



National Center on Safe Supportive  
Learning Environments  
Engagement • Safety • Environment



## - Lessons from the Field -

# High-Quality Emergency Operations Plans Build School Emergency Preparedness Capacity

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*Transcript*

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**Cindy Carraway-Wilson:** Good afternoon. Welcome to today's webinar, High-Quality Emergency Operations Plans Build School Emergency Preparedness Capacity. On behalf of the United States Department of Education, we're so pleased to have you with us today. And in fact, over 800 people have registered for the webinar from every state in the U.S., Washington D.C., four additional U.S. territories and three other countries. We expect more people to be logging on shortly.

This webinar is part of our lessons from the field series that highlights the effective tools and techniques and strategies that are employed by everyday practitioners to address the hot topics that are on the top of your minds. You can access the recorded webinars from this series on the webpage via the link that is now being shared in the chat box.

We are all stronger together when we share our effective strategies across schools and districts in our country. So we hope that you continue to share your best practices by going to the Best Practices Clearinghouse at [ed.gov](https://ed.gov).

Please know that the content of this presentation does not necessarily represent the policies or views of the United States Department of Education, nor does it imply endorsement by the United States Department of Education.

My name is Cindy Carraway-Wilson and I'm so pleased to have you here today. I am a training specialist for the National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments or NCSSLE, and I will open up the webinar today before passing it to our moderator.

NCSSLE is funded by the Office of Safe and Supportive Schools within the Office of the Elementary and Secondary Education. To learn more about NCSSLE we encourage you to visit our website. On this slide you can see a picture of our

current homepage on the right, and on the left some icons demonstrating some of the resources that we have to offer.

We also share our resources and events coming out of the field via social media so please do follow us. Please note that this webinar is being recorded and all materials that you see today, including the slides, the referenced resources, and the recorded archive of the webinar will be available on the event webpage within this website. And in fact, the slides and speaker bios are already posted on this site if you'd like to download the slides to follow along.

Please also note that you can access those previous webinars from this series and also other lessons from the field sessions by visiting that webinar series homepage also listed here and post it in the chat.

We're excited to be partnering also with the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Safe and Supportive Schools TA Center, the Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools Technical Assistance Center commonly referred to as REMS TA Center. We are working together to create this webinar and they have a variety of resources on their website to help build the preparedness capacity including prevention, protection, mitigation, response and recovery efforts of schools, school districts and institutions of higher education with their community partners at this local, state and federal levels.

The REMS TA Center offers free technical assistance, asynchronous and synchronous trainings, publications and guidance documents as well as topic-specific resources, interactive tools all designed to support schools and school districts and these institutions of higher education in their efforts to collaborate with community partners as they work to develop and maintain high-quality emergency operations plans.

So please do visit their website at [rems.ed.gov](https://rems.ed.gov) and follow them on social media at REMS TA Center to get ongoing updated information on the resources, trainings and tools that they offer and release to the field.

In today's webinar we're following our standard practice of beginning with our introduction and logistics. In just a moment you'll hear the welcome from the U.S. Department of Ed and then we'll move into content which includes the context-setting presentation and the panel discussion.

We will do some brief closing remarks and then end the webinar on a live Q&A. So please do remember to click that Q&A button to register your questions so that we may pull them in at the end.

Now it's my pleasure to introduce Ms. Carlette KyserPegram, the Education Program Specialist in the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education at the Office of Safe and Supportive Schools. She is also the lead for the Climate Transformation Group at the U.S. Department of Education. Carlette?

**Carlette KyserPegram:** Thank you, Cindy and thank you all for joining us today. On behalf of the U.S. Department of Education, I am pleased to welcome you to our latest lessons from the field webinar, which we have titled High-Quality Emergency Operations Plans Build School Emergency Preparedness Capacity.

This is the second webinar in our miniseries dedicated to preventing and addressing school violence, including gun violence. The premise of the miniseries is simply this. In order to promote school safety we need to ensure that all schools are safe, positive, supportive learning environments where students feel a sense of belonging and receive the support they need to fully engage in school every step of the way.

The webinars in this series focus on evidence-based and promising practices to prevent, prepare, respond, and recover from incidents of school violence. According to the results from a new Pew Research Center survey, 59% of K-12 teachers say they are at least somewhat worried about the possibility of a shooting happening at their school.

This is not surprising given that there were 82 school shootings in the U.S. on K-12 and college campuses in 2023. And so far in 2024 there have been 14 on K-12 sites. Additionally, nearly one in four teachers experienced school lockdowns at least once in the 2022-2023 school year.

This study's data also showed that 39% of surveyed teachers said their school did a fair to poor job in providing training and resources they would need to deal with a potential active shooter. Teachers in urban schools particularly felt they were poorly prepared to maintain the safety of their students and themselves. This data highlights the importance of being well-prepared to address any emergency, including incidents of violence.

Well-prepared and practiced emergency operation plans, or EOPs can make a significant difference in emergency response and can save lives. So today's webinar will provide techniques and strategies on developing and enhancing robust EOPs that address school violence, including gun violence.

The speakers and panelists will discuss how to collaborate with a variety of school personnel and community partners to ensure that the EOPs meet the needs of students and staff during emergencies. They will also discuss how to conduct trauma-informed drills and exercises to ensure everyone in the school understands the EOP and can implement it effectively.

As we proceed with today's webinar we are confident that you will hear valuable information and strategies that you'll be able to use in your schools and districts. So again I say to you, thank you for joining us today and especially thank you for your efforts in creating safer environments in your schools and communities. At this point, Cindy, I'll pass it back to you to introduce our context-setting speakers.

**Cindy Carraway-Wilson:** Thank you so much, Carlette for that welcome. I appreciate your being present here today and welcoming us in, and of course for the ongoing support that the Department of Education is providing for this webinar series.

Now it's my pleasure to introduce our co-host for this event and a member of our planning team, Ms. Janelle Hughes, who's the Project Director for the Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools Technical Assistance Center, the REMS TA Center as it's known.

Janelle will provide a context-setting presentation and then she will moderate the panel discussion. Janelle?

**Janelle Hughes:** Thank you so much, Cindy and thank you so much, Carlette for sharing some of the latest data on school safety and emergency preparedness and some of the feedback that have been received from staff and students.

This topic is truly near and dear to my heart and is really at the heart of the work that we do here at the REMS TA Center. So we're just grateful to partner again with NCSSE on this important webinar that highlights the important topic of preventing and addressing gun violence in the school setting and also highlighting the importance of using school EOPs as a tool to help with gun violence preparedness.

We'll spend time today, again talking about really using a collaborative and cyclical preparedness process to create school EOPs that address gun violence. So we're all here today as a part of this second webinar in our series to talk about preparedness, but how can we define preparedness?

The National Preparedness System describes the nation's approach to preparedness and defines preparedness around five mission areas as you see on the screen. And as we explore preparedness in the context of gun violence, it's really important to consider how work around each of these mission areas can help strengthen the emergency preparedness capacity of not just the school and the school district, but the entire school community.

So let's define some of these mission areas a bit. Prevention is really looking at the capabilities necessary to avoid, deter, or stop an imminent crime or threaten or an actual mass casualty incident. Mitigation means the capabilities to eliminate or reduce loss of life and property damage by lessening the impact of an emergency such as a gun violence incident. And protection is really looking at those capabilities to secure schools against acts of violence.

In our upcoming webinars we'll also take a look at the final two mission areas, response and recovery. I use the phrase final two mission areas loosely because as you see illustrated, preparedness is truly a cyclical and continual process. It doesn't stop when recovery ends. Recovery efforts feed right back into prevention efforts and the preparedness cycle continues.

Carlette shared some stats earlier. I wanted to just highlight a few additional statistics from the school survey on crime and safety that is conducted by the Department's National Center on Education Statistics and really collects data on school safety and security practices. Many of you attending today may be familiar with it.

It really looks to survey public school principles on their existing safety and security measures as well as whether they have any written procedures for responding to specific types of threats and hazards and whether they are conducting emergency drills for students around those specific types of threats and hazards.

Research from the latest survey shows that more than 90% of public schools had a written plan in the event of the types of hazards and threats that you see listed on the screen. I do want to note here that the percentages were higher in looking at 2019 and 2020 in comparison to 2009 and 2010 for active shooter-related EOPs specifically. So that's a shift from 84 to 96% of schools over a 10-year period.

And again, Carlette outlined some additional statistics on the prevalence of lockdown and other types of exercises and drills that really hone in on how schools can prepare for incidents of gun violence. So whether rural, urban or suburban, public or private, gun violence has hit every type of school in our country.

All schools must work together with their community partners to be prepared and plan for gun violence within their emergency operations plans. And a gun violence annex or section of an EOP will really help schools again build that preparedness capacity as Carlette mentioned, to manage the before, during and after aspects of an incident of gun violence.

So what is the school EOP? I like to say that it can be considered a school emergency's preparedness playbook. It outlines those goals, courses of action and objectives for all key stakeholders in the event of a variety of emergency types.

And EOPs are not one-size-fits-all documents. They are not templates. They are living and breathing tools that should be customized based on the unique needs and vulnerabilities of each school and school community. Also, again based on a variety of threats and hazards including gun violence.

The guide for developing high-quality EOPs which was developed by six federal agencies outlines key principles for developing and maintaining comprehensive and high-quality school emergency operations plans. I just want to walk quickly through those principles here because we will be really covering each of these principles within our panel discussion in a moment.

So the first one is really making sure that planning is supported by leadership and this translates into district-level prioritization of resources, allocation of

time, budget, staff and integration of district and/or state visions, policies and practices.

Effective planning is also built around comprehensive ongoing assessments of the school community. Data gathered through assessments are used to customize plans to the building level again, taking into consideration those unique circumstances and resources at that school level.

We talked about the importance of including a wide range of threats and hazards and looking at the before, during, and after aspects of an incident. And we also talked about making sure that they account for the needs of the whole school community. So are there students, staff, families and visitors who have mobility issues or disability that may impact the way that they receive and process information? Do they represent different racial and ethnic and cultural and religious backgrounds that require considerations on particular safety practices? Will they require medical assistance? How will you ensure the safety of your school community and really consider those unique needs in the event of an active shooter situation?

School EOPs must also account for incidents that not only occurred during the school day and within a school building, but really thinking about all settings and times. So outside activities, before school, during the afterschool drop-off and pickup period, outside of the school day, field trips, et cetera. We can never predict when and where an emergency will take place. So it's important that EOPs consider all settings at all times.

Then I think one of the most important planning principles is that creating and revising a school EOP must be done using a collaborative process. I do want to take again, a moment to highlight that last planning principle. It's so important that, that collaborative process includes multiple perspectives, and the most comprehensive and effective school EOPs are truly developed by a multidisciplinary planning team.

In no instance should the EOP be produced in isolation. Today's modern schools are too diverse and complex for one or two people to represent the needs of all stakeholders. So buy-in from multiple teams and individuals really can help ensure that all concerns are addressed. We've provided a sample right here on the screen of who might be included in a multidisciplinary planning team.

Again, this is going to vary from school to school and district to district. But as you reflect with your team following this webinar, I encourage you to explore who else in your school building you should invite to your next planning meeting.

Remember that in many cases there may not be a need to reinvent the wheel. More than likely there are already individuals in your school community who are a part of planning efforts and will have specialized skills and psychological first aid, et cetera that can support the planning process around gun violence

incidents. Consider what new and fresh faces and perspectives may be needed to look at your EOPs through another lens.

I'd like to take a moment and just ask everyone to raise your hand using the Zoom feature if you include students in your efforts to plan for emergency incidents. You will notice that they exist on this screen in a category on their own and that's intentional.

Students can truly be some of the best resources of information and insight as schools explore how they can improve processes in collaboration with their community partners. We'll hear from one student safety advocate in a moment on why it's important to integrate students into those efforts and we're so happy to have her here today.

Schools and school districts do not have to work in isolation as they prepare for gun violence incidents. Support is also available outside of the school building and it's important to reach out and develop those relationships. We've listed again some of the local, state and school community partners that schools should consider calling on as gun violence annexes and EOPs are developed. Again, I want to highlight parents, families, and guardians as additional important partners to include in the conversation.

Our panelist will share some of the strategies that they use to collaborate with community partners as EOPs are developed and enhanced. It's really important to make sure that these relationships exist before an incident takes place. And memoranda of understanding and agreements with those community partners that you designate can really help ensure that everyone is aware of their role and the actions that they'll need to take during each phase of active shooter incident.

So you've established your collaborative planning team. After that it's really a great time to take a step back and work together to really understand the situation in your unique school community. Assessments are essential preparedness tools to have in your toolbox as you work with community partners and the whole school community to understand again those unique needs, risks, vulnerabilities, climate, capacity of your team as preparedness for incidents of gun violence are explored.

We spent some time discussing threat assessments and culture and climate assessments during our first webinar in this series, which we encourage you to view if you haven't already. But we will take some time today to focus on the other two assessment types that are serving as bookends in this graphic on your screen and that are also critical in preparing for gun violence incidents. So I'm going to start with site assessment, which some people may refer to as a security audit.

The purpose of a site assessment is to really gain an increased understanding of the potential impact of those threats and hazards on the school building ground. Again, those risks and vulnerabilities and really having knowledge of which

facilities are physically accessible to students, staff, parents, volunteer workers, emergency response personnel and really ensuring that you're in compliance with the law around school building safety, and that there are a lot of individuals that you'll want to involve in site assessments.

Again, similar to EOP development, they should not be done in isolation. You can involve facilities managers who can provide that input on accessibility, floor plans, schematic drawings, upcoming and deferred maintenance plans and more. Disability services coordinators will have insight on ADA requirements and accessibility needs. The security director and of course, SROs are going to provide key input on evacuation routes and choke points, access control systems, et cetera.

So as you are walking through your site assessment make sure that you have the right team of people with you. In order to really conduct a comprehensive site assessment for strategic planning we recommend that you follow these steps outlined on this slide. Forming an assessment team and really hosting an initial entrance conference with the administrator to again, discuss those roles, concerns, et cetera. Reviewing documents, policies and procedures. Using those outside assessments, culture and climate assessments as well as insight as you're walking the school buildings and grounds and hearing that feedback from students and staff and parents. Again, and in working with your partners to finalize a report that you can share and that can be used to enhance your courses of action that are outlined within your gun violence annexes.

Site assessments can really go a long way in ensuring that school safety partners are aware of all possible safety vulnerabilities within school buildings and that potential active shooters may take advantage of.

Capacity assessments will be another critical activity to engage in as you determine who is missing from your school planning team. In the context of a gun violence annex, they can help you figure out what capacity gaps exist and how partners again can help fill those preparedness gaps.

The purpose is really to get that increased understanding of the resources available and information about staff capabilities. You may have people already in the building who are skilled in first aid, critical first aid, psychological first aid, mental health support, et cetera. So it's important to identify those capacity needs and identify the staff with those expertise and skills. It's also an opportunity to look at your equipment and your supply inventory in the event that there is a lockdown and making sure that you have the proper supplies, you're clear on the barricades and the traffic routes, how you're going to manage or changed access control. So all of these things will be explored as a part of your capacity assessment effort.

The Gun Violence Annex will capture all of the knowledge gained from those assessments, as well as insight from your community partners and members of the school community and insight from scenario-based planning sessions that you conduct with the planning team. Again, it's going to outline those goals,



objectives, and courses of action for all parties as an incident unfolds. Those goals, objectives, and courses of action will really become the foundation of your Gun Violence Annex, which may also cross-reference additional functional annexes that may need to be activated in the event of an active shooter incident.

As you can see on the screen, we've listed various types. For example, who will manage communications and warning for first responders and other members of the school community when a gun violence risk have been discovered? Are they trained in the required communications systems and tools? Are your communications available in various languages to align with the demographics of your community? What steps should students and teachers take when the school goes under lockdown? Again, referencing that Lockdown Annex, which will outline those details. How will students with mobility issues be evacuated? Who's responsible for accounting for all persons? How will family reunification plans be communicated to those families? So these are all questions that other functional annexes can answer and that you can integrate into your Gun Violence Annex. The goal is to ensure that that annex answers the questions that we've just walked through as well as others, and again, prepares you to outline those specific courses of action for members of the planning, response, and recovery teams.

So the plan is written, and it's handed over to your partners. What's next? The most important part, which is practicing the plan, and everyone involved in the plan needs to know her or his responsibilities before, during, and after an emergency, such as a gun violence incident. We've just provided some recommendations on the screen as you think about practicing your plan, reviewing it at least annually, and holding a meeting with all partners, really giving all of those involved parties the relevant information on the plan and understanding who should get access to what. I'm showing appropriate stakeholders the location of evacuation routes, and sites, and media triage areas, shelter-in-place areas, et cetera, and, of course, training the school community on the skills necessary to fulfill their roles, bringing community partners into those training efforts and into the school to talk about the plan as well, again, as to participate in exercises, and drills, and tabletop exercises, and tabletop and scenario-based planning.

It's really going to serve a critical role in preparing the whole school community. Whether planning an unannounced or an announced drill or practicing the plan with students, staff, or community partners. It's important that we work to ensure that all techniques used are trauma-informed and that lessons learned feed updates to the EOP to keep it alive. We are so excited to talk to some of our panelists today about that in just one moment. I do want to just confirm with everyone that the REMS TA Center, we are here to support you. The U.S. Department of Education and its Office of Safe and Supportive Schools created the REMS TA Center and administers us to help build your preparedness capacity.

We are a resource. We are only an email or a phone call away. If you ever need technical assistance, support, or really aren't sure where to get started with your EOP, please reach out to us, and we are happy to provide support to you. So with that, I do want to segue into our panel discussion for today. I am so happy to introduce our varied panel, which includes Zaria Naqvi, a student school safety advocate from the State of Maryland, Steve McElroy, director of security with Westerville City Schools in Ohio, Carlton Gerald, coordinator for Security and Emergency Operations at Alexandria Public Schools in Virginia, Kimberly Daubenspeck, a school safety director within the Office of School Safety and Transportation within the Tennessee Department of Education, and Krista Curley, director of the Project Prevent mental health grant within McAlester Public Schools in Oklahoma.

If I can have all of my panelists join me, we'll hop right into our discussion now. So we just walked through the importance of collaborating across and outside of the school building to support EOP development, and I'm going to turn my first question to you, Carlton. Why is collaborating with community partners a critical component to addressing gun violence preparedness within the school EOP?

**Carlton Gerald:**

It's a great question, obviously, and hello, all. Thanks, Janelle, for the question. So I can't express enough the importance of schools and school districts partnering with first responders as well as your local office of emergency management with regards to training and crosswalking through what-if scenarios. Collaboration, partnership, and training provide support structures to school-based staff that I think that give them a clear understanding of roles, responsibilities, and response actions, importantly, to recover, or rather to respond to and recover from gun violence in and around schools.

Schools' EOPs or crisis plans, as a best practice, should be all-hazard yet prescriptive to our current topic of gun violence. I'll add, finally, that schools should develop an internal playbook where they receive information and intelligence that a potential act of gun violence or threat is imminent. For example, what is the school-based staff going to do? What is your school or school district's senior leadership action steps? What are the action steps of your law enforcement partners the minutes before, the hours, and the day before said threat is made? So a lot of information there, Janelle. Hopefully, that helps.

**Janelle Hughes:**

Very helpful. Thank you so much, Carlton. Kimberly, I'd like to turn it to you now, and through our work with you as a part of the Grants to States for School Emergency Management Grant Program, we know that the Tennessee Department of Education reviews schools' emergency operations plans annually. Can you speak a little bit about what strengths you've seen within EOPs as it pertains to responding to reports of a firearm on campus? I welcome you to share any gaps, as well.

**Kimberly Daubenspeck:**

Okay. Thank you. So part of our work here at Tennessee, we receive all emergency operations plans across the state from our LEAs and public charter

schools every year. And so we review those on a three-year cycle. We review them against a rubric, and what we find is that they're getting more and more trained. But also, at the same time, there's turnover. So it's like you've got to constantly offer the training to them as that turnover happens.

Some of the things that they have gotten good at are their behavioral threat assessment trainings across the state. And so they've gotten good about those planning features of how they're going to prepare for whenever a student concern comes into the Behavioral Threat Assessment Team and how they're going to manage that threat assessment to keep that student off the pathway to violence. We also have partnerships in the state at our level with the Department of Safety and Homeland Security, where they have actually developed an anonymous reporting app that schools can use called the SafeTN app that can ... Any information can go to any district that comes in through that app.

Some districts use their own apps, and if they do, they have to have how they're going to utilize that app within their emergency operation plan and how they're going to respond. So we're seeing that inside of their plans. The plans that they have also just began this year where they have to be on our template, our state template. And so we were able to make sure that our state template has everything that it needs for a comprehensive emergency operation planning and that it meets all the hazards that they could possibly need to address within their emergency operation planning.

We've gone across the state to districts to provide that training to ensure that they partner with all of their local emergency response first responders, their local EMA, their local law enforcement, their local fire departments, their local 911, all of those other resources that they may have within their community to give an effective response. But communication and building relationships is key to all of that, and you can tell in their emergency operation plans where they've done that. It comes out in those. You can see it when we're doing those reviews.

So what we do after we conduct a review, if we see there's any issues, we'll certainly give that district feedback. We'll even offer to go out and do more training and technical assistance with them if there are any gaps. It's a yearly thing that we do. It's, again, on that three-year cycle, so over the course of three years, we feel like we're addressing every district within the state.

**Janelle Hughes:**

Wow. Thank you so much for sharing that, and at the top of your remarks, you talked about retention. I think that that's such an important part of this conversation and why it's so important to continually review and practice EOPs as staff and students are moving in and out of the school setting. Krista, I'm going to turn things to you now. I know that your district is partnering with school resource officers in the development and maintenance of EOP. What are some of the key lessons learned in that process that you can share with others?

**Krista Curley:**

Partnering with our SROs in the development and maintenance of the emergency operation plans can be very beneficial to us, and some things that I

would like to share with you all that we have learned that can be beneficial to you all, one would be clear communication. Communication is key. It's always best to include your school administrators, staff, SROs, and other stakeholders throughout the planning process. It's very important that everybody understands their roles and responsibilities.

The second thing I would like to mention would be tailored plans. For specific needs and challenges of each school or district, SROs can provide valuable insights into potential threats and appropriate responses. Some things to consider there would be the age level that you are having your drills and your plans with, number of students in the building, the layout of the building and/or the campus, and just the surrounding area. We always pull and use our campus maps when we are looking at revising our plans. So I think it's very, very important, if you have those maps, to pull those in.

The next thing that I would like to mention would be regular training and drills. Everyone needs to be familiarized. All stakeholders need to be familiarized with emergency procedures. SROs can help coordinate and participate to ensure that they are effective. It's important that SROs familiarize themselves with the building, and that's one thing that we have been able to implement, is more SROs in our district. They need to be out in the hallways. They need to be seen. They need to be at events. They need to be out at lunchtime. But that's one thing that we are working really hard on, is building those relationships. They're not only there to protect and serve, but they're also there to help, to offer support, and to let the students know that they are approachable.

The fourth thing that I would like to talk about would be community engagement. Involve parents, students, and the community in the planning process to allow them their input and address their concerns. Along with the input from local authorities, law enforcement, city officials, we've even invited our mayor and our district attorney in to be a part of our meetings. That way, it assesses procedures and that they're set up to maximize protection, safety for our students.

Two more things that I would like to share with you. One would be flexibility and adaptability to your emergency plans. Changing threats and circumstances happen regularly, so be able to review those. Do updates, and have that input from your SROs. Because they're a part of that, and it can help you assure that your plans remain relevant and effective. The last thing that I would like to mention would be the evaluation and feedback. Regularly evaluate the effectiveness of your emergency operation plans through debriefs, surveys, feedback from all stakeholders, including your SROs, the use of information to make improvements and adjustments as needed.

**Janelle Hughes:**

Thank you so much, Krista, and you spoke for a moment about the importance of community engagement and specifically talked about engaging students in that process. I'm so happy, again, to have Zaria from the State of Maryland here to talk a little bit about the importance of engaging students. So Zaria, I'm

hoping that you can tell us about your role as a student safety advocate for the State of Maryland and the types of efforts that you support as a student.

**Zaria Naqvi:**

Yes. Thank you for asking. I'm also very happy to be in this space with you all, and it's an amazing opportunity. So something that the students here in Maryland try to focus on a lot is preventative instead of reactive measures when it comes to gun violence. So that means that we're doing things to prevent the problem from actually taking place rather than scaring the students. So one aspect in that which is important to consider is that when you're taking actions to prevent something from happening when they're not entirely necessary, it can actually be counteractive. So, for example, if you go to a safe school that doesn't necessarily face a lot of threats, or a lot of incidents, or a lot of violence, if you're mandating clear backpacks or requiring metal detectors in your schools, you're actually making the students feel a lot less safe if they're already entering a rather safe space.

However, of course, if you are in a school area that is particularly unsafe or dominated by a lot of violence, it is essential that we have these measures in place to make them feel safer. So it's always important to look at the level of safety your school is currently at and then properly assess what is required for your school. Again, we strongly support preventative measures instead of reactive measures, making sure we can stop the problem before it happens. So that means focusing on bullying prevention, mental health support, peer-to-peer counseling, reflections after active shooter safety drills, and things like that.

**Janelle Hughes:**

Thank you so much for that insight, Zaria, and I hope that all of the school safety leaders who are joining us here today tuned in to what Zaria had to say. I know that she represents, likely, the perspective of students within your school buildings, as well. So we talked, as we started this panel discussion, about developing EOPs, and we talked a little bit about those efforts to practice and refine EOPs, as well.

I want to dive into that a little bit deeper, and I'm going to turn things to you, Steve. I'm hoping you can describe the process that you use for working with community partners to conduct exercises and drills specific to gun violence prevention. And so how often are you conducting exercises? What community partners do you involve? Does it include fire rescue, hospitals, 911, as was mentioned before, and how are you synthesizing any findings from those drills to refine your EOP?

**Steve McElroy:**

Thank you for the question, Janelle, and real quick, thanks, to U.S. Department of Education, REMS TA Center, NCSSLE, et cetera for having this webinar. At my current school district, Westerville City Schools, first of all, we work with four different municipalities. So it's not just one municipality. We work with four, and we have students who live in five different cities, so five different municipalities. So communicating and developing relationships is critical. We also, obviously, have to follow state law, which includes we have to conduct six fire drills, three safety drills, a theoretical drill, tornado drills, et cetera.

So in order to combine all of this to make sure that we're coming up with a collaborative approach for our EOPs, we've created a School Safety Committee, which is really very similar to the planning team that was described earlier. So we have people from our first responders, our building administrators, teacher representatives, parent representatives, et cetera on this committee that helps govern the drills that we're having throughout the year. Also, by state law, we're required to conduct a tabletop exercise, functional exercise, or a full-scale exercise over a three-year period.

So this partnership with our various agencies that sit on this panel or on this committee are able to view these drills, either in person or electronically, and ask questions to make sure people are comfortable with the way the drills are conducted. Now, specific to gun violence, we ask that at the beginning of the year, each school conducts a theoretical drill. So the staff comes together. They're talking about school safety with gun violence as one of the topics. So then, once we conduct our drills, we're constantly focusing on the chance of having gun violence and then honing those drills to make sure that we're comfortable with how they flow.

Then, lastly, once we've conducted those tabletop, full-scale, or functional exercises, we ask each of our schools to list three areas of improvement. Then, that information, we compile to make sure that we're looking back at our drills to ensure that they're meeting the needs of our community, meeting the needs of our schools, and all of our community partners are comfortable with how those drills flow, and we're more comfortable with reducing the chances of violence occurring in our schools.

**Janelle Hughes:**

Thank you so much, Steve. I think having that committee does sound very similar to the core planning team we described, but as you know, it is multidisciplinary in nature. Kim, I'd like to turn things back to you. I'm wondering if you can talk a little bit about how, again, important it is to practice emergency response coordination with all of those different community responders, so police, fire, hospitals, and what best practices can you share with schools on how they can strengthen their notification of local law enforcement and other emergency response partners?

**Kimberly Daubenspeck:**

So we certainly encourage our LEAs and schools to ensure that they don't write these emergency operations plans in isolation, that they actually bring in all of their community first responders, to include local law enforcement, emergency management agencies, 911 centers, local fire departments, it could even be local hospitals and community colleges that are in their area, to help respond. So they need to build those relationships and not wait until an emergency occurs to build those relationships. They need to know who those people are, and I think, like I said earlier, where we have turnover in all of those areas, you need to meet regularly so that you all know where you are and who the people are that are going to respond and what those roles and responsibilities are. And it really does take a lot of training as you have turnover to ensure that everybody knows what their roles and responsibilities and best practices are. Also, best practices can change. I know we've added things to our emergency

operation template over the years, such as swatting, which has been more of an issue lately than it may have been in previous years. So you're going to want to totally be flexible and refine any best practices and trainings that you provide. Also, there's always different communications that come out that could be starting to use those wearable panic alert devices.

They need to make sure they know how those operate and they need to practice with those so that they know how the local law enforcement's going to receive it and then respond to it. We've created also some tabletop exercises to help everyone involved know how each scenario could play out. And with those tabletop exercises, law enforcement's required to participate in those. We also are getting more and more school resource officers and school security officers in our schools. So I think they get training on this type of active shooter response themselves as well. And then they come in and they bring that training into the school. All of that has an impact on the relationships that they're building in the schools to respond to this.

**Janelle Hughes:**

Thank you so much, Kimberly. And you just mentioned active assailant or active shooter drills and exercises, and Carlton, I want to turn things to you now because I know that when we think about active assailant drills and active shooter situations, there can be some concerns about the impacts on students and staff. So can you talk about how does a trauma-informed lens inform your approach to school-wide drills? What factors are you taking into consideration, for instance, in training and staff and in the language and activities used to instruct students? What plans are in place to support students' mental health during and after drills? And how do you walk that line between prevention complacency, while also preserving a trauma-sensitive approach to school-wide drills?

**Carlton Gerald:**

Great question and thanks. Understanding the purpose of safety drills is to practice. We have time, so we definitely want to practice that, but practicing can provide a window to design, educate, and prepare student staff from a trauma-informed lens. Basically, meaning that regarding what they could... Or rather, it gives them the opportunity to have a clear understanding of what they can expect, why the schools conduct drills, as well as an opt-out portion or possibility as well from a high-level safety drill, such as an active threat outside of a traditional evacuation drill.

With regard to mental health and safety drills training before and after, as a best practice, I'm a firm believer that student support teams can be an outstanding and great resource of assistance for language support as well for students, families and safety drills, and more importantly, for the after-action debriefs with school leaders and crisis management teams, whatever your school or school district may call those teams. Again, in my experience, they provide amazing feedback from their perspective as well as having that, or rather preserving that trauma-informed lens. So definitely leaning into student support teams, ensuring that they are there and they are part of those safety drills, but providing that really important feedback to the school leaders in

regards to what they're seeing and hearing in regards to those students that may exhibit some signs or concerning behaviors in regards to these drills.

**Janelle Hughes:**

Thank you, Carlton. I want to turn things to you now, Krista. I'm hoping you can add to this conversation around trauma-informed and developmentally appropriate drills and share some of the strategies that you're using within your school district. Krista? Okay. I think we may have lost Krista, so I'm going to turn things now to you, Zaria. And we know that you recently offered testimonies to the General Assembly in Maryland as House Bill 416 was presented and recently passed around trauma-informed active assailant drills. Can you tell us about that experience and share some of what you shared during that testimony?

**Zaria Naqvi:**

Absolutely. Testifying for this bill was, of course, an amazing experience. It wasn't my first time testifying to the Maryland General Assembly, but it's always a very welcoming space and I was very grateful for the opportunity as well. Something I shared was how there is a severe lack of communication before, during, and after the drills. It's important that we're having instant communication for both the students and the adults in charge and their parents. For years now, I can remember my friends and my peers panicking during a drill because they're not sure whether it's a drill or a legitimate threat to their lives. So it's important that they're constantly aware of what is actually taking place.

I also think it's important that we're not doing anything trauma-inducing or triggering for our students. So fake gun noises or having students pretend that they are in real danger in a more graphic manner can be a lot more trauma-inducing and provoking rather than educational. It's important that we're doing everything in an appropriate manner, in an age-appropriate manner, and we're making sure that we're not putting students in an uncomfortable position doing things that would push them to feel uncomfortable and feel unsafe in that situation as well. I think it's important that we're having frequent drills and we're also having proper communication during these drills so everyone is on the same playing field and everyone is in the loop, but we're also not doing anything unnecessarily abrasive or disheartening.

**Janelle Hughes:**

Thank you so much, Zaria, for everything that you've shared. Again, I'm hoping that all of these school leaders here are kind of taking notes to take back to your school team or your crisis team or your committee, as Steve mentioned. Krista, I'd love to turn it back to you just to see if you have any additional insight you'd like to share on the practices that you used around trauma-informed drills within your district.

**Krista Curley:**

Yes, ensuring that emergency drills and exercises are trauma-informed, developmentally appropriate, and culturally and linguistically sensitive is crucial for creating a safe and supportive environment. A few things I'd like to talk about is, one would be trauma-informed approach to recognize that some students have experienced trauma and design those drills with sensitivity and up to their needs, provide advance notice of the drills, offer options for participation, and ensure supports are available. One thing that we do is all of



our head principals do weekly newsletters and they put those drills out in advance so that everyone knows that those drills are about to happen in the following week. And so that doesn't cause panic so that they're aware. And we also have an opt-out form. So if we're going to have an active shooter drill, we let all of our students know in advance, let them know what's expected of them and what's going to happen so that way it doesn't cause panic and they know, and then the parents and the students have that choice of opting out if needed.

The next thing would be developmentally appropriate, tailor the drills to the age and the development level of the students. Always remember that to use appropriate language and concepts for their attention span. And number three could be cultural and linguistic sensitivity. Take into account the diversity of the student body, provide instructions and materials in multiple languages, and ensure that the drills are culturally sensitive and respectful for diverse beliefs and practices. And you can pull in if you need an interpreter, if you need that, or if you need to, like I said, make sure that you have those in different languages. And then inclusive planning. Involve students, again, parents, community members in planning process to ensure that the drills are inclusive and consider the needs of all individuals. Take into the account the factors including but are not limited to disabilities. And then the training and education. It's important to provide all your faculty, your staff, your administrators or SROs on trauma-informed practices and cultural competence, ensure that everyone is involved in the emergency preparedness and understands how to support students in a sensitive and respectful manner.

We have implemented in our district trauma training and it's called Trauma-Informed training, and we have done that district-wide. It is our bus drivers, our maintenance, our custodians, our child nutrition, of course, all of our teachers and administrators, but we've done it district-wide because everyone in our profession is around students and kids. And that way, they'll be trauma-informed to know if something's going on and they'll know how to help them or report it to someone else. And then it's important for feedback and evaluation. Seek feedback from students, parents, staff after the drills to assess their effectiveness and identify areas of improvement and use that data to make adjustments for future drills.

**Janelle Hughes:**

Thank you so much for sharing that, Krista. And I think it was so important when you noted that trauma-informed training for school bus drivers, facility managers, transportation directors. As you pointed out, all of these individuals are regularly engaging with students. So it's important not just to think about the educators and the administrators, but all school staff as we think about gun violence preparedness. Steve, I'm going to turn it to you first and then to you, Carlson. I'm hoping that you can share a highlight of a time when coordinating exercises with community partners really paid off later in preventing or mitigating a gun violence emergency.

**Steve McElroy:**

Thanks for that question, Janelle. First off, I just have to say, isn't Zaria impressive? I mean, I think we're going to see her at a national level one day just to throw that out there. But in terms of your question, again, we work with five

different municipalities, so communications is critical. What we discuss at multiple levels is our response if a threat of violence occurs before, during, or after school. And these threats of violence, as we know, could be on social media, they can be written, they can be verbal, et cetera. What we try to do, we receive information that a threat of violence has occurred, we immediately contact our first responders. We immediately contact our building administrators and others. And the phenomenal thing here in Westerville and the other municipalities, our law enforcement officers, once we have the correct information, the correct address, will visit the home where that threat may have occurred and have a conversation with the families about what has taken place.

And we've had, like most school districts, I believe, across the nation, those types of threats that may have come via social media, but again, the relationship-based approach that we're able to respond quickly, go to a home, have a face-to-face conversation with a family or families has greatly reduced the chances of violence occurring in our schools, and that's exactly what has happened here. We've had that threat, we visited the home, we've had a conversation, and then we follow up back at the school with the behavior threat assessment. So we're closing that loop and ensuring we're providing any services needed for that individual and obviously, reducing the chance of violence occurring in our school.

**Janelle Hughes:**

Thank you so much, Steve. Carlton, over to you.

**Carlton Gerald:**

Yeah, thanks, Janelle. I really appreciate it. And good seeing you as always, Steve. I would say that before leaving my previous school district, which was a very large school district, that we were fortunate enough to really, really press upon our law enforcement community as well as our emergency management officials that living in the national capital region, we have to be prepared for almost anything. As we continue to see our world change, it is more important that schools need to be extremely, or rather, well-prepared for, as we started with, before, during, and after critical incident. So I would say that more training, training and training is always top of mind, but using that, our team was able to justify support and collaborate high-level functional exercise with the Metropolitan Police Department as well as other jurisdictions in regards to an active threat scenario, as well as leveraging the current technology that we had in regards to emergency notification apps, different technologies within the building infrastructure and all of that.

We were able to crosswalk and rather intersect all of those what-if scenarios based upon an active threat. And really, really what we got out of it is that our law enforcement partners were more clear in regards to what the school districts emergency response protocols are in comparison to other school districts because for some reason, there are law enforcement agencies that think that when and if there is a active threat, that all folks may evacuate. Your protocols may be different. It may be options-based protocols. So they have a better understanding that as that contact team shows up on scene, that they may see people actually in a lockdown protocol as well as people evacuating. I

think that that provides value within itself. That's what we really got out of that, as well as not leaning on technology as much. Technology is great, but at the same time, I think it's also important that we have a backup to the backup to the backup.

We were really able to see that and we were very fortunate that all of these agencies came together to support one of our very large high schools. We were extremely happy and supportive that our local Homeland Security supported that effort from a funding standpoint and really, really putting us all together and tying us in a way, or rather, tethering us together to say, "Okay, these are the resources and the tools that the local Homeland Security can provide when these situations happen."

So again, I would definitely say that I think training, training and training and what-if scenarios, and I would just like to say that just in time that when those school leaders are arriving on campus and everybody has a quick huddle, he, she, or they can speak to what they're seeing and what possible student or staff member may be doing in regards to something that they might need to keep their eye on or an area of concern. Just like Steve said, Virginia is also a mandated threat assessment state as well. So really, really understanding when and if you need to bring that team together to really, really identify any concern and behaviors. Again, you can close that loop, but more importantly, provide support services if need be. I'll leave it at that.

**Janelle Hughes:**

Thank you so much, Carlson. And you talked about the Metropolitan Police Department, the local Homeland Security, and I think it emphasizes that that preparedness support is not only going to come from within the school building or at the district level, it can come from states as well. And with that, Kimberly, I want to turn it back to you because I know you talked a little bit already about some of the supports that the Tennessee Department of Education offers to schools. And I'm hoping you can expand a little bit on that and share what are those technical assistance services that you're offering to districts and schools on creating and adopting procedures for responding to those reports of firearm on campus?

**Kimberly Daubenspeck:**

Thank you. Through the grants to states for emergency management, the GSEM grant that we received, we've been able to partner with not only Safe and Sound Schools to develop trainings and resources for our districts, but also, we have school safety mentors across the state that help build our capacity. And those safety mentors have a background in different, I guess, work environments. We have some that have a background in law enforcement, some that have a background in mental health, some that come from school administration or district administration. So they are able to provide a variety of different resources and trainings and technical assistance across the state. That's really helped us build our capacity.

And some of the trainings that they provide are developing emergency operations plans, reunification training, transportation safety, behavioral threat assessment, PREPARE Postvention for recovery, youth mental health first aid to

notice what any signs and symptoms of a mental health challenge could be, bullying prevention. And then we're also going to be offering, again, our virtual safety summits so that anybody that can't attend in person can attend virtually and watch as needed. We offer feedback from our EOP and drill log reviews, and then we offer training and resources based on what we see. That kind of helps us plan on how we're going to develop any resources and trainings going forward.

**Janelle Hughes:**

Thank you so much. And Krista, I know that you are also really engaging in some school safety and emergency preparedness work through the Project Prevent Grant. So can you a little bit about how that Project Prevent Grant program has impacted your school district's capacity to create safe learning environments focused on preventing incidents free of gun violence. And feel free to also share any gun violence prevention strategies, programs, or approaches your school has developed using this grant funding that has then been integrated into your EOP.

**Krista Curley:**

Okay, thank you. The Project Prevent Grant has been a crucial factor in our efforts, allowing us to use best practices and implementing key factors for extra supports. We've hired additional SROs in our district and we've also hired more licensed mental health professionals and they're all housed in our schools across the district. So it has been awesome. A couple things I'd like to talk about, one would be threat assessment teams. Once again, include your admin, your counselors, your mental health professionals, your SROs on crisis intervention techniques and de-escalate strategies to address potential incidents. We use the multi-tiered systems of support and that's very, very important. And we meet monthly and we look at just different ways to improve that, the multi-tiered systems of support.

The next thing would be crisis intervention training. Establish multidisciplinary teams to assist and address potential threats of violence, including those related to firearms. And anonymous reporting systems, we have implemented that in that those are set in place as a tip line or an online platform to allow students and staff or even community members to report concerns about potential threats of violence, including those related to firearms. And it lets them do this without fear of retaliation. So it's all anonymous and those are sent straight to our head principals so that they can look into and all of that. Next I would like to talk about school climate improvement. It's important to focus on fostering positive school climates and promoting social emotional learning to reduce violence and increase relationships among students and staff. We have a foundations team. We have our leadership teams and our department heads that we include. We have our Safe and Healthy school committee, and we also, one thing that we do is we do school climate surveys and we do those with our students through grades third through 12th. And so those are very beneficial to us.

And then I have two more things. One would be to access to the mental health services, ensure that access to mental health services and support for students who may be at risk of engaging in violent behaviors if they're struggling with

trauma, substance abuse, mental health challenges, it's very important that you have access to your mental health services, and that's where we've added our licensed mental health professionals has been absolutely beneficial to our district.

And then the last thing I'd like to talk about is to collaborate with law enforcement. I've talked about that already, but I'd like to touch on it again. To develop those protocols for responding to incidents of gun violence, active shooter situations, to conduct joint trainings, exercises to ensure a coordinated response and just implement those programs or drills to address those threats with the community response teams in place. And like I said, we have met with our police department, our fire department community members, and have these in place. And we have reunification. We have reunification onsite. The onsite reunification are for incidents like an incoming storm or power failure. Schools consider an onsite reunification. The key concepts include notifying the guardians, confirming transportation needs in reunifying students with their guardians at school. And then we also have an offsite reunification. And an offsite reunification may be necessary for events like a fire, a bomb threat, gas leak, or a violent crisis at school.

This type includes notification, evacuation, transportation, and reunification at your selected reunification site. And this is something that we've worked with others in preparing. And one thing that I want to let everyone know, a lot of districts don't know about this, but our district has implemented an app or a program and it all can be accessed through your phone or a device, and it is to... We initiate our drills through this. The teachers can take attendance so that way when we do have these drills or if it's an emergency situation, they will know who's accounted for and who's not accounted for. It's a great tool for us to have and we really, really use that a lot.

**Janelle Hughes:**

Thank you so much Krista, and thank you to you Carlton, Steve, Kimberly, and Zaria, I'm saving you for last because I really would like to turn this last question in our panel discussion to you. Again, as Steve mentioned, we appreciate you joining. We can already tell that you are a star. You represent the next generation of school safety advocates. So again, thank you for being here. I'd love to hear you share, what are those first steps that you would recommend that school safety leaders take as they work to more actively involve students in emergency preparedness and school safety efforts?

**Zaria Naqvi:**

Yeah, so I think the first thing that we have to start with and the most important thing is just education. So including our education for not just high school students, but also the younger students, elementary schoolers and middle schoolers. It's important to keep in mind the appropriateness and levels of education we're giving, making sure we're using appropriate language. And again, we're not doing anything triggering. Again, we're not attempting to scare the students into safe practices. We're just attempting to make them well-formed so they can make educated decisions in the future and take drills more seriously.

I also think it's important that we recognize that students such as myself, we're just sixteen-year-olds, I'm a sophomore in high school, so we have a heavy workload in school. We have extracurriculars, we have a social life. We have so much going on and so much on our plate that we are not going to be the ones going to you guys saying that we are concerned. So that means it is your guys' responsibility and our responsibility as people already empower to go to the students. A simple way we can do this, that's basically like no fail rate is right after drills. If we're doing polls and we're doing reflections either in the classroom or doing a Google form, that way we can assess the student's thoughts and opinions, how they thought it went for them personally, and then use that and incorporate that into training for SROs in the future, drills in the future, maybe an announcement to the whole school or county, whatever works. And then if there are students who are outside interested in getting involved with this planning, they can maybe form a focus group in your school. It can be in countywide initiative. We have state-wide initiatives here in Maryland, but we also have county and school-wide initiatives.

But it's super crucial that we understand that students will not be the ones to make the move and come to you. So that means you guys, it is your responsibility to come to us and ask us our thoughts and opinions. I think again, the easiest way to do that is social media because us teenagers and even adults too, we are constantly on our devices. We're constantly checking our Instagram, our TikTok, so making sure that we're using social media platforms that both parents and students as well use. And then also having communication in person in schools before, during, and after drills as well, asking students to assess how it went for them.

**Janelle Hughes:** Thank you so much Zaria. Really powerful information shared and we wish you well as you continue on your journey as a student. And as you mentioned, we know that your schedule is busy and we thank you for prioritizing this conversation today. And with that Cindy, I'll turn it back to you.

**Cindy Carraway-Wilson:** Excellent. Thank you everybody. You all provided amazing information. We greatly appreciate that and our panelists and speakers will come back in just a moment. We wanted to review just some of the takeaways we hope you got from the webinar and make sure that you're aware of the upcoming events as well as being able to give us some feedback on this webinar.

So you can see on this slide that our takeaways are focusing primarily around those emergency operations plans, which are essential to school safety, which also need to be created by multidisciplinary teams, including the students whenever possible, and that those plans are reviewed and updated on a regular basis. We also heard quite a bit about the importance of holding drills, but also making sure that the drills are trauma and culturally sensitive in the way in which they are implemented.

And then that last piece was around coordinating with any kind of community partners that are going to support the safety and wellbeing of students before, during, and after an incident. And that includes our law enforcement, it includes

our community-based organizations, our SRO professionals as well. So these are the takeaways that we hope you heard from our speakers today, and we do want to thank everybody for participation. We know that there are lots and lots of questions coming in which we're going to jump into in just a moment.

We want to remind everybody that we have two more webinars in this series coming up. May 8th is going to be focusing in on strategies and approaches for responding to an incident and May 22nd, we'll be focusing in on strategies and techniques for helping schools and students and staff to recover from an incident. Our link for our feedback form is going into the chat now, and we do hope that you take a few after the event to complete this form. We really do use the form to guide our content development. There's also an opportunity in the form to ask any additional questions and all questions go out to the speakers and to the Department of Education.

And without further ado, I'd love to go ahead back into our Q&A area. So if all of our speakers can come back on webcam, that would be wonderful and we'll get through as many as we can get through. We have about 12 minutes to jump into these pieces. So there were a couple questions in the theme of who is responsible for completing and operationalizing the EOPs and incorporating that school safety plan. So that's the first question I'm going to put out to you. When you're thinking about the lead person who might pull together that group of others, who would you suggest that would be in a school? Does anybody want to respond? Carlton, I saw you come off.

**Carlton Gerald:** Yeah, I'd definitely come off. I think, well, in Virginia we have a designee known as the emergency manager, that person who is in responsible charge of the school of school, District's crisis plans or EOPs that he, she or they has a clear understanding of it. They are in responsible charge in regards to editing, updating, sharing that plan with local and first responders and all of those things. But more importantly, have a highly qualified person that knows schools and this particular plan and as well as someone that's going to exercise the plan as well. So definitely have a point person rather than not.

**Cindy Carraway-Wilson:** So having that point person, that point person should know the school, know the plan, and know who's responsible for what. And Steve, I think I just saw you come off. Did you come off of mute for a moment to jump in or no?

**Steve McElroy:** I did real quick because in Ohio we do exactly what Carlton mentioned and we also, based on the state, we have to complete a stakeholder signature page. So each school district has a person who's specifically responsible, like in my school district, it's me, but we filter that through our principles that at the end of the day, our stakeholders have to sign off. That's emergency responders, EMA Fire, our county, EMA, parent representatives, etc. So there may be one person who is the point person, but it's a collaborative approach that everyone signs off and agrees on what that EOP actually says.

**Cindy Carraway-Wilson:** Absolutely. I think that collaboration, from what I heard from all of you and Janelle's presentation is that collaboration is what makes the EOP robust and

effective because you get all those perspectives in. I hear that is important for sure. Another question that's come up, it's come up in a couple of different ways, so I'm pulling together several questions on this theme. What are some best practices to do with the drills, both live drills and trainings about drills for students with disabilities? So some of the specifics that folks have been asking around are students with hearing or visual impairments, physical disabilities or other differences that might make it harder for them to process what's going on? Does anybody want to try to respond to that one?

**Kimberly Daubenspeck:** I was going to say in Tennessee, since we've partnered with Safe and Sound Schools, they have a whole curriculum and program called Especially Safe, and that really helps people to plan for any type of mobility, visual, audio, trauma, language issue that you may have to consider when you're in an emergency. So basically that is a piece of their emergency operation plan and they have to get with their team. And it may be even they're getting with their special ed team or their IDEA team to help develop what those plans are going to be,

**Cindy Carraway-Wilson:** Right, and making sure that everybody knows what students are where in the school. And Janelle, I saw you come off mute. Did you want to join in?

**Janelle Hughes:** Thank you Cindy and thank you so much. Brianna. We just shared via the chat a fact sheet that the REMS TA Center developed on integrating the needs of students with disabilities into school emergency management planning. And I definitely recommend you to download that and check that out. And again, it really covers much of what Kimberly just described. I also wanted to share that we're in the process of finalizing another fact sheet that really looks at the means of students and staff with neurodivergences. So again, really thinking globally and not necessarily about, I think what we traditionally think of when we think of disabilities, not only just mobility issues, but again those neurodivergences as well.

**Cindy Carraway-Wilson:** Absolutely. Because that processing the sight and sound processing can be impacted by neurodivergence as well as a variety of other experiences that they have. And then Carlton, I saw you come off. Did you want to join?

**Carlton Gerald:** Yeah, I just want to add one quick point in regards to safety drills. I always like to say this, what's the rush? What's the rush? There's a reason why we call it practice. Again, we can again set the stage for our trauma-informed lens, right? Some of our physically challenged students and staff as well so that we can get it right. There's a reason why we have unannounced drills and announced drills. So I would just definitely tell our audience to, again, pause, get it right and just go from there. But just set the stage.

**Cindy Carraway-Wilson:** Excellent. That's a great point. I love that you said what's the rush? Because it is practice you, you're not in an emergency at that moment. So being able to set that stage and make sure everyone knows what they're going to do and who's going to help whom in the process. For sure. Thank you so much for that. We also had some questions coming in. Let's see around, oh, I just lost the question. There we go. The capacity assessment. So a couple of people are asking about



the capacity assessments. I think Janelle, I think you spoke about that a little bit and others may have mentioned that as well. Can you give a little bit more detail around what that looks like or how to implement?

**Janelle Hughes:** Sure, I'd be happy to. And to your point, I think, I believe it was Steve or Carlton kind of touched on this a little bit, but the goal of the capacity assessment is to look at your staff resources, your physical resources, and really get an understanding of what skills do you have, what equipment do you have, what tools do you have in place that are going to support you with response and recovery? And again, it's an opportunity to identify those gaps. So you might learn that you don't have enough people in the school building to provide critical first aid in the event that emergency responders aren't able to get into the school building. And so it could be working to train certain staff members and or students, for example, through Team CERT programs to gain those skills. So it's really an opportunity to look at the big picture. What do we have in terms of equipment, tools, technology, staffing skills, and what do we have and how can we work with our community partners to fill those gaps?

**Cindy Carraway-Wilson:** Excellent. Thank you so much. And Steve, you're off mute. Did you want to join into that?

**Steve McElroy:** Just real quick to dovetail on that capacity assessment should really go hand in hand with the threats and hazards as you've identified in your emergency operations plan. So if identified X amount of threats and hazards and you're working through the procedures that you'll follow, those procedures should identify what you need to do and then the assessment would determine what you still need to add to complete that goal. So capacity should definitely parallel your threats and hazards approach. So therefore you identify those gaps and be able to hopefully obtain those needed resources.

**Cindy Carraway-Wilson:** Excellent. Thank you so much for that addition that really makes it... Expands that response to being about a whole bunch of different hazards that might exist within a community. For sure. Thank you. Another question here, here is a couple of folks were wondering about the opt-out, of students opting out of drills. So this is sort of a two-parter. One is what would be some circumstances where a school or a district might allow or why would you allow a student to opt out? And I think we've danced around this a little bit, but I'd like to go in a little bit more detail. Zaria, I saw you come off you and then Carlton, did you want to respond, Zaria.

**Carlton Gerald:** Yeah, I'll definitely defer to Zaria.

**Zaria Naqvi:** Yeah, so I was going to say I believe that if any guardian parent or student expresses concern or the feeling of being uncomfortable to be put in that situation, they should not by any means be required. Whatever their reasoning may be, it could just be they have severe anxiety or they have personal, a personal friend, a personal experience with gun violence, whatever that may be. If because they know themselves well enough to understand that they will not be comfortable in that position, they might understand that they might have an

anxiety attack or a panic attack in that situation. And if they are expressing that concern us as administrators or people in power, we cannot say that's an invalid excuse. No reasoning they give can be an invalid excuse. So if they are coming to us with that concern no matter what, I think we should allow them to opt out.

**Cindy Carraway-Wilson:** So you really highlighted several reasons why a student or family might want to opt out. And as you said, they're all valid because they know themselves and we're trying to teach folks to be able to know their limits and to be able to be within those comfort zones, if you will. Carlton, would you like to add to that?

**Carlton Gerald:** Yeah, I definitely agree to that. Having an option really works because again, you really don't know someone's story, so therefore having that opt-out opportunity is really good. But at the same time, there's also a way to provide awareness training, especially for our elementary staff, even our middle schools and some of our high schoolers in regards to training from teachers. That's just a slide deck that they know that there are safe places here when and if this happens, all of that, they might not need to be a part of the actual drill, but they've gotten information that they know what my school and school district does when these things happen.

**Cindy Carraway-Wilson:** Absolutely. So they're still getting the information that just may not be in that live event, whether it's announced or unannounced. So they still have at least an idea of what they're going to be doing, what their role is and what their choices are within that moment. So that's a great way of, you already answered that second part of that question, so thank you so much for that. And we are almost at time. So how about if we try one more, are there any other resources that anybody can think of that you would say, Hey, there's this resource that I would highly recommend for supporting you in the development of your emergency operations plan? So we already know Janelle gave us a ton of them. Are there any additional resources? Maybe we all just go back to REMS TA Center.

**Janelle Hughes:** Well, I will say, and I believe Brianna will share via the chat that the REMS TA Center has created various EOP interactive tools. One being EOP assist that you can actually use to walk through with your committee crisis planning team, core planning team, whatever you're calling them to walk through and create the plan. And as a result you can get a downloadable plan. We also created our site assess mobile application, which you can use to walk through the school buildings and grounds again to assess the safety and vulnerability. And we also have EOP evaluate, EOP assess, which allow you to really assess and evaluate again your understanding of those emergency management principles. So I encourage you to check out those tools and also contact us if you need training Carlton and Steve who are two of our master trainers. So we will come to your school of how we can train you on EOP development site assessment and variety of the training topics that we offer. So we're here and we are a source of support.

**Cindy Carraway-Wilson:** Excellent. Thank you so much. And we are at time, so I want to thank everybody for all of the amazing information that you have shared and also the passion that you've clearly displayed for maintaining safe supportive learning

environments and helping us to be prepared to events happen at schools. I also want to thank our audience, look at those icons coming up. We appreciate your attention, your questions, your responses, and we hope that we were able to meet your needs. Any questions that we didn't answer, will go out to our panelists and definitely go out to the Department of Education for guidance for future materials and future webinars. And with that, I'd like to say thank you so much. The feedback form link should be back in the chat, so please take a few minutes to complete that and have a wonderful rest of the day.