

School Emergency Preparedness Survey Report:

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Southern California
Injury Prevention
Research Center

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START NATIONAL CONSORTIUM FOR THE
STUDY OF TERRORISM AND RESPONSES TO TERRORISM

This study was funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention through the Southern California Injury Prevention Research Center (#CE000199-01) and by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security through the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) (#N00140510629). The views expressed in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect views of the sponsoring agencies. The authors acknowledge the contributions of A.A. Afifi, J.F. Kraus, J.M. Siegel and T. Franke at UCLA; C. Nichols and J. Mayer of the California Department of Education; W. J. Ybarra of the Los Angeles County Office of Education; and M. Ramirez of the Childrens Hospital of Los Angeles.

A Written Plan is a Good Start, But Only A Start

Megumi Kano and Linda B. Bourque

Data in this report were obtained from 157 public schools located in 34 of the 58 counties in California. The survey was administered by mail between September 2005 and February 2006. The majority (87%) of respondents were school principals, assistant principals, or their secretaries. The statistics are based on unweighted sample frequencies and are not representative of all schools in the State of California.

Between 2002 and 2005, over 60% of the schools experienced emergencies involving:

- Angry parents;
- Animals or insects on campus;
- Power failures;
- Neighborhood crime;
- Campus intruders;
- School violence;
- Weapons on campus;
- Gang activity; and/or
- High winds/storms.

In preparing to manage future school emergencies:

- 87.9% of schools have school-specific disaster plans;
- 88.5% reviewed their plan during the previous school year; and
- 84.1% said their district office maintains a copy of their plan.

- But only 56.1% have plans that are based on the Standardized Emergency Management System (SEMS).¹

Schools do not have enough resources:

- 71.3% have no emergency preparedness coordinator;
- 27.4% have no crisis response team; and
- 22.3% have no funding for emergency preparedness.

On a scale of 1 (Not at all prepared) to 5 (Very well prepared):

- 57.3% rated their school's overall preparedness for handling future emergencies as 4 or 5.
- However, 44.0% rated their school's preparedness to shelter students for 24 hours as 1 or 2.

¹The Standardized Emergency Management System (SEMS) is a protocol that all government agencies in California, including public school districts and schools, are required to use in order to be eligible for government reimbursement of emergency-response related costs (Government Code Section 8607, effective January 1, 1993). SEMS makes it easier for schools to coordinate with police and fire departments and other agencies when there is an emergency. See the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services website (<http://www.oes.ca.gov/>) and click on "SEMS/NIMS" in the sidebar for more information on SEMS and the National Incident Management System (NIMS).

A comprehensive school emergency preparedness strategy should include plan development, education, training, and maintenance of equipment and supplies.

School Disaster Plans

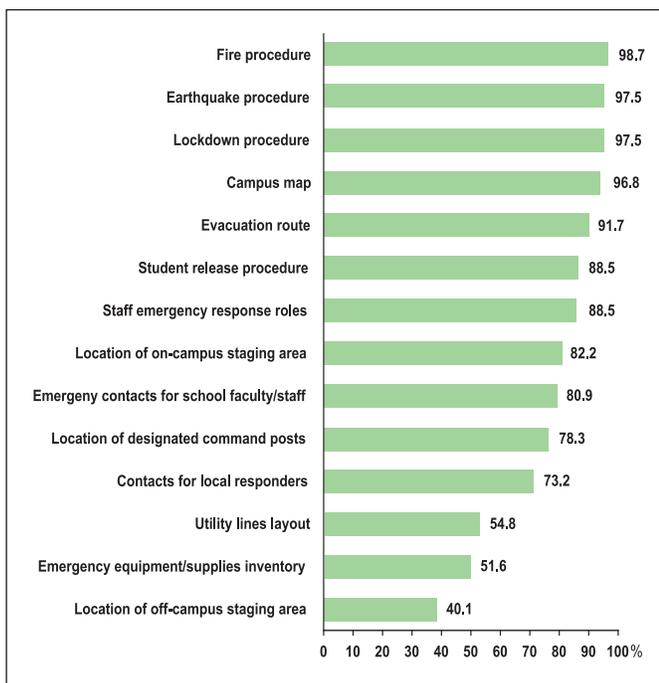
Most surveyed disaster plans included:

- Procedures to be followed in fires, earthquakes, and lockdowns;
- Maps of the school campus and evacuation routes;
- Student release procedures; and
- Emergency response roles of school faculty and staff.

But some information was often missing, including:

- Layout of utility lines and shut-off valves on campus;
- An inventory of emergency equipment and supplies; and
- The location of designated staging areas off campus.

FIGURE 1

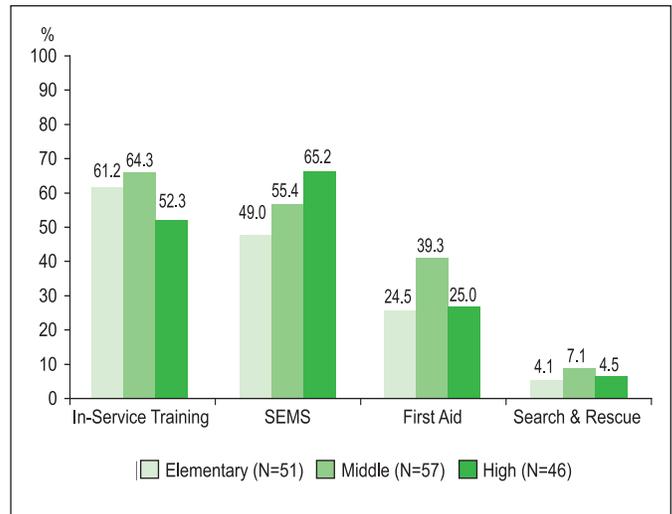


Percent of Schools Reporting the Inclusion of Specific Information in their Disaster Plan, California, 2005

Training for School Faculty and Staff

Less than 65% of respondents had received in-service training on emergency response during the previous school year (Figure 2). SEMS training was relatively more common in secondary schools than in elementary schools. No more than 25-40% of respondents had received first aid training in the previous year, and only a fraction of them had been trained in search and rescue. Overall, 31.8% of high school respondents, 16.1% of middle school respondents, and 22.4% of elementary school respondents received no training during the prior school year (data not shown).

FIGURE 2

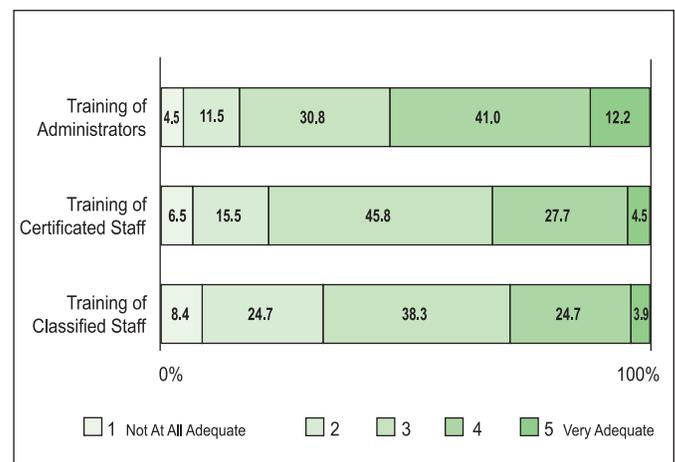


Percent of Survey Respondents Who Received Training During the Previous School Year, by School Level, California, 2005

Note: SEMS: Standardized Emergency Management System. None of the differences in frequencies between elementary, middle, and high schools were statistically significant using Pearson chi-square tests.

The majority of respondents rated the adequacy of training for school administrators as a 4 or 5, on a scale of 1 (Not at all adequate) to 5 (Very adequate). In comparison, only about a third of them said training for certificated or classified staff was adequate or very adequate. These results suggest that school staff are not given equal training opportunities.

FIGURE 3

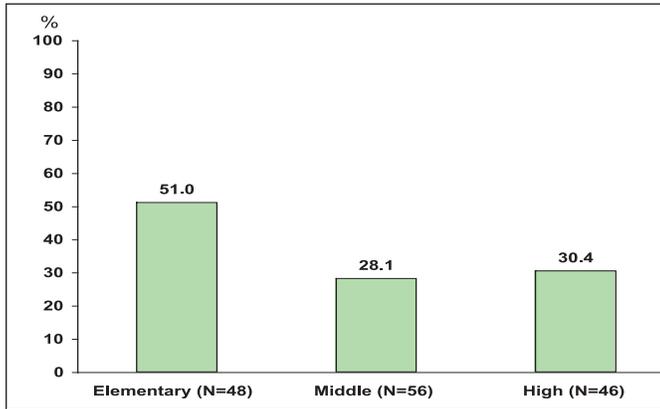


Perceived Adequacy of Training, by Staff Category, California, 2005

Preparedness Education for Students

Only about a half of elementary schools and a third of secondary schools said they provide any information or instruction to students about how they can prepare for and respond to disasters at home. Successful preparedness education can help students become positive “change agents” in their household and community.

FIGURE 4



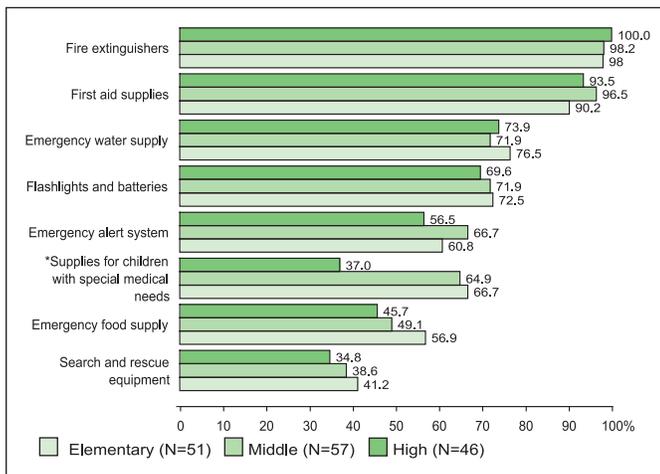
Percent of Schools that Provide Disaster Preparedness Education, by School Level, California, 2005

Note: The difference in frequencies by school level was statistically significant, Pearson chi-square=7.10, df=2, p<0.05.

Emergency Equipment and Supplies

Almost all schools said they have fire extinguishers (which are required by law) and first aid supplies. About 25% or more of the schools, however, did not have an emergency water supply, flashlights with replacement batteries, or emergency alert systems. Even fewer schools had an emergency supply of food or search-and-rescue equipment. High schools were especially unlikely to have emergency supplies for children with special medical needs, though this could partly be due to having fewer special needs students.

FIGURE 5



Percent of Schools Reporting the Availability of Specific Emergency Equipment and Supplies, by School Level, California, 2005

Note: *The difference in frequencies between elementary, middle, and high schools was statistically significant, Pearson chi-square=10.95, df=2, p<0.05.

Resources for Schools, Teachers, and Children

► **Crisis Response Box: Partnering for Safe Schools**
<http://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/ss/cp/documents/crisisrespbox.pdf>
 A guide to assembling a *Crisis Response Box* containing information essential for effective management of a critical incident. “The box” is a product of the California Attorney General and State Superintendent of Public Instruction’s Safe Schools Task Force.

► **American Red Cross Disaster Services Publications: Materials for Teachers and Schools**
<http://www.redcross.org/pubs/dspubs/tchrschl.html>
 Disaster education materials specifically designed for school use are offered, including:

- **Masters of Disaster: Integrated Disaster Safety Curriculum**
 A curriculum to help integrate hazard safety into regular academic lesson plans in math, science, social studies, and language arts. Available in three complete kits for teachers of grades K-2, 3-5, and 6-8.
- **Facing Fear: Helping Young People Deal With Terrorism and Tragic Events**
 A curriculum supplement to help teachers deal with children’s concerns, fears, and anger when human-caused events occur. Aligned with national standards in social studies, health, and language arts. Available in four complete sets for grades K-2, 3-5, 6-8, and 9-12.

► **Preparedness for People with Special Medical Needs**
<http://www.preparenow.org/pwsmn.html>
 PrepareNow.org provides the tools, expertise, and access to resources to assist anyone engaged in disaster planning for individuals with special needs.

► **Ready Kids** <http://www.ready.gov/kids/home.html>
 A web site designed for children in grades 4-5 featuring age-appropriate instructions on what families can do to be better prepared. Ready Kids is part of a national campaign to educate and empower Americans to prepare for and respond to natural disasters, potential terrorist attacks, and other emergencies.

► **FEMA for Kids** <http://www.fema.gov/kids/>
 Kids can enjoy stories, play games, and watch videos while learning how they and their families can be better prepared. A section for teachers and parents offers safety tips and curriculum that can be used in the classroom or at home.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Most schools surveyed in California were affected by one or more emergencies or crises in recent years, ranging from storms to power failures to school violence. While the schools generally feel well prepared to handle future emergencies, some limitations were identified. The following recommendations may help increase the schools' capacity to protect the welfare of their students and staff in an emergency.

- ▶ **Planning.** Written plans should be reviewed annually so that they are comprehensive, up to date, and in compliance with SEMS/NIMS. Schools should not hesitate to contact local agencies for their input to make sure the plan includes information and procedures that would facilitate their response to an emergency.
- ▶ **Training.** All staff members should receive in-service emergency response training every year. Designated members should receive further training in special skills. Emergency procedures should be practiced regularly by students and staff, in coordination with the district office, other schools, and local emergency responders.
- ▶ **Education.** Schools should teach students what they can do to be better prepared at home. Improvements in household preparedness will contribute to community-wide preparedness. There are several educational resources available (See page 3).
- ▶ **Equipment and Supplies.** Schools should have essential emergency equipment and supplies properly maintained and accessible from every classroom. Schools that do not have a budget for such items might ask the PTA or local community for assistance through fundraisers and donations, or pool resources with other schools or agencies at the district or county level. Some schools ask students and staff to bring their own emergency kits if it is possible to organize and store them at school. Provision should also be made for the emergency care of children with special medical needs.

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