



SIA Recommendations on emergency evacuation for students, staff and visitors with accessible and functional needs

Emergency preparedness is critical for all students, staff and visitors at your school, but even more so for individuals who require assistance during an evacuation. There are a significant number of considerations for the evacuation process which must be planned in advance in order to be effectively implemented in the midst of an emergency situation.

The following recommendations are provided to assist in the process of planning and creating written documentation for individuals with access and functional needs. These documents should be integrated into existing written emergency evacuation plans to create one global document for emergency planning.

The recommendations in this document are not intended to provide a specific method of creating a written emergency planning document. Because of the countless variables involved with school facilities, geography, different types of emergencies, different evacuation needs and types of disability, it is difficult to provide a one-size-fits-all template. However, these steps will provide guidance in creating the needed documentation and in undertaking the thoughtful evaluation that is required in developing emergency plans for individuals with access and functional needs.

Additional materials including sample individualized student evacuation plans, emergency medical information forms and references to more detailed reports and recommendations are available from SIA. Please contact Bryan Moffitt, ADA Education Specialist, at bmoffitt@sia-jpa.org with questions or requests for further information.

1. Create roster of students or staff who will require assistance during an emergency evacuation

Broad review of students including those with mobility-impairment, cognitive, hearing, speech or visual disabilities. Additionally, consider students with respiratory ailments such as asthma or other medical conditions which could be exacerbated in an emergency situation

Most of the student's disability information is confidential and requires specific authorization for access. Consent and authorization for all individuals involved in emergency evacuation planning should be obtained regarding information that discloses the student's disability.

Identify students or staff with temporary disabilities (i.e., student in a wheelchair for a broken leg) including contingency plans for on-campus visitors with disabilities or temporary disabilities.

2. Determine accessible emergency egress from all locations on campus to the evacuation sites

Perform a site walk to evaluate the path of travel to the emergency evacuation site from all sites on campus. Identify any potential egress problems related to stairs only access; excessive slopes; surfaces that are not firm, stable and slip-resistant; significant changes in level, etc. Consider alternative evacuation site locations if the existing site is determined to be on a non-accessible route.

Identify both a primary and secondary evacuation route in the event the primary route is unavailable during the emergency

Determine if there is a platform lift to the stage in the MPR/cafeteria and if it has an operational backup battery power system which will allow the unit to run in the event the power is turned off.

Significant advanced planning is required for multi-story building emergency egress. See “Additional Notes for Emergency Evacuation Planning for Schools with Multi-story Buildings”

3. Determine if your facility signage and emergency notification system is accessible for all persons with disabilities including those who are deaf/hearing-impaired or blind/visually impaired (tactile signage and visual fire alarms)

Post accessible room identification and exit signage in all applicable rooms and primary function areas on campus.

Identify classrooms or areas of primary function (main office, multi-purpose room, cafeteria, library, etc.) that do not have visual alarms. Develop contingency plans for these locations as needed if existing emergency notification system does not provide visual alarms.

Provide emergency notification devices as needed for students.

4. Consider use of individualized student evacuation plans (e.g., NFPA Personal School Emergency Evacuation Planning Checklist) for each student identified with access or functional needs.

For those students who have IEP’s or Section 504 plans, consider incorporating emergency evacuation planning into this process. A joint meeting with the teacher, administrative staff,

student and parents is a good opportunity to discuss evacuation or other emergency planning procedures, issues and questions addressed in the individual student evacuation plan.

Identify any special circumstances which require additional planning in the event of an emergency such as medication requirements, medical necessity for wheelchair due to respiratory support or other health issues, planning for mobility post evacuation if wheelchair evacuation not possible, service animal evacuation issues, etc.

Engage parents and student as appropriate on decision-making for emergency evacuation planning. When possible, students should have an understanding of their plans for emergency evacuation and practice them. For instance, individuals who are blind or with low-vision are encouraged to practice way-finding to multiple exits in the event that no assistance is available to them.

5. Train all responsible staff and include individuals with access and functional needs in all emergency drills and exercises

Review the accessible path of travel to emergency evacuation sites with all staff members

Identify assistants or “buddies” and any evacuation devices or equipment required for each individual student with special needs.

Note: The student/staff with special needs should be involved in picking their assistants to provide a level of comfort and familiarity. The assistant does need to be an acceptable choice based on their ability to perform the evacuation assistance (i.e., strong enough to lift or support the person if required). There should be twice as many assistants identified as would actually be required to account for absences, changes in personnel, scheduling, etc.

Provide detailed review of evacuation assistance procedures, training on equipment and proper lifting techniques for all staff or students identified as evacuation buddies or assistants.

Consider designating a floor/wing/building coordinator to take responsibility for emergency evacuation activities with special emphasis on students with access and functional needs.

Always incorporate individuals with access and functional needs into all emergency fire drill procedures. Test all emergency evacuation plans as indicated in written documentation in a controlled but realistic setting. Make alterations to the plan as needed based on the results.

6. Develop advance planning for transportation needs post evacuation

Identify and contract with appropriate transportation in advance to match the needs of those evacuated including buses or vans equipped to transport individuals with wheelchairs or other requirements as needed.

7. Coordinate in advance with the local emergency response teams designated for your facility including the fire and police departments.

Review all components of emergency evacuation for students and staff with access and functional needs including roster, planned primary and secondary evacuation sites, multi-story building evacuation plans as applicable, planned evacuation procedures with designated assistants/buddies, oxygen and/or medication needs and any other special circumstances related to particular students or staff as needed.

Incorporate any input or recommended modifications by emergency response team into final planning procedures

Ask emergency responders to participate in a special fire drill or otherwise interact with students or staff with access and functional needs in advance to provide recognition and support prior to an emergency situation.