

## Arizona School Safety Emergency Operations Planning

None of the school emergency operations plans (EOPs) we reviewed fully met the State's EOP Minimum Standards and none of the schools we reviewed had fully implemented and tested their plans; additionally, student safety could be enhanced State-wide through efforts to provide more guidance to schools, review and update the EOP Minimum Standards, monitor compliance, and clarify the role of emergency responders

### Audit purpose

This audit is the first in a series of school safety special audits and evaluates a sample of school districts' and charter schools' emergency operations plans (EOPs) to determine whether they meet minimum standards developed jointly by the Arizona Departments of Education (ADE) and Emergency and Military Affairs (DEMA). It also evaluates whether the schools have fully implemented and tested their plans and includes a review of other state and recommended practices to identify changes that could improve schools' emergency preparedness in Arizona.

### Key findings

- Most school EOPs we reviewed met fewer than half of the EOP Minimum Standards we tested and some charter schools did not have EOPs, which could affect their abilities to effectively respond to safety emergencies. We found that EOP requirements need to be more clearly communicated to charter schools, and all schools could benefit from increased outreach, guidance, and training on emergency planning.
- Most schools we visited had not provided emergency procedures training to all staff, including substitute teachers; had not conducted all required safety drills; and had not posted certain safety reference materials, which could affect their preparedness to respond to emergencies.
- Some EOP Minimum Standards are too vague, may be impractical, or lack a clear purpose. A comprehensive review and update of the EOP Minimum Standards could help ensure all standards are necessary and clearly explained.
- Most other states we reviewed had monitoring processes to ensure schools comply with EOP requirements and have more clearly defined the role of law enforcement and emergency response agencies in EOP development; changes in these areas in Arizona could help improve schools' emergency preparedness.

### Key recommendations

- ADE should ensure charters are aware of their responsibilities to develop school EOPs; and analyze the staffing and resources needed to initiate a compliance monitoring process and communicate the monitoring plan and authority and resource needs to the Arizona Governor and Legislature for further consideration.
- ADE and DEMMA should evaluate what additional guidance is needed to help schools comply with the EOP Minimum Standards and provide necessary assistance; jointly complete a comprehensive standards review with stakeholder involvement; and work with stakeholders to clarify emergency response agencies' roles in EOP development and, if needed, seek statutory changes.
- Districts and charters should develop school EOPs that comply with the EOP Minimum Standards, and ensure school EOPs are fully implemented, tested, and reviewed annually.
- Charter sponsors should help ensure their charters meet the statutory requirement to develop school EOPs and incorporate compliance monitoring into their statutorily required review and renewal processes.