

Lessons Learned:

Natural Disasters Toolkit for Schools



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Special thanks to Jester Insurance and the board/superintendent teams at Aplington-Parkersburg, Cedar Rapids, Dike-New Hartford, Waverly-Shell Rock and Grant Wood AEA.



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Letter from the President

Dear colleagues,

Last year, weather events tore Iowa apart, including its schools and other education facilities. Luckily, most of the damage was only to property, but those damages were immense in scale. Following the EF-5 tornado and devastating floods, the staff at the Iowa Association of School Boards immediately began fielding calls: Which funds can we use to rebuild? Who do we contact for attendance waivers? What damages are covered? This toolkit aims to help educators everywhere learn from these disasters and prepare for the next.

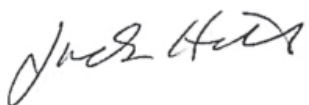
IASB staff and representatives from Jester Insurance toured the state and talked with folks about their experiences. The biggest lessons, which multiple people reiterated, were the importance of relationships, whether between board members and their superintendent, or between the school district and other agencies; and also that teamwork is key in emergency situations, and no one can recover alone. Please, don't just read this and set it aside; put proactive tips into practice and know where to find the reactive advice should you need it.

As Dave Markward, superintendent of Cedar Rapids Community School District said, "Sometimes people are cavalier about these things. But there's a whole 'what if' attitude, and it applies to other things now. Things you don't ever think could happen... this is good evidence they do."

Aplington-Parkersburg school board member Jill Kalkwarf emphasized the importance of teamwork and patience. "Everybody just wants to see something happen and you have to have the patience to make it happen," she said. "There's so much going on to rebuild the school and yet you want to do it fast and do it right."

We hope this toolkit will help everyone know how to prepare and also how to recover from natural disasters. Please read through it, pass it along to your colleagues, and also go online to the IASB Web site at www.ia-sb.org for a related video, photos and other tools. One other lesson we've all learned this year is the importance of helping one another in a time of need – thanks to all for your support to the affected school districts, and now, please allow us to support you and your school communities with this compilation of advice.

Sincerely,



Jack Hill
IASB Board President

Leadership

Be Proactive:

Board-superintendent relationship. Every board/superintendent team that went through a disaster this year emphasized the importance of a strong, trusting relationship between the board and superintendent. They all said that had they not already had that relationship, they don't know how they would have gotten through it. Disasters place stress on everyone, but working together will make things easier. Nurture your relationship before you end up needing it.

Weather the Storm:

Superintendent flexibility. When a disaster strikes, often board members and other staff will be affected personally. The board may need to place more trust in the superintendent than usual so that the superintendent can do the job and make decisions on the spot, in a timely fashion.

Get Help. You can't do it alone. If your recovery project is at all significant, you will need to get some sort of additional help, whether that help be in the form of an internal promotion or outside consultant. All those we talked to said they knew early on they couldn't do it themselves and it wasn't fair to themselves, their families, or the district to try. You can't burn yourself out so much that you are no longer productive and you make yourself sick. Take it from the experienced folks – get help.

Communication. In times of disaster, roles may change, but the entire board/superintendent team needs to know what is going on. One school board held weekly meetings to update the board and community on what was going on, to vote on repairs and contracts and discuss how to proceed with rebuilding; another focused on e-mail communication between the superintendent and board president to keep both sides apprised of events. Communicate, but at the same time, respect people's time; only hold meetings as necessary, rather than just because they're on the schedule.

Be practical. Determine what method of communication and decision-making is right for your situation. If your entire board lost family members, friends or their homes, how much time can they dedicate to their roles? Think about utilizing tools like conference calls for meetings in order to be flexible and to work together.

Be models. Disasters test everyone involved, especially leaders in the spotlight. Share your knowledge of events with the community and act professionally – model the behavior you expect from your community.

REAL ADVICE

"You need a safe harbor so superintendents can make decisions. Having a good relationship with the board is key. If not, it would really be magnified in this situation."

- Jon Thompson, Aplington-Parkersburg superintendent

"How would the community react to something like this? People were uneasy. The school is very important to the community. They want to know, are we going to rebuild, or close, and what's going to happen? One of the things we tried to do is put out a letter with information right away to our community to say yes, our efforts are going to be to clean up, pick up, and get back in there."

- Lindsey Beecher, Dike-New Hartford superintendent

"It's a time when administrators need to be real leaders, available and visible to the community. They really stepped up. I don't know how many times I saw them out there in dirty blue jeans and t-shirts. The staff really stepped up, as well."

- Tom Lizer, Dike-New Hartford board member

Communication/Collaboration

Be Proactive:

Contacts

- Keep a list of employees' home and cell phone numbers – keep a printed version in a waterproof bag or container, in multiple places, so it is available when needed. That way you have it if your electricity is out and your computer doesn't work. Also, consider adding at least the leadership team's numbers to your cell phone's memory.
- Keep a student directory available, including parents' addresses and home e-mails, off-site in a protected area.
- Maintain an off-site directory of all emergency contact information such as for local law enforcement and emergency crews.
- Make sure your student handbooks tell parents where students will be if they have to be evacuated during the day so parents know where to go to pick up their children.

Collaborate

- Communicate with neighboring school districts, and your AEA, and talk about ways you could collaborate if something happens to one or more of the area's districts. Plan together and use one another's expertise.
- Work with local emergency management now. Don't wait until a crisis occurs. Get to know them and their agencies' responsibilities and resources. Let them get to know you, your resources and what your needs may be in the case of a natural disaster. When you experience a natural disaster, you will likely lose control of your facilities. Having a strong, trusting relationship with emergency management in advance will make that transition easier when the disaster hits.
- If any of the your district's facilities are shelters in times of crisis, ensure there is an appropriate backup should your facilities be unable to be used, such as during floods, if the site is hit by a tornado, or if the site is without electricity. You should also have a backup plan for your use of your own facilities should your facility be a shelter. For example, where can you practice and play basketball if your gym is being used as a shelter after an ice storm?
- Buses may also be used to evacuate not only your students, but your town. The transportation director and local EMS should be working together on that evacuation plan.

Communication

- Audience. Think about all the stakeholders with whom you need to communicate, and how you would do so under various scenarios. Remember employees, parents, other school districts and the AEA, government or emergency officials, and community members.
- Spokesperson. Identify someone to disseminate information and to work with the media. Most districts identify the superintendent to act as a spokesperson for the school district and the board president as the spokesperson for the board. Make sure you have backups.
- Phone service. Plan, with your local phone company, what to do should the facilities be shut down but phones need to be forwarded to other numbers.
- Media. Build good relationships with the media before you need them in an emergency situation. Get to know your local reporters and let them get to know you. In times of crisis, the media can be your best ally in getting timely, accurate information out to your community. If you already have a strong working relationship, it will be easier to get the information out and you can have an assurance that the information may be more accurate and appropriate since the reporter isn't coming into the situation starting from scratch.

Communication/Collaboration, continued

Weather the Storm

Outside Resources

- Communicate with statewide education groups, such as the Iowa Department of Education, IASB, SAI, ISEA, etc., all of which can help disseminate information about your situation, coordinate donation or volunteer efforts, and offer support and advice.
- You will likely be bombarded by groups from all over the country wanting to help with the recovery effort. If they're volunteers, send them to your identified volunteer coordinator. If they are vendors, see that section for guidance on how to address their offers of help.

Local Resources

- Ensure your local agencies, Red Cross, Salvation Army, churches, etc. know your needs and will assist you in getting the resources – whether human, financial or physical – you need to get back up and running.
- Work with other city and county officials to plan for disasters, and include one another as you plan; you may find opportunities to share resources or contracts with vendors. Determine ahead of time the role each group would play in a disaster, such as where shelters or other emergency resources, including backups, will be located.

Communicate

- When a disaster strikes, people crave information. You need to ensure they get accurate information as soon as you know it. You need to be on top of rumor control from the first minute the disaster strikes. Use local media, e-mail, your Web site, phone trees, postal service, bulletin boards or other channels you think can best reach your audience. Keep your community informed early and often.
- If power is out around town, or you're having difficulty reaching people to share information, recruit volunteer crews to hand-deliver newsletters or other messages to families and staff. If no one is home, tape the materials to the front door - even if the house is damaged, it's likely they will return for things.
- Maintain communication with local emergency management even after the initial disaster is over. They not only have experience in fighting the disasters, they also have experience in recovering, and more importantly, mitigation to prevent future ones.
- Don't hesitate to use a form response when you get requests for help, offers of assistance, etc. That response is better than no answer and no one expects you to be able to sit down and personally answer thousands of e-mails and phone calls.

REAL ADVICE

"Communication was part of our emergency operations. (Officials) met twice a day, but we didn't know how to best get information out. Roads were still closed. I came back here to type up updates and sent them out to all staff so they knew what was going on. I found out later that those e-mails were going out everywhere. Even overseas. You can't underestimate the need for communication. There's a hunger for it. People crave it."

- Jere Vyverberg, Waverly-Shell Rock superintendent

"We made a conscious choice early on to talk to anyone who wanted to talk to us. It's one more opportunity to get your message out... we prepared a written statement for the radio, which they played. It was on TV stations, too, but a lot of people didn't have power. We put information up on the Web site and at recovery centers... One of the biggest challenges was handling all the people reaching out to us. I created form replies for e-mails. I had four answers and I would cut and paste and send them right back, even if it was just 'Thanks for the offer, it's possible we'll get back to you.' A lot were from well-wishers... Some were legitimate offers and some were business people."

- Jon Thompson, Aplington-Parkersburg superintendent

Insurance

Be Proactive

Inventory

- Keep an annual inventory of the contents of your buildings. Even if you cannot do a complete inventory each year, take photos or videos of all areas, from classrooms to outbuildings, and document the contents. Then, duplicate the photos or videos and keep them off-site at two separate locations, or keep them online in a Web-based file, not a school district-based file.
- Make sure all employees have current inventories of their work areas. While this is especially important for teachers, it is also key for cooks, custodians and transportation directors who all have a great deal of equipment that will be difficult to document when it comes time for replacement.
- Teachers. Make sure teachers, and other employees, understand that only school district owned property is protected by the school district insurance plan. Private property is not protected. Therefore, employees, especially teachers, should annually document their own personal property on site. Their homeowners policy will likely protect some of the property but those who don't have homeowners coverage should contact insurance. EMC can help teachers inventory their rooms.
- Aerial photos. At some point, get aerial photos of your property and buildings. FEMA likes the photos because they give them an understanding of before and after when analyzing loss.

Coverage

- Make sure you have replacement cost coverage on at least half of your bus fleet.
- Make sure you have building code upgrade coverage in your property insurance. When you have to rebuild or renovate, the new construction has to meet the current building codes. These "upgrades" can cost millions. A-P estimated that almost a third of the cost of construction at their new high school is to comply with codes that have changed since the old school was built.
- Have EMC do a walk-through of your facilities to ensure the evacuation areas and routes are the most appropriate depending upon the disaster.

Weather the Storm

Call your insurer. Even if you don't believe you have insurance for your situation, call your insurer anyway. They may be able to help you in other ways, such as doing air quality testing, which is often offered as a free service.

Collaborate. Work with your insurance adjuster. Good insurance adjusters will do all they can to help you get the reimbursements you deserve. Invite them in early, and remember you both have jobs to do. If you aren't happy with your adjuster, contact your local agency or the home office to work through the issues or to get a new one.

Signing off. Wait to sign off on final estimates or jobs until you are certain they are the final numbers. In Waverly-Shell Rock, lockers were washed down after a flood, but then later rusted, and the insurance needs increased. If district officials had already signed off on their reimbursement amount, they would not have been able to recoup that cost. But weigh how long you need to wait and balance the need for the insurance money with the need to ensure there are no more changes – you also must sign off in order to get the insurance money, which you'll need to pay your contractors and for other services.

Document. Document everything, during and after a disaster. Take photos of destruction or water levels while it is still going on, as well as the damage to your facilities. This will help when you are discussing the facts of the disaster with your insurance company or federal officials.

Facilities/Buses

Be Proactive

Tornado safety. Invite your insurer to walk through and evaluate your buildings for tornado safety. Every building is different, and each will have safe and dangerous areas, which could be different from what conventional wisdom says, or what your current tornado plan says. At Aplington-Parkersburg, for example, school was not in session but the tornado ripped through the main hallway, where students would have been sheltered; officials have now learned the safest zones would have been in small spaces like bathrooms or closets. Every building is unique, based on its construction and site, so ask the experts!

Equipment. Have generators and water pumps available, as well as the gas to run them. In addition, make sure multiple custodians or others on your staff know where the backup sewer valves and utilities switches are. Make sure they are tested regularly to ensure their dependency in times of crisis.

Storage. Identify a backup storage area you could use if necessary. Talk to local businesses that may have empty warehouses, facilities, etc.

Prepare for the worst. If you think a flood will bring in a foot of water, move things up even higher, or take them out of the building entirely. You never know when a dam will burst, how upstream water will flow, or if the rain won't stop, so play it safe.

Move buses. Have a plan and drivers in place so that as soon as you know water is headed your way, you can quickly move your buses to a safe location. Talk to the Army Corps of Engineers, local EMS or insurance to find out if your current, proposed or back-up parking area is in a floodplain.

Pressure. Watch where floodwater or other problems are creating pressure in your building. At Dike-New Hartford, officials opened doors to let floodwater through so it wouldn't break glass windows.

Weather the Storm

Contamination.

- Any porous materials exposed to floodwater or other hazardous materials have the ability to grow mold or contaminate your school. Things that cannot be cleaned thoroughly must go. Drywall has to be replaced farther up the wall than where water touched it, because the wall will have soaked it up.
- In addition, once cleanup begins, make sure staff knows where to get supplies such as squeegees, moving boxes, powerwashers, fans, gloves and masks.
- Ensure all entering the buildings for clean-up are outfitted with the appropriate clothing, gloves, masks, etc. for the disaster.
- Remember, you can't necessarily see contaminants. Don't forget to test the air quality after a disaster to determine if it's safe to work in the facility, or to have students there. EMC offers this service free of charge for its clients. After you have cleaned up the facility and are ready to re-enter for business, contact the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, EMC or another entity to perform tests to ensure the air quality is within acceptable levels, especially after a flood. Mold can continue to grow in grasses and plants and you won't know it unless tests are conducted. The testing entity can then tell you how to deal with the contaminant.
- Before equipment or other goods go into storage prior to renovation, make sure all of it has been decontaminated. If you don't, and you have one piece of equipment that is contaminated, then it will just spread to the rest while in storage.

Security

Be Proactive

Plan. Determine how you would secure a facility impacted by a disaster. Have the necessary equipment available, such as fencing, or make sure custodians know where they can purchase it quickly if needed. If you need to keep people away from an area, something as flimsy as crime scene tape will not work.

Weather the Storm

Cooperate. Work with law enforcement, National Guard or other security to guard the property. Determine who is in charge.

Vandalism. Beware of vandalism and looting after a disaster strikes. If doors are open or a facility is not secure, there may be people from inside or outside of town who take advantage of the situation. Have security patrolling the area or lock the building if possible.

Toxins or hazards.

- If toxins are an issue, you will likely no longer be in charge of your facility. Even though it's not likely your responsibility to notify the public, make sure the public knows the facility is not safe and people are to stay away.
- Use your media contacts to get the message out that the site is off limits. Place signs at multiple locations and entrances to let people know there is a serious reason they should not enter.

REAL ADVICE

"When it gets dark out, and it's a building with walls partially knocked out, people get in and walk through and sort through things. A few took souvenirs. The police tried hard and the National Guard was 20 feet away. But we should've brought in heavier fencing. 200 to 300 gallons of construction fuel was taken from the demolition site once. Yellow tape or signs don't work... Sometimes it was just kids going in, but it was unsafe. The building did collapse further after the initial time."

- Jon Thompson, Aplington-Parkersburg superintendent

Record-keeping

Be Proactive

Back it up. Regularly back up your computer records and files off-site. This is recommended for anything you don't want to lose, including student records, personnel files, district financial information, etc.

Weather the Storm

Move records. If you have warning before a natural disaster, move your records out of the facility at risk, or at least move records to a safer place within the building, such as up on a second floor in the case of a flood. Files to protect include student grades and records, personnel files and financial information.

Protect records. If possible, when you need to move records, ensure that only trusted personnel are in contact with them. Many files contain private information that only certain eyes should see. If you do need to depend upon others to help move paper files, make sure they realize the necessity of maintaining the confidentiality of any information they see.

Emergency Management Services (EMS)

Be Proactive

Relationships with Local Agencies

- If you haven't already done so, you need to begin the process of building strong working relationships with local emergency management as well as city and county governmental agencies. All should know what their role will be in an emergency and what resources they can bring to the table. At a minimum, invite the police and fire departments to walk through your buildings so they know where critical equipment is located, and give them copies of your floor plans, including utility shutoffs, and a map showing all district facilities.
- Ask for their advice on your evacuation plans to see if they have suggestions that might better protect students, employees and visitors, should a disaster strike.
- School buildings are the likely shelters in every community in Iowa. Make sure other groups know you are willing to open your facilities when needed but also make sure there is a backup in case your facility isn't able to be used.
- Depending on the situation, it is likely you will no longer be in control of your facilities. If you have the strong relationships already built, then you will be more comfortable in turning over your facilities to law enforcement or whatever agency takes over.
- Prior to a disaster, build good working relationships with other entities in your area, not just the city, county and EMS. Work with other education groups, including private schools and post-secondary institutions, as your needs will likely be the same in case of a disaster and you may be able to back one another up should any of you be struck by a disaster. Think about all your resources - buses could help evacuate towns, etc.

REAL ADVICE

"The role I played was in an after-action review... to formally evaluate the lessons learned. Two primary areas emerged. One was the need to integrate more formally from one player or association or organization with another. There were various crisis management plans, but few if any acted integrated. The other was communication... now we have a task force that involves all the public information officers of the entities in the community because you have to have all the right people talking before a disaster to know where to start."

- Angie Chaplin, Lutheran Services in Iowa's Center for Learning and Leading, and consultant to Waverly-Shell Rock schools

Weather the Storm

Communicate. Work with EMS, and remember everyone has a job to do during a disaster. Keep officials apprised of what is going on, such as security at school locations or your needs for patrols. Discuss key issues, such as who is in charge of the sites affected by the disaster.

Relationships

- In case of a disaster, rely on the relationships you've already built to see if you can pool your resources to help with cleanup or recovery, such as group purchasing whether for cleaning supplies, buses or desks, or getting a better deal with a contractor if the project is bigger, etc.
- Even though you may be in control of your facilities, you will still have emergency management to assist you in the process. If the local EMS is unclear about what to do, they have a statewide network that they can tap for the resources needed.
- During a crisis, you may get conflicting advice, directions or orders. Knowing the hierarchy of authority will help you when struggling with what to do next.

Volunteers/Donations

Be Proactive

Plan Ahead

- Identify at least one individual who will work with volunteers. You may want two or three in case that individual is unable to assist.
- Let them know that when volunteers begin to arrive to help, you must begin documenting that assistance from the beginning. If you are eligible for federal assistance, the work of the volunteers can be used as part of your co-payment, so the documentation is vital to lowering your co-pay. (Find out whether all they need to document is hours or name, address, etc.)
- Have a donations/gift policy in place for everyday issues but it will also help in times of crisis to guide the receipt process.

Weather the Storm

Utilize volunteers! Volunteers can make a huge difference as you prepare or recover from a disaster. After the floods, Dike-New Hartford staff estimated they needed about \$300,000 worth of cleanup work done, but after volunteers performed much of the work, they only had to pay an outside contractor \$50,000. The community's help saved thousands of dollars, which could then go to other recovery needs. Since it's likely your staff will be caught up in their own personal crises, you will need volunteers more than ever.

Plan. Decide how to communicate your needs to volunteers, and how to tell them when and how they can help. Use the media, your own communication tools, other school districts and disaster communication tools like bulletin boards.

Track hours. Ask volunteers to sign in with the date, their name, and the time they arrive and leave, so you can track their hours. This will be extremely valuable if you work with FEMA, because volunteer work hours can count toward your match when you need to match funds.

Safety. Only allow volunteers in safe areas. Match volunteers' tasks with their skills and age appropriateness. For example, don't have high school students clean up a chemistry lab. Also, if there are health risks involved, work with your local public health office or clinic to offer tetanus shots or other resources if needed.

Volunteer yourself. Pitch in, and also remember those who helped you when it comes to their time of need.

Donations/Gifts. Decide whether to follow the policy. Most districts' policies say that once the gift is received, it's the district's determination as to whether to follow the intent. During a crisis, you may want to consider waiving that in order to recognize gifts being given.

REAL ADVICE

"The fact that everyone was impacted made it easier. Everyone was so supportive of rebuilding efforts. People came out of the walls to help, we had a semi-truck donated and how many hundreds of people showed up one day to make the move. Even meetings we've had with the community since, on what to do long-term, people are being so darn supportive."

- Dennis Epley, Waverly-Shell Rock board president

"This teaches you how important it is to attend to your own employees' stress... We established an employee relief fund at a bank and had a group of current and past employees oversee the dispersement of that to employees."

- Ron Fielder, Grant Wood AEA administrator

Emotional/Personal Impact

Weather the Storm

Be sensitive. Realize that when disasters strike, they affect everyone in different ways, and at different times. For some, it will be when they first see the destruction, and for others, it may be the first day of school – recognize varying needs.

Support staff. Your staff may also be dealing with personal losses at home. The thought of losing their collection of lesson plans and teaching materials may be a huge disappointment. Train your teachers and staff on how to cope and help one another through their difficult times, in effect, to counsel one another.

Closure. Think about how the losses and disruption affect students and staff, and think about how to bring everyone together. Some schools that had to close early due to a tornado or flood held special school gatherings or “class time” when everyone could participate in a program and learn about what would happen to the school.

The next event. Be aware that your next tornado drill or the next rainstorm could cause anxiety among students, and plan for that. Talk about what you’ve all gone through and how you can practice being safe.

Illness. You may see more illnesses following a disaster. In Aplington-Parkersburg, one board member mentioned the “tornado cough” that people have from breathing in dust when they cleaned up after the storm. In the areas that had floods, people noticed an increase in respiratory illnesses due to the mold that was still floating around town.

Counselors

- Have counselors on hand for both students and staff, and the community, and encourage people to talk with them if they are having a hard time dealing with the emotions and aftermath of a storm.
- Ask your neighboring school districts to loan their counselors. This is where your relationships with your AEA and neighboring school districts can help.
- Red Cross, local churches, counties and other entities often offer these services as well.
- Make sure the counselors are training the staff to recognize the signs of stress and anxiety in students and fellow staff members.

REAL ADVICE

“It’s important to encourage people to seek help and support one another. You have to acknowledge that the grief process is not linear. It will continue to go on and on. You have to understand what does trauma mean, and how does each person personalize trauma? I may not think something is hard, but a colleague might. We need to be cognizant of that and be counselors even in informal ways.”

- Angie Chaplin, Lutheran Services in Iowa’s Center for Learning and Leading, and consultant to Waverly-Shell Rock schools

Finance

Be Proactive

Back up financial documents. Just as with other types of records, keeping backups of key financial information is critical. Your accounting system, just like your other electronic systems, should have regular backups that are stored off-site in a secure location. Accounting systems and records along with audits, Certified Annual Report, Certified Enrollment and Basic Educational Data Survey information should have secure backups as well.

Weather the Storm

Public bid law. The AEA chief administrator can waive the public bid law for construction for school districts in emergency situations. Call your AEA chief administrator if he or she doesn't call you in advance to offer it. AEAs can have the public bid law waived for construction upon approval of the Director of the Iowa Department of Education.

Management Fund. Many districts do not realize that payment of deductibles for property and casualty losses are eligible to be paid from the Management Fund. For districts with high deductibles and significant losses, there are procedures to issue debt backed by the Management Fund for the repayment of these obligations.

Property taxes. Many are worried about the fact that property valuations will decrease after a disaster because there are fewer buildings or homes, the buildings or homes are uninhabitable, etc. For schools, this is less of an issue because of state aid, because the state back-fills the property tax shortages, but significant reductions in valuations can cause the property tax rate to spike the following year. Significant delinquencies in property taxes during the fiscal year can impact a district's cash flow.

Cash flow shortages are best dealt with through participation in the Iowa Schools Cash Anticipation Program (ISCAP). This program allows short-term borrowing against anticipated property tax and state aid collections at low- or zero-interest costs. Districts are encouraged to fill out the required information twice yearly to see if they are eligible to participate in the program. Districts must have a reasonable expectation of a cash flow deficit during the fiscal year to participate, but ISCAP has created an online system where a district can fill out the required information in less than an hour. Other options, such as stamping warrants, are available in an emergency situation.

The School Budget Review Committee (SBRC) has the power to award modified allowable growth (spending authority) in situations where districts experience unique and unusual situations. Districts should contact the SBRC upon any disaster and discuss what possible options are available to the district.

Request assistance. During severe crises where your entire business office is displaced, you should contact neighboring districts to assist you with things like completing payroll, paying accounts receivable, etc.

At the time of this document's production, the DE was proposing language that would apply somewhat of a budget guarantee for those districts that lost enrollment due to natural disasters. The details are unknown at this point but we will keep you posted of any changes.

Attorney General/Working with Contractors

Iowa Attorney General's Office:

www.iowaAttorneyGeneral.org

The Iowa AG's Office offers helpful advice on protecting yourself from scam artists and the best ways to work with contractors.

Check out a contractor before you sign a contract or pay any money. Try to deal with an established, reputable, local contractor. Check references. Ask the Attorney General's Office if it has received complaints (515-281-5926 or 888-777-4590).

Get it in writing! Get several written estimates for the job, and get a written contract detailing work to be done, responsibility for permits, costs and any other promises.

Don't pay large sums in advance! Con-artists may just "take the money and run." If you have to make a partial advance payment for materials, make your check out to the supplier and the contractor. If you suspect a scam, report it to the AG's Office or local authorities.

Report price-gouging to the Attorney General. Iowa has a rule against price-gouging that goes into effect in counties with a disaster declaration. Price-gouging is charging very high prices that are not justified, and taking unfair advantage of disaster victims.

Beware of online schemes and charity scams. Con-artists may set up Web sites to make it look like they are legitimate or local contractors, and others may ask for donations but may give little of the money to actual flood or tornado victims.

If you have complaints or questions, contact the AG's Consumer Protection Division, Des Moines, IA 50319. Call 888-777-4590 (toll-free) or 515-281-5926.

REAL ADVICE

"My charge was to get us going on cleaning and get the buildings rehabbed immediately, and there's so much at stake... if contractors were local, we gave them the courtesy of inviting them to a meeting... for out of town companies, we had no idea whether they were fly by nights or high quality.... Our interview process was, 'Tell us why you should get the job in five minutes or less.' We did call references before making the final decision. We received approval from Grant Wood AEA to waive public improvement bid formalities due to the emergency situation we were in."

- Steve Graham, Cedar Rapids director of business services

FEMA

Weather the Storm

Work with officials. Put aside any positive or negative feedback you've heard about FEMA and work with them. You may work with numerous people within FEMA, but use the "do unto others" rule and they will be helpful.

Paperwork. You will encounter heaps of paperwork when dealing with FEMA. Think about how you will get the technical side of the work done, as well as how to handle all the other needs for cleanup or rebuilding. Consider hiring a consultant who specializes in FEMA to help wade through it all; ask colleagues who have gone through this before for references.

Document everything! It is key to document everything, from volunteer hours to photos of damage.

Additional Resources

Help keep our schools safe.

Visit www.ia-sb.org to find additional resources:

- Video interviews with school leaders affected by disasters,
- Photos of school districts that have suffered natural disasters,
- An article with advice from board/superintendent teams,
- An electronic version of this toolkit,
- Contact information for IASB staff.

Additional Resources:

- American Red Cross: <http://www.redcross.org>
- U.S. Department of Education Crisis Planning Guide:
<http://www.ed.gov/admins/lead/safety/emergencyplan/crisisplanning.pdf>
- National School Safety and Security Services:
<http://www.schoolsecurity.org/resources/crisis.html>
- American Academy of Children and Pediatrics:
<http://www.aap.org/disasters/index.cfm>
- National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities: <http://www.edfacilities.org/>
- FEMA Course on Emergency Planning: <http://training.fema.gov/EMIWeb/IS/is362.asp>