



School Safety Recommendations for Election Day

According to the U.S. Department of Education (REMS-TA), “Election days may present a security challenge for schools and school districts because many designated polling places are on school grounds. Therefore, on election days, some school districts may cancel school or designate the day for teacher professional development”.¹

According to the U.S. Department of Education (REMS-TA), “Other districts remain open and use the event as a lesson in democracy. Some states, including North Carolina and Georgia, have developed procedures for preparing and responding to election days.”¹

The decision to close a school or remain open during an election is a decision for local officials. The safest option for students, faculty and staff is to close school on election days.

The recommended polling site is an area of the campus that is separated from the students, such as a gym or auditorium. The site should be set up in a way that does not allow voters to interact with the students or easily access the school.



Be prepared to:

- Initiate lockdowns, evacuations, or other school safety measures as needed. Notify poll workers about who will make evacuation or lockdown decisions based on the district’s standard operating procedures.¹
- Discuss with poll workers the school’s policies regarding access to the school during the day.¹

According to the U.S. Department of Education (REMS-TA), there are several actions for schools to consider taking to prepare for any election day. These actions include:¹

- Plan the logistics of the day with county board of elections officials.¹
- Work with local law enforcement officials to schedule extra security.¹
- Do not schedule large student assemblies for the election day.¹
- Create plans to redirect student traffic away from the voting area.¹
- Train staff to direct visitors to the proper locations.¹
- Consider back-up communication systems as the phone lines may be needed by the poll workers to communicate with the Secretary of State’s office or to download data.¹
- Remind students, faculty, and staff of the changes the day before.¹
- Before putting in place any additional security measures coordinate with local election officials to ensure voter rights are maintained.¹
- Coordinate with poll workers regarding everyone’s role in the school’s emergency management plan and actions associated with lock-downs or emergency evacuations.¹

On election days schools may want to consider implementing some of the following strategies: ¹

- Use signage around campus to alert voters of where the polling place is located. ¹
- Lock all exterior doors except for those necessary for poll access and/or the main entrance to the school. ¹
- Cordon off specific parking areas for voters away from student and staff vehicles and prepare for extra traffic and traffic flow disruptions due to increased campus population. ¹
- Remind faculty, staff, and students to wear their identification badges. ¹
- Have the school resource officer or other law enforcement officials visible to help deter illegal or disruptive activity. ¹
- Be sure to cordon off the voting area to students and school officials who are not voting. ¹
- Work with community partners such as law enforcement to provide staffing to redirect voter or student traffic near the polls and to control parking areas. ¹
- Consider increasing the frequency of security sweeps to ensure student and voter safety. Pay close attention to the poll areas, restrooms, common areas, parking areas, and entrance and exit routes. ¹

Contingency and Disaster Planning for Polling Locations

“The U.S. Election Assistance Commission has collaborated with local election officials to develop a series of helpful tips for election management”. “Whether an election emergency is natural or human-caused, jurisdiction-wide or localized, advance planning minimizes the disruption and aids in a quick recovery while preserving the security and integrity of the election.” ²

Here are three important contingency tips recommended by the U.S. Election Assistance Commission:

1. “Identify Possible Disasters and Create Contingency Scenarios. Carefully evaluate the types of ‘what ifs’ that can occur, natural or human-caused.” ²
2. “Make Certain You Create a Comprehensive Contingency Plan. Meet with your state’s election officials to review your state’s disaster and contingency plans.” ²
3. “Have a Plan for Communication Failures Addressing communication failures are an important part of any

disaster and contingency plan. In your planning.” ²

Additional Election location resources can be found by searching:

- FEMA Building Vulnerability Assessment Checklist https://www.fema.gov/media-library-data/20130726-1524-20490-4937/fema452_a.pdf
- U.S. Department of Commerce, National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) <https://www.nist.gov/>
- Election Center (National Association of Election Officials) <https://www.electioncenter.org/>

References

- 1 - https://rems.ed.gov/docs/ERCMX_Vol3Issue6.pdf
- 2 - <https://www.eac.gov/documents/2017/08/03/six-tips-for-contingency-and-disaster-planning-from-eac-audit-election-administration>

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