

ICS for Schools

Why is ICS important for Schools?

Each year, natural disasters such as tornadoes, floods, and severe storms affect schools. Health-related incidents such as flu outbreaks, food-borne diseases, and even rabid animals can threaten schoolchildren. Accidents — whether in chemistry labs, sporting venues, or on school buses — may occur. Furthermore, schools continue to be subject to man-made threats, such as intruders, crime, and violence.

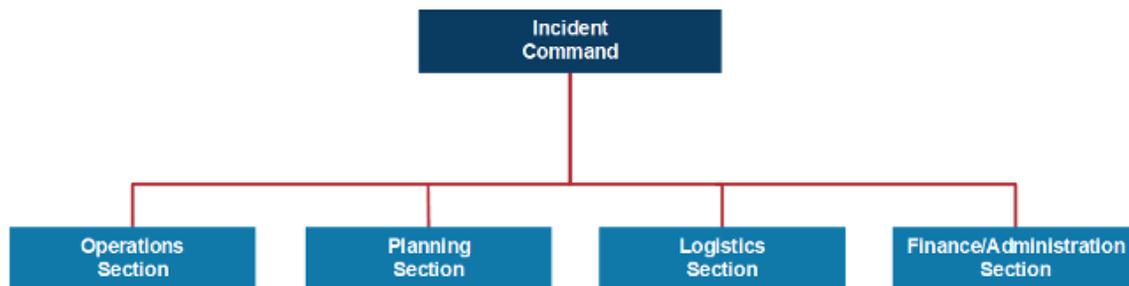
In spite of our best efforts and preparation, school personnel may need to serve as first responders for an array of emergency incidents.

School personnel are likely to be the first on the scene when an incident occurs on school property or involves school staff or students. Eventually police, fire, emergency medical services or another external agency will manage response to the incident. However, the first response will likely be by school employees. They will act as a bridge, conducting initial response activities until first-responders such as police, fire and emergency medical services can arrive. School employees can manage these initial response activities for an incident more effectively by establishing incident command.

ICS can also be utilized as an effective management structure for pre-planned, non-emergency events such as a football game or a school graduation.

Additionally, the use of ICS is required for all schools and school districts receiving emergency preparedness funding including the U.S. Department of Education Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools (REMS) grants, CFDA #84.184 E (formerly known as the Emergency Response and Crisis Management (ERCM) grant program).

How might the ICS Command Structure Look in a School?



The components of the ICS structure are standard no matter where it is established. These components are activated as needed to manage the incident. If a section is not needed the Incident Commander won't establish it. However, the Incident Commander is responsible to personally manage any function that he or she does not delegate to a subordinate.

Remember the concept of Supervisory Span of Control discussed in this course. The organizational structure is tailored to effectively manage the resources assigned to an incident or event. The ICS structure for a missing student on the school grounds might be very simple, possibly only requiring an Incident Commander, an Operations Section Chief and a number of Search Parties. There may not be a need for Planning, Logistics and Finance/ Administration Sections because the incident can be expected to be of short duration and geographically restricted. The type of incident, nature of the task, hazards and safety factors, and distances between personnel and resources all influence span of control and determine how large of an ICS organization is required for the incident or event.

It is important to remember that when an ICS organization is established for an incident or event in a school:

- There is no correlation with the school administrative structure.
- The ICS structure is different from the daily administrative structure in order to avoid confusion over whom you should take direction from.
- The supervisors of the Incident Command should use the correct ICS titles; these will be different from their daily school position titles.

To illustrate this, consider a hypothetical incident involving multiple cases of heat stroke in which the school nurse is designated as the Incident Commander. The Incident Commander is responsible for work assignments for all personnel assigned to the incident. Although the Vice Principal may “out-rank” everyone in the ICS organization, it would be inappropriate for this administrator to go around the established ICS chain of command and give members of the incident management team direct orders. The Vice Principal should give any guidance or direction to the Incident Commander, who will then in turn determine what actions are necessary and who within the incident command will conduct the actions.

Incident Commander

The Incident Commander is the individual designated by the school leadership to manage the incident or event. He or she has overall responsibility and will set the objectives, strategies and priorities for incident response.

The Incident Commander is the only ICS position that is always staffed. For small incidents involving only a few school personnel it is possible that the Incident Commander will not establish any subordinate supervisors; in this case he or she is personally responsible for performing all incident management functions. It is more common for the Incident Commander to designate several subordinate supervisors to assist in managing various incident management functions for an incident or event.

When an individual is assigned as the Incident Commander, he or she has been delegated the authority to manage the incident. Regardless of this individual’s normal rank or position within the school’s administration, when designated as the Incident Commander he or she is in charge of incident management and can delegate this authority to others to manage aspects of the ICS organization.

In an actual bomb threat at the Gila River Indian Community in Bapchule, AZ, Sister Carol Mathe, a teacher, was designated by the school leadership as the Incident Commander for evacuation of children from the building. She established an ICS structure and began the evacuation. To help her she designated a Safety Officer, a Public Information Officer, a maintenance person, a planner and someone to document the actions taken. Note that due to the size and complexity of the incident she established key Command Staff positions (Safety and PIO) but did not establish any General Staff Sections. Once the police arrived she transferred incident command to a police department designated Incident Commander. After relinquishing incident command, she assumed another role within the ICS structure as a liaison from the school to the Incident Commander.

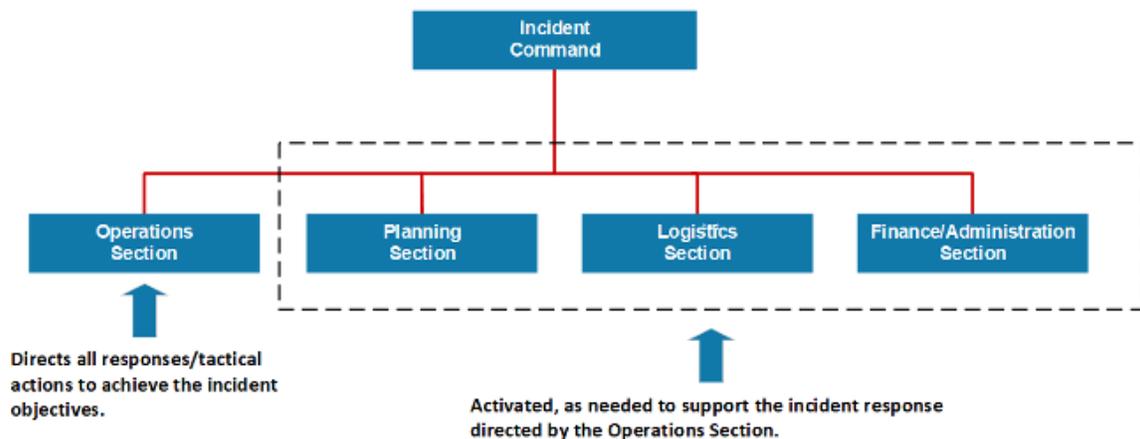
Command Staff

Depending on the size and type of incident or event, the Incident Commander may designate personnel to provide information, safety and liaison services.

- A Public Information Officer serves as the conduit of information for the incident or event to include the media and parents.
- A Safety Officer monitors safety conditions and develops measures for assuring safety.
- A Liaison Officer is the primary contact for supporting agencies assisting at an incident.

General Staff

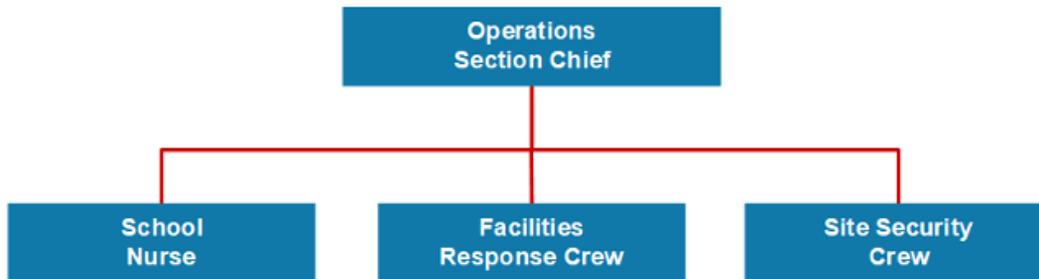
The General Staff consists of up to four sections: Operations, Planning, Logistics and Finance/Administration. In an expanding incident the Incident Commander first establishes the Operations Section. The remaining sections are established as needed to support the operation.



Operations Section

The Operations Section manages the operations, directing resources to achieve incident objectives. If an Incident Commander for a school incident or event establishes only one section it will most likely be an Operations Section.

During an incident, the Operations team may include several individuals from the school. For example the Operations Section Chief could manage an individual, such as the School Nurse, as well as groups of individuals such as a School Facilities Response Crew (School Maintenance), and a Site Security Crew (School Security). When managing a group of people such as the Facilities Response Crew, one member of that crew would be designated as the supervisor.



When organizing Teams remember to consider span of control. Each Team Leader should only manage from three to seven team members. The Operations Section Chief should also only be managing from three to seven individuals (some of whom will be team leaders). When the span of control exceeds seven, it is time to review the organizational structure and consider designating additional supervisors.

Planning Section

The Planning Section is established as needed to manage an incident or event. The Planning Section collects, evaluates and displays incident information, prepares and documents incident action plans, tracks resources assigned to the incident, maintains incident documentation and develops plans for demobilization.

In a school incident, the Planning Section helps to ensure that responders have accurate information, such as the number of students remaining in the building. The Planning section can also provide resources such as maps and floor plans. In addition to developing plans, this section can act as recorders to document incident activities. This could be invaluable after the event for legal, analytical, fiscal and historical purposes.

Planning may be as simple as one individual designated to document the incident. If the school incident or event involves multiple planning functions it may require multiple individuals working under a Planning Section Chief.

Logistics Section

The Logistics Section is responsible for ensuring that there are adequate resources including personnel, supplies and equipment.

During an incident or event at a school, Logistics is responsible for ensuring that there are sufficient resources such as food, water and sanitation supplies. Logistics will also be responsible for arranging busses for evacuations, providing communications equipment, and managing facilities requirements. While medical services for injured students is provided by medical personnel assigned to Operations, the Logistics section has responsibility for providing medical services to response personnel within the ICS organization. When resources must be purchased to support an incident or event, Logistics must coordinate with Finance.

The Logistics function could be performed by a single person working directly for the Incident Commander. When a school incident or event requires multiple logistics functions, multiple individuals will work under a Logistics Section Chief.

Finance/Administration Section

The Finance/ Administration function manages paying for the incident or event response. This includes all aspects of financial and cost analysis: contract negotiation, tracking personnel and equipment time, documenting and processing claims for accidents and injuries occurring at the incident and keeping a running tally of costs associated with the incident. The Finance/ Administration Section works closely with Logistics to contract for and procure the resources needed to manage the incident.

In a school incident or event the Finance/ Administration function could be performed by a single person working directly for the Incident Commander. When a school incident or event requires multiple Finance/ Administration functions, multiple individuals will work under a Finance/ Administration Section Chief. On some school incidents the Finance/ Administration function is not done at the incident scene but rather is handled by the school district.

Application of Incident Command in a School

Let's take a look at some of the responsibilities and actions that might be taken by the different roles in the ICS Organization using a scenario.

You and several other teachers are in the schoolyard during recess. A child falls on his back and is breathing but not moving. You hear a clap of thunder in the distance.

Several things have to happen quickly. The child must be evaluated and given appropriate medical care. To accomplish this someone must contact medical help. You will likely require outside help such as emergency medical services, so someone will have to call 911. The injured child and the other children must be moved to safety and you must maintain accountability of all children and the other teachers and administration responding to this incident. Someone must think about other safety risks to the students or the responders (teachers). Someone must notify the administration, outside medical services, and the child's parents. It may even become necessary to make a statement to the local press. Someone will have to record the incident actions and you may also encounter issues with pay or workman's compensation.

To accomplish all of this in a coordinated fashion someone needs to be placed in charge establish incident command. In ICS the senior first responder on scene establishes the initial incident

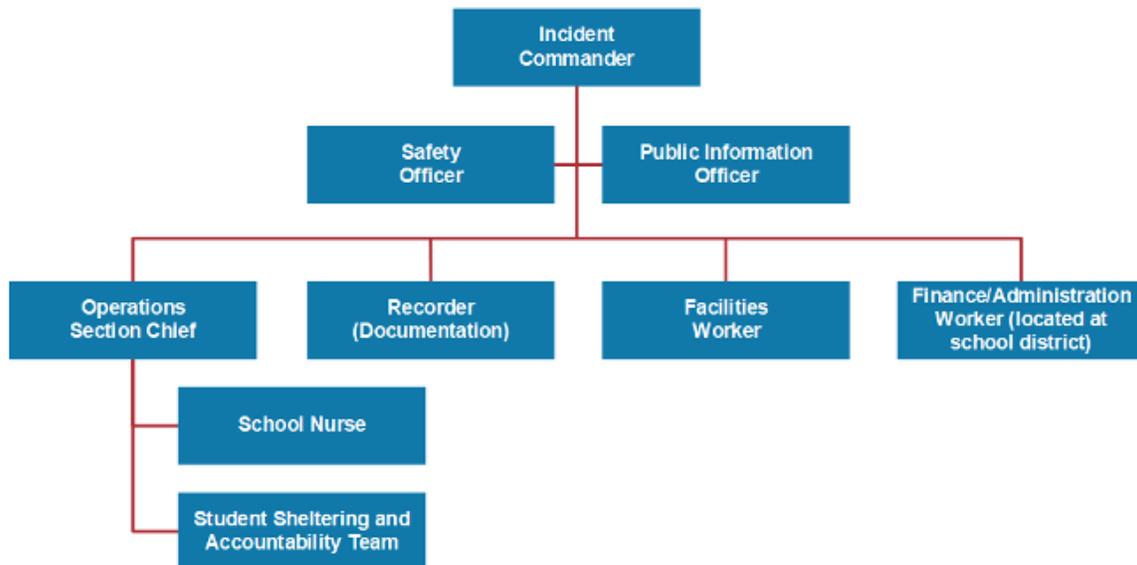
command. In this scenario let's say that you are the senior teacher and you have training and experience in the Incident Command System. You establish initial Incident Command and will maintain it until the incident is resolved, or the school administration designates another Incident Commander.

As you direct the initial actions and organize the response you will also want to develop an incident command structure to assist you in managing this incident. Remember that if you are the Incident Commander that you are responsible for any function for which you have not delegated authority to a designated supervisor for that function.

So what are some of the functions and responsibilities that you will need to consider?

| ICS Management Function | Responsibilities |
|-------------------------------|--|
| Command | Establish Incident Command Determine what needs to be done (initial incident objectives) |
| Safety | Assess safety concerns and recommend additional actions to ensure safety for students and responders |
| Public Information | Prepare and disseminate information to parents and media |
| Operations | Organize responders to effectively manage the incident Ensure that the child does not move and monitor vital signs. Provide comfort to the injured child. Determine if you can get temporary shelter for you and the child. Determine appropriate actions to ensure the safety of other students |
| Planning | Monitor the approaching weather. Prepare your strategy if lightning strikes occur. Prepare your strategy if the child stops breathing. |
| Logistics | Arrange for temporary shelter to cover the injured child. |
| Finance/Administration | Complete reports and work with appropriate school personnel to submit appropriate insurance forms. |

How can you organize the response for this incident? The following is one possible Incident Command Structure for this incident:



The Incident Command System utilizes a modular approach. As the Incident Commander you only activate those portions that you need to manage the incident. In this case only one General Staff section, Operations, is utilized. The Planning function is a single person, the Recorder. The Logistics function is a single person, a facilities worker. The Finance/ Administration is a single person, and this person is located at the school district, not at the incident site. Similarly, Command Staff positions, Safety Officer and Public Information Officer, are each staffed with a single person.

Note the span of control for this ICS structure. As the Incident Commander you would have six individuals reporting directly to you: a Safety Officer, a Public Information Officer, an Operations Section Chief, a Recorder, a Facilities Worker, and an Administration/ Finance Worker. The school nurse and the Student Sheltering and Accountability Team would report to the Operations Section Chief. Because the Student Sheltering and Accountability Team is composed of several teachers, one teacher would be designated as the Team Leader to manage the efforts of the Team.

Remember that once designated as the Incident Commander, you will remain the Incident Commander until either the incident is concluded, or you are replaced by another Incident Commander. Some smaller incidents may be resolved quickly and this “transfer of command” will not happen. For larger incidents involving outside first-responders, you can anticipate that fire, police, emergency medical services or another outside organization will likely assume Incident Command. When this happens the school will normally move into a supporting role for the incident and provide a school liaison to the new incident commander.

Conclusion

In some emergency incidents school personnel may need to serve as first responders. For these incidents, as well as for some pre-planned events, the use of the Incident Command System can help the school to effectively manage these incidents and events.

For additional Information:

- US DOE, Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools, <http://rems.ed.gov/>
- FEMA ICS Resource Center, <https://training.fema.gov/emiweb/is/icsresource/>
- Additional ICS Training, <https://training.fema.gov/>