



Special Needs Students Need Special Attention in Emergency Response Planning

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Date: 2017-05-17

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David Savage of the Los Angeles Times on [March 22](#) reported a unanimous Supreme Court decision rejecting a lower learning standard for and supporting a federal law guaranteeing a “free appropriate public education” to children with disabilities. That decision reinforces the fact that, in cases of emergencies on school grounds, it is very likely first responders will be coming to the aid of special needs students.

For children who have physical, medical, sensory or cognitive disabilities, emergencies such as fires, floods, active shooter situations, and acts of terrorism present a unique challenge. FEMA and the Red Cross all agree that when developing the pre-incident plan as campus safety lead or as local first responder, it is imperative to think of everyone in the building.

According to a 2015 study from the National Center for Education Statistics, disabled or special needs children make up 13 percent of the school age population. Children with special needs are likely to respond to any form of stress following a crisis with more extreme reactions and will need extra time in an emergency. Some will need more time just to comprehend the emergency. It is up to school officials and first responders to consider as many situations as possible:

- Are there any individuals who will have problems reaching and activating an alarm?
- Does anyone need help to leave the building office?
- Is there anyone who relies on auditory cues – cues that may be absent if the electricity is off or alarms are sounding?
- Does anyone rely on Braille?
- Will someone’s hearing aids fail if they get wet from emergency sprinklers?
- Is there an emergency response staffer who acts as an interpreter?
- How prepared is the school nurse?
- What will people do if ramps are shaken loose or become separated from the building?

A campus emergency response plan needs to be paired with an incident pre-plan program that is all-digital and operable both on- and off-line. The response plan outlines roles, responsibilities and procedures. The incident pre-plan is a summary of the critical building and property information required by first responders so they can act with knowledge. This includes site plans, floor plans, hazardous material details, utility shut-off locations, geographical maps, fire hydrants locations, and other critical building and infrastructure information.

An all-digital pre-plan program allows campus safety leads to share highly-detailed grounds and facility information with first responders. This kind of program should include a notes section where unique needs and characteristics can be listed:

- Students with cognitive or developmental disabilities
- Students and staff who are medically fragile or require the care of a personal attendant
- Occupants who are on medication and their medication schedule

In the end, thinking broadly about the needs of every student can mitigate the impact an emergency situation has on the students. The right tools will ensure every first responder is informed, as well.

Mr. Stephen Nardi is CEO of RealView, LLC, developers of the CommandScope all-digital pre-plan technology. For more information, visit www.realviewllc.com