1 to 2 months) should be organized throughout the school year to review response protocols and ongoing issues as they arise.

The team leader should organize periodic meetings between the IMT and local emergency responders to coordinate response and communication procedures. IMTs also should be involved in regular school drills, including fire, lockdown, shelter-in-place, and evacuations. Coordinating these drills with local fire, emergency medical services, emergency management, and law enforcement agencies can help familiarize IMT members with emergency response agency procedures.

For additional information on providing training for IMTs, please see the *LLIS.gov* Best Practice document: *School Emergency Management Planning: Training, Exercises, and Drills* (forthcoming).

RESOURCES

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