

Michigan State Police Office of School Safety



Emergency Preparedness for School Events

TOOLKIT



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School Safety Toolkit Project Funding

This project is supported by Michigan’s FY19 STOP School Violence Technology and Threat Assessment Solutions for Safer Schools Program # 2019-YS-BX-0084, awarded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ), and administered by the Michigan State Police (MSP). Points of view or opinions contained within this document do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the DOJ or the MSP.

This resource was developed in partnership with the Michigan School Safety Initiative, housed at the University of Michigan Institute for Firearm Injury Prevention, and informed by the subject matter expertise of Katherine Schweit, J.D.



1. Introduction

Schools often host events and activities outside of the regular school day. These activities require additional planning considerations within a school's Emergency Operations Plans (EOPs), because they have different audiences, settings, and operational risks. This toolkit highlights key considerations and potential action steps to help plan for emergencies at various school events.

1.1 Defining “Emergency Event Planning”

This toolkit uses the term emergency event planning throughout. Emergency event planning refers to the emergency preparedness efforts for all non-routine school activities, including those occurring before or after school hours and off-campus. These events fall under the broader umbrella of emergency preparedness and should be included in the school's EOP.



- School-sponsored before and after-hours events, such as theater productions or sporting events.
- Non-school-related events held on school property, such as community gatherings, field rentals, or religious services.
- Off-campus activities, such as field trips or away sporting or performing arts events.



1.2 How Emergency Event Planning Differs from Standard Emergency Operations

EOPs should take an all-hazards approach that considers both routine, day-to-day operations and planning for events that have more unique requirements. A section of a school's EOP should include the basic process of emergency event planning, recognizing that distinct events will have different needs. For these distinct events, an additional event safety plan may be useful.

Determining whether you need a distinct event safety plan begins with a simple question: “Is this activity already covered in our EOP?” If not, then a supplemental event-specific safety plan is likely necessary.

View the [Michigan State Police Office of School Safety All-Hazards Emergency Operations Planning Guidance](#) for complete guidance on creating and implementing school emergency operations plans.



After-hours events often involve activities outside the typical school day and involve participants unfamiliar with the school's emergency protocols, such as:

- Parents.
- Visiting students.
- Substitute teachers.
- Volunteer chaperones.
- Coaches.
- External vendors or renters.



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2. Planning Considerations

2.1 Questions to Ask When Safety Planning for Events

Question	Why it is Important	Actions You Can Take
Is the event indoors or outdoors?	Indoor events typically accommodate smaller audiences due to space constraints, while outdoor events can vary significantly in size. Outdoor events, such as football games, also require consideration of a larger area during planning.	Make sure to account for people who may have parked offsite or who may remain in the parking lot during the event.
What is the estimated crowd size?	Plan staffing and volunteer needs based on the expected number of attendees. Ticketed events typically have a more predictable crowd size and flow, making scheduling easier.	For events that allow walk-in attendance, consider who can predict crowd size. For example, volunteers who sell concessions or manage parking may be helpful when estimating attendance.
Is the event during the day or at night?	As night falls, attendees may feel less safe leaving the premises and walking back to their cars, as parking lots can pose a higher risk in the dark.	Have adequate staff to monitor areas such as parking lots. Make sure they wear reflective vests or clothing. Consider having backup floodlights and flashlights on hand. You might also enlist a few volunteers to park strategically and use their headlights to help guide attendees out safely. Plan a safe area for people waiting to be picked up from the event.

Question	Why it is Important	Actions You Can Take
Will people be coming and going throughout, or staying for the full duration of the event?	Events such as school carnivals often have people coming and going throughout the day, while those like student performances are less fluid, with people arriving and leaving at roughly the same time.	Ensure plans are in place to manage traffic at entrances and exits. For more fluid events, consider having personnel stationed at key points for the duration of the event to report and manage problems.
Are there other events happening at the same time?	When multiple events overlap, planning should include identifying other events that might be affected if an emergency occurs. For example, a gymnastics competition may be happening indoors while a baseball game is happening simultaneously nearby. If an emergency occurs at the gymnastics meet, it may be necessary to alert those attending the baseball game about the incident.	Each event should designate an event emergency team that operates in coordination with the responding law enforcement. When multiple events co-occur, some of the team roles may overlap, making prior coordination particularly important.
What is the expected weather for the event?	In inclement weather, it is important to provide a safe indoor area where people can wait during an emergency. Some attendees may have been dropped off by parents and will need a place to wait for a ride.	Students may be able to relocate to another area within the building while they wait, but they will need at least two adult supervisors. Alternatively, buses may be used to provide a warm, temporary shelter or to transport students to another location.



During a winter basketball game, a fire breaks out at the high school. The event's emergency lead activates the response plan by turning on the buses for warmth. Students are directed to board the buses, where they wait until everyone is accounted for, emergency responders have cleared the scene, and it is safe for students to either drive home or remain on the bus until they are picked up.

2.2 Off-Campus Events

Events that occur off-site require some additional considerations. These considerations include:

- Ensuring all participants are accounted for from the moment they board transportation until they are safely returned to their designated drop-off locations.
- Maintaining clear and consistent communication with families and school administrators.
- Assigning on-site personnel who can provide information about delays or emergencies and coordinate the appropriate response.

Media and Public Communication for Off-Site Incidents

If an off-site emergency draws media attention, schools must be prepared to:

- Promptly notify families and caregivers about the status and safety of all students.
- Coordinate all public messaging with designated communication leads.
- Avoid disclosing personally identifiable information (PII) such as names, ages, or grade levels without authorization.
- Anticipate media presence at the school, where concerned parents may be awaiting their child's return.



A high school tennis team was returning from a game located an hour away when their bus was involved in a minor accident.

Coach Jones promptly calls the athletic director, informing him of the accident and the expected delay in the team's return. The athletic director then uses the school's communication app to inform families and caregivers, assuring them that all students are unharmed, despite the delay.

The next morning, the high school sends an email to the entire school community, confirming that although there was a bus accident, all students were unharmed and made it home safely.

3. Roles, Responsibilities, and Components of Event Emergency Planning

3.1 Roles and Responsibilities

A best practice for a school’s EOP is to clearly define key incident command roles. Those roles extend beyond the regular school day and should be designated for before and after-school activities, as well as off-campus events. Keep in mind that the individuals assigned to these roles during normal school hours may not be present at special events. To address this, plan ahead to ensure all critical roles are covered and that designated personnel have access to the necessary resources.



Role	Responsibilities
Event Manager	Oversees general event logistics and coordination. This person should have a strong understanding of the event location, who is attending, and the schedule of activities.
Emergency Lead	Directs all emergency response efforts; to preserve role clarity, this position should be separate from the event manager. The emergency lead should be well-versed in school/district emergency procedures and protocols.
Support Staff	Retrieve emergency equipment, unlock doors, and administer CPR as needed.
Volunteers	Call 911, guide emergency responders, clear pathways, and help direct people to designated shelter or evacuation locations.

Remember, no planning should involve a single point of failure. Distributing responsibilities and establishing backups helps ensure things run smoothly if someone becomes unavailable. For example, if the school athletic director typically has keys to the Automatic External Defibrillator (AED) but will not be present for a band concert, make sure someone on the event’s emergency response team is provided the keys in case of emergency. Consider keeping additional copies of keys to important locations and equipment in secure but accessible locations throughout the school.

Teams should also identify who will be responsible for post-incident documentation.

Consider providing [Community Emergency Response Teams \(CERT\) training](#), offered by FEMA, to volunteers, community members, and teens.



During a high school basketball game, an attendee suffered a heart attack. The athletic director, serving as the event manager, continued managing the event, while an assistant coach serving as the emergency lead called 911 and coordinated emergency services. Volunteers working the concession stand, who had been briefed on emergency roles ahead of time, retrieved the AED and cleared a pathway for emergency responders.

3.2 Pre-Event Checklist

Before the event, administrators should complete a pre-event checklist to gather essential information. This checklist should be kept with the EOP to be used as a template and include:

- ☐ Names and roles of key personnel (e.g., primary and secondary event managers, primary and secondary emergency leads).
- ☐ Estimated attendance.
- ☐ Planned activities.
- ☐ Specific rooms or locations that will be used.
- ☐ Communication methods for key personnel.
- ☐ Communication methods for attendees and/or their families.

In addition, administrators should create a simple safety packet for event managers that includes:

- ☐ Contact information for relevant district personnel.
- ☐ Event address.
- ☐ Facility evacuation routes.
- ☐ A communication plan and school/district media contact.
- ☐ Locations of phones, radios, first aid stations, AEDs, fire extinguishers, and other emergency supplies.

Appendix A provides a template for creating this checklist.

A best practice for the school EOP is to develop a quick-reference guide for classroom use that includes much of this information. Providing this quick guide to group leaders will

also create efficiencies and coordination for communicating key information. For a template Emergency Operations Plan Classroom Quick Guide, visit the [Michigan State Police EOP Suite of Resources](#).

Event safety planning should follow [FEMA's six-step framework](#) and be adapted to reflect the unique risks and characteristics of each event (e.g., off-campus vs. on-campus, large-scale vs. small-scale gatherings).

3.3 Pre-Event Team Setup and Briefings

Start planning early. Work backwards from the event date to finalize safety protocols at least one month in advance or earlier, depending on the event's scale. Share your plans with relevant groups, including:

- School board representatives.
- Emergency responders.
- School staff (e.g., custodians, bus drivers, coaches, band directors).



Before the event, conduct a short safety briefing with all staff and volunteers. Briefings should cover:

- Event location and duration.
- Expected weather conditions and contingency plans.
- Definition of an emergency.
- Who is responsible for initiating emergency protocols, and how to reach them.
- Who will provide internal updates during an emergency.
- Who will contact the emergency responders.
- Introduction to on-site law enforcement or security personnel, if present.

All team members should be given setup materials, including:

- Name tags or lanyards clearly indicating their roles (e.g., Staff, Volunteer).
- An emergency contact card with relevant phone numbers. To protect personal information, be sure to collect cards after the event.

When hosting events with other school districts, ensure emergency plans are shared in advance.



Anytown High School regularly competes with Everywhere High School in sports. At the beginning of the school year, Anytown requests emergency plans for various sporting events from Everywhere High. These plans are kept on file so that Anytown has the correct contact information and procedures in place.

Emergency Responders

Emergency responders should be provided with:

- Facility maps.
- The specific event location.
- Contact information for the person in charge of the event.

3.4 Adapting Crisis Communication Plans

Much of a school's crisis communication infrastructure is designed for incidents occurring during the regular school day. However, special events can present new challenges. When preparing for any event, consider whether the following steps should be incorporated into your crisis communication strategy:

- Designate a point person to manage incoming calls and media inquiries in real-time.
- Share a simple “who-to-call” sheet with event managers.
- Prepare template messages for rapid communication with parents and caregivers.
- Reinforce that no PII should be released during a crisis.

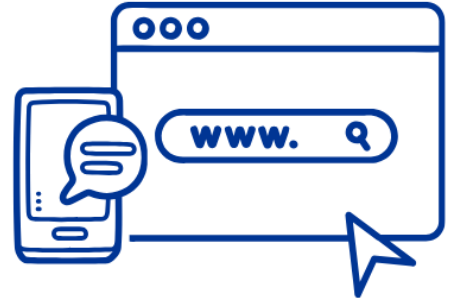


Prepare Emergency Messaging

Consider in advance what platforms you'll use to communicate in an emergency. Preparing scripts ahead of time helps ensure accurate, timely messaging. If the event includes announcers, provide them with approved scripts in advance, along with clear guidance on who has the authority to initiate emergency announcements.

In addition to live announcements, you may also use:

- Social media.
- School communication apps.
- The school or district website.



These channels can help keep families and caregivers informed throughout the emergency.

Creating a dedicated webpage for emergency planning can help your school community know exactly where to find reliable information. Consider including:

- Evacuation procedures.
- Reunification sites.
- Key contact information.
- Emergency communication plans.



3.5 Training and Drills

Volunteer Training

All volunteers should receive brief, event-specific safety training. These trainings should:

- Clarify their assigned roles (e.g., retrieving emergency equipment, directing attendees to exits, assisting with evacuation, or managing the parking lot).
- Include visual aids such as maps of exits and locations of emergency equipment.

Not all volunteers may be able to attend a pre-event training. Much of this information can be shared in the five-minute safety briefings mentioned earlier. Additionally, consider providing simple visual guides that can be emailed ahead of time or handed out on the day of the event.

Tabletop Exercises

Tabletop exercises are a useful way to help school staff and emergency response team members prepare for different scenarios, like power outages or medical emergencies in a crowd. These exercises should reflect both on-campus and off-campus situations. For example, you may run a tabletop exercise involving a medical emergency during a field trip to a local zoo.

Drills

While tabletop exercises help build shared understanding, hands-on practice is equally important. Emergency drills help ensure that all school community members are prepared to respond effectively in emergencies.

Under [Public Act 12 of 2014: Emergency Drills and Reporting](#), Michigan schools are required to conduct several types of drills, including:

- Fire.
- Tornado.
- Safety and security (e.g., Lockdown, shelter-in-place drills).



At least one safety and security drill must take place when students are present but not in classrooms. Drills conducted outside of regular class hours, such as during dismissal or lunch, can provide valuable insight for improving emergency preparedness and event planning. Consider running additional drills during common before- or after-school events, such as fall sports practices, to help staff and students become more familiar with emergency procedures in a variety of scenarios. Refer to the [MSP All-Hazards Emergency Operations Planning Guidance](#) for more information about conducting drills.

3.6 Day-of-Event Actions

If possible, make an announcement at the start of the event to inform attendees of emergency procedures. For example:

“In case of emergency, follow volunteers wearing red lanyards to Exit X.”

Evacuation Routes

Post evacuation routes and shelter-in-place procedures in high-traffic areas. While this information can also be shared digitally, such as on the school website, printed versions should be clearly visible for quick reference during an emergency.

During an emergency, ensure instructions are simple and direct. For example:

“Your role is to hold this gate open during the evacuation.”

3.7 Post-Event Debrief

Following any incident or emergency, it is essential to conduct a structured post-event debrief with staff and emergency personnel. The purpose is to evaluate the response, identify strengths, and uncover areas for improvement.

Document any emerging issues, procedural gaps, or communication delays that occurred during the event. Use these insights to revise and enhance response protocols and EOPs, ensuring continuous improvement based on experience.



Sample After-Action Review Meeting Agenda:

- Welcome, Introduction, and Purpose for the Review.
 - Set the stage and explain the objectives of the debrief session.
- Ground Rules and Facilitator Role.
 - Establish a respectful, solution-focused environment. Clarify the facilitator's role as a neutral guide.
- What was the Intended Plan?
 - Review the original objectives, procedures, and expectations.
- What Actually Happened?
 - Provide a factual, chronological overview of events.
- What Went Well, and Why?
 - Identify successes and contributing factors.
- What Can be Improved, and How?
 - Discuss shortcomings and explore actionable solutions.
- Responsibility for Future Improvements?
 - Assign follow-up tasks and designate individuals or teams to revise plans or protocols.
- The Way Forward: Closing Comments and Next Steps.
 - Summarize key takeaways and outline the timeline for completing the after-action report and implementing changes.

4. Communication and Information Sharing

Clear, proactive communication is central to ensuring safety during special events. Whether the event is held on or off campus, the goal is to make sure staff, volunteers, participants, and caregivers understand how to respond in an emergency and receive timely, accurate updates.

4.1 Coordination with External Partners

Advance coordination with external agencies is essential for an effective emergency response. These might include any organization using the school facilities, law enforcement, or emergency responders.

- Share your emergency plans in advance to align expectations and response strategies.
- Request copies of safety plans from any external groups using your facilities.

4.2 Off-Campus Events

Communication with Families and Caregivers

Share logistics and safety plans for off-campus events in multiple languages to ensure accessibility for all families and caregivers. Use visual aids to support non-readers or individuals with limited English proficiency. Provide families with:

- Event name, date, and address.
- Emergency contact numbers.
- Parking maps and access routes.



Before the off-campus event, send home a half-sheet handout with all key information so caregivers have a clear, physical copy on hand.

Staff and Volunteers

Conduct a pre-event safety briefing for all staff and volunteers attending off-campus events. This briefing should cover:

- Their specific roles and responsibilities during an emergency.
- Communication and notification procedures.
- Reunification logistics and designated locations.



4.3 Student Role in Communication

Students' roles in emergency communication should be age-appropriate.



- For elementary-age children, schools should handle all emergency communication directly with caregivers.
- Middle and high school students can be guided to text or call their caregivers with updates as appropriate, while staff maintain formal communication channels.

5. Conclusion

Safety planning for school events isn't just about having procedures in place; it's about staying flexible and prepared to adapt when situations change. By anticipating challenges, assigning clear roles, and ensuring everyone understands how to respond, schools can create safer environments for students, families, and staff.

Effective communication, both before and during an event, is key to smooth operations and a coordinated emergency response. With preparation and adaptability, schools are better equipped to protect everyone involved, no matter what arises.

To prepare for your next event, refer to the **Event Emergency Planning Form** in **Appendix B**.

- Visit the [Michigan State Police EOP Suite of Resources](#) for comprehensive emergency planning tools.
- Use [Yale University's Special Event Emergency Planning form](#) as a useful template to prepare for each event.



Appendix A: Safety Packet for Volunteers

Instructions

Use this checklist to ensure all essential information is communicated to volunteers before the event. Space is provided to fill in key contact details and locations as needed.

☐ **Event**

address: _____

☐ **Key Contacts (school/district personnel, event manager, emergency manager, media contact point):**

Name	Role	Contact Information

☐ **Key Locations:**

Evacuation/Reunification Site	
Shelter in Place Locations	
First Aid Stations	
Fire Extinguishers	
Automated External Defibrillators (AEDs)	
Radios or Phones	

☐ **Facility maps and evacuation routes are attached to this documentation.**

☐ **A communication plan is included.**

Appendix B: Event Emergency Planning Form

Instructions

Complete this form before each event to document your emergency response team, communication strategies, and key safety plans.

Basic Information

This section will cover key information about your event.

Event Name:	
Event Location:	
Event Date:	
Event Time:	
Expected # of Attendees:	
Attendance Flow (will attendees stay for the duration, or come and go throughout the event?):	
Plan Developer:	
Date Prepared:	

Event Emergency Team

Use this section to document your event's emergency response team. There is space to add volunteer roles and contact information below.

Role	Person(s) Responsible	Contact Information
Event manager:		
Event emergency lead:		
Support staff:		
Additional volunteers:		

Key Locations

Identify your designated evacuation/reunification site(s) below:

Communication

Who should be informed of this plan? List their names/roles in the space below:

Who must be notified of an emergency at your event? Provide names and contact information below:

Name	Contact Information

What communication platform(s) will be used to notify attendees or the public in an emergency (e.g., PA system, text alert, website, handheld radios)?

Draft Messaging

Provide sample emergency messages that can be quickly adapted during an emergency. Consider different types of emergencies (e.g., weather, medical, evacuation).

Additional Notes