



STATE OF MAINE
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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COMMISSIONER

April 5, 2021

Senator Joseph Rafferty, Co-chair
Representative Michael Brennan, Co-chair
Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

Dear Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and Members of the Joint Committee,

LD 429, An Act To Protect the Health of Students and Educators by Requiring the Establishment of Health and Safety Committees in School Administrative Units (EMERGENCY) requires each school administrative unit to establish a health and safety committee to coordinate planning and response to health and safety matters affecting students and staff of the school administrative unit. These committees must prioritize planning and response to health and safety concerns associated with the outbreak of COVID-19 during the state of emergency. The bill specifies that each committee must include teachers and other school employees, school administrators, school board members and parents of students.

Current best practices in school emergency management necessitate that each school and district develop and utilize a collaborative planning team. More specifically, the US Department of Education Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools (REMS) web site outlines specific recommendations [here](#).

The core planning team should include representatives from a wide range of school personnel, including, but not limited to the following: administrators, educators, school psychologists, nurses, facilities managers, transportation managers, food personnel, and family services representatives. It should also include student and parent representatives, and individuals and organizations that serve and represent the interests of students, staff, and parents with disabilities, and others with access and functional needs, as well as racial minorities and religious organizations, so that specific concerns are included in the early stages of planning. Additionally, the core planning team should include community partners such as first responders, local emergency management staff, and others who have roles and responsibilities in school emergency management before, during, and after an incident. This includes local law enforcement officers, emergency medical services (EMS) personnel, school resource officers, fire officials, public and mental health practitioners, and local emergency managers. Their expertise will inform the development, implementation, and refinement of the school emergency operations plan (EOP).

The planning team should be small enough to permit close collaboration with first responders and other community partners, yet large enough to be representative of the school, its families, and its community. It should also be large enough as to not place an undue burden on any single person.

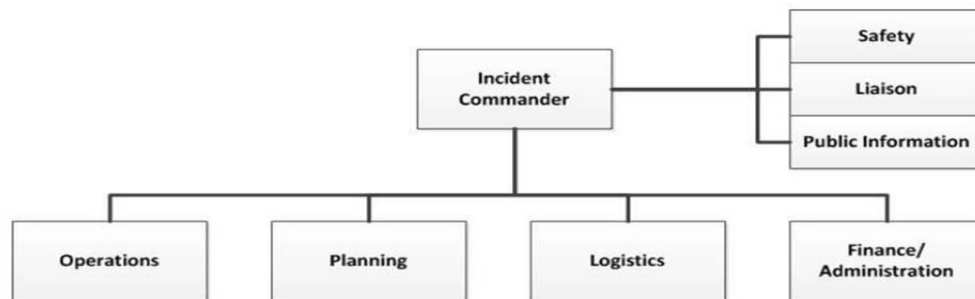
A collaborative planning team should have a wide range of membership based upon expertise, role in the school/community, and ability to constructively inform the process of making the school safe. A collaborative planning team must be continually operational, not only during a state of emergency. Last summer, the Department's Maine School Safety Center team facilitated a series of professional development sessions focused on emergency management planning for School Administrative Units

(SAUs) and their collaborative planning team members. Throughout the 2020-2021 school year, the MSSC has provided ongoing technical assistance to collaborative planning teams.

Health and safety are intertwined in many components of an Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) and should never become a singular issue addressed in isolation. Rather, health and safety are a subsection of a comprehensive EOP and influence many components of the plan. Furthermore, focusing solely on COVID-19 is incompatible with the overall development of school EOPs. A subset of emergency planning based on health and safety should be found in appropriate annexes in the EOP, such as infectious diseases. Health and safety planning should address all infectious diseases that could impact a school (measles, chicken pox, influenza, Ebola, etc.).

The process that LD 429 outlines could be integrated into an incident command system (ICS) at the local level. DOE's Maine School Safety Center recommends the establishment of required permanent collaborative planning teams for schools and districts to ensure schools are safe, healthy, and well prepared for an emergency. An ICS is used by public agencies to manage emergencies. It may also be used by businesses to effectively work together with public agencies during emergencies. Private sector businesses are also familiar with the fundamental concepts of incident command and often coordinate planning with local public emergencies services. Functions and roles may be assigned to multiple individuals or a few persons may be assigned multiple responsibilities.

Not all the ICS positions need to be active in each incident. The ICS structure is meant to expand and contract as the scope of the incident requires. For small-scale incidents, only the incident commander may be assigned. Command of an incident would likely transfer to the senior on-scene officer of the responding public agency when emergency services arrive on the scene. Command transfers back to the business when the public agency departs. Included below is an incident command system diagram.



The Department looks forward to continued conversations around LD 429 and will be happy to answer any questions.

Sincerely,

DocuSigned by:

Jonathan Shapiro

Jonathan Shapiro

Director, Maine School Safety Center

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