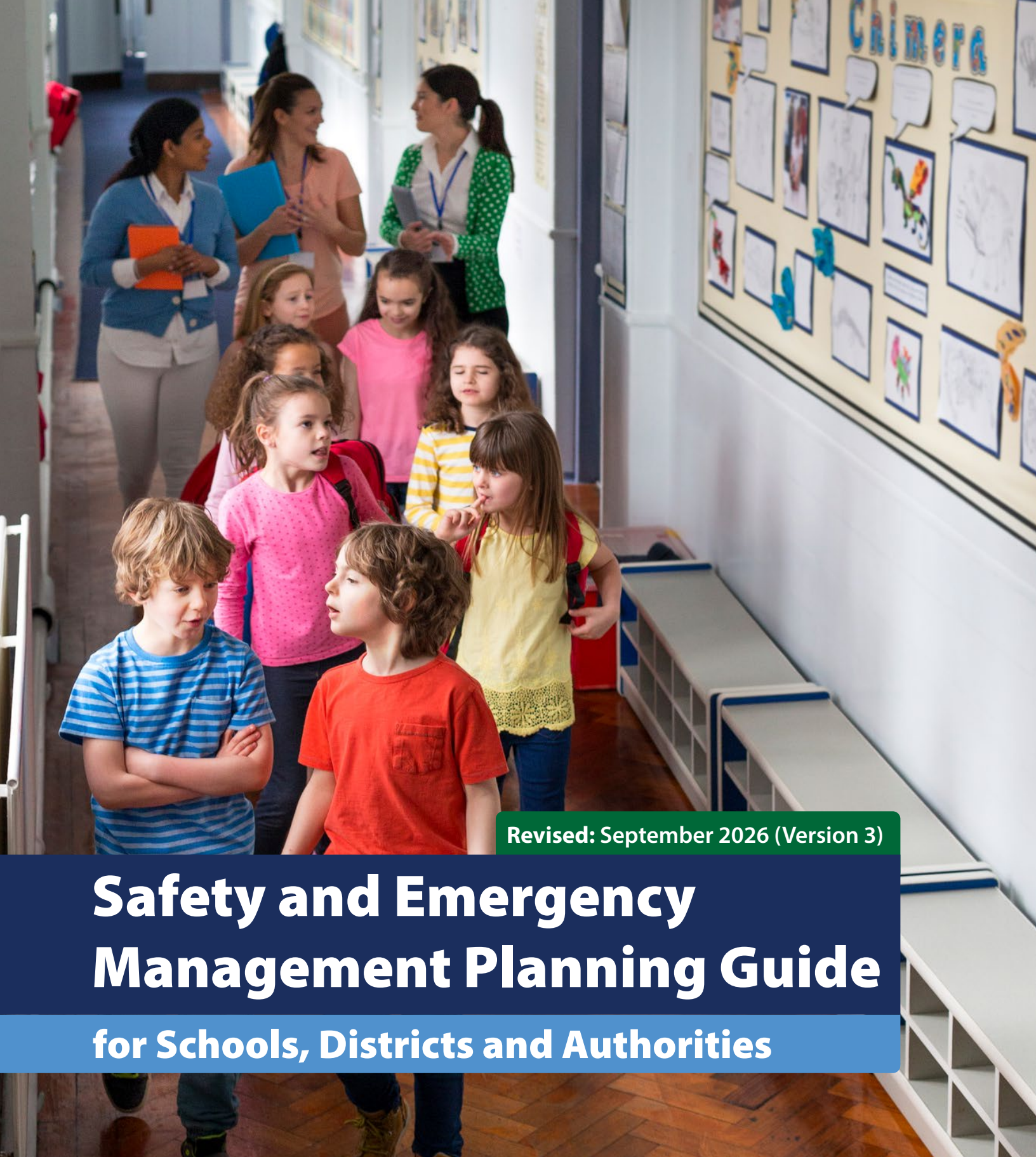




Revised: September 2026 (Version 3)

Safety and Emergency Management Planning Guide

for Schools, Districts and Authorities



Ministry of
Education and
Child Care

erase | EXPECT RESPECT &
A SAFE EDUCATION

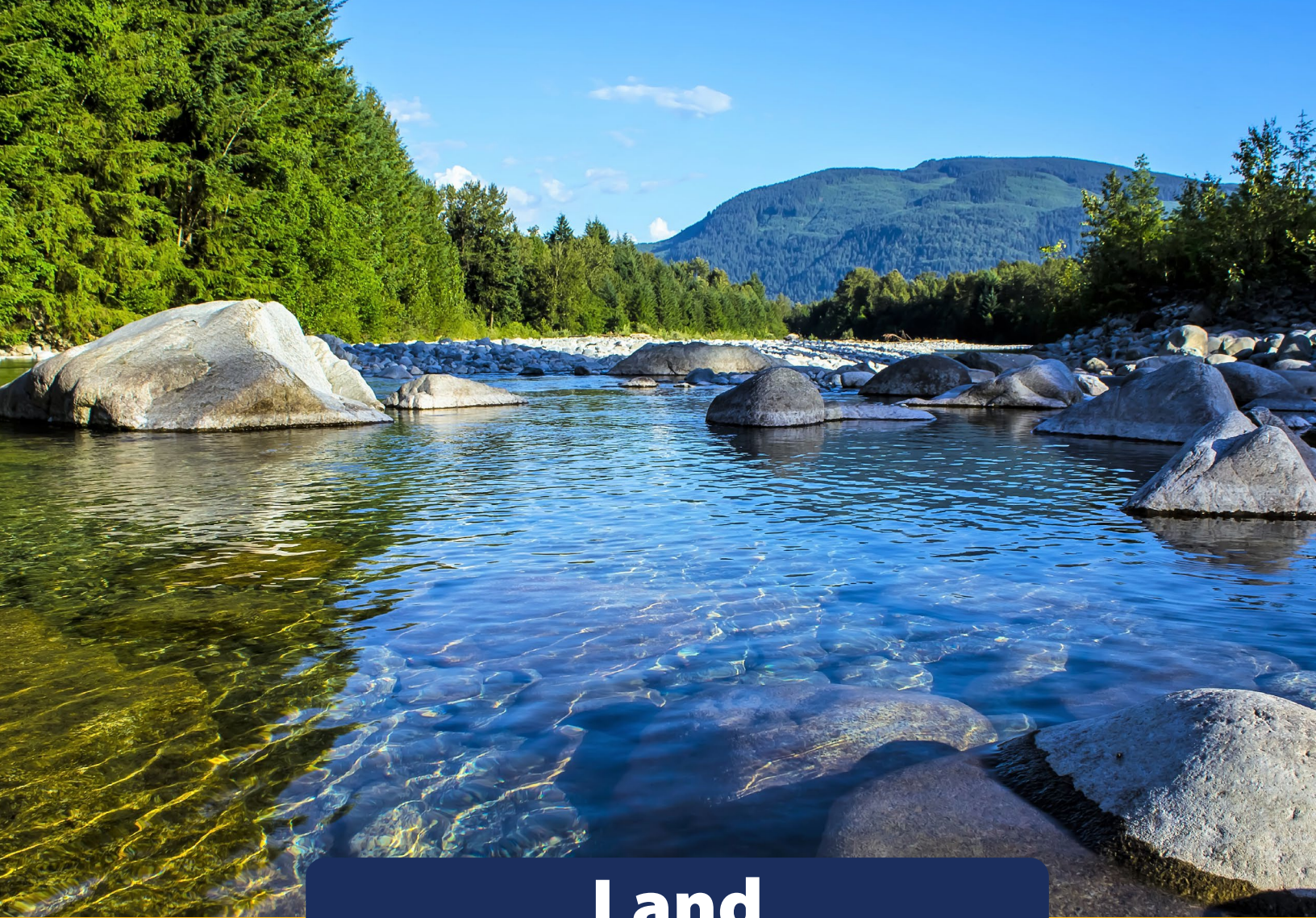
Safety and Emergency Management Planning Guide
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Ministry of
Education and
Child Care



Land Acknowledgment

The Ministry of Education and Child Care acknowledges that its offices are situated on the Lək'wəŋən territory of the X^wsepsəm (Esquimalt) and Songhees Nations and on the territories of the x^wməθk^wəyəm (Musqueam), Sḵwḵwu7mesh (Squamish), and səlilwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations.

The K-12 Education and Child Care sector carries out its work on the territories of the 204 First Nations communities across B.C., each with unique cultures, languages, governance systems, and relationship to these lands and waters.

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Section 1

Introduction

Emergencies are often unpredictable and can cause significant disruption with little or no warning. As one of the primary areas in which students and adults gather daily, schools play a critical role in community safety. Comprehensive emergency preparedness is essential to protecting the safety and well-being of students, staff, and the broader school community and to supporting public confidence in the education system.

Schools and communities in British Columbia (B.C.) operate within diverse environments. Resources, structures, geography, capacity, partners, and institutional knowledge can differ considerably between communities. Effective response can depend on established relationships, shared expectations, clear roles, and a current understanding of available resources.

The Safety and Emergency Management Planning Guide for Schools, Districts and Authorities (revised 2026) is based on best practices and is intended to support public, independent, and First Nations schools in B.C. in developing and maintaining effective school emergency management plans. Callout boxes throughout the guide highlight actions that are recommended for schools and districts in support of this outcome.

This guide aligns with the [British Columbia Emergency Management System](#) (BCEMS), the provincial standard for emergency management that provides a coordinated, scalable, and inclusive framework grounded in shared responsibility and a four-phase, all-hazards approach. It uses language that is consistent with the public school system (e.g., school district, board of education); however, information included in this guide is intended to be adaptable to the unique structures and operations of public, independent, and First Nations schools.

B.C. school districts and independent schools have developed a comprehensive Safe School Coordinator role through the Expect Respect and A Safe Education (*erase*) strategy. Safe School Coordinators are a key source of information about district and school safety measures. Safe School Coordinators as well as health and safety, critical incident response, facilities, and threat assessment teams should collaborate to ensure alignment and coordination in safety and emergency planning and response.

Recommendation

Every school in B.C. should develop and implement a School Emergency Management Plan (SEMP) with support and guidance from their school district. A SEMP ensures a proactive, coordinated, and inclusive approach to managing emergencies.

This updated guide includes considerations for incorporating early learning and licensed child care facilities on school grounds into emergency planning processes. It also contains updated guidance for inclusive emergency management practices. While this guide provides general suggestions and information, schools and districts are encouraged to develop emergency management policies and procedures that best address the unique needs of their schools.

Safety and emergency planning should be viewed as an ongoing, collaborative operational process rather than a static planning exercise. Schools, districts, local police and emergency services, local authorities, Ministry partners, and other agencies should understand their respective roles, and maintain sufficient familiarity with other local plans and capabilities to support an effective community response when circumstances require it.

This guide provides a practical framework for planning, preparedness, coordination, and continuous improvement. It recognizes that effective emergency planning must be consistent enough to support a common provincial approach, while remaining sufficiently flexible to reflect local context, resources, and operational realities.

Section 2

BC Emergency Management System Response Goals

The [British Columbia Emergency Management System](#) (BCEMS) has developed broad response goals and guiding principles for emergency management in B.C. These goals include: ensure the safety and health of responders, save lives, reduce suffering, protect public health, protect environmental infrastructure, protect property, protect the environment, and reduce economic and social losses.

Schools and districts are encouraged to adapt these goals to reflect their specific priorities, which may include:

- Keep students, staff, and visitors safe in the event of an emergency
- Minimize physical, emotional, and psychological harm to the school community
- Prevent or manage health and safety threats within the school community
- Preserve school facilities, learning materials, and critical infrastructure
- Minimize environmental impact from school-based emergencies
- Maintain educational continuity and minimize disruptions to learning, support services, and daily life

Recommendation

Include goals and guiding principles in your school emergency management plan to reflect the unique priorities of your school community.

Section 3

Understanding Emergencies and Critical Incidents

In K–12 school settings, operational understanding of emergencies and critical incidents relate to distinct but often interconnected events that require coordinated planning and response.

Within the K–12 education context, the term critical incident typically refers to an unexpected event that causes significant trauma and overwhelms a school community's ability to cope, even if it does not exceed the capacity of external emergency service providers. Examples may include deaths or near-deaths, acts of physical or psychological violence, overdose, or other events that significantly affect students and staff (Safer Schools Together, 2025). This operational use reflects established sector practice and training, and it is distinct from the definition set out in the Emergency and Disaster Management Act (EDMA).

Under the [Emergency and Disaster Management Act](#) (EDMA), terms are defined as follows:

- **An emergency** is a state resulting from an event that has occurred, is ongoing, or appears imminent, including incidents such as accident, fire, explosion, technical failure, riot, security threat, terrorist activity, force of nature, transmissible disease, environmental toxin, or other prescribed circumstances, and that requires the prompt coordination of action, or the special regulation of persons or property, to protect the health, safety, or well-being of persons, or the safety of property or heritage sites.
- **A critical incident** is a single incident that requires the prompt coordination of actions at a particular location to protect the health, safety, or well-being of one or more persons. A critical incident occurs when the actions required exceed the capability or capacity of the responsible emergency service provider, but the situation does not meet the threshold for a declared provincial or local state of emergency.

Recommendation

Health and safety, critical incident response, facilities, safe school coordinators, and threat assessment leads should collaborate to ensure alignment and coordination in planning and response.

Emergencies often initiate activation of the Incident Command System (ICS) and involve coordination with emergency responders and external agencies. Critical incidents require a coordinated, trauma-informed psychosocial response and support for students and staff, which may include activation of established Critical Incident Response and Management (CIRM) processes. These systems can often work in tandem and each require clear protocols to ensure safety as well as recovery from traumatic events.

- **Incident Command System** provides a structured, scalable framework for managing the operational aspects of emergency response.
[See Section 8: Incident Command System](#) for more information.
- **Critical Incident Response and Management** guides the response to the emotional and psychological impact of incidents that cause trauma or distress. In other sectors, this may be referred to as psycho-emotional support. Training is available to support school and district staff with critical incident response and management, both through the [Ministry's Expect Respect and a Safe Education \(erase\) strategy](#) as well as [WorkSafeBC](#).

Schools and districts should be prepared to activate both ICS and CIRM systems when needed. While these systems serve different purposes, they can align and operate in parallel during incidents that require emergency-related operational response and recovery components while also requiring significant psychological support.

The ICS and CIRM processes can be activated simultaneously during an event. CIRM functions may be embedded within the ICS structure to ensure a unified and holistic response to both physical and emotional needs. CIRM functions can also be leveraged to support emotional and psychological recovery efforts after an event has occurred. Training school staff in both ICS and CIRM ensures that schools are equipped to respond holistically to complex and high-impact events.

The scope of this guide is focused on safety and emergency management. Considerations should be made regarding where and how CIRM can work in support of these frameworks.

Section 4

Legal Framework and Guidance

Legislation, policies, and guidelines provide the framework that guides emergency management for schools, districts, and child care operators.

Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act

British Columbia is committed to implementing the [Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act](#) (DRIPA). DRIPA establishes the [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#) as the Province's framework for reconciliation. Emergency planning must uphold the rights of Indigenous Peoples, including:

- The right to health, safety, well-being, and cultural continuity
- Meaningful participation in decision-making
- Respect for culturally significant lands, environments, and resources

Emergency and Disaster Management Act

The 2023 [Emergency and Disaster Management Act](#) (EDMA) and supporting regulations provide the legislative framework and guiding principles for emergency management in B.C. Under EDMA, regulations may be made for public sector agencies with respect to:

- Preparing risk assessments and emergency plans
- Developing business continuity plans
- Participating in training and exercises
- Collaborating with Indigenous governing bodies and local authorities
- Engaging in continuous improvement across the four pillars of emergency management: mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery

School Act

The [School Act](#) outlines several legislative duties and authorities that support school and district safety and emergency management responsibilities, including:

- Boards may temporarily close a school when student health or safety is at risk
- Boards must ensure safe custody, maintenance, and oversight of school buildings (including Section 177)

Recommendation

Engage with local First Nations, nearby independent First Nations schools, and Indigenous partners to build relationships, explore opportunities for collaboration and shared learning in emergency management, and ensure culturally safe, coordinated emergency planning and response.

Recommendation

Align school emergency management plans with the [Emergency and Disaster Management Act](#) and other relevant policies, legislation, and regulations.

- Boards may use video surveillance to enhance safety and protect property (with required review processes)
- Medical health officers may inspect schools, require closures, and direct examinations or removal/return of students, and boards may require medical assessments for employees or contractors when health conditions pose risks to others

Independent School Act

The [Independent School Act](#) outlines legislative authorities and duties that support emergency management responsibilities. Under this Act, independent school authorities are responsible for:

- The operation, policies, and supervision of schools, including decisions that affect student health and safety
- Compliance with applicable provincial and local requirements, including building, fire, and health and safety regulations

Accessible British Columbia Act

The [Accessible B.C. Act](#) is a law that supports the B.C. government to work in partnership with people with disabilities and the broader community to address barriers to the full and equal participation of people with disabilities in B.C. It has requirements that ensure government and regulated organizations take steps to identify barriers experienced by people with disabilities, remove those barriers, and prevent the creation of new barriers.

Safe Access to Schools Act

The [Safe Access to Schools Act](#) came into effect May 2024 to preserve safe access to schools for students, staff, and families by prohibiting disruptive and harmful protest activities on or within 20 meters of school grounds. Please confirm that the Act is currently being enforced.

Child Care Licensing Regulation

Many schools and districts either host or directly operate licensed child care centres. The Province establishes the regulatory framework under the [Community Care and Assisted Living Act](#) and [Child Care Licensing Regulation](#). Health authorities are responsible for oversight and for ensuring that licensed facilities comply with these statutory requirements.

Response to Unexpected Health Emergencies

Under the [Support Services for Schools Order](#) and the [Response to Unexpected Health Emergencies Policy](#), boards of education must maintain a publicly available policy or administrative procedure to ensure schools can respond quickly and effectively to unexpected health emergencies. These requirements support timely, lifesaving intervention before first responders arrive.

Key requirements include:

- Ensuring Automated External Defibrillators (AEDs) and naloxone kits are readily accessible and maintained in every public school (effective September 2026)
- Aligning district policies or administrative procedures with WorkSafeBC statutory regulations and local school contexts
- Establishing clear guidance on signage, conducting routine inspections to ensure functionality and monitor expiry dates, providing barrier-free access, and non-stigmatizing presentation of tools

Safe and Caring School Communities Policy

This Ministry of Education and Child Care [policy](#) supports boards of education and schools in fostering safe, caring, and inclusive learning environments, and in developing prevention and intervention strategies to address worrisome behaviours, including threats or potential risks of violence. Boards of education are expected to use the following:

- District Safe School Coordinators and teams
- School codes of conduct
- Online student reporting tool
- Community threat assessment protocols

These measures contribute to early identification, coordinated response, and overall preparedness within school safety and emergency management.

Duty of Care

Duty of Care is a well-established legal principle requiring educators to exercise the same standard of care toward their students—both within the school and on school-sponsored activities—as a prudent or careful parent would in similar circumstances (Uzelac & Krzus, Field Trips and the Duty of Care, TC Magazine, Fall 2007).

In the event of an emergency, boards of education and educators (including teachers, principals, and superintendents in both public and independent schools) must ensure that students are cared for until they can be safely reunited with their parents or guardians. As employers, boards of education and independent school authorities are also responsible, under the [Workers Compensation Act](#) and the [Occupational Health and Safety Regulation](#), for ensuring the safety of employees.

Canadian courts have established a strong body of common law governing the responsibilities of school personnel. In *Myers v. Peel County Board of Education* (1981), the Supreme Court of Canada held that "the standard of care to be exercised by school authorities in providing for the supervision and protection of students for whom they

Recommendation

Review professional responsibilities as outlined in relevant legislation including:

- [The School Act](#)
- [The School Regulation](#)
- [The Workers Compensation Act](#)
- [Occupational Health and Safety Regulation](#)
- [Standards for B.C. Educators](#)

are responsible is that of a careful or prudent parent." This principle has been repeatedly upheld in subsequent court decisions across Canada.

Collectively, statutory requirements, common law, and professional standards provide clear direction for educators regarding the level of supervision and support expected in various types and severities of emergencies.

Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act

In matters of health and safety, the [Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act](#) (FOIPPA) provides authority for sharing personal information in specific circumstances. The legislation supports sharing necessary information quickly during emergencies, while protecting privacy as much as possible. Relevant to independent school authorities, the [Personal Information Privacy Act](#) (PIPA) provides authority for sharing personal information in specific circumstances, such as a medical emergency.

Schools may share personal information when there is a serious and urgent risk to health or safety. An authorized decision-maker (e.g., superintendent or designate) must determine that there are clear, compelling circumstances to do so before information is shared. Individuals should be informed of the actions afterward, unless doing so could create further risk.

Safety Trumps Privacy

In a [joint news release](#) (May 2008), the Privacy Commissioner of British Columbia and the Information and Privacy Commissioner of Ontario clarified an important principle about privacy and information disclosure for school/district staff:

- "If there are compelling circumstances affecting health or safety, or if an individual is ill, B.C.'s privacy laws allow disclosure to next of kin and others, including school officials and health care providers"
- "Privacy is important, but preserving life is more important"

Both Commissioners emphasized that such disclosures should not be routine but rather reserved for extraordinary circumstances where doing so is necessary to protect student safety. This clarification followed the case of Nadia Kajouji, a Carleton University student who died by suicide. University officials, aware of her distress, did not contact her parents or others, citing privacy concerns.

Recommendation

School districts and independent school authorities should consult legal counsel when interpreting relevant legislation or court decisions, especially when developing or updating emergency policies, procedures, or plans.

The Supreme Court of Canada has also addressed the balance between privacy and safety in schools. In *R. v. M. (M.R.)* (1998), the Court ruled that principals and school authorities (provided they are not acting as agents of the police) are held to a different standard of reasonableness than law enforcement. The Court stated:

- "Teachers and principals are placed in a position of trust that carries the onerous responsibilities of teaching and of caring for the children's safety and well-being"
- "In order to teach, school officials must provide an atmosphere that encourages learning. The possession of illegal drugs and dangerous weapons at school challenges the ability of school officials to fulfil their responsibility"
- "Current conditions require that teachers and school administrators be provided with the flexibility needed to deal with discipline problems in schools and to be able to act quickly and effectively. One of the ways in which school authorities may be required to react reasonably is by conducting searches of students and seizing prohibited items"
- "Where the criminal law is involved, evidence found by a teacher or principal should not be excluded because the search would have been unreasonable if conducted by police"

The Court further noted that the reasonableness of a search depends on the gravity of the suspected infraction and must be assessed considering the circumstances, including the responsibility of educators to ensure student safety. Please see [Maintaining School Safety: A Guide for School and Police Personnel in B.C.](#) for additional guidance on information sharing, searches, and seizure.

Section 5

Roles and Responsibilities

Effective emergency management requires clarity regarding roles and responsibilities. The following parties play key roles in maintaining the safety and well-being of children and staff across schools and licensed child care on school grounds in B.C.

Ministry of Education and Child Care

The [Ministry of Education and Child Care](#):

- Provides leadership and funding to the K–12 education system, early learning, and licensed child care sectors through governance, legislation, policy, and standards
- Governs these areas alongside boards of education, with responsibilities outlined in the [School Act](#), [Independent School Act](#), [Teachers Act](#) and other agreements

The ministry supports emergency preparedness by providing guidance and resources that are aligned with Emergency Management and Climate Readiness (EMCR) procedures, liaising between sectors and other agencies, supporting continuity of operations, and promoting safe learning environments. The ministry also provides training, resources, and subject matter expertise to schools and districts including through a contracted safety expert.

Ministry of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness

The [Ministry of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness](#) (EMCR) is the lead provincial agency responsible for coordinating emergency management across B.C. Its responsibilities include:

- Providing provincial leadership, executive coordination, multi-agency facilitation, and strategic planning across all four pillars of emergency management: mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery
- Supporting local and regional emergency management partners, including First Nations and local authorities, in their areas of jurisdiction
- Operating the Provincial Emergency Coordination Centre (PECC) and Provincial Regional Emergency Operations Centres (PREOC) to manage large-scale or multi-jurisdictional events

This guide aligns with the B.C. Emergency Management System (BCEMS) and other EMCR protocols to support consistent and effective emergency management processes across the education sector.

Ministry of Health

The [Ministry of Health](#) has a role in supporting school, early learning, and child care safety, including:

- Under Sections 89 and 90 of the [School Act](#), regional health authorities must appoint a school medical health officer with authority to inspect schools, report and make recommendations to school boards, and recommend closures if student health or safety is at risk

Health Authorities

Section 22 of the [Child Care Licensing Regulation](#) requires providers to maintain emergency plans and equipment, conduct drills, and ensure staff training and resources. Licensing officers assess compliance and may provide region-specific tools and considerations.

Ministry of Infrastructure

The [Ministry of Infrastructure](#) supports the repair, replacement, and recovery of K–12 public school facilities impacted by emergencies or disasters. Responsibilities include:

- Support assessment, repair, and reconstruction of damaged school infrastructure
- Work with the Ministry of Finance to provide capital funding for school facility damage through programs such as the School Protection Program
- Collaborate with the Ministry of Education and Child Care and school districts to support safe, functional learning environments

Boards of Education

Boards of education are responsible for the overall operation and management of schools in B.C.'s 60 public school districts. Under the [School Act](#), boards have authority to:

- Establish local policy for the effective and efficient operation of schools
- Temporarily close schools if the health and safety of students is endangered
- Oversee staff responsibilities under the School Regulation
- Install and operate video surveillance systems
- Direct individuals to leave school property when necessary for safety

Independent Schools

Independent schools operate under the [Independent School Act](#) and are governed by an authority responsible for the school's operation, staffing, policies, and major decisions (similar to a public board of education).

Independent schools must:

- Comply with provincial and local regulations (e.g., building and fire codes)
- Maintain emergency response and drill policies
- Establish student safety and supervision procedures

The Office of the Inspector of Independent Schools monitors compliance and provides oversight.

First Nations Schools

First Nations schools are administered by their respective First Nations, funded by the federal government, and located on reserve lands. First Nations schools operate under varying governance models:

- Many are funded by the federal government and administered by First Nation bands under the [Indian Act](#)
- Some are B.C.-certified independent schools under the [Independent School Act](#)
- Some are self-governing with their own jurisdiction over education

First Nations schools in B.C. are important partners in all phases of safety and emergency management.

Superintendents

In the public school system, superintendents act on behalf of boards of education to ensure district- and school-level emergency management planning and implementation. Their responsibilities include:

- Implement policy and standards related to emergency management
- Oversee the development, maintenance, and review of district and school emergency plans
- Assume control at the district level (or designating someone to do so) during a significant emergency event
- Promptly report emergencies to the Ministry of Education and Child Care

Recommendation

School districts should support and help guide the development of SEMP's to ensure consistency and coordination across schools.

Recommendation

School districts and nearby independent schools are encouraged to build relationships and explore opportunities for collaboration and shared learning in safety and emergency management planning.

In the independent school system, a head of school, superintendent, or school principal may fulfill the superintendent's duties in addition to responsibilities associated with an individual school. For example:

- A head of school may oversee two or more schools operating within a single mandate (e.g., an elementary school at one location and a secondary school at another)
- A superintendent in the Catholic school system may be responsible for the operations of many schools within one diocese

Safe School Coordinators

As per the Safe and Caring School Communities Policy, all boards of education and independent schools have a Safe School Coordinator who is responsible for school or district-wide safety initiatives, including monitoring the online reporting tool, liaising with school administrators regarding student reports, building the capacity of school personnel to prevent and respond to safety concerns, and liaising with the Ministry of Education and Child Care. Safe School Coordinators are a key source of information about district and school safety measures.

Principals

Principals are responsible for the overall operation and management of the school, including knowing how to respond in an emergency to protect students and staff, both on and off site. Their responsibilities include:

- Ensure a school-based emergency plan is in place and understood by staff, students, parents/caregivers, tenants, and visitors
- Conduct required emergency drills to support preparedness
- Maintain order during an emergency and coordinate the school's response with first responders when they arrive
- Communicate and work with staff throughout the event, understanding that first responders may be delayed and that the school must manage the initial response
- Act as the person-in-charge during an emergency at their school (or designating an appropriate alternate)
- Ensure students can be safely reunified with parents, guardians, or authorized pick-up persons once the situation allows

Teachers, Support Staff and Students

All school and district personnel (including principals, teachers, educational assistants, support staff, facilities staff, etc.) along with students, are expected to be familiar with the school emergency management plan and understand their specific roles in carrying it out. Support staff are often well-positioned to carry out key functions based on their skills and training. Key expectations include:

- All school personnel are expected to know the emergency management plan and their assigned responsibilities
- Students are expected to understand emergency routines to the best of their abilities and to follow instructions from their teachers during an emergency

Child Care Operators

Child care operators are expected to collaborate with schools and districts to support the safety of children on school grounds and ensure alignment in emergency preparedness activities. Licensed child care operators must comply with emergency preparedness requirements under the [Child Care Licensing Regulation](#).

Parents, Guardians and Caregivers

Parents, guardians and caregivers play a vital role in supporting school preparedness. They should:

- Stay informed about school emergency procedures
- Provide up-to-date contact, medical and student reunification information
- Participate in emergency drills and preparedness activities (including student reunification) when invited
- Work with the school to ensure emergency plans, drills, and training are supportive of their child's individual needs
- Encourage their child to take drills seriously
- Participate in the development of emergency planning and sourcing of supplies and resources (where appropriate)

Visitors

Visitors may work with staff and students on a regular basis or be supporting on- or off-site events. It is essential that they are included in emergency planning. Visitors should:

- Be familiar with emergency procedures and their responsibilities
- Be encouraged to participate in relevant drills and preparedness activities while on site
- Report incidents that threaten the safety and security of students, staff, or the school, and contact emergency supports as required (i.e., call 911)

Schools may require visitors to formally acknowledge their emergency responsibilities.

Local Authorities

Local authorities maintain capabilities, plans, and procedures to support the safety of citizens during emergencies. Local authorities, including municipalities and regional districts, are required under the EDMA to:

- Establish or join an emergency management organization
- Prepare and maintain an emergency plan

When an emergency requires coordinated support at the site level, local authorities:

- Activate their Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) to manage the consequences of the event
- Activate local emergency plans and directly manage the jurisdictional resources needed for response and recovery
- Request assistance from external agencies, such as Ministry of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness, when necessary

First Responders

First responders operate at the school site level of an emergency and include police, fire, ambulance, and other municipal or regional agencies as required. Their actions may include:

- Secure the perimeter
- Provide medical response
- Firefight
- Manage crowds or evacuation zones

Specific police responsibilities include assessing and responding to safety or security threats and coordinating protective actions and law enforcement response during active threat incidents.

Schools work closely with first responders during emergencies, making it important to involve them as much as possible in planning, preparedness, and training activities. Public safety lifeline volunteers (such as search and rescue organizations) also work with schools and school districts during emergencies.

Recommendation

Involve local authorities and first responders in safety and emergency management planning. School districts, if not invited to do so, should request to be included in emergency planning at the local authority level.

Section 6

Foundations of School Emergency Management

The following sections introduce key foundational concepts to support schools and districts to develop school emergency management plans. Effective school emergency management is grounded in the shared concepts and structures used across B.C.'s emergency management system. This guide aligns with the [BC Emergency Management System](#) (BCEMS), the provincial framework that provides common principles, terminology, and structures to support a coordinated, scalable, and all-hazards approach to emergency management across the province.

Recommendation

Review the [BCEMS](#) framework and other EMCR resources to support understanding of B.C.'s approach to emergency management, and align with school emergency management.

Section 7

All-Hazards Approach

This guide is grounded in the all-hazards approach outlined in the [BCEMS](#). Rather than developing detailed plans for every type of incident, this approach focuses on a core set of flexible, scalable procedures that can be adapted to a wide range of emergencies.

In school settings, this means preparing for a variety of potential events, such as earthquakes, fires, or human-caused threats, by practicing and implementing five standardized responses: Drop, Cover, and Hold On; Evacuate; Lockdown; Hold and Secure; and Shelter in Place. Further information can be found in [Section 10: Response](#).

School-based emergencies can range on a scale from localized incidents, such as a small fire affecting a single classroom, to large-scale events that impact multiple schools or entire districts, such as wildfires or extended power outages. The all-hazards approach enables school and district staff to respond effectively across this spectrum by applying common procedures in a coordinated and confident manner. Implementing this approach requires collaborative planning with first responders and community partners, as well as ongoing training and drills to ensure readiness across all levels of the school system.

Recommendation

Consider utilizing an all-hazards approach, which increases efficiency by integrating common elements across hazards and adding specific components only where needed.

Section 8

Incident Command System

The Incident Command System (ICS) is a nationally recognized command-and-control framework used across emergency management agencies to coordinate response efforts in a structured, scalable, and integrated manner.

The ICS structure is a temporary organizational structure during an emergency that allows school-based teams to respond to incidents in a structured way while maintaining alignment with local authorities and first responders.

Key benefits of ICS in school settings include:

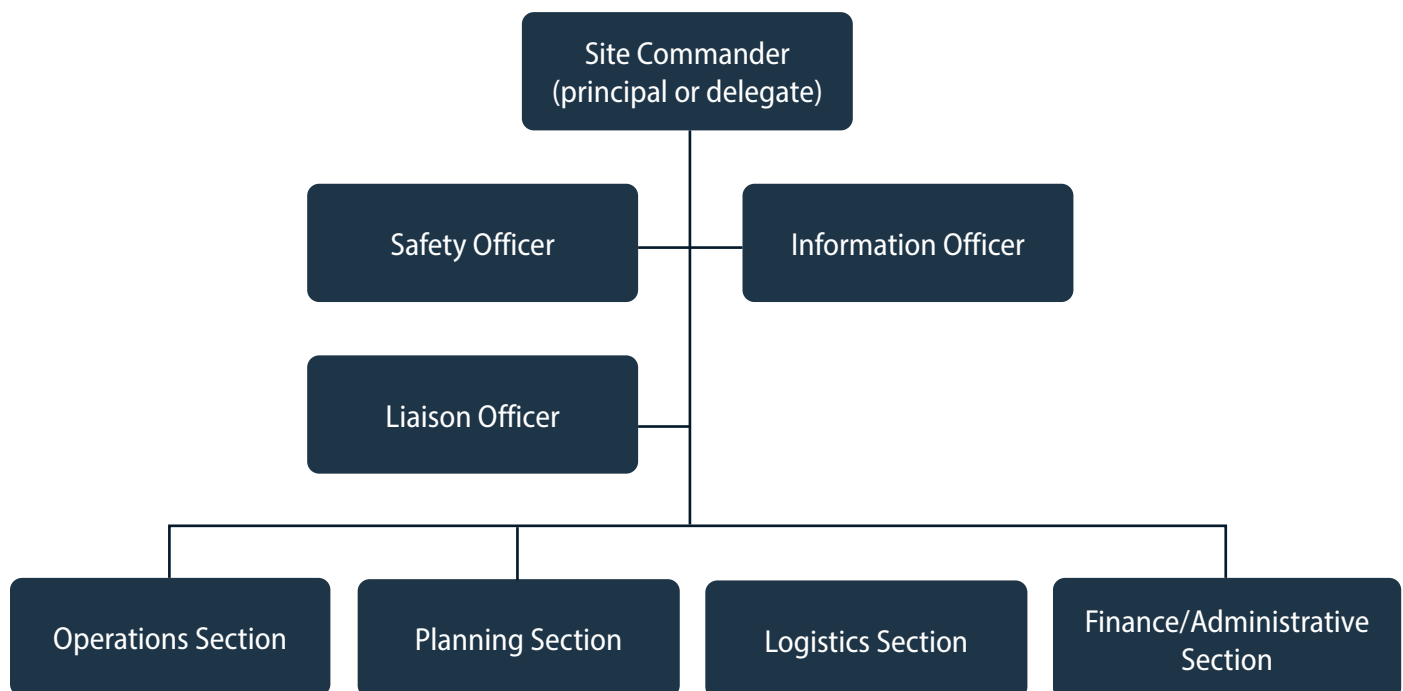
- Allowing for authority to be delegated to the most qualified school or district personnel
- Supporting clear roles and responsibilities
- Providing common terminology across education and emergency sectors
- Supporting improved coordination with first responders
- Providing a scalable structure for incidents of any size

Recommendation

Pre-assign staff to roles and ensure that staff and backup personnel are trained.

ICS Structure

The ICS structure shown below provides an example of a hierarchy of command within a school site.



Example command structure within a school site	
Site Incident Commander	Leads on-site response efforts at the school and responsible for managing overall response. Manages staff and students, communicates with the district safety team, and coordinates with first responders. Note: There may be numerous event incident commanders if multiple agencies are involved. In this case, each should work collaboratively together while maintaining primary responsibility for their area of expertise.
Safety Officer	Monitors safety conditions and develops measures for ensuring safety of staff and students.
Liaison Officer	Serves as primary contact for partners, including assisting agencies or organizations.
Information Officer	Responsible for public information, media relations, and internal information.
Operations Section Lead	Manages tactical operations including crisis intervention, first aid procedures, evacuation/shelter and care, student reunification, as well as overall safety and security of the building/site.
Planning Section Lead	Collects and analyzes incident information, tracks resources, and facilitates on-going and future planning. Maintains incident documentation.
Logistics Section Lead	Responsible for service and support needs of an incident; supports all response activities by coordinating and supplying services, personnel, and supplies (e.g., food, transportation, deployment of staff, information technology).
Finance/Admin Section Lead	Tracks incident accounting, costs, reimbursements, claims and compensations. Note: this function is generally managed at the district level.

Adapting ICS for School Contexts

ICS is a standardized emergency management framework that schools can adapt to fit their unique context, staffing, and needs. Schools can expand or modify roles, consolidate responsibilities, or designate additional positions to support school-specific needs. School districts may play a significant role in the ICS structure, including district safety team members that may coordinate with first responders and otherwise support the response. Support of the CIRM team can be embedded within the ICS structure, with roles and responsibilities as part of the Operations section.

It is important to consider span of control—ensuring responsibilities are distributed in a way that maintains clarity and accountability—and to scale the structure appropriately based on the size and complexity of the incident.

The sample structure shown in this guide is only one example; schools may organize responsibilities differently. Most important is that essential roles and functions are assigned and clearly understood.

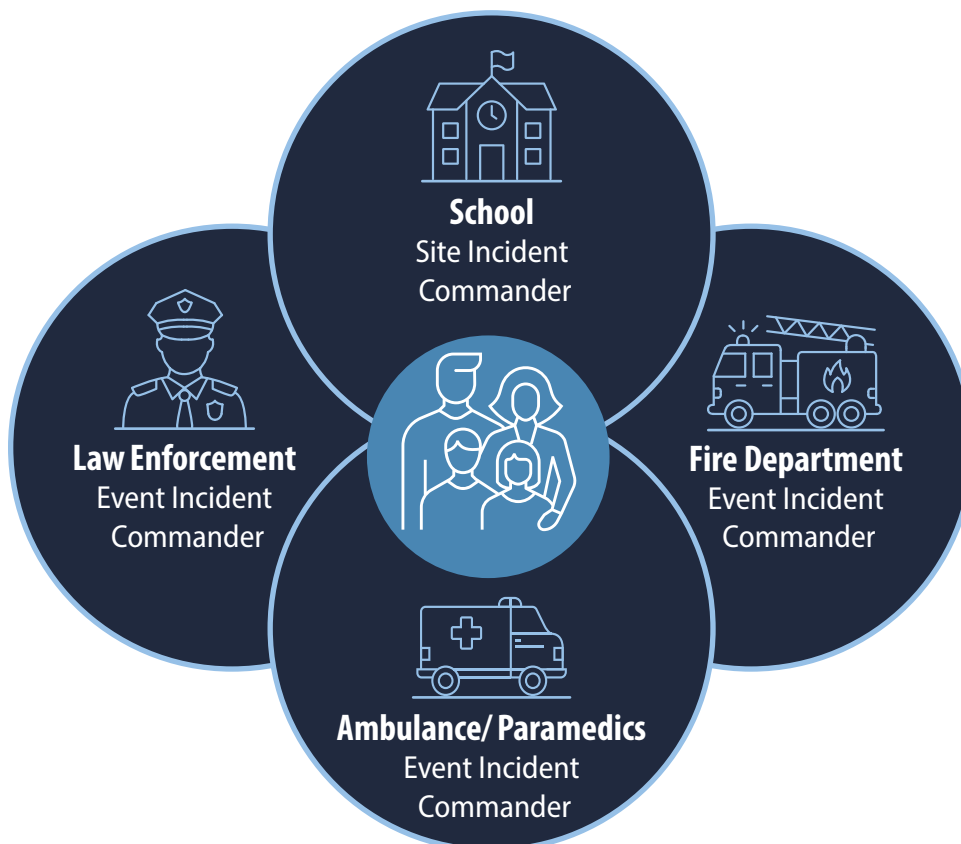
Unified Command

In many emergencies, both school personnel and external responders (e.g., fire, police, paramedics) are involved. Unified Command is an ICS principle that brings together incident leaders from each responding agency or organization to coordinate response efforts under one shared set of objectives.

It is important to note that only the key individuals/agencies with primary jurisdiction should occupy Unified Command positions. In a school setting, this typically includes the Site Incident Commander (usually the principal or designate) and the Event Incident Commander(s) (e.g., fire or police commanders). There may be situations where first responders are delayed in arrival, until which time Site Incident Commanders must be prepared to manage the situation on their own.

Together, these roles contribute to a Unified Command structure, allowing each leader to maintain authority over their area of responsibility while working collaboratively to ensure a safe, efficient, and coordinated response.

The Four Commanders



Recommendation

Staff that are interfacing with first responders are encouraged to complete introductory Incident Command training (e.g., ICS 100).

Example Scenario

Following a minor fire in a school, the Site Incident Commander (principal or designate) consults with the Event Incident Commanders to decide whether the school is safe to re-occupy. The decision to allow students and staff back into a school is the principal's decision made in consultation with first responders.

Local authorities also play a role in emergency management. When an emergency requires coordinated support at the school site level, local authorities activate Emergency Operations Centres (EOCs) to manage events. Schools and districts should work with their local authorities during planning to support alignment and operations during emergencies.

In some circumstances, the school district will activate an EOC to provide additional support to school sites. In these cases, the District EOC will collaborate with the school as needed. The extent to which district level involvement is required will depend on the scope of the emergency. Refer to [Section 11: School District Emergency Management](#) for more information.

Section 9

Considerations for School Emergency Management Plans

Comprehensive emergency management begins with a clear, well-developed plan. Every school in B.C. is encouraged to develop and implement a School Emergency Management Plan (SEMP), with support and guidance from their school district or authority. A SEMP ensures a proactive, coordinated, and inclusive approach to managing emergencies. Plans should be reviewed and updated regularly. They should be flexible enough to meet the diverse operational realities of each school while aligning with district and provincial frameworks.

Throughout all phases of emergency management, schools should consider specific contexts, groups, and operating conditions that may require tailored planning. The following considerations should be integrated into a SEMP to support a coordinated, inclusive, and local context-responsive approach.

Inclusive Safety and Emergency Planning

Inclusive safety is a foundational principle of effective emergency management. At every stage of emergency management (mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery), schools and districts should ensure that the individual needs and capabilities of all students and staff are meaningfully addressed. This includes individuals with disabilities, diverse abilities, language barriers, or other intersecting identities that may impact their safety during an emergency. A proactive, inclusive approach ensures that all individuals can access the same level of safety, dignity, and support during an emergency.

Key Considerations

[Especially Safe: An Inclusive Approach to Safety Preparedness in Educational Settings](#) (Safe and Sound Schools) provides a template for inclusive emergency planning and outlines five core areas of support to ensure the safety and well-being of all individuals – the TEAMS Framework for Inclusive Safety Planning:

- **Transportation and Mobility:** Supports needed to help individuals move safely to a secure location, alternate site, or protective position before, during, or after an emergency. Examples include:
 - Use of mobility aids or adaptive transport equipment (e.g., manual or powered evacuation chairs, stair lifts)
 - Staff trained to assist with mobility needs and additional practice opportunities for individuals and support personnel

Recommendation

Tailor SEMPs to address the unique needs of each school and address factors such as geographic location, access to emergency services, building structure, and student population.

Recommendation

Develop individual inclusive safety plans with students and staff who require additional support. Utilize the plans during drills and ensure plans are updated frequently to remain current.

- **Emotional, Mental and Behavioural Health:** Considerations to support emotional regulation, reduce distress, and promote psychological safety during emergencies. Examples include:
 - Pre-identified calming strategies or sensory supports
 - Access to comfort items (e.g., noise-cancelling headphones, fidgets, familiar books or toys, weighted blankets)
- **Auxiliary Communication:** Strategies and tools to help individuals receive, understand, and communicate information during emergencies. Examples include:
 - Emergency instructions translated into multiple languages or conveyed using visuals, symbols, braille, or auditory formats
 - Use of alternative alerting systems such as vibrating or light-based alarms
- **Medical Health:** Planning for medical support required to maintain health and safety during an emergency. Examples include:
 - Medical devices or supplies (e.g., insulin, syringes, feeding tubes) including audible alerts for continuous glucose monitors
 - Protocols for medication administration, toileting, or specialized medical and personal care
 - Backup power sources for essential medical equipment (e.g., ventilators, powered mobility devices)
 - Considerations for service animal care
- **Security and Supervision:** Measures to ensure the accountability and protection of an individual during and after an emergency. This may include:
 - Designated staff trained to support individuals with difficulty following safety procedures (e.g., those prone to elopement or unable to remain still during lockdowns)
 - Designated quiet spaces or additional safe locations

Inclusive emergency planning is essential to protecting the rights, safety, and well-being of all students and staff. By embedding inclusion principles throughout emergency management planning, schools demonstrate a commitment to safe, caring, and inclusive learning environments for all. For additional support, refer to the Emergency Preparedness section of the [School Site Accessibility Assessment Tool](#) (BC CAISE).

Child Care on School Grounds

Many school properties in B.C. host early learning programs and/or licensed child care facilities, operated by the school district, independent school authority, or third-party providers. All licensed child care facilities in B.C. are regulated under the [Community Care and Assisted Living Act](#) and must meet the [Child Care Licensing Regulation](#), including requirements to:

- Develop an emergency plan that addresses mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery
- Establish emergency exits and a fire drill system
- Conduct monthly fire drills and annual emergency procedures drills
- Ensure staff are trained in emergency procedures
- Maintain reliable emergency communications and ensure certified first aid staff are on-site
- Submit reportable incidents

District-operated child care is staffed by district employees and should be formally integrated into school and district emergency plans, including drills, communications, and reunification protocols, as appropriate.

Third-party operated child care on school grounds may not be considered in current school emergency plans. In these cases, districts are encouraged to establish or adjust agreements to ensure clarity and coordination in emergency procedures.

Note: In emergency plans, schools should consider scenarios in which communication with nearby child care centres is critical, for example, during a hold and secure that extends past regular instructional hours.

Off-Site and In-Transit Activities

Students and staff may be off school property or in transit during an emergency, including during lunch breaks, outdoor events, field trips, or travel for sports and other activities. Emergency planning must explicitly address these situations.

Key considerations

- Ensure transportation plans address student safety and supervision while in transit, including clear emergency response procedures for drivers and supervising staff (e.g., evacuation, drop-cover-hold on), communication with the school or district, and guidance for reunification
- Ensure staff and visitors are aware of hazards and risks in the area and any protective measures required in the event of an emergency (e.g., tsunami or avalanche risk zones)

Recommendation

Include early learning and child care programs on school grounds in emergency planning (drills, resources, and supplies, where feasible) and emergency response. Invite child care operators to participate in drills (e.g., hold and secure, student reunification).

- Ensure supervising staff have access to emergency contact information, reliable communication tools, and appropriate first aid supplies and training

Non-District Groups on School Property

External organizations (e.g., community programs, after-school clubs) that may be on site outside of regular school hours should be considered in emergency planning. Consider engaging non-district groups that use school or district spaces to understand their needs and support aligned emergency plans.

Visitors, Temporary Staff and Contractors

Temporary, part-time or contracted personnel working in schools may be unfamiliar with school emergency procedures. It is recommended that schools provide site-specific safety orientations and/or quick-reference emergency instructions to all visitors, temporary staff, and contractors.

Additional practices to consider include displaying emergency signage and information in high-traffic areas, maintaining sign-in/out procedures that include collecting contact information, and establishing clear protocols to ensure all on-site individuals are informed during an emergency and included in accountability processes.

Recommendation

Include clear guidance in school emergency management plans for response when students and staff are off school property or in transit.

Recommendation

Ensure that visitors, temporary staff, and contractors understand what to do in an emergency.

Section 10

The Four Phases of Emergency Management

Emergency management involves not only the actual response to an emergency, but also a continuous process of preparation, testing, drills, practice and revision. The process can be imagined as an ongoing cycle involving four major components or phases: mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery.

Rather than being a linear sequence, these phases function as an interconnected and fluid cycle, where activities often occur simultaneously or inform one another. For example, recovery efforts may begin while response actions are still underway, and mitigation strategies can be considered while rebuilding after an emergency.

The following sections of this guide are structured around these four phases, with each section providing guidance on elements to be considered within a school safety and emergency management plan.

Overview of the Four Phases of Emergency Management

Mitigation

4 categories of hazards

1. Human-caused
2. Natural
3. Technological
4. Biological

4 risk assessments

1. Site assessment
2. Culture and climate assessment
3. Capacity assessment
4. Threat assessment

Preparedness

7 steps to prepare

1. Establish an emergency planning committee
2. Develop a school profile
3. Assign staff to roles
4. Document response and recovery protocols
5. Prepare resources and equipment
6. Conduct training and drills
7. Engage parents, guardians, and caregivers

Response

5 response protocols

1. Drop-cover-hold on
2. Evacuate
3. Lockdown
4. Hold and secure
5. Shelter-in-place

Recovery

4 aspects of recovery

1. Emotional and psychological recovery
2. Physical and structural recovery
3. Continuity of operations and learning
4. Operational debriefing



Mitigation

Mitigation refers to the actions taken to reduce or eliminate the risks and impacts of emergencies on people, property, and the environment. Mitigation is a proactive and continuous process, includes both structural and non-structural measures, and is a core priority under the B.C.-adopted [Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction](#). Every school emergency management plan should include a hazard mitigation plan intended to identify hazards, assess risks, and reduce vulnerabilities to support a safe and resilient school community.

Categories of Hazards

Mitigation should address multiple hazard types, including:

1. **Human-caused:** arising from a deliberate, intentional act to threaten or harm others (e.g., explosive devices, active shooters, dangerous intruders, civil disruptions.)
2. **Natural:** arising from weather events or other natural phenomena (e.g., flood, earthquake, avalanche, wildfire.)
3. **Technological:** arising from the result of technological or industrial accidents, infrastructure failure, or certain human activities that do not result from an intention to harm (e.g., power failure, gas or chemical leaks, explosion.)
4. **Biological:** arising from contaminated food or water or from infectious diseases (e.g., infectious animal, communicable diseases)

Hazard and Risk Assessments

Mitigation involves assessing factors that could contribute to the impact of hazards and taking steps to reduce or eliminate those risks. In school settings, four types of threat and hazard assessments are particularly relevant and may already be included in school site specific safety orientations.

4 categories of hazards

1. Human-caused
2. Natural
3. Technological
4. Biological

Recommendation

Include mitigation strategies and hazard response plans in school emergency management plans.

Recommendation

During instructional time, most exterior doors should remain locked, with visitors entering through the school's main office. Classroom doors may stay propped open but should remain in locked position for securing classrooms quickly. Schools should routinely check that doors remain locked.

Types of Hazard and Risk Assessments

Type	Description	Example Mitigation Strategies
1. Site Assessment	Focuses on the physical safety of the school site and infrastructure in relation to hazards. Staff, students, visitors, and contractors should be made aware of the hazards and risks at the school. Districts should consider structural mitigation strategies during site selection processes and new construction planning (e.g., avoiding floodplains, adherence to seismic recommendations, etc.). Schools and districts are encouraged to align facility-related decisions with the best available hazard and risk data.	• Secure heavy furniture to walls • Secure hazardous materials and equipment • Ensure access and egress routes are clear for all users, including those with disabilities or diverse abilities • Identify potential flood, wildfire, or seismic risks to structures using provincial and local hazard data • Ensure signage is visible for emergency responders (e.g., numbered entrances) • With police partners, designate spaces in classrooms and other school spaces to be used in lockdowns
2. Culture and Climate Assessment	Promotes a positive, inclusive school environment that can help reduce risks from human-caused hazards (e.g., violence, bullying) by assessing the overall culture and climate of the school. Culture can be defined as the deep, underlying set of values, beliefs and traditions that shape how people in the school community behave and interact. It influences the unwritten rules and expectations within the school environment. Climate refers to overall atmosphere and feel of the school environment, encompassing attitudes, behaviours, and experiences of students, teachers, and staff in the school environment. It's about how people feel when they're at school - climate can be influenced and changed.	• Conduct student and staff culture and climate surveys • Support strengthened student-adult connections • Foster a culture of respect, inclusion, help-seeking behaviours, and reporting (e.g., supporting use of the <i>erase</i> Report It tool) • Implement and maintain bullying, harassment and violence prevention programs • Utilize <i>erase</i> training and resources to support a welcoming, safe and inclusive environment

3. Capacity Assessment	Assesses school readiness to manage an emergency, ensuring adequate resources, staffing, and plans are in place.	• Assignment of staff roles and emergency responsibilities • Availability and organization of emergency supplies and equipment (e.g., food, water, first aid kits) • Accessibility of emergency plans and documents in both digital and print formats
4. Threat Assessment	A structured, multi-disciplinary process to evaluate specific digital and behavioural threat related concerns.	• Threat assessments can be conducted by the school-based team and/or the district safety team. • Utilize the Community Threat Assessment Protocol Guide (password protected for school safety team members) to develop procedures for threat assessments. • Free professional training on digital and behaviour threat assessment is available through the Ministry's <i>erase</i> strategy. • See Behavioural and Digital Threat Assessment below.

Behavioural and Digital Threat Assessment (BDTA)

The provincial threat assessment framework is based on the BDTA model. The BDTA assessment process is initiated by school and district staff to assess specific digital and behavioural indicators to determine whether an individual may have the means, capacity, and intent to carry out a threat. BDTA is grounded in best practices established by the US Secret Service/National Threat Assessment Center and incorporates a trauma-informed lens across six domains: individual, digital, peer, family, school, and community. If schools and districts do not use the provincial threat assessment framework, they should ensure a robust digital process is concurrent with a behavioural assessment.

Preparedness

Preparedness involves taking steps to ensure that processes, individuals, and agencies are ready to respond to emergencies in a safe, coordinated, and effective manner. It includes analyzing risks, developing detailed protocols, training personnel, conducting drills, and ensuring that all resources and roles are clearly defined and supported.

This section outlines preparedness measures that should be incorporated into a school emergency management plan, including how to ensure readiness for emergencies and a strong foundation for recovery.

1. Establish an Emergency Planning Committee

Each school or district should form an Emergency Planning Committee to inform the development, implementation, and ongoing refinement of the SEMP. Alternatively, schools may incorporate emergency preparedness into established Health & Safety Committees and Critical Incident Response Teams. This committee should be inclusive and collaborative, reflecting the full school community and broader emergency management partners.

Key participants may include:

- Principal/Vice-Principal (including provincial or district online learning school principals, if applicable)
- District Health and Safety Manager
- Safe School Coordinator
- Teaching staff representative (including online learning teachers, if applicable)
- Support staff representatives from key areas (EAs, facilities, administrative staff, etc.)
- First responders (fire, police, ambulance)
- Parent representatives (Parent Advisory Council members)
- First Nations partners
- Child care operators on school grounds
- Health and mental health professionals
- Tenants or other non-district groups on school property (as appropriate)
- Student representatives (as appropriate)

7 Steps to Prepare

Schools are encouraged to take the following steps related to preparedness:

1. Establish an emergency planning committee
2. Develop a school profile
3. Assign staff to roles
4. Establish response and recovery protocols
5. Prepare resources and equipment
6. Conduct training and drills
7. Engage parents, guardians, and caregivers

Recommendation

Incorporate the Seven Steps to Prepare to support the development and maintenance of a comprehensive school emergency management plan.

2. Develop a School Profile

A comprehensive school profile supports effective emergency planning by capturing key physical, operational, and school community information. It should be developed early in the SEMP process and updated regularly.

Components of the school profile may include:

- A master list of all individuals regularly at the school (students, staff, child care and early learning staff, regular visitors, tenants, etc.) with relevant information including:
 - Name, phone number, address
 - Emergency contact information
 - Medical and support needs
 - Other information as appropriate (days and times of tenant use, etc.)
- Student reunification details
- Plans for individuals requiring additional support during emergencies. [See Section 9: Inclusive Emergency Planning](#) for more information.
- Floor plans of the building with identification of hazards, evacuation routes, and other key details (gas and water shut-off, eyewash station, first aid stations, AEDs, etc.)
- Identification of primary and secondary assembly areas in addition to off-site alternatives
- Maps of surrounding area that identify off-site student reunification sites, nearby hazards and other key details (e.g., rivers, slopes, etc.)
- Other details from hazard analysis and risk assessments (e.g., structural vulnerabilities of the building, etc.)
- Contact information for key individuals with pre-assigned emergency responsibilities

Note: School profiles should only be shared internally (within the school or district) or with law enforcement and emergency services, as needed. Sensitive information—such as hazards, vulnerabilities, school floor plans/maps and identifiable student or staff details—must not be publicly released.

Recommendation

Ensure that the school profile is securely stored, regularly reviewed, and readily accessible (i.e., available in both digital and print formats). Pertinent information (e.g., staging areas, building features, floor plans, school contacts, etc.) should be provided to first responders. Identify multiple sites for assembly areas.

3. Assign Staff to Roles

Pre-assigning staff to clearly defined emergency roles ensures that responsibilities are understood and can be carried out efficiently during an emergency. Whether using ICS or an alternative model, schools should identify key functions that must be performed during an emergency, assign staff to these functions in advance, and ensure that staff are prepared, equipped and trained to fulfill their duties. Refer to [Section 8: Incident Command System](#) for more information.

Key considerations:

- Assign staff to roles early in the planning process
- Assign based on staff skills and qualifications; consider surveying staff at the start of the school year
- Review assignments annually and update as needed
- Ensure training as well as cross-training so staff can fill in for absent colleagues during an emergency
- Prepare for the possibility of not returning home immediately after an emergency; if dependents may be left alone, schools should consider how to balance staff responsibilities with personal obligations
- Establish a school-based team to carry out threat assessments in alignment with the district's Community Threat Assessment Protocol
- Consider how Critical Incident Response Teams can integrate into an emergency management structure to support mental health and psychological safety during and after emergencies. See [Section 3: Understanding Emergencies and Critical Incidents](#) for more information.

4. Document Response and Recovery Protocols

Schools are encouraged to work in collaboration with districts, local governments, unions, first responders, and Indigenous partners to develop and document comprehensive emergency response and recovery protocols. These protocols can guide immediate action during an incident, ensure a coordinated response, and support effective recovery and continuity of learning.

Key elements include:

- Response:
 - Steps to take when an emergency occurs
 - Standardized Response Protocols (drop-cover-hold on, evacuate, lockdown, hold and secure, shelter in place)
 - Emergency Communications
 - Student Reunification
- Recovery:
 - Emotional and Psychological Recovery
 - Physical and Structural Recovery

- Continuity of Operations and Learning
- Operational Debriefing

For details on developing these protocols, see the [Response](#) and [Recovery](#) sections.

5. Prepare Resources and Equipment

Schools should identify and maintain essential emergency resources, equipment and documentation to support the health, safety, and well-being of students and staff during emergencies. This includes resources needed to support immediate lifesaving actions, basic first aid, supervision, communication, and protection from harm during the period before first responders arrive and/or before students can be safely reunified with their parents, guardians or caregivers. Consider working with parent advisory councils and/or community groups to support gathering and safely storing materials.

Emergency documentation

- May be developed using the information collected in the School Profile and may already be included as part of the school's fire safety plan
- Ensure that documentation is readily accessible in both digital and print formats, stored securely in multiple locations (e.g., main office, district office, and at an alternate secure location), and available on offline devices (e.g., USB drives) or online platforms accessible by handheld devices

Physical resources and equipment

Consider the following resources/equipment:

- First aid supplies
- Emergency food and water
- Communication tools (e.g., cellphones, radios, megaphones)
- Other emergency equipment (flashlights, batteries, etc.)

Refer to [Section 15: Emergency Equipment and Resources Checklist](#) for a more detailed list of recommended supplies.

6. Conduct Training and Drills

Schools can ensure that students, staff, parents/caregivers and other members of the school community are well-prepared to respond to emergencies. Consistent training and regular drills are critical to successful emergency response and recovery. Training and drills can provide an opportunity to learn about and practice emergency procedures in a safe and controlled setting, build confidence, and reduce anxiety.

Recommendation

Consider developing general criteria or guiding questions to assess whether school sites can operate safely (e.g., availability of essential services such as communication or lighting), recognizing that these will vary by context.

Recommendation

Conduct training prior to drills. Ensure that training is aligned with pre-assigned roles and adapted to the ages, abilities and needs of participants. All staff, students, and families should be familiar with emergency protocols and expectations.

Training Considerations:

Ensure all students and staff understand response protocols and the importance of following procedures.

- Organize classroom discussions that cover everyone's roles and responsibilities along with an understanding of the overarching goals of emergency protocols
- Orientate all staff on the School Emergency Management Plan (SEMP) and emergency protocols; staff should be familiar enough with the SEMP to adapt or deviate from typical responses when necessary
- Support school and district staff training on ICS principles; this includes role-specific duties as well as general coordination training to support a multi-school incident response
- Include annual refreshers and updates to reflect any changes to the plan
- Consider incorporating emergency education programming into classroom learning, for example [EMCR's Master of Disaster Youth Emergency Preparedness Program](#) or the [FireSmart BC Education Program](#)

Recommendation

Connect with local police regarding their recommendations for drill frequency and invite police partners to participate in drills.

Recommendation

Ensure key elements of school emergency management plans are accessible on school or district websites.

Drill Considerations

- Ensure that drills are carefully timed, thoughtfully delivered, and trauma informed. Keep in mind the school and community's unique culture and climate as well as significant events that could impact students and staff
- Vary drill conditions (e.g., use alternate routes, conduct drills during lunch or recess)
- Practice scenarios where primary communication methods fail and alternate methods are required (e.g., no public address [PA] announcement)
- Test accessibility supports (e.g., ensure lifts or supports are functional and staff are trained)
- Include child care operators, parents/caregivers, visitors, and first responders in drills where appropriate, including if contractors are on site during a drill
- Staff with roles in student reunification should be trained in these procedures and participate in exercises. Advance communication with families helps support understanding and cooperation during drills and exercises
- Coordinate closely with local police partners for lockdown drills and consider student age and development
- Conduct an operational debrief with staff after all drills to identify and address deficiencies (e.g., blinds that don't close properly, faulty door-locking mechanisms)

Drill Requirements and Recommendations

Type	Guidance	Schedule	Notes
Fire Drills	Required (BC Fire Code)	Six fire evacuation drills per year	Conduct three in the fall (by December 31) and three in the spring (by June 30)
Earthquake Drills	Recommended (BC Earthquake Alliance)	Three earthquake drills per year	Consider participating in the Great BC ShakeOut (third Thursday in October) Schedule additional Drop-Cover-Hold On and evacuation practice throughout the year
Lockdown and Hold and Secure Drills	Recommended (provincial police partners)	Two lockdown and/or hold and secure drills per year	Conduct one per semester in collaboration with police partners to ensure procedures are appropriate and trauma-informed Practice transitioning between a hold and secure and a lockdown drill
Tsunami Drills	Recommended (Ministry of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness – High Ground Hike)	One drill per year	Recommended for schools in tsunami hazard zones or low-lying coastal areas Consider alignment with the Great BC ShakeOut, or local High Ground Hike events

7. Engage Parents, Guardians, and Caregivers

Effective emergency preparedness requires clear communication and trust with parents, guardians, and caregivers. Schools are encouraged to proactively engage families to build understanding and support for emergency protocols before an emergency occurs.

Consider the following preparedness strategies:

- Include emergency procedures in parent/caregiver resources such as school websites, parent handbooks, and newsletters
- Host annual information sessions or parent nights on emergency preparedness
- Communicate expectations regarding student reunification processes
- Gather and annually update emergency contact and student reunification information
- Provide resources to help families talk with children about emergencies
- Ensure communications are clear, accessible, and culturally appropriate

Response

The response phase of emergency management involves taking immediate action to protect life, stabilize the situation, and minimize further risk or damage. In a school context, this means ensuring the safety and well-being of students, staff, and others on site while coordinating effectively with district leadership and emergency responders.

It is recognized that emergencies can be high stress events and that staff and students have varied capacity to respond. Schools should be prepared to take critical actions before emergency responders arrive, including lifesaving interventions such as basic first aid or evacuation support.

Each emergency is unique. Response actions must be informed by the nature of the hazard, the school environment, and evolving conditions. All response efforts should be guided by the [BCEMS](#), which emphasizes a coordinated, scalable, and flexible approach to managing emergencies.

Six Recommended Response Steps:

1. Assess the situation

Determine what is happening and whether there is an immediate threat to life, safety, or property. Consider the type, scope, and potential escalation of the hazard. Contact emergency services as needed.

2. Establish command

The principal or designated Site Incident Commander assumes leadership and begins directing the response. If external responders are involved, a Unified Command may be established to ensure coordinated decision-making and shared objectives.

3. Execute response protocols

Carry out the school's emergency procedures. Based on the situation, this could include one or more of the five standardized emergency response protocols (e.g., evacuate, lockdown, etc.). Account for all students, staff and visitors; coordinate with first responders; and prioritize life and safety throughout the response.

6 recommended response steps

1. Assess the situation
2. Establish command
3. Execute response protocols
4. Activate the school emergency team
5. Contact the school district or authority
6. Manage the incident

Recommendation

Incorporate these six emergency response steps into school emergency management plans. During an emergency, these steps may not occur in a linear order and may take place simultaneously, or be repeated as conditions evolve.

4. Activate the school emergency team

Activate pre-assigned roles and functions based on the scope of the emergency. In smaller incidents, this may involve just a few roles; in more complex scenarios, a full response structure may be needed. Liaise with first responders as needed.

5. Contact the school district or authority

Notify district contacts or the independent/First Nations school authority. Share situational updates, request support, and follow direction regarding coordination with partners including local emergency services as appropriate.

6. Manage the incident

Continue leading response operations under the established command structure. Work collaboratively with emergency responders in Unified Command, maintain effective internal communication, and coordinate student reunification and external communications as directed. Continuously gather and assess information from staff, students, and emergency services to understand and adapt to the evolving situation. District teams may be activated to assist the response.

5 response protocols

1. Drop-cover-hold on
2. Evacuate
3. Lockdown
4. Hold and secure
5. Shelter-in-place

Recommendation

Ensure school emergency management plans include procedures related to the five standardized response protocols along with student reunification and emergency communication.

Five Standardized Response Protocols

As part of an all-hazards approach to emergency management, schools should be prepared to implement five core response protocols.

Each school's emergency management plan should account for local hazards and environmental conditions and ensure that staff are trained to assess the situation and determine the most appropriate response, recognizing that multiple protocols may be required in sequence or in combination. These protocols are designed to be flexible and context-dependent; the most appropriate response will vary depending on the nature and evolving conditions of the emergency.

1. Drop-cover-hold on

This protocol is most commonly associated with earthquakes and should be immediately initiated when shaking begins or after receiving an alert from the Canadian Earthquake Early Warning System. It may also be appropriate in other situations that cause structural instability, such as explosions.

Procedure:

- Drop to the ground
- Take cover under a sturdy desk or table
- Hold on until the shaking or impact subsides

Drop-cover-hold on is often the first step in a layered response and may be followed by evacuation or shelter-in-place, depending on post-event safety.

2. Evacuate

Evacuation is used when it is safer to be outside the building than inside (e.g., fire, bomb threat, flooding, chemical spill). It involves the organized movement of students and staff to a designated assembly area or alternate site.

Procedure:

- Leave the building or affected area calmly and quickly
- Follow designated evacuation routes
- Report on assigned assembly areas for accountability

Note: Evacuation is not always the safest option. For example, following a mild flood during extreme weather, remaining indoors may be safer than evacuating.

3. Lockdown

A lockdown is used when there is an immediate threat inside the school building that requires isolating students and staff in secure rooms, e.g., dangerous intruder, active shooter, or barricaded subject of concern.

Procedure:

- Communicate clear lockdown instructions through the school's designated notification system
- Close locked doors, window blinds, and turn off lights
- Move away from sightlines to pre-designated areas of the room, as much as possible
- Students or staff in hallways should move to the nearest room that is securable, stay quiet and out of sight, and not move through open areas to return to their classroom
- Support students and staff who may need assistance, including those with individual safety plans
- Remain silent and await instructions
- Silence cell phones if staff or students have them on their persons, including vibrate
- Do not open the door for anyone
- Do not move from pre-designated areas until 'all clear' status is confirmed by authorized personnel
- Staff and students who are outside on school grounds should leave school property and report in at a pre-determined off-site assembly area

Recommendation

Avoid using code words when ordering response protocols. Use plain language for clarity and consistency. Communication to alert the school should last no more than 30-60 seconds.

4. Hold and Secure

This protocol is used when there is a threat or emergency occurring outside the school building but not directed at the school, e.g., a police incident in the neighbourhood. Hold and secure can be initiated by school administration or police partners. This protocol allows activities to continue inside while the perimeter remains secure. Activities may be restricted as appropriate.

Procedure:

- Perimeter of the school is secured - lock and monitor all exterior doors
- Movement inside the school may be restricted or escorted, where possible
- Take attendance and report status, including if hold and secure is a transition from lockdown
- Be prepared for potential escalation to lockdown
- No entry or exit until advised by police partners

5. Shelter-in-Place

Shelter-in-place is used when it is safer for students and staff to remain indoors due to an external environmental hazard or other situation where evacuation poses greater risk, e.g., gas leak, hazardous spill near the school, or severe weather. Unlike hold and secure, this protocol is typically triggered by environmental conditions rather than a security incident.

Procedure:

- Bring everyone inside the building
- Seal the building if needed (turn off HVAC systems, close windows and doors)
- Move to designated areas if needed
- Await further instructions from emergency personnel

Note: Not all emergencies are addressed through these five protocols. For example, communicable disease outbreaks may require different responses such as isolation measures, temporary school closures, and/or coordination with public health authorities.

Emergency Communications Plan

Effective communication is a critical component of emergency response and coordination. The Ministry of Education and Child Care and its contracted safety partner can support schools and districts in ensuring aligned and responsive communications. Schools and districts are encouraged to connect with the ministry for communications support, high profile police investigations, and if media is or may be involved.

Internal Communication

Internal communication refers to the flow of information within the school site and school district. This includes students, staff, early learning, child care operators, tenants, and district personnel.

The communications strategy should clearly outline:

- What information will be communicated
- When and how it will be communicated
- Who is responsible for initiating and managing communication

Contingency planning is essential. The school should be prepared to communicate even if systems are disrupted (e.g. power outages, loss of cellular or internet connectivity, etc.). Schools should maintain backup communication methods such as:

- Two-way radios
- Battery-powered megaphones or PA systems
- Pre-designated runners or messengers

External Communication

External communication may refer to outreach to parents and caregivers, first responders, local Nations and Indigenous authorities, community organizations, provincial partners, and/or media.

The communications plan should specify:

- Who is authorized to speak on behalf of the school or district
- Approved methods of communication (e.g., text alerts, email, social media, website updates)
- Protocols for responding to inquiries and for sharing verified, timely information

Recommendation

Develop a communications plan to support timely and necessary information sharing during and following an emergency.

Recommendation

Maintain technology service continuity to ensure that basic information technology is available during and following an emergency.

Key Considerations

- **Families:** The SEMP should outline how and when families will be notified of an emergency, and who will initiate the communication. As noted in the Preparedness section, schools are encouraged to proactively inform parents/guardians about emergency protocols to support awareness and response during actual incidents.
 - Consider communications during regular instructional hours as well as if student reunification takes place after end of day bell time
 - Pre-established parent/guardian email distribution lists can support timely communication during events
- **First Responders:** The principal (or designate) is responsible for maintaining real-time communication with first responders. Once they arrive, Unified Command with first responders may be established. Command of staff and students remains with the school. Refer to [Section 8: Incident Command System](#) for more information.
- **Media:** Media relations protocols should be clearly outlined in the communications plan. The plan should:
 - Identify the spokesperson/Information Officer (e.g., principal, superintendent, or designated media representative). If a designated media spokesperson is unavailable, ensure the individual fulfilling this role has received basic media training
 - Outline procedures for verifying and releasing public information including coordination with police partners; consider joint messaging
 - Include guidance on managing social media messaging and media requests
- **Social Media:** If social media is being used to communicate updates during an emergency, assign a knowledgeable staff member to this role. Information should be factual, timely, and coordinated with district and police communications. Encourage students and staff to avoid posting potentially misleading or incorrect messages on social media platforms. The communications plan should also establish protocols for addressing misinformation and monitoring public response.

Communication Tools

The following tools and systems should be considered and maintained. Tools should be assessed for effectiveness during drills.

- Automated mass notification systems (e.g., text, phone, email alerts)
- Emergency contact trees
- Website and social media platforms
- PA systems or portable speakers
- Analog options (e.g., hand-held radios, printed contact sheets)

Recommendation

Ensure information is factual, timely, and coordinated as well as culturally appropriate and accessible (e.g., translated materials, plain language).

Student Reunification

A safe, orderly, and well-communicated reunification process is essential to maintaining student safety, reducing trauma, and supporting family trust. Each school's emergency management plan should include a student reunification plan that outlines how, when, and to whom students will be released during or after an emergency, and should include considerations if an incident has been prolonged (e.g., an extended evacuation or lockdown).

Core Elements of a Student Reunification Plan

- **Documentation and Forms:** Schools should collect student reunification information at the start of each school year and upon registration of new students. Information should be stored securely in both electronic and hard copy formats. This documentation includes:
 - Authorized pick-up persons
 - Emergency contact details
 - Legal custodial documentation, if applicable
- **Pre-Identified Reunification Sites:** Schools must designate primary and secondary reunification sites (in case the primary site cannot be used) and communicate these locations to families in advance. Sites should be accessible, safe, and designed to support an efficient flow of parents/caregivers and students.
- **Three-Station Reunification Model:** A structured three-station process is recommended to ensure safety, accountability, and an orderly release of students from a supervised assembly area (see [The "I Love U Guys" Foundation](#) for more information). A reunification plan should be a component of the SEMP.
 - **Station 1: Parent Greeting**
Parents/caregivers are welcomed, provided instructions, and complete a reunification form (one form per student). Staff direct them to the appropriate check-in line.
 - **Station 2: Identification Check-In**
Parents/caregivers present photo identification. Staff verify authorization against student records and initiate retrieval of the student. Parents do not enter the student assembly area.
 - **Station 3: Student Release**
Staff retrieve the student from the supervised assembly area and reunite them with the verified adult. Release is documented before departure.
- **Communication with Families:** Schools should have a plan for notifying families of the reunification process during or after an emergency. This should align with the school's broader emergency communications plan and include multiple communication channels (e.g., email, SMS, phone), plain language, and translation as needed, and designated spokespersons or school officials for updates.

Recommendation

Include a student reunification plan in the SEMP that outlines how, when, and to whom students will be released during or after an emergency.

Recommendation

Avoid using open outdoor fields as reunification sites wherever possible. These environments present line-of-sight challenges, security concerns, and logistical difficulties. Indoor or partially enclosed spaces (e.g., gymnasiums, multi-purpose rooms) allow for better supervision, protection from weather, and structured movement.

Additional Considerations

- **Custody and Legal Documentation:** Schools must maintain and reference up-to-date legal custody information. Staff involved in reunification should be aware of any restrictions or legal directions related to student release.
- **Cultural Safety and Accessibility:** Reunification plans should consider diverse family structures, language barriers, and accessibility needs. Schools should provide interpreters and accessible check-in formats as required.
- **Digital Reunification:** Students and staff will likely leave belongings behind during evacuation to prioritize safety. Reunification of students with families/caregivers may occur before recovery of student belongings. Access to retrieve belongings occurs when the school site is safe. Belongings should be returned using a planned, supervised, and trauma-informed process.
- **Operational Efficiency:** Schools are encouraged to use:
 - Pre-signed authorization forms for alternate caregivers
 - Trained runners to escort students to verified guardians
 - Sign-in/out tracking logs to ensure accountability and accurate recordkeeping

Recovery

Recovery refers to the efforts undertaken to restore infrastructure, social and economic systems, learning, and emotional well-being following an emergency or disaster. For schools and districts, a return to normalcy is vital not only for the school community but also for broader community stability. Recovery should not simply focus on returning to pre-incident conditions but should incorporate opportunities for improvement, including mitigation and resilience-building. Planning for recovery should begin well before an emergency occurs and be integrated into overall emergency planning.

A successful recovery process restores safety, promotes healing, and ensures continuity of learning in a timely and inclusive manner.

Four key aspects of recovery

1. Emotional and Psychological Recovery

Emergencies can have significant and long-lasting emotional and psychological effects. They often disrupt a person's sense of safety, community, and control. While some individuals may demonstrate resilience and recover over time, others may require additional support to cope with trauma and loss. Staff in schools play a key role in identifying and addressing the emotional needs of students, staff, and families throughout the recovery process.

Understanding Trauma

Emergency and disaster-related trauma can result in a wide range of emotional and behavioural responses in children and youth including anxiety, withdrawal, fear, anger, sleep disturbances, headaches, aggression, and declines in academic performance. Adults also may demonstrate a wide range of emotional and behavioural responses. Reactions may vary depending on the nature of the event, personal circumstances, prior traumatic exposure, individual resilience, and the availability of support systems.

Key principles from disaster mental health and trauma-informed practice highlight the importance of:

- Recognizing that all individuals affected by a disaster are impacted in some way
- Recognizing that trauma can lead to a wide variety of reactions and approaching these with understanding
- Acknowledging that trauma can affect a person's ability to learn, regulate emotions, build relationships, and feel safe

4 key aspects of recovery

1. Emotional and psychological recovery
2. Physical and structural recovery
3. Continuity of operations and learning
4. Operational debriefing

Recommendation

Align school and district recovery efforts with the [B.C. Provincial Disaster Recovery Framework](#). Ensure plans are scalable, inclusive, and integrated across systems to promote long-term community resilience. Build recovery into the emergency management cycle with training, cross-sector collaboration, and regular plan updates.

- Addressing inequities in how trauma is experienced and processed, particularly among marginalized populations
- Recognizing that pre-trauma functioning can impact one's response to a traumatic event

Recommendation

Collaboration and consultation with local unions is a key component of recovery.

Strategies for Supporting Recovery

A trauma-informed approach supports recovery by fostering a safe, supportive, and predictable environment that promotes healing. Schools should consider the following:

- **Create calm and structured environments:** Predictable routines help students and staff feel secure. Communicate changes clearly and regularly
- **Promote connection and belonging:** Rebuilding social networks and relationships supports emotional healing. Consider supporting group activities, peer mentoring, and opportunities for meaningful engagement
- **Recognize signs of distress and respond/refer appropriately:** Monitor for trauma symptoms, identify individuals requiring more support, and establish clear referral pathways for services
- **Ensure counselling availability and psychoeducation:** Help staff, students, and families access emotional support and normalize reactions to trauma and coping strategies
- **Offer culturally appropriate and equitable services:** Ensure mental health and well-being supports are inclusive, accessible, trauma-informed, and responsive to the needs of diverse communities
- **Support staff well-being:** School staff may be impacted by emergencies and may experience traumatic stress. Unaddressed adult stress can affect the broader school environment and influence how children and youth experience recovery. Prioritizing staff well-being helps promote calm, stability, and emotional safety. Offer support such as employee assistance programs, wellness resources, and peer support networks

Planning Considerations

- Traumatic events often extend beyond school or district capacity and may require coordinated external support. Consider how Critical Incident Response Teams can be embedded into recovery plans to provide support.
- Establish partnerships with local mental health providers, neighbouring districts, and community agencies before an emergency occurs.
- Maintain trust, safety, and confidentiality when providing emotional support.

- Schools are often seen as community hubs; consider establishing guidelines regarding when and how schools can work to support the broader community in recovery efforts.

Physical and Structural Recovery

Following a disaster, it may be necessary to repair or rebuild damaged school facilities. There may also be personal belongings, including personal digital devices, that were left onsite during an evacuation and may need to be returned. This process can extend the overall disruption to school life and heighten emotional stress for students, families, and staff. While the technical responsibilities for physical recovery typically rest with district staff, schools also play an essential role in supporting students through this transition and helping to maintain a sense of safety and normalcy on site.

Key Considerations

- **Structural Assessments and Inspections:** Coordinate timely structural assessments to evaluate building integrity and determine the safety and usability of school facilities following an emergency event. This includes conducting or coordinating a Rapid Damage Assessment (RDA) as part of the Post-Disaster Building Assessment Process to quickly determine whether a facility can be safely occupied prior to detailed engineering evaluation.
 - Training through B.C. Housing equips personnel who are not structural experts to conduct rapid damage assessments and support informed decisions about potential building safety risks following a disaster
 - Districts may conduct RDAs where trained personnel are available, or work in collaboration with local authorities, First Nations, or other officials to complete assessments
- **Temporary Facility Use:** Where school facilities are partially damaged or temporarily unusable, identify and plan for alternative learning spaces to support continuity of operations. Temporary facilities may include other schools, community centres, or shared public spaces. Plans should address safety, accessibility, transportation, supervision, and communication with families, and may require coordination with local authorities, unions, First Nations and community partners.
- **Building Back Better:** As encouraged by the Sendai Framework, rebuilding efforts should not merely aim to restore the pre-disaster state, but instead strengthen resilience, safety, and accessibility. Recovery planning should aim to integrate mitigation measures (e.g., seismic retrofitting, fire and flood-resilient design, improved ventilation systems) and support sustainable long-term resilience.
 - Contact the Ministry of Infrastructure for more information about physical and structural recovery for school districts

Recommendation

Personnel involved in structural assessment are encouraged to complete the [Rapid Damage Assessment course](#) through BC Housing.

- **Reunification of Belongings:** Students and staff will likely leave belongings behind during evacuation to prioritize safety. As outlined in the Student Reunification section above, reunification of students with families/caregivers occurs before recovery of student belongings. Access to retrieve belongings occurs when the site is safe. Belongings should be returned using a planned, supervised, and trauma informed process.

Continuity of Operations and Learning

Continuity planning helps schools and districts sustain essential educational, administrative, and operational functions when facilities or systems are disrupted. Depending on the nature and scale of the emergency, these efforts may be needed for a few hours, several days, or extended periods of weeks or months.

Planning for continuity of operations helps ensure that schools can maintain their most essential services during and after a disruption. Schools and districts should identify the critical functions that must continue (such as instruction, student supports, and key administrative processes), determine who is responsible for carrying them out, and outline how these functions will be sustained if facilities, staff, or systems are impacted.

Re-establishing school operations—even in modified or alternative formats—can help restore normalcy and promote broader community recovery. Continuity planning should be proactive, inclusive, and adaptable to the specific context of each school or district. If schools cannot reopen in a timely manner, districts and authorities should activate alternative instructional methods that are inclusive and accessible. These may include:

- **Online Learning:** B.C.'s Online Learning framework enables students to continue their education remotely during periods of disruption. Online learning options are available through certified provincial providers and school districts. For more information, visit the [Ministry of Education and Child Care's Online Learning website](#)
- **Hybrid Models:** Where students require in-person support or have limited connectivity, instruction may combine online learning with scheduled in-person check-ins or teacher-directed distance options. For more information, see the [Online Learning Policy](#)
- **Shared Learning Spaces or Partner Facilities:** In collaboration with local authorities and community organizations, schools may identify temporary learning spaces (e.g., community centres, other schools) to continue in-person instruction

Recommendation

Incorporate continuity of operations and learning into emergency management plans. Ensure that barriers to access are considered and addressed in an equitable way.

Operational Debriefing

Operational debriefing following an emergency is a critical component of the recovery process. Post-incident operational debriefing should be approached with care, empathy, and a focus on operational improvement and supportive, non-intrusive check-ins. These conversations help identify successes and gaps, while ensuring that students and staff can be connected with appropriate supports.

The insights gained from operational debriefing can be used to inform revisions to school emergency plans, protocols, and training; strengthen collaboration with community and emergency response partners; identify ongoing support needs for students and staff; and document lessons learned to support preparedness and organizational memory.

Key considerations:

- **Timing and trauma sensitivity:** Schedule operational debriefs with sensitivity to participants' emotional needs. Conduct debriefs while memories are still fresh, but only after individuals have time to stabilize and access necessary support. Avoid structured group emotional processing or asking participants to recount their experiences. Based on traumatic impact, operational debriefing may need to be conducted individually or in small groups to increase psychological safety of participants. Ensure participation is voluntary and provide access to private follow-up support for anyone who needs it.
- **Appropriate participation:** Involve all relevant individuals in operational debriefs (e.g., staff, first responders, community partners, etc.), ensuring appropriate formats for different groups. For example, staff check-ins may provide an opportunity to identify support needs and access resources, while first responder sessions may be a structured after-action review.
- **Skilled facilitation:** Operational debrief sessions should be led by individuals trained in trauma-informed practice (e.g., the Critical Incident Response Team). Additional mental health professionals may assist when events involve significant distress.

Recommendation

Provide safe, optional opportunities for staff, students, families, and community partners to share needs, ask questions, and access available supports. These conversations should not involve asking participants to recount traumatic details or process emotional reactions in a group setting.

Critical incident stress debriefing (CISD), in which groups come together to recount and emotionally process a shared traumatic event, is not considered best practice in school settings. It is distinct from the operational debriefing referenced here, which focuses on reviewing actions, procedures, and supports rather than processing trauma narratives.

Section 11

School District Emergency Management

This guide focuses on school-level emergency management. However, school districts play a critical role in supporting coordinated emergency planning and response. Districts should work with local and provincial governments including Ministry of Education and Child Care, First Nations, and regional districts to align emergency planning processes. Considerations include:

- **Site-Level Emergency Management Plans:** Each board office and district-operated site (e.g., resource centres) should develop a site-specific emergency management plan using the same foundational elements outlined in this guide. District sites are encouraged to adapt the SEMP components—including the all-hazards approach, pre-assigned roles/responsibilities, response protocols, and recovery considerations—to ensure district facilities and staff are prepared for emergencies that may affect operations, even when students are not present.
- **District Emergency Operations Centre (EOC):** Districts are encouraged to establish an EOC to assist schools by providing strategic coordination and operational support during emergencies that exceed a school's capacity or affect multiple sites.

Note: Independent schools may not require an authority-level EOC, particularly if functioning as a stand-alone entity. Independent school systems with centralized administration may benefit from establishing an EOC for system-wide coordination.

School District Emergency Operations Centre

When a school district faces an emergency that affects multiple sites or requires coordination beyond the capacity of an individual school, the district may activate its Emergency Operations Centre (EOC). The EOC plays a central role in coordinating strategic response efforts, ensuring resource allocation, managing external communications, and supporting affected school sites.

The EOC command structure can mirror the ICS structure used at individual schools, with clearly defined roles and functions. When activated, the district EOC can collaborate with schools, local authorities, first responders, and Ministry partners to ensure a unified and effective response.

Recommendation

Boards of education should adopt formal emergency management policies and work with local emergency program coordinators to align district plans with municipal resources and school-based protocols.

Example command structure within a school district	
EOC Director	Responsible for overall management of the EOC, ensuring that it is functioning to support the site, manage consequences, and ensure operational continuity. Has the authority to sign off on expenditures and public information. Liaises directly with the Policy/Executive Group.
Risk Officer	Monitors for risk to the organization, including Health & Safety.
Liaison Officer	Responsible for all external communications such as press releases and drafting key messages for staff.
Information Officer	Responsible for public information, media relations, and internal information.
Operations Section Lead	Responsible for connecting directly to the site and ensuring that the EOC is working to support site needs.
Planning Section Lead	Manages the information coming into the EOC and ensures it is documented appropriately. Undertakes planning for future operational periods.
Logistics Section Lead	Sources exceptional resource requests to support the site, including setting up the EOC facility. Works directly with Operations to ensure the site has what it needs to manage the incident.
Finance/Admin Section Lead	Tracks expenditures and prepares for future compensation efforts.

Activating a District EOC

A District EOC may be partially or fully activated depending on the scope, complexity, and geographic scale of an incident. The following elements outline when a school district may want to activate an EOC:

- There is a district-wide emergency involving multiple school sites
- The magnitude of an emergency requires resources beyond individual school site capacity
- The duration of an emergency is lengthy (e.g., lasting more than three days)
- Major policy decisions are required
- A state of local emergency is declared
- Threats are made to the community or region
- Activation supports the successful management of an emergency or school crisis

When the district EOC is activated, the following responsibilities are generally passed from individual schools to the district:

- Media communications
- Agency and stakeholder coordination (e.g., Ministry of Education and Child Care, Emergency Management and Climate Readiness)
- Resource support

EOC Locations and Resources

Districts should identify and equip at least two EOC locations:

- A primary site (typically within the board office) with essential communications, IT, and emergency management materials
- A secondary or backup site in case the primary site is unavailable

Districts may also maintain virtual or hybrid EOC capabilities to support rapid activation, remote coordination, and continuity in the event that staff cannot safely access physical sites.

The EOC should have:

- Access to digital and hard-copy versions of all current school emergency management plans
- Communication tools (e.g., phones, radios, internet)
- Maps, district contact lists, emergency reference materials, and other relevant information

Districts are encouraged to work proactively with ministries, local governments, First Nations, unions, and emergency management partners to clarify roles and coordination during community-wide emergencies. As part of broader community emergency planning, districts may support response efforts, such as providing facilities or transportation resources, where appropriate. These arrangements should be discussed and understood in advance to ensure alignment with district responsibilities to students and staff.

For more information on EOCs, see the [Emergency Operations Centre Operational Guidelines](#).

Recommendation

Roles and responsibilities between school and district levels should be clearly defined in advance and reinforced during activation to prevent gaps or duplication.

Section 12

Conclusion

Every school day, families entrust educators, staff, and administration in schools with the safety and well-being of their children. School teams take this responsibility seriously, working to create safe, caring, and welcoming environments.

Emergencies, both large and small, can occur without warning, and events in B.C. and beyond remind us of the importance of being prepared. While not all incidents are catastrophic, the risks are real. Wildfires, floods, human-caused incidents, and the threat of a major earthquake highlight the need for coordinated emergency planning. Delaying preparation due to limited time or resources can leave students, staff, and communities vulnerable.

Effective emergency management requires proactive planning, training, and practice across all levels of the education system. Developing a comprehensive emergency management plan is critical to ensuring the safety and well-being of every student and staff during an emergency.

Section 13

Resources

- [An Emergency Management Framework for Canada \(3rd Edition\)](#)
- [BC Earthquake Alliance](#)
- [BC Fire Code – Ministry of Housing](#)
- [BC Smart Infrastructure Monitoring System – BC Ministry of Transportation and Transit](#)
- [British Columbia Emergency Management System \(BCEMS\)](#)
- [British Columbia Public School Employers' Association - OHS Resources & Tools](#)
- [ClimateReady BC](#)
- [Community Threat Assessment Protocol Guide – Safer Schools Together \(password protected\)](#)
- [Disaster Behavioral Health All-Hazards Planning Guidance](#)
- [Disaster Psychosocial Support – Provincial Health Services Authority](#)
- [Earthquakes Canada – Resources Canada](#)
- [Emergency Management and Climate Readiness \(EMCR\)](#)
- [Emergency Management and Climate Readiness \(EMCR\) Office Contacts](#)
- [Emergency Management Planning Website - Ministry of Education and Child Care](#)
- [Emergency Management – Public Safety Canada](#)
- [Emergency Operations Centre Operational Guidelines \(2nd Edition\)](#)
- [Especially Safe: An Inclusive Approach to Safety Preparedness in Educational Settings – Safe and Sound Schools](#)
- [Expect Respect and a Safe Education \(erase\)](#)
 - Report It Tool: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/erase/erase-for-students>
 - Free training: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/erase/erase-for-school-staff>
- [Get Prepared – Government of Canada](#)
- [Guide for Developing High-Quality School Emergency Operations Plans - U.S. Department of Education](#)

- [Healing Families, Helping Systems: A Trauma-Informed Practice Guide for Working with Children, Youth and Families - Ministry of Children and Family Development](#)
- [High Ground Hike – EMCR](#)
- [I Love U Guys Foundation](#)
- [Incident Command System \(ICS\) Canada](#)
- [Master of Disaster Youth Emergency Preparedness - EMCR](#)
- [Online Learning BC– Ministry of Education and Child Care](#)
- [Online Learning Policy – Ministry of Education and Child Care](#)
- [Ontario and B.C. Privacy Commissioners’ Joint Message \(2008\)](#)
- [Post-Disaster Building Assessments - BC Housing](#)
- [PreparedBC](#)
- [Professional Standards for BC Educators - BC Teachers' Council](#)
- [Provincial Communicable Disease Guidelines for K-12 Settings](#)
- [Provincial Disaster Recovery Framework](#)
- [Safer, Stronger, Smarter: A guide to improving school natural hazard safety – US Federal Emergency Management Agency](#)
- [School Action for Emergencies \(SAFE\) Plan – Royal Canadian Mounted Police \(RCMP\)](#)
- [Schools Protection Program \(SPP\) – Ministry of Finance](#)
- [School Site Accessibility Tool – BC CAISE](#)
- [Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction – UNDRR](#)
- [WorkSafeBC Critical Incident Response \(CIR\) Program Critical Incident Response Program guidelines | WorkSafeBC](#)

Section 14

Forms

Downloadable versions of additional tools and forms are available on the [ministry's website](#).

Section 15

Checklists

School Emergency Management Plan Checklist

This checklist is intended as a quick reference aid to be used in collaboration with the Safety and Emergency Management Planning Guide for Schools, Districts and Authorities. When developing a school emergency management plan, the following elements should be addressed.

1. Foundations of Emergency Management

- ☐ Plan aligns with BC Emergency Management System and relevant policies and legislation
- ☐ Plan aligns with school district/authority and relevant local government and/or First Nation procedures
- ☐ Plan addresses all four phases of emergency management:
 - ☐ Mitigation
 - ☐ Preparedness
 - ☐ Response
 - ☐ Recovery
- ☐ Plan considers the following:
 - ☐ Inclusive emergency planning
 - ☐ Child care on school grounds
 - ☐ Non-district groups on school grounds
 - ☐ Off-site and in-transit activities
 - ☐ Visitors, temporary staff and contractors

2. Mitigation

- ☐ School hazard and risk assessment completed
- ☐ Risks considered across four categories of hazards:
 - ☐ Natural
 - ☐ Human-caused
 - ☐ Technological
 - ☐ Biological
- ☐ Mitigation actions identified

3. Preparedness

- ☐ Emergency Planning Committee established
- ☐ School profile maintained and securely stored, inclusive of:
 - ☐ Contact list for staff, students, and others regularly on school grounds (name, phone number, address, emergency contact)
 - ☐ Student reunification information
 - ☐ Medical needs
 - ☐ Inclusive safety needs
 - ☐ Floor plans and maps of surrounding areas including primary, secondary and off-site reunification sites
- ☐ Staff pre-assigned to emergency roles
- ☐ Response and recovery protocols documented
- ☐ Resources and equipment prepared
- ☐ Training and drills conducted
- ☐ Parents and caregivers engaged

4. Response

- ☐ Response steps established for when an emergency occurs:
 - ☐ Assess the situation
 - ☐ Establish command
 - ☐ Execute response protocols
 - ☐ Activate school emergency team
 - ☐ Contact school district/authority
 - ☐ Manage the incident
- ☐ Plan details the following response protocols:
 - ☐ Drop-cover-hold on
 - ☐ Evacuate
 - ☐ Lockdown
 - ☐ Hold and secure
 - ☐ Shelter in place

- ☐ Emergency communication plans established:
 - ☐ Internal (staff, students, district staff, child care operators, etc.)
 - ☐ External (families, first responders, media, etc.)
- ☐ Student reunification plan established

5. Recovery

- ☐ Plan addresses:
 - ☐ Emotional and psychological recovery
 - ☐ Physical and structural recovery
 - ☐ Continuity of operations and learning
 - ☐ Operational debriefing processes

Emergency Equipment and Resources Checklist

Schools should maintain a minimum, core set of emergency resources and equipment to support immediate lifesaving actions, basic first aid, supervision, communication, and protection from harm during the period before first responders arrive and/or before students can be safely reunified with their parents/guardians. All sites should be prepared to support students and staff for a minimum of 72 hours (as per PreparedBC).

School Emergency Resources:

These items support school-wide coordination and response and should be stored in a central location (e.g., main office).

A. Emergency Plans, Records, and Documentation (printed and digital formats)

- ☐ School Emergency Management Plan
- ☐ Student contact information (name, phone number, address, emergency contact)
- ☐ Staff contact information (name, phone number, address, emergency contact)
- ☐ Student and staff medical information
- ☐ Student reunification procedures and forms
- ☐ Individual safety plans (for students and staff with disabilities, diverse abilities, or other support needs)
- ☐ List of staff with pre-assigned emergency roles
- ☐ Daily attendance and class lists (including whether classes are on field trips, etc.)
- ☐ Records and contact information for child care operators, visitors, contractors, temporary staff or volunteers on school grounds each day
- ☐ Building floor plan and map of surrounding area (showing evacuation routes, hazards, etc.)

B. Communication

- ☐ Charged cell phone(s)
- ☐ Portable battery banks and charging cables
- ☐ Battery-powered or hand-crank radio(s)
- ☐ Megaphone or other portable voice amplification device

C. First Aid and Health

- ☐ School-appropriate first aid kit(s)
- ☐ Student and staff medications and other required equipment/aids
- ☐ Non-latex gloves
- ☐ Emergency/thermal blankets

D. Emergency Food and Water

- ☐ Emergency drinking water
- ☐ Non-perishable, ready-to-eat food (allergen-aware)

E. Basic Logistics and Safety

- ☐ Battery-powered or hand-crank flashlights
- ☐ Traffic safety vests (for supervision and movement)
- ☐ Keys to support access to critical areas (e.g. utility rooms, emergency supplies.)

F. Classroom Emergency Grab and Go Kits

Each classroom or learning space (gym, library, music room, etc.) should have a kit.

Recommended contents:

- ☐ Small first aid kit (for minor injuries)
- ☐ Laminated class list, where feasible
- ☐ Flashlight (battery-powered or hand-crank)
- ☐ High-visibility identifier for supervising adult (vest, hat, lanyard, etc.)
- ☐ Whistle
- ☐ Card listing teacher's emergency roles and responsibilities
- ☐ Personal protective equipment

Optional/Hazard-Specific Equipment

Some schools may require additional resources based on local hazards and risks, including geography, climate, or access to emergency services.

Examples:

- ☐ Snow shovels or ice melt (winter storm risk)
- ☐ Additional water and food storage (remote or rural schools)
- ☐ Portable fans or cooling aids (extreme heat risk)
- ☐ Flood mitigation supplies (identified flood risk)



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