



Emergency Planning for Students with Disabilities and Special Needs



Arizona Department of Education
School Safety and Prevention

Response: Key Considerations

- What actions need to be taken once the event begins?
 - Sound the alarm/communicate
 - Staff and students need to respond per the school's emergency plan
 - Use the buddy system (evacuation assistants)
 - Utilize Go-kits if they are available.
 - Move to evacuation area if possible, if not move to designated **area of refuge.**
 - If imminent danger, evacuate using assistance devices
 - Report status to Incident Commander



Response: Communication Considerations

- Communicate information and instructions (according to need) to students. Visual aids, sign language, large print, etc.
- Alarm systems for fire, etc., should incorporate both audible and visual elements. Hearing impaired and deaf students may be best alerted by flashing light alarms.
- Emergency back-up lighting systems may benefit students with limited visual acuity.
- Students with learning disabilities may have difficulty reading or understanding complicated directions for evacuation or response plans. Simple diagrams or pictures can provide non-reading or overstressed students with sufficient information to get to safety.



Access/Functional Needs

- Physical disabilities that might impede mobility
- Physical disabilities that might impede access to instructions, e.g., hearing or sight impairment
- Sensory disabilities that might heighten a distress reaction and/or impede response to instruction, e.g., autism
- Cognitive disabilities that might impede understanding a situation and/or instructions



Disability or Special Needs	Factors that Elevate Risk
Autism	May panic, run, not understand direction or other behaviors. May be non-verbal or use argumentative communication.
Emotional/Mental Health	May disobey or resist direction, may panic.
Hearing Impairment	Needs specialized communication for direction in an emergency, may not respond to oral language or auditory clues.
Language	Has limited understanding of the English language.
Medical	Is medically fragile, has need for medical devices.
Orthopedic	Has an injury or physical disability that limits mobility.
Severe Cognitive Disability	Has limited ability to understand environmental events, situations, or procedures. May be non-verbal.
Vision	Is blind or has a visual impairment that limits the speed of movement or requires guidance from a sighted person.
Wheelchair	Requires the use of a wheelchair or cannot negotiate stairs and is dependent on an elevator.

Response: Use the Buddy System

- Teachers, instructor assistants, students trained in evacuation and shelter-in-place (i.e., Teen CERT) for students with disabilities and special needs.
- A primary and secondary individual is identified to assume responsibility for the evacuation process of each student that has an Individual Plan.
- “Buddies” will attend training on various techniques and equipment to safely evacuate students with special needs. Buddies also participate in drills and exercises.



Response: Special Considerations for Evacuation

- Visually impaired students should have an extra cane if they do not have a seeing eye dog. Visually impaired students may need to be informed about obstacles that may be in their paths and require verbal or physical guidance through hazardous areas.
- Hearing impaired or deaf students may need face to face contact in order to read lips. Writing on a note pad is only practical if there is enough light to see.
- For mobility impaired students, evacuation by themselves may be extremely difficult or impossible because of obstacles in their paths or elevators not operating. Special pre-planned assistance must be provided.



Response: Evacuating Non-Ambulatory Students

- Decisions about how to evacuate a student should be determined in advance, during the Preparedness phase, and should be communicated to first responders.
- If leaving a student in an anticipated Area of Refuge is not viable, the student must be evacuated.
- Evacuation devices should be accessible within a reasonable amount of time and could be pre-staged in secure areas near stairwells.
 - Evacuation devices include slings, stretchers, sleds, and evacuation chairs.
 - Manual wheelchairs could also be staged near major doorways so that individuals may use them once safely evacuated from the building.



Response: Report Status through ICS

- Once in the evacuation area, assess needs and request additional support if needed.
- Report evacuation status to Incident Commander.
 - If a student is waiting in an Area of Refuge, provide first responders with the location, special needs assistance requirements, buddy if assigned, and preferred communication method.
- Specify special transportation requirements if moving to alternate location.



Response: Shelter-in-Place Strategies

- What actions should be considered for Shelter-in-Place of special needs students?
 - Personal Go-kits will provide for immediate necessities per the Individual Plan. Classroom Go-Kits will include age appropriate activities.
 - Risk Codes will identify students needing special attention.
 - Student Wellness Team (mental health/counseling) and First Aid Response Team from each school as designated in the School Emergency Plan will assist.
 - Privacy screens/curtains to create an environment for those needing privacy for emotional or physical issues.

