

Safety Planning in the Shelby County School System

In conjunction with the Alabama State Department of Education, the Shelby County School system requires all schools to have a safety plan based on the State Department template on file each year. Crisis management in our schools is a continuous process in which all phases of individual school plans are reviewed and revised. These plans are multi-hazard plans that are updated yearly and require monthly drills for fire and weather as well as drills twice per year for lock downs. Good plans are never a finished product but are living documents.

The basis for our plans employs four basic phases of crisis management.

1. Mitigation/Prevention: addresses what can be done to prevent incidents
2. Preparedness: focuses on the process of planning.
3. Response: the steps we take during an event or crisis
4. Recovery: deals with how to restore the learning and teaching environment.

Our plans are also developed with the representation of local school committees that use not only key school personnel but also parents, citizens and other safety-oriented agencies. These agencies include:

- Local Law Enforcement
- Local Fire and Rescue
- Shelby County EMA
- Alabama Homeland Security
- FEMA
- Red Cross
- Department Human Resources

One key development this year has been the achievement of NIMS Certification for our school system. NIMS is the National Incident Management System established by then President Bush because of the 9/11 tragedy. In addition to the Board of Education approving a resolution adopting NIMS practices and strategies, every administrator and key school safety personnel have taken two online courses on the Incident Management system. This initiative also puts into practice ICS or the Incident Command System that helps define those in charge in the event of a major event or crisis.

Finally, a developing initiative is Virtual Alabama. This effort extends the Virtual Alabama toolset of 3-D imaging technologies using a Google Earth platform, currently protecting a number of critical infrastructures, to provide the common operation picture and situational awareness needed by Alabama's first responders to safeguard children in our schools before, during and after a disaster.

Families trust schools to keep their children safe during the school day. Thanks to the efforts of our teachers, administrators, staff and local agencies, our schools are safe havens for the youth of Shelby County. The unfortunate reality is, however, our schools may be touched either directly or indirectly by a crisis of some kind at any time.