

Chapter I – Introduction

A. Concept of the Toolkit

1. The Pennsylvania “All Hazards” School Safety Planning Toolkit provides guidelines for school districts/schools and communities to address all types of crises, emergencies, and disasters that might impact their campuses. Standard procedures are provided for these situations to assist facilities with a foundation for planning and a framework for response when an event happens.
2. The likelihood of effectively managing an emergency is increased with a comprehensive “All Hazards” School District level Safety Plan and individual building plans tailored to the conditions and resources of an individual school or facility. The guidelines contained herein provide a step by step model for districts and individual schools to develop their own “All Hazards” School/District Safety Plan.
3. For purposes of this Toolkit, a “Crisis” is an incident, or series of incidents, expected or unexpected, that has a significant effect on one or more persons, but may not involve the entire school or community. An “Emergency” is defined as a sudden, generally unanticipated event that has the potential to profoundly and negatively impact a significant segment of the school. A “Disaster” is defined as any incident which results in multiple human casualties and/or disruption of essential public health services or any incident which requires an increased level of response beyond the routine operating procedures, including increased personnel, equipment, or supply requirements. Collectively and hereafter in this Toolkit, they will all be referred to as incidents.
4. The “All Hazards” School Safety Plan should be a collaboration and partnership between the school district and the community. The Emergency Management Services Code, 35 Pa. C.S. §§7101 *et seq.*, as amended, states, “Every school district and custodial child care facility, in cooperation with the local Emergency Management Agency, and the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency, shall develop and implement a comprehensive disaster response and emergency preparedness plan consistent with the guidelines developed by the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency and other pertinent State requirements. The plan shall be reviewed annually and modified as necessary. A copy of the plan shall be provided to the county emergency management agency.” However, this partnership should be expanded to include first responder organizations and any other entity who would be involved in the response to or recovery from an incident that impacts the school district.

5. Each school district should form a District Safety Committee that includes these community partners. The District Safety Committee can then provide guidance to each school building in the development of their own committees and plans. This is a comprehensive district level steering committee regarding all aspects of school safety, emergency planning and management. It should not be considered a safety committee concerned only with workers' compensation and injury reduction.

B. The Commonwealth Perspective

1. The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania has set three broad goals for education:
 - a. High student performance.
 - b. High quality teaching and administration.
 - c. A safe, secure, and supportive environment for each school and every child.
2. To achieve these goals, this Toolkit provides protocols for all types of incidents that may affect a school in line with the phases of an emergency: Prevention/Mitigation, Preparedness, Response, and Recovery. These protocols will ensure that school districts/schools and their campuses can quickly and adequately restore the school climate to optimal learning conditions. Each of these phases is addressed briefly in the next chapter and then defined and applied in detail in later chapters of the Toolkit.

C. Phases of an Emergency

1. Prevention/Mitigation – Prevention and mitigation are proactive efforts, laying the groundwork for avoiding and reducing the effects of incidents. Many school districts/schools have addressed prevention efforts to varying degrees. However, the potential to minimize risk through mitigation efforts needs to be explored further by many school districts/schools.
2. Preparedness – Preparedness is a critical part of any “All Hazards” School Safety Plan. A sound preparedness strategy informs the staff about what to do in order to keep students safe in the event of an incident. It helps school districts/schools to develop and practice routines that reduce the likelihood of panic during stressful situations. This also means that school districts/schools have designed procedures for communicating to parents, staff, and the community and reunification of children with their parents/guardians. Preparedness is also the link that ties the school district with the larger community.
3. Response – The response phase is designed to ensure that the action steps in the “All Hazards” School Safety Plan are properly implemented when an incident occurs. Typically, the response phase outlines the responsibilities for those who have a role in the response effort.

4. Recovery – How quickly a school district recovers from an incident is impacted by how well that district manages its post-incident communications with response agencies, the local community, parents/guardians, students, district staff, and the media. It is important to ensure that the appropriate level of support is provided to those who suffer physical or emotional trauma during an incident. Recognizing warning signs and providing assistance will help to reduce the overall impact of an incident.

D. How to Use this Toolkit

1. The “All Hazards” School Safety Planning Toolkit is presented in such a manner as to allow each school district and building within that district to meet specific local needs. Each section of the Toolkit will walk the team that develops the plan through the various topics that need to be addressed in an effective School Safety Plan.
2. Each section includes an explanation of the items that should be included in that area of the plan, examples to explain the item further, and a resource section that includes key planning terms, authorities and references, websites of interest, list of recommended reading materials, and sample documents. The sample documents are policies and procedures, forms, and other items gathered from across the nation that the “All Hazards” School Safety Planning Toolkit development committee considered “best practices”.
3. This Toolkit represents an effort to bring together elements of emergency management for natural and human-caused (accidental or intentional) incidents, interpersonal violence, threats to self or others and any other type of incident that may affect the school districts/schools in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.