

**Testimony of the Anchorage School District for the
Subcommittee on Emergency Management, Intergovernmental Relations,
& the District of Columbia
Homeland Security & Governmental Affairs Committee
United States Senate**

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The Anchorage School District appreciates the opportunity to report to the Committee on its emergency planning and preparedness. The District takes this mission very seriously and has dedicated significant time and resources to make sure that the students and staff under our care are as well prepared as possible in the event of an emergency. I believe Anchorage is a national leader in this field.

Our planning and preparedness efforts are closely coordinated with the local and state emergency preparedness agencies. The District's plans are incorporated into the Municipality's plans. On a regular school day as much as 20% of the area population could be inside a district facility so close coordination is essential.

Our efforts begin at the school level. The District operates almost 100 schools. Each is required to develop an Emergency Action Plan (EAP) every year. According to Alaska State Statute 14.33.100, Required School Crisis Response Planning, notice of each school's completed plan must be posted at each school. The updated plan must be available for inspection by employees and the public.

The plans are designed to provide a framework for protecting students, staff and school facilities, as well as to describe the responsibilities of staff members for a wide range of emergency and disaster situations that may occur. In the event of a widespread emergency such as an earthquake, it is recognized that available government resources will be overtaxed and may be unable to respond to all requests for assistance. These plans assume that the school must be self-sufficient for a time and may be required to provide shelter to the immediate community. The contents of these plans are passed on as district guidelines but at the time of the crisis, common sense combined with the facts as they are known must prevail.

There are three levels of emergencies as viewed by the district: a localized emergency which school district personnel can handle by following the procedures in their own emergency plans such as a power outage or minor earthquake; a moderate to severe emergency, somewhat beyond the school district response capability, which may require mutual aid assistance from the fire department and/or police department such as a fire, severe earthquake with injuries and/or structural damage; and a major disaster, clearly beyond the response capability of school district personnel, where large amounts of mutual aid assistance will be required, recovery time will be extensive and the response time from major supportive agencies may be seriously delayed and/or impaired.

These plans meet the requirements of the following laws, regulations and mandates: 1999 MOA/ASD Memorandum of Understanding, Bomb Threats; Anchorage Municipal Code, 23.45.405, Emergency Evacuation Drills; Alaska Statute 14.03.140, Emergency Drills; Alaska Statute 14.331100, Required School Crisis Response Planning; Title 29 Code of Federal Regulations 1910.38, Emergency Action Plans; 2000 International Fire Code Section 405, Emergency Evacuation Drills; Anchorage School Board Policy 395, Safety Drills and Crisis Plans.

The plans will be initiated by the principal or designee when conditions exist which warrant its execution. It will be implemented by all staff at the school until they are released.

The plan contains many components. Among these are the following: annual plan update, hazard assessment, site survey, orientation training, drills, evacuation routes, staging areas, parent communication responsibility, supplies and equipment, and emergency evacuation kits.

The plans specifically recognize nineteen foreseen emergencies and instructions on how to assist persons with disabilities. Detailed response checklists for each are covered. The principal or designee will be responsible for determining the type of emergency and the course of action.

Until or unless relieved the principal or designee has the authority to direct all necessary actions to bring the emergency under control. The principal or designee accomplishes this mission by assembling and commanding a School Incident Command Team. This team carries out the principal's directives and help the principal oversee the work of several emergency response units composed of pre-designated school employees. Other teams will be a communications team, a first aid team, a search and rescue team, a student release team and a crisis intervention team.

Schools and other departments prepare for emergencies by conducting drills throughout the year. All schools practice evacuation in case the building itself becomes unsafe and the occupants must leave, duck-cover-hold drills to safeguard lives while an earthquake is occurring, lockdown drills to limit the danger of an armed intruder or criminal if they gain access to the building, stay-put drills to prevent external events such as storms, dangerous animals and criminals from entering a building and finally we annually prepare for sheltering-in-place to protect students and staff from nuclear or volcanic fall-out, chemical releases and other significant airborne disasters.

In addition to this school based planning and preparedness, the District supports the overall community response. The District's primary mission, beyond the care and support for students and staff is the establishment of community shelters. We have equipped 22 facilities (eight high schools, eight middle schools and six elementary schools) as emergency shelters, as well as, three shelter support sites. The decision on which shelters will be activated in an emergency is one that is made by the municipality of Anchorage emergency operations center and the District at the time of the emergency based on the type of emergency, any damages to the shelter buildings and the ability to access the shelter to keep it supplied and keep the occupants safe during the disaster and into the following recovery period.

The shelters have been established in coordination with the Municipality and are placed at key locations around the area. Shelter sites have been established with a combination of supplemental electric generation and alternate fuel heating systems to provide the greatest possible flexibility for shelter operations in the event of a loss of utility service.

Each shelter is also provided with a pre-positioned supply of materials necessary to initialize a shelter operation at that site. Usually located in steel connexes, the supplies are checked annually to ensure their availability and functionality. School staffs are prepared to assist in the early phases of shelter operations. Long-term shelter operations are the responsibility of the Municipality.