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Natural Disaster Preparation and Response: A Toolkit for Charter Schools



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The National Charter School Resource Center (www.charterschoolcenter.ed.gov) is dedicated to supporting the development of high-quality charter schools. The NCSRC provides technical assistance to sector stakeholders and has a comprehensive collection of online resources addressing the challenges charter schools face. The NCSRC is funded by the U.S. Department of Education and led by education consulting firm Safal Partners.

Prepared By:



Safal Partners (www.safalpartners.com) is a mission-driven strategy consulting firm that supports education reform efforts at the federal, state, district, and school levels.

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CONTENTS

Introduction and Purpose	3
Defining Emergencies and Specific Protocols	4
Identifying Risks	4
Defining Vocabulary and Processes	5
Creating a Plan	5
Professional Development and Training	6
Understanding the National Incident Management System	7
Using New Technologies in Emergency Management Planning	8
Support Strong Communication Practices Ahead of a Disaster	8
New Technologies for Emergency Management	9
Federal Resources.....	9
Other Resources	9
New Technology Tracking Students During Disasters	9
Social Media Implementation	10
Disaster Relief and Federal Funding Sources	11
Tips for Working with FEMA.....	12
Conclusion	13
Acknowledgements	13
Appendix: Emergency Management Planning Resources	13
Sources	20

Introduction and Purpose

More than 25 million Americans—almost eight percent of the population—were affected by natural disasters in 2017. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), which is an agency of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, supported 59 major disaster declarations, 16 emergency declarations and 62 Fire Management Assistance Grant declarations across more than 35 states, tribes, and territories.¹ Given the catastrophic events of 2017, these natural disasters remind families and communities of the importance of preparing for, responding to, and recovering from natural disasters.

The National Charter School Resource Center (NCSRC) presents this toolkit that provides resources and examples to help charter school leaders and administrators (hereafter referred to as “leaders”) prepare for and respond to the effects of natural disasters such as earthquakes, floods, hurricanes, tornadoes, and wildfires. This toolkit provides a centralized and comprehensive list of resources that charter schools can use to plan for and respond to natural disasters, including school efforts to:

- Define specific natural disasters and emergency protocols;
- Develop and customize emergency preparedness plans, procedures, drills, and checklists for students, staff, and facilities;
- Create and access emergency management professional development and training;
- Use technology to establish or enhance communication before, during, and after a disaster; and
- Access federal disaster relief funding sources.

Emergency management is defined by FEMA as “the managerial function charged with creating the framework within which communities reduce vulnerability to hazards and cope with disasters.”² Best practices in emergency management are applicable to all schools; however, each school’s emergency management plan needs to be tailored to its unique student body and staffing, community needs and resources, and facility or campus context.

Charter schools may face additional obstacles that need explicit attention and efforts compared to district schools. First, at the school level, charter schools may not be treated as public schools or public entities by other parties. For example, first responders and other community and civic organizations may not know that they exist if they are only provided with list and monitoring of district schools. This could occur even though charter schools: 1) serve children; 2) could serve as community assets in terms of shelters and recovery efforts; or 3) may be vulnerable—for example, due to different building construction if the school is not located in a district facility.

First responders may be used to assisting schools within the district system, and by doing so assume they have covered all public schools. To foster awareness and understanding between charter schools and first responders and community organizations, charter school leaders need to proactively reach out to other civic stakeholders before a natural disaster occurs. The second section of this paper provides more details on resources for building relationships with first responders and community organizations.

Second, in terms of policy, federal entities may not consider charter schools to be public entities or they may require further criteria and documentation for charter schools to qualify for federal funding for natural disaster prevention and recovery. Policymakers at the state and federal levels should ensure that charter schools are treated as public schools and/or other public entities for the purposes of funding eligibility. This is a challenge for the charter and public education sector to address.

Despite charter-specific challenges, there is a wealth of emergency management resources focused on natural disasters. This toolkit brings together links and descriptions of resources, with a focus on materials and funding from federal departments. The goal of this toolkit is to be the “one-stop shop” for emergency management resources for

charter school leaders. This central repository can help charter school leaders efficiently leverage existing resources to create and develop emergency management plans that fit their unique school context.

This toolkit includes an appendix of resources categorized by publication date, organization, type of disaster(s) addressed, and a brief description. Readers can also access a searchable version of the resource appendix online at [this link](#).

Defining Emergencies and Specific Protocols

While schools are primarily places of learning, they also serve a broader function in the community. In terms of emergency management, school buildings may serve as shelters or community meeting places. Because of their community functions, schools should integrate the vocabulary, processes, and approaches they select for their emergency management plans with those of first responders or other stakeholders. A list of agreed upon terms and procedures can serve as a critical starting point.³

There are many terms and acronyms associated with emergency management, and these new terms may be unfamiliar to school personnel. Sorting out all the terminology and creating a comprehensive plan may seem overwhelming, especially when trying to balance the day-to-day operational needs of a charter school. However, there could be high costs to not preparing in advance. For example, “shelter” has different procedural steps than “evacuate,” and each action can be appropriate for different natural disasters. Sheltering is the safest option for a tornado, while evacuating for a tornado could leave students and staff exposed to harm. On the other hand, a fire requires evacuation, with a plan on how to alert staff and students of the danger and a strategy to take people out of harms way already in place. During and after a disaster, student locations need to be verified against class rosters, parents need to be notified, and communications about the school’s operation must be made, to name a few steps. All of these actions are more effective if they have been thought through and practiced outside of an emergency.

The good news is that there are several comprehensive resources that can help schools identify which natural disasters they are most likely to experience, provide lists of definitions that schools can adopt into their preparedness and response plans, and provide step-by-step instructions on how to create a plan. There are also ways to tailor your plan to the specific needs and context of the student body, school community, and its facility.⁴

Below are recommended resources that serve as a first step to help school leaders create or update emergency management plans.

Identifying Risks

FEMA created the *Safer, Stronger, Smarter: A Guide to Improving School Natural Hazard Safety* (2017) to help schools with emergency management efforts.⁵ The second chapter, “Identifying Relevant Natural Hazards,” contains information about identifying natural disasters and the frequency with which they occur, mapped by state. The chapter

KEY ACTIONS

- Make an emergency management plan before a natural disaster occurs.
- Identify risks so you plan for the highest-frequency natural disasters in your school’s location.
- Define key terms and procedures so all students and staff know what to do in case of a natural disaster.
- Establish a relationship with first responders so that your school receives the help it needs.

RESOURCES:

- *Guide for Developing High-Quality School Emergency Operations Plans* (FEMA, 2013).
- *Safer, Stronger, Smarter: A Guide to Improving School Natural Hazard Safety* (FEMA, 2017).
- *Guide to Working With Your Local 1st Responders for School* (American Red Cross 2018).

concludes with a checklist for which natural disasters a school should plan for based on where they are located. The natural disasters discussed in this report include earthquakes, floods, hurricanes, tornadoes, tsunamis, high winds, and other hazards. This is a useful resource to help charter school leaders identify and prioritize which natural disasters should be part of their emergency management plans.

Defining Vocabulary and Processes

The U.S. Departments of Education, Health and Human Services, Homeland Security, and Justice, along with the Federal Bureau of Investigation and FEMA, created the *Guide for Developing High-Quality School Emergency Operations Plans* (2013). The 2013 *Guide*'s emergency management approach looks at preparedness around five areas:

- **Prevention** means the capabilities necessary to avoid, deter, or stop an imminent crime or threatened or actual mass casualty incident. Prevention is the action schools take to prevent a threatened or actual incident from occurring.
- **Protection** means the capabilities to secure schools against acts of violence and manmade or natural disasters. Protection focuses on ongoing actions that protect students, teachers, staff, visitors, networks, and property from a threat or hazard.
- **Mitigation** means the capabilities necessary to eliminate or reduce the loss of life and property damage by lessening the impact of an event or emergency. It can also mean reducing the likelihood that threats and hazards will happen.
- **Response** means the capabilities necessary to stabilize an emergency once it has already happened or is certain to happen in an unpreventable way; establish a safe and secure environment; save lives and property; and facilitate the transition to recovery.
- **Recovery** means the capabilities necessary to assist schools affected by an event or emergency in restoring the learning environment.

Most emergency management documents and first responders refer to the timelines associated with the disaster—before, during, and after.⁷

Within the preparedness and timeline frameworks, school leaders should define specific vocabulary, processes, and approaches. This will help leadership teams communicate effectively and uniformly with each other and with other staff, students, parents, and community members.

FEMA⁸ and Yale University⁹ provide a list of terms and acronyms that can be a helpful starting point for deciding how to communicate about risks identified in the previous step. Precise language that has a common understanding across the school community is important for implementing an effective and actionable emergency management plan.

Creating a Plan

The 2013 *Guide* walks leaders through a six-step approach to creating a plan.¹⁰ The 2013 *Guide* recommends that those writing an emergency plan:

1. Form a Collaborative Planning Team;
2. Understand the Situation;
3. Determine Goals and Objectives;
4. Plan Development (Identifying Courses of Action);
5. Plan Preparation, Review, and Approval; and
6. Plan Implementation and Maintenance.

The 2013 *Guide* offers a comprehensive approach to creating a plan. Although the 2013 document is 75 pages, it contains distinct tasks and steps that a school leadership team can work through over time.

The National Incident Management System (NIMS) is a standardized, nationwide approach to emergency management. Schools are not required to use NIMS unless receiving federal preparedness funding, but the U.S. Department of Education recommends that all schools implement NIMS. NIMS provides the vocabulary, systems, and processes to help schools effectively manage emergencies and coordinate with first responders in their community.

One element of NIMS is the Incident Command System (ICS), which provides a common organizational structure, set roles and responsibilities, and uniform procedures. ICS is the standard for emergency management nationwide. ICS also gives school leaders a proven management system for incidents of all types and scale. The 2017 *Safer, Stronger, Smarter* guidebook offers an in-depth explanation and planning steps for implementing NIMS and ICS.¹¹

Developing awareness of your school's needs and establishing relationships with first responders is another important step for charter schools. First responders like police, firefighters, and emergency medical technicians (EMTs) should be aware of your school's needs, such as any special building features and student or staff special needs or chronic medical conditions. In turn, your school can make efforts to include first responders in campus life and use them as resources for developing the school's emergency management plan. For example, charter schools could consider:

- Welcome first responders to participate in special school activities, demonstrations, or career days;
- Work with first responders to determine if any special equipment or resources are needed for the school's emergency management plan; and
- Attend trainings and meetings held at local police or fire precincts.¹²
- The American Red Cross has a guide with further suggestions to help schools work with first responders.¹³

Professional Development and Training

In all emergency situations, it is imperative that every administrator, teacher, and staff member is capable of leading students out of danger and towards safety. As a disaster could potentially strike at any time in any part of the school, there is a need for regular training and ongoing professional development to reinforce confidence and familiarity with roles and responsibilities during an emergency.

Charter school leaders can support professional development and training by:

- Providing fiscal resources and time needed to plan for emergencies and to train all school personnel;
- Engaging all school leadership in proactive emergency management planning; and
- Collaborating with a broad spectrum of professionals and agencies to help develop training.¹⁴

Working with community partners and local agencies (police, fire, and other local emergency response teams) will help charter school leaders create professional development and training plans based on the unique characteristics of the school building and grounds as well as the students who attend the schools (e.g., students with disabilities and special needs).¹⁵

KEY ACTIONS

- Commit the time, resources, and collaboration necessary to train all staff to be able to lead students away from danger and toward safety.
- Base training on the National Incident Management System (NIMS), a nationally accepted best practice.

RESOURCES:

- *National Incident Management System website* (FEMA, 2018).
- *Ready.gov website* (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2018).
- *REMS Technical Assistance Center website* (U.S. Department of Education, 2018).
- *Helpful Hints for School Emergency Management, Volume 2, Issue 5* (ERCM Technical Assistance Center, 2007).

Understanding the National Incident Management System

Charter school leaders should align their professional development and training with the NIMS.^{16,17} This unified, standardized national system for managing domestic incidents is suitable for schools nationwide to use during all phases of emergency management.¹⁸

Implementing NIMS Training

The U.S. Departments of Homeland Security and Education recommend all key personnel involved in school emergency management and incident response take the NIMS, ICS, and NRF training courses and support the implementation of NIMS.¹⁹

FEMA's Emergency Management Institute (EMI) School Program training courses range from multi-hazard emergency planning for schools, to specific environmental disaster planning (e.g., earthquake and floodplain courses). There are also additional courses recommended for leadership personnel.²⁰

Additional Training Resources

To enhance and sustain professional development and training, charter school leaders should also regularly consult with federal resources such as Ready.gov²¹ and the Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools (REMS) Technical Assistance Center.²²

- Ready.gov organizes training resources on the business section of the website, in addition to providing specific resources for educators.²³ The resources for educators focus primarily on implementing emergency preparedness into classroom instruction.²⁴
- REMS Technical Assistance Center offers services and tools, including publications, guidance documents, toolkits, virtual trainings, on-site trainings, communities of practice, and technical assistance aimed at building the “preparedness capacity” of schools, school districts, and institutes of higher education (IHE) and their community partners at the local, state, and federal levels. The training resources can be found at the following links:
 - **Virtual Trainings (Online Courses and Webinars)**: This diverse set of trainings includes downloadable webinars and self-paced online courses to school practitioners.²⁵
 - **Trainings by Request (TBR)**: This type of training can be delivered on-site at a school, school district, or IHE. These trainings (including training personnel and training materials) are free of charge. They include “Train-the-Educator” (TtE) and “Train-the-Trainer” (TtT) courses.²⁶
 - **Specialized Training Packages**: These downloadable Specialized Training Packages feature self-paced emergency management training materials that support high-quality emergency management across a range of special topics. Charter school leaders can use these materials to train their staff or refresh their own knowledge regarding special topics in school emergency management).²⁷

WHAT IS NIMS?

- NIMS guides all levels of government, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and the private sector to work together to prevent, protect against, mitigate, respond to, and recover from incidents.
- NIMS provides stakeholders across the whole community with the shared vocabulary, systems, and processes to successfully deliver the capabilities described in the National Preparedness System.
- NIMS defines operational systems, including the ICS, Emergency Operations Center (EOC) structures, and Multiagency Coordination Groups (MAC Groups) that guide how personnel work together during incidents. NIMS applies to all incidents, from traffic accidents to major disasters.

Excerpt from the National Incident Management System, Third Edition, October 2017

Using New Technologies in Emergency Management Planning

Clear communication during and after a disaster is one of the most crucial aspects of disaster response and recovery because it is what will ultimately connect all affected students, staff, teachers, families, support systems, and communities.²⁸ The reliability and accessibility of your information systems are key to your school's and community's resilience following a disaster. School leaders can reinforce communication practices prior to a disaster by regularly updating staff members on what information systems are currently in place and what backup systems can be applied should power or cellular service go out.

This section will cover what steps school leaders can take to prepare staff members on strong communication practices ahead of a disaster. It will also cover new technologies for emergency management planning and response, including:

- New or existing mobile apps that can be used during emergencies (e.g., Nextdoor,²⁹ Zello,³⁰ Waze,³¹ and American Red Cross³²);
- Student databases; and
- Social media (e.g., Facebook Safety Check, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat³³).

Support Strong Communication Practices Ahead of a Disaster

Charter schools may already have communication practices and information systems in place that allow them to quickly communicate to teachers and staff, students, and families. Possible information systems may include the following:



Email newsletter system;



Internal school messaging system or online portal specifically for school staff;



Text-messaging system or telephone tree;



School mobile app;



School website; and



Social media websites or other online social networks.

As charter schools are developing their communication plans to implement before, during, and after a disaster, school leaders should ensure that their staff is both aware of what information systems exist or are currently in use as well as how to use all information systems. Communication tools—including text messaging systems, school websites, mobile apps, and social media websites—are not ubiquitous across all demographic segments, and the usefulness of some of them may deteriorate should power or cellular communication be destroyed or diminished during or after a disaster.³⁴ Charter school leaders may also find certain communication tools, such as social media websites and other online social networks, more efficient for disseminating information. These tools may be more readily accessible as they allow users to post information

KEY ACTIONS

- Use technology to communicate clearly and broadly before, during, and after a natural disaster.
- Build online communication infrastructure and practices before a natural disaster occurs.

RESOURCES:

- Mobile Apps and Social Media safety features.
- *Communication During Disaster Response and Recovery* (Associated Press, NORC at the University of Chicago, 2013).

more quickly than on school websites or internal message boards. The following recommendations include what charter school leaders should consider when developing their emergency management communications plan.

- Catalog all current information systems available to teachers and staff and disseminate details on where, when, and how they may access them and use them;
- Provide training on all current information systems to teachers and staff;
- Survey teachers, staff, and families prior to implementing new information systems to determine overall accessibility and usefulness; and
- Prior to implementing new information systems, specifically social media websites and mobile apps, provide training to all teachers and staff and inform families that new information systems will be in use.

New Technologies for Emergency Management

Charter school leaders can look to federal resources, including Ready.Gov and FEMA, for new technologies available to help plan for and respond to an emergency. These technologies may assist charter school leaders in creating disaster checklists, doing headcounts, obtaining weather conditions, or providing news alerts. More details about these resources follow.

Federal Resources

- **Ready.Gov** provides information on using technology in emergency management, including:
 - How to “Get Tech Ready,” with tips on how to be better informed during a disaster, how to make a plan, and other helpful tips on using technology during a disaster;³⁵ and
 - Detailed information on the Integrated Public Alert and Warning System (IPAWS), the nation’s wireless alert and warning infrastructure.³⁶
- **FEMA** has several technology-related resources available on its website, including:
 - Information on how to install the FEMA app to receive real-time alerts from the National Weather Service, learn emergency safety tips for more than 20 types of disasters, and locate emergency shelters and disaster recovery centers in your area³⁷; and
 - An overview of social media accounts available in English and Spanish that feature information as well as social media conversations happening across the U.S. on any disaster.³⁸

Other Resources

The American Red Cross has multiple mobile apps available in English and Spanish for specific emergencies, including an all-inclusive app that allows users to monitor more than 35 different severe weather and emergency alerts at a time.³⁹ These apps also provide helpful tips on preparing for specific disasters before, during, and after one happens. There is also a First Aid app that allows for instant access on handling common first aid emergencies.

There are many for-profit companies that have created mobile apps that allow for instant communication during emergencies in the form of two-way radio. These can be found on the Apple or Android application stores.

New Technology Tracking Students During Disasters

There are a variety of technologies that charter schools may already be using to track attendance at their schools. Charter school leaders may find that simply having class headcounts available in a digital format or shared document (e.g., Google Drive, Dropbox, or other file sharing platform) may provide instant access to attendance information during an emergency.

There are also many mobile apps available on Android and Apple application stores that are specifically designed for educators. Some of these mobile apps can be used for direct communication with families and students.

Social Media Implementation

The use of social media during recent disasters, including Hurricane Harvey and Hurricane Maria, has been widely reported, especially with how social network applications like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram were being used by affected individuals to communicate with friends, family, first responders, and those providing relief and assistance.⁴⁰ Charter school leaders are encouraged to use social media to connect with their networks quickly and clearly. The following tips involving social media may help you formulate a social media plan during and after emergencies.

- Track social media account information on a spreadsheet. When alerts or other information are ready to disseminate, use the spreadsheet to remember to which accounts you should post.
- Assign specific staff members to manage social media accounts.
- Prior to emergencies occurring, use social media to provide helpful emergency management tips to keep the account active and engaging before a disaster happens.

WHAT SOCIAL MEDIA TOOLS SHOULD YOU USE?

“We recommend giving careful consideration to the amount of resources and expertise required before deciding on the tools you may want to use. It is often beneficial to start with social media projects that may be considered low risk or use fewer resources at the outset, and then adopt more engaging tools that may require additional resources, expertise and leadership support.”

[*The Health Communicator's Social Media Toolkit*](#),
Centers for Disease Control

Consider the following social media websites when planning your communications strategy.



Facebook: Facebook’s popular use (more than one billion active users) makes it very accessible to diverse audiences, including teachers, staff, parents, and students who may need to post to the platform or receive information from the platform using a computer or mobile device. Facebook also provides its own Crisis Response features, which allow users to:

- “Mark Yourself Safe” to self-report safety during and after a crisis;
- “Give or Find Help” to connect directly with people nearby to give or find help with resources like food, supplies, or shelter;
- Support people in crises by fundraising or donating money; and
- Get information about a crisis from news organizations and other sources.

Additionally, Facebook supports photos, videos, and live streaming capabilities. These features may aid in communicating information to a broad audience during and after an emergency.



Twitter: Twitter is another easy-to-use social media platform that allows for short text posts (280 characters or less) with photos and videos. The nature of this social media platform is brief and to-the-point, providing a platform where users can post real-time updates and use regional or disaster-specific hashtags (e.g., #HurricaneHarvey and #Houston) to disseminate information quickly.



Instagram: Instagram has surged in popularity in recent years, making it another valuable free social media platform to consider posting to during an emergency. The format allows for photos, video posts, and the ability to record short videos called “Instagram Stories,” where users can leave temporary notes on the platform. There is also the ability to broadcast live video from a mobile device. Users can use popular hashtags to disseminate information.



Snapchat: During a crisis, this popular mobile app may be useful not only for communicating to students and parents in a crisis but also for its “Snap Map” feature. During Hurricane Harvey, Snap Map provided real-time updates on the ongoing flood situation with geolocation and time-stamping.⁴¹



Nextdoor: Nextdoor is a digital tool that allows its users the ability to communicate with neighbors in their local jurisdiction. Users can only interact with other users in their neighborhood or city, where they can discuss safety matters and other concerns. Local governments can also communicate directly with residents in their jurisdiction to disseminate safety information quickly by geo-targeting posts.⁴²

Disaster Relief and Federal Funding Sources

FEMA has moved toward a “whole community” approach to emergency management. This approach “recognizes that all resources and diverse segments of the community must be fully engaged to most effectively prepare for, protect against, respond to, recover from, and mitigate against all hazards.”⁴³ Partners in a whole community emergency management approach include:

- FEMA and other federal agencies;
- Local, tribal, state, and territorial leaders;
- Schools and higher education;
- Health care;
- NGOs, including faith-based and non-profit groups;
- Private sector industry; and
- Individuals and families.

The whole community approach acknowledges and incorporates diversity across organizations and community roles to ensure that all members, including those from historically marginalized groups, are represented.⁴⁴

In addition to community engagement, federal resources can also assist in recovery. FEMA provides grants for schools to make infrastructure improvements. These grants include Pre-Disaster Mitigation (PDM) Grants⁴⁵ and Post-Disaster Hazard Mitigation Grants (HMGP).⁴⁶ According to the HMGP, “Hazard mitigation measures are any sustainable action taken to reduce or eliminate long-term risk to people and property from future disasters... Studies have shown that every \$1 spent equals \$4 of future damages mitigated.”⁴⁷

The following resources might also be relevant:

- The Stafford Act authorizes “the delivery of federal technical, financial, logistical, and other assistance to states and localities during declared major disasters or emergencies. FEMA coordinates administration of federal disaster relief resources and assistance to states if an event is beyond the combined response capabilities of state and local governments.”⁴⁸
- FEMA’s Public Assistance (PA) program provides “supplemental federal disaster grant assistance for debris removal, emergency protective measures, and the repair, replacement, or restoration of disaster-damaged, publicly-owned facilities or certain private not-for-profit institutions following major disasters or emergencies declared by the President. The federal share of assistance is not less than 75 percent of the eligible cost. The recipient (usually the state) determines how the non-federal share (up to 25 percent) is split with the sub-recipients (eligible applicants). The PA program also provides assistance for hazard mitigation measures during the recovery process.”⁴⁹ Learn more at the FEMA Public Assistance Program and Policy Guide [website](#).⁵⁰

KEY ACTIONS

- Engage the whole community in response and recovery efforts so diverse voices are heard and rebuilding is stronger.
- Confirm with your state education agency that your school is considered a public school or other public entity for natural disaster funding.
- If your building is not up to current disaster code, consider pursuing Pre-Disaster Mitigation federal funding.

RESOURCES:

- *Pre-Disaster Mitigation Grant Program website* (FEMA, 2018).
- *Hazard Mitigation Grant Program website* (FEMA, 2018).
- *Safer, Stronger, Smarter: A Guide to Improving School Natural Hazard Safety* (FEMA, 2017).

Tips for Working with FEMA

Charter school leaders and emergency management experts who have worked with FEMA on natural disaster recovery efforts offered the following advice:

- Confirm with your state education agency (SEA) if your charter school is considered a local education agency (LEA) and/or local government entity for grant eligibility.
- Document any losses as immediately as possible with pictures. Make sure you have electronic copies of important legal documents (building lease agreement or deed, payment records, insurance policies, etc.).
- Consider the pros and cons to beginning re-building work before the insurance company or FEMA disburses money. As one charter school leader whose school facility was damaged in Hurricane Harvey explained, “My piece of advice is don’t start any work until you get your money from FEMA. We had volunteers come in to help with cleanup and minor rebuilding efforts at one campus. We learned that FEMA saw that as making us less “in need” and would thus reduce the amount of funding that FEMA considers the school eligible for.”⁵¹
- If you are developing or refining an emergency management plan, read the requirements for recovery funding first. This way you can work backwards from FEMA’s guidance and requirements to ensure the school has the policies and practices in place that can help protect it down the line.

Below are examples from a school leader and state education agency that worked with recovery efforts after Hurricane Harvey:

“After Harvey, the procurement laws were relaxed. But in order to use the expedited procurement the school had to already have a policy in place in order to take advantage of it. For example, schools were allowed to pay staff overtime during recovery efforts. But you had to have a written overtime policy dated before the storm to be able to be reimbursed for overtime expenditures.”⁵²

—Michelle Bonton, *Founder & Superintendent of the Rhodes School for the Performing Arts*

“A lot of our schools had opened as shelter sites after the storm. Because they didn’t have a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the city, we had to work with the Texas Department of Public Safety, Division of Emergency Management to make sure that FEMA funds passed from the state Department to the schools to reimburse them for those costs.”⁵³

— Candace Stoltz, *Director of Emergency Management at the Texas Education Agency*

Although FEMA offers many grants for recovery, the process can be quite difficult to navigate and access. According to one Texas charter school leader that is recovering from effects of Hurricane Harvey, “The biggest challenge to recovery has been navigating all the different programs and identifying what programs we qualify for.”⁵⁴ A member of the emergency management team at the Texas Education Agency said, “We had a number of districts that chose not to apply to FEMA for assistance given the paperwork and slowness. Some boards have said we are not going to do it. We’ll figure something else out.”⁵⁵

Conclusion

Charter school leaders have full days and full calendars doing the critical work of educating students. It is also their job to protect their students. Charter school leaders and educators wear many hats, and it may seem outside of the job description or comfort zone to allocate resources toward natural disaster planning. However, the reality is that a natural disaster could strike at any time. In fact, 94 percent of all U.S. children live in communities at risk for natural disasters.⁵⁶

Despite best efforts, there are always natural forces beyond our control. One charter school that was interviewed for this toolkit is dealing with the aftermath of Hurricane Harvey, which struck the Houston, Texas area in 2017. The school leader reported that about 30 percent of their students are still homeless one year after the storm.⁵⁷

The school faced additional difficulty with recovery due to issues with its definition as a public school or eligible government entity to receive federal funding. This challenge needs to be addressed in state and federal policy to ensure that charter schools, as public schools, are eligible for federal recovery funding. At the local level, emergency management planning could be a topic for inclusion in district-charter collaboration efforts. A citywide approach to emergency management for all public schools, including charter schools, would also increase awareness among first responders and other community organizations about charter schools' existence, needs, and vulnerabilities during a natural disaster.

That said, prioritizing planning and preparedness can make a world of difference to your school and broader community. Studies have shown that every \$1 spent on hazard mitigation equals \$4 of future damages mitigated.⁵⁸ Natural disaster preparation can be a challenging and time-consuming effort. But these efforts are essential. It can be the difference between life and death; prolonged problems or a rapid recovery; or a community that is torn apart or that rebuilds stronger.

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Appendix: Emergency Management Planning Resources

This appendix provides an overview of vetted resources for charter school leaders to aid with their emergency management planning. The resources are categorized by disaster type, authoring organization, publication date, and include a brief description.

Readers can also find a sortable, online version of the appendix at [this link](#).

Natural Disaster Preparation and Response:
A Toolkit for Charter Schools

Functional Category	Resource Type	Resource Source	Resource Link	Year	Resource Focus
Community Engagement	Webinar	U.S. Department of Education	TeenCERT:Enhancing School Emergency Management through Youth Engagement and Preparedness	2015	This webinar discusses the Teen Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) program and how schools may use it to engage youth in school emergency management planning and promote student preparedness.
Earthquake	Website	U.S. Geological Survey	Earthquake & Earthquake Fantasy School Story	2018	This website addresses common misconceptions about earthquakes, with a few fast facts. It provides an introduction about how to prepare for an earthquake.
Earthquake	Website	American Red Cross	Preparing for an Earthquake	2018	This website includes general safety notes on how to prepare and protect yourself in your home before, during, and after an earthquake.
Earthquake	Website Tool	American Red Cross	Earthquake Safety Checklist	2018	This thorough checklist is for preparing for an earthquake. It is available in nine languages.
Earthquake	Poster	FEMA, U.S. Department of Homeland Security	FEMA 529, When Earthquake Shaking Begins...Drop, Cover, and Hold On Poster	2018	Printable poster for use in schools.
Earthquake	Website	FEMA, U.S. Department of Homeland Security	Earthquake Safety at School	2015	This is the landing page for FEMA's earthquake safety specific to schools. It provides general earthquake safety information.
Earthquake	Presentation	American Clearinghouse on Educational Facilities (ACEF)	Earthquake Preparedness in Schools	2013	This presentation is full of relevant resources and informative content about how to prepare educational facilities for an earthquake.
Earthquake	Guide	FEMA, U.S. Department of Homeland Security	FEMA 424: Design Guide for Improving School Safety in Earthquakes, Floods, and High Winds	2010	This manual provides guidance for the protection of school buildings from natural disasters. This volume concentrates on K-12 schools. Its intended audience is design professionals and school officials involved in the technical and financial decisions of school construction, repair, and renovations.

Natural Disaster Preparation and Response:
A Toolkit for Charter Schools

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Earthquake	Guide	Earthquake Engineering Research Institute/FEMA	FEMA 240: Earthquake Preparedness What Every Child Care Provider Needs to Know	2006	This guide provides general details about earthquakes and emergency preparedness, as well as a brief summary of mental health assistance for children in the event of an earthquake.
Earthquake	Guide	FEMA, U.S. Department of Homeland Security	FEMA 454: Designing for Earthquakes: A Manual for Architects	2006	This manual explains the principles of seismic design for those without a technical background.
Earthquake	Worksheet	Earthquake Engineering Research Institute/FEMA	FEMA Tremor Troop: Earthquakes, A Teacher's Package for K-16 (FEMA 159)	2000	This guide for teachers includes activities for preparing students for earthquakes
Emergency Management	Presentation	FEMA, U.S. Department of Homeland Security	Video: PrepTalks: Social Capital in Disaster Mitigation and Recovery	2018	This video presentation discusses disaster resilience and recovery.
Emergency Management	Website Tool	American Red Cross	How To Prepare for Emergencies: Mobile Apps	2018	The American Red Cross mobile apps include first aid, blood donation, severe weather, tornado, hurricane and earthquake information. The apps allow you to monitor specific disasters and set up emergency alerts.
Emergency Management	Website	U.S. Department of Homeland Security	Ready.gov Home Page	2018	Ready.gov is a National public service campaign designed to educate American people to prepare for, respond to and mitigate emergencies. It includes resources for different types of emergencies that could occur and their appropriate responses as well as how to make a family emergency plan, build an emergency supply kit, and get involved in your community. It also provides educator resources.

Natural Disaster Preparation and Response:
A Toolkit for Charter Schools

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Emergency Management	Publication	U.S. Department of Homeland Security	Ready.gov Educator Resources	2018	These publications provide supplemental curriculum for grades 1-12 to engage students with three lessons of inquiry-driven, project-based, and differentiated learning activities aligned to core subject standards.
Emergency Management	Website	U.S. Environmental Protection Agency	Disaster Preparedness and Recovery Resources for K-12 Schools	2018	This EPA website page provides links to disaster preparedness and recovery information for K-12 schools that can apply to many different disaster situations.
Emergency Management	Website	U.S. Department of Education	Readiness and Emergency Management Schools Technical Assistance Center	2018	The federally funded Readiness and Emergency Management Schools Technical Assistance (REMS TA) Center provides online resources including development guidelines, interactive worksheets, plan templates, a toolkits, trainings, and other resources.
Emergency Management	Website	FEMA, U.S. Department of Homeland Security	ICS Resource Center	2018	Incident Command System website provides training in ICS, useful forms, and job aids.
Emergency Management	Website	FEMA, U.S. Department of Homeland Security	Children and Disasters Landing Page	2017	This is the general landing page for Children and Disasters on the FEMA.gov website. It includes background information, youth preparedness resources, family preparedness resources, social media toolkit, emergency planning resources, response and recovery resources, training resources, and resources on how to help children cope with disasters.
Emergency Management	Website Tool	U.S. Dept. of Homeland Security	Ready.gov Children and Youth Preparedness Social Media Toolkit	2017	This toolkit provides helpful twitter and social media posts for educators and parents for disseminating emergency preparedness resources.

Natural Disaster Preparation and Response:
A Toolkit for Charter Schools

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Emergency Management	Publication	FEMA, U.S. Department of Homeland Security	FEMA P-1000, Safer, Stronger, Smarter: A Guide to Improving School Natural Hazard Safety	2017	This Guide provides up-to-date, authoritative information and guidance that schools can use to develop a comprehensive strategy for addressing natural hazards. It is intended to be used by administrators, facilities managers, emergency managers, emergency planning committees, and teachers and staff at K through 12 schools.
Emergency Management	Publication	U.S. Dept. of Education; U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services; U.S. Department of Homeland Security; U.S. Department of Justice; Federal Bureau of Investigation; FEMA	Guide for Developing High-Quality School Emergency Management Operations Plans	2013	This guide provides federal recommendations for planning teams responsible for developing and revising school Emergency Operations Plans.
Emergency Management	Publication	FEMA, U.S. Department of Homeland Security	Preparedness Tips for School Administrators	2013	This publication provides information for school administrators and leadership when considering youth and disaster preparedness in their districts.
Emergency Management	Webinar	FEMA, U.S. Department of Homeland Security	FEMA Course IS-362: Multi-Hazard Emergency Planning for Schools	2013	This online course covers basic information about developing, implementing, and maintaining school emergency operations plan.
Emergency Management	Guide	U.S. Department of Education	Emergency Management in Nontraditional School Settings	2007	This guide provides a helpful synopsis of challenges that nontraditional school settings face (e.g., rural schools).

Natural Disaster Preparation and Response:
A Toolkit for Charter Schools

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Emergency Management	Publication	U.S. Department of Education	Practical Information on Crisis Planning: A Guide for Schools and Communities	2007	This guide provides information on crisis planning, preparedness, and examples of promising practices.
Emergency Management	Publication	U.S. Department of Education	Brochure: Practical Information on Crisis Planning: A Guide for Schools and Communities	2007	This brochure summarizes the Practical Information on Crisis Planning Guide in a brief checklist format.
Emergency Management	Publication	U.S. Secret Service; U.S. Department of Education	Threat Assessments in Schools: A Guide to Managing Threatening Situations and to Creating Safe School Climates	2002	This guide provides suggestions for developing a threat assessment team within a school or school district, planning steps to take when a threat strikes, considering when to involve law enforcement personnel, resolving issues of information sharing and sharing ideas for creating safe school climates.
Facilities	Publication	National Alliance for Public Charter Schools (The National Alliance)	Facilities Funding for Charter Public Schools	2016	This guide provides general details about facilities funding for charter schools.
Flood	Website	FEMA, U.S. Department of Homeland Security	Risk Mapping, Assessment and Planning (Risk MAP), FEMA	2018	This page discusses the Risk MAP program and what the program can mean to communities. This page is intended for a variety of audiences, including state and community officials; homeowners, renters and business owners; real estate, lending, insurance professionals; engineers, surveyors and architects.
Flood	Presentation	U.S. Environmental Protection Agency; Administration for Children and Families	Cleanup: Bringing Children Back to Flood-Stricken Areas Safely	2013	This presentation offers guidance on returning children to storm-impacted facilities, specifically flood-stricken areas. It also includes information on ways to effectively cleanup and sanitize child care facilities, as well as methods to deal with mold.

Natural Disaster Preparation and Response:
A Toolkit for Charter Schools

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Flood	Guide	FEMA, U.S. Department of Homeland Security	FEMA 543: Design Guide for Improving Critical Facility Safety from Flooding and High Winds: Providing Protection to People and Buildings	2007	This guide was written after Hurricane Katrina to address safety to people and buildings during flooding and high wind emergencies.
Hurricane	Website	U.S. Department of Homeland Security	Hurricane Ready.gov	2018	This webpage provides guidance on actions to take during a hurricane watch or warning alert from the National Weather Service. It also provides tips on what to do before, during, and after a hurricane.
Hurricane	Website	National Hurricane Center	National Hurricane Center's Hurricane Preparedness	2018	This webpage provides tips and links for hurricane preparedness.
Tsunami	Website	National Weather Service	Maps of Tsunami Hazard Zones	2018	This website maps tsunami hazard zones created by the National Tsunami Hazard Mitigation Program's participating states and territories.
Tsunami	Publication	FEMA, U.S. Department of Homeland Security	FEMA P-646, Guidelines for Design of Structures for Vertical Evacuation from Tsunamis, Second Edition	2012	This guidance document includes information to assist in the planning and design of tsunami vertical evacuation structures.
Wildfire	Publication	National Clearinghouse for Education Facilities	Wildfires and Schools	2008	This toolkit summarizes FEMA's Wildfire Mitigation Fact Sheet and provides information on how to survive a wildfire.

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