

Chapter 6

Proposed K–12 School Emergency Communications Guidance

K–12 schools in Washington State are challenged by the potential for natural and human-caused emergencies and disasters. State law requires the K–12 public school system to develop and maintain comprehensive safe school plans that address the major safety threats to a school environment, and collaborate with local community safety agencies to develop plans that work for students, staff, parents and community members. This guidance document addresses the essential elements of communication that schools need to address as part of their preparedness, mitigation, response, and recovery efforts.

Policy Recommendation

All K–12 schools in Washington State shall adopt policies, procedures and practices that provide for the most effective means of communication when emergencies and disasters impact schools. The elements of a school emergency communications plan includes, but is not limited to:

1. The ability to communicate within the school district to notify, coordinate and authorize actions appropriate to the type of emergency or disaster; and,
2. The ability to communicate with those outside of the school district, to notify emergency management and response agencies, the media, parents, personnel, and the community of the status of the school and the plans to address the immediate situation.

Emergency Communication System Elements

As part of a school district’s comprehensive safe schools plan, an annual review should occur to assess the district’s capabilities of using a variety of methods to communicate during and after emergencies or disasters. The types of systems available to schools may include:

1. Telephonic notification systems
2. Cell phones
3. E-mail notification systems
4. Text Messaging systems
5. School District Web sites
6. Local community safety agency Web sites
7. Satellite phones
8. Internet-based secure communications systems (e.g., the school mapping system)
9. 800-Mhz two-way radio systems
10. Local two-way radio systems
11. Ares/Races ham radio systems
12. Local radio and television station