

BULLETIN NO. 15

Evacuation Planning for Students with Disabilities



Federal law mandates that every child receive a free and appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment. The three Federal laws that pertain to students with disabilities and education are the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. IDEA requires that planning is done through the development of an Individual Education Program (IEP) to meet the individual needs of the student. The IEP is a written plan that outlines measurable goals for academic achievement and specifies any accommodations and modifications that are provided for the student with disabilities.

Students with disabilities who are self-sufficient under normal circumstances may need assistance in an emergency or disaster. This may include, but is not limited to, communication, evacuation, transportation, supervision, medical care and regaining independence.

All portions of the school Emergency Operations Plan should consider and address people with disabilities. Disabilities can include mobility, low to no vision, low to no hearing, cognitive, developmental and mental health. It is recommended to work with students with disabilities individually to create an evacuation plan. This helps them understand their abilities and how to instruct others if they need help.

Notification Systems

- Consider establishing incident specific warnings that are visual, audible and tactile.
- Audible alarms should run on intervals so that students with low to no vision can hear instructions or the voices of others as well.
- Consult with the fire marshal responsible for your school district on the installation of lighted fire strobes and vibrating devices for low to no hearing students along with the audible systems.
 - Where possible, lighted strobes should not exceed five flashes per second to avoid risk of causing seizures in some people.
- Consider the use of student cell phone or personal electronic devices to alert of an emergency and evacuation procedures.
- Make sure students have a thorough understanding of each warning or procedure and exercise those procedures regularly

Signage

- It is important to comply with ADA Accessibility Guidelines for Buildings and Facilities requirements (ADAAG). Signage requirements included in ADAAG Chapter 7 cover such matters as the type and size of letters used, height above the floor, placement relative to other building elements, symbols used, etc.
- Post signage with the name and location of each area so that the students will know exactly where they are.
- Certain signage such as exit signs and evacuation routes are required by ADAAG to include Braille.
 - These exit routes should be free from barriers for those using assistive devices for mobility (wheelchairs, walkers, crutches, etc)
 - For passages and doorways that might be mistaken for an exit, place visible signs that proclaim, “NOT AN EXIT”

Evacuation aids

- Students with a mobility disability may need evacuation devices/chairs that can maneuver stairs. These chairs vary in quality, and there are no current standards for their design and construction or placement in a building. Staff and students should be trained how to use and assist with these devices.
- Test the equipment to make sure that it will work when needed.
- Discuss evacuation issues with the staff members and caretakers of students with disabilities. Include individuals, who may be temporarily disabled (i.e., a student with a broken leg).
- For proper lifting techniques when lifting a person for evacuation, provide in-depth training to those designated to evacuate students.

SERVICE ANIMALS

There are a host of different tasks and animals that are widely used, depending on the individual's disability. The ADA defines a service animal “as any guide dog, signal dog, or other animal individually trained to provide assistance to an individual with a disability”. Service animals do not have to be licensed or certified by state or local governments. They are permitted into public and private facilities, shelters, hospitals and emergency vehicles.

Service animals should never be separated from their human partner. They may be excluded from a facility only if the animal poses a threat to the health and safety of others or poses an undue hardship. Because the service animal is considered part of the team, they will only respond to their partner unless otherwise instructed. Service animals should always be evacuated with their human partner.

The Iowa School Safety Coalition was formed in December 2012. Participating organizations include Iowa Homeland Security & Emergency Management, Iowa State Fire Marshal, Iowa Division of Intelligence and Fusion Center, Iowa Department of Education, Iowa Emergency Management Association, Des Moines Police Department, Iowa State Education Association, Iowa Association of School Boards, School Administrators of Iowa, American Institute of Architects – Iowa Chapter, EMC Insurance Companies.