

# **ANNUAL SAFETY SITE VISIT REPORT**

Randolph Public Schools

On site visit and walk through conducted:

28 October 2019

Conducted in accordance with Nebraska Title 92, Chapter 10 Section 11 – School Environment

Conducted at the request of Mr. Jeff Hoelsing, Superintendent

On site visits and walk through conducted by:

Kevin Garvin

Emergency Management Director

Cedar County Nebraska

## BACKGROUND

In preparation for this visit, I also reviewed Nebraska Administrative Code from the Nebraska Department of Education Title 92, Chapter 10, section 11 regarding School Environment for guidelines regarding this visit. 92NAC10 Section 11 is rather vague as to what the scope of this visit should entail.

The Nebraska Department of Education Safety & Security Standards Self- Assessment document provides some additional information that could be utilized to help guide these walk through visits.

Also reviewed were various resources located at:

<https://www.education.ne.gov/safety/safety-security-standardsresources/>

## Professional Qualifications

For proper context regarding these observations, the qualifications of the person conducting the site visit should be listed. These qualifications and certifications do not represent any particular area of “expertise”, but rather only reflect the training, education and or experience of the person conducting the review. The relevant training and qualifications listed below should be used to frame the context of the comments and recommendations.

Nebraska Licensed Emergency Medical Technician – 1993

Nebraska Trained Public Safety Dispatcher – 1996

Nebraska Jail Standards – Jail Management/Corrections Officer training program - 1996

Firefighter I Certification, NFPA/NPQS/NSFM - 1997

Nebraska Licensed Emergency Medical Services Instructor – 1999

Nebraska Certification – Reserve Law Enforcement Officer – 1999

Nebraska Emergency Manager – Basic Certification – 2001

FEMA L-449 Incident Command System – Train the Trainer -2006

FEMA – ICS – All Hazards Planning Section Chief Course – 2011

School Active Shooter Training – 2014

## **OVERVIEW AND SCOPE**

The annual site visit is required by Nebraska Administrative Code 92NAC10, 011.01D (Nebraska Department of Education Rule 10)

The review process included:

- 1) A List of items was discussed either with the site administrator or the head custodian at each campus. The list was compiled from:
  - Mandatory items listed in rule 10, Section 11 that were listed,
  - The self-assessment document provided to the schools by the Nebraska Department of Education,
  - Relevant selected portions of NFPA standards including the Life Safety Code and National Electrical Code
  - FEMA recommendations for planning
  - Information obtained from past school trainings/exercises attended
- 2) A walkthrough of each campus facility was made and observations discussed
- 3) A review of the findings as they were observed was made briefly with either the principal Brandi Bartels and Custodian Jeff Bermel
- 4) A written report of all findings/observations/suggestions is to be forwarded to the Superintendent pursuant to 92NAC10 011.01D. The written report is also to be forwarded to the school safety and security committee. The superintendent will provide the report to that committee in a timely fashion as is required in the regulations.

## RANDOLPH JR-SR HIGH CAMPUS – OCTOBER 28, 2019

On October 28, 2019, I met with Mr. Jeff Hoelsing, Superintendent, Ms. Brandi Bartels High School Principal, and Mr. Jeff Bermel- custodian. I wish to thank all involved for their hospitality and professionalism during the site visit.

Upon my arrival to the school, the entry doors were locked and a video intercom system was utilized to gain access. The intercom system terminates in the administrative office area and can be operated from two positions. Once admitted, staff have direct line of site of persons entering from the office area to the front door.

Mr. Hoelsing made available to me a binder with several copies of different plans and various pieces of information in it. A brief review of those plans indicates that the school is utilizing planning tools provided by the Nebraska Department of Education. The plans appear comprehensive in the areas they are intended to cover. Mr. Hoelsing did mention that the plans were reviewed by school legal counsel and they are a living document subject to revision as the information contained within changes. Changes are distributed to all plan holders.

This is outstanding that the planning process has come this far and that the school staff seem to have a good idea regarding the planning process. The plans are readily accessible on a moment's notice. A discussion was held about the desire to exercise some of the plan components perhaps as soon as spring 2020. Staff are trying to put an exercise together regarding reunification.

I would offer a few suggestions regarding the plans. First, insert a record of change sheet for each plan either at the front or back of the plan. This way plan holders can see when the last revision was to the plan and if the revision was included in the copy they have. It also gives insight as to who changed the plan, when it was changed and who if anyone updated that particular copy with the new information.

Secondly, in the plan I didn't see (perhaps I overlooked it) a quick reference sheet that details at a glance which position is responsible for some of the generic duties. An example is attached to this document. In times where the plan is being utilized it provides the ability to glance at a chart quickly rather than looking through the entire plan to figure out who is responsible for what.

I noticed that contact information was included in the plan, and it was on the back page of one of the plans. Nothing wrong with that. It is an easy spot to flip to if you're in a hurry.

I would recommend including as an addendum to the plan a threatening phone call worksheet. It would help to utilize the same worksheet that the Public Safety Dispatchers are supposed to utilize. It helps if everyone attempts to get a standardized set of information.

The school conducts regular Fire, Bus and Tornado drills as required by law. Ms. Bartels did show me a spreadsheet where she keeps track of such things. Those parts of the plan get exercised on a regular basis.

In terms of planning, as the school starts to progress through exercising more of its plan I recommend creating an After Action Report and Improvement Plan (AAR/IP) for each exercise conducted. Identify what went well and what didn't go so well, make the necessary changes to the plans or procedures and validate the changes.

I didn't see a continuity of operations plan or any plan that detailed the lines of succession in writing should all three administrators become unavailable/incapacitated. As I conversed with the Administration staff they have a plan in place to cover continuity of operations in terms of facilities and logistics that they have discussed it internally but I just didn't see it written down formally.

A walk through of the building was conducted with Mr. Jeff Bermel, school custodian.

The school appeared very clean, neat and well kept.

Jeff showed me the new Fire Alarm System that was installed. The system is monitored by a commercial company and an annunciator panel is located near the main entrance for easy access by Emergency Services Personnel in addition to School Staff should an alarm sound.

As I toured the school I had the opportunity to observe several storage areas where electrical breaker panels were located. Some of the panels were identified with a name plate and some were not. Some had a legend inside the door indicating what breaker went where and some did not. If power had to be disconnected in a rapid fashion, absent disconnecting power to the entire building nobody would have an accurate idea of which breaker in which panel needed to be turned off. Jeff mentioned that if they have the occasion to learn what a particular breaker controls, it is notated on the panel at that time. I would recommend that electrical panels be clearly labeled on their exterior and a list of what each breaker controls be kept current in each panel.

Storage within the building is in short supply. I did observe some rooms where things were stored in a manner that impeded access to the electrical breaker boxes in the room. Fire code mandates that there be at least 36 inches of unobstructed space to the front of each breaker box so that you can gain immediate access in the event of an emergency.

It was obvious that as additions to the school were made, someone gave great thought as to the design. In the new gymnasium area there are doors at the top of the bleacher area that lead to classrooms and doors at the bottom. Ingress and egress for this area is good. If something happened within the school main floor students/staff could use the gymnasium as a pathway for escape or as an emergent pathway to shelter on the lower level. The area is well protected with railing around the top walkway.

The stage in the old gymnasium was being utilized for One Act Play production. That area had proper stairways and railings to the upstairs storage area above the stage. In addition there is an electrical breaker box on the main stage that controls the outlets and lights utilized during a performance. This area appeared organized and maintained.

Within the facility both interior and exterior there were signs at all the exits labeling each door number. This provides clarity for responders coming in during an Emergency when staff students, and responders can utilize a common numbering system. The lettering was in large print and easy to see.

Some rooms were labeled and some were not, especially on the lower level near the new gym. Some facilities have a sign adjacent to the door with a room number, some have it in lettering on the door frame itself. My suggestion is to make sure each room has some visible label or designation on the hallway side near the door no matter that it is used for. This helps with clarity in communicating specifically what room you are discussing.

The custodial staff do maintain chemicals on site for use in their daily activities. Those chemicals that I observed were locked in an appropriate room and stored appropriately. One such room had a steel cabinet that housed several cleaning chemicals. The cabinet had some age to it, but would presumably offer some additional protection in the event of a leak, spill, fire or other mishap in that area. I spoke with Jeff about making sure staff would keep the cabinet doors closed when not in use to maximize protection.

I would suggest implementing something like the NFPA 704 marking system for rooms where chemicals are housed so that responders can recognize the hazards easily if they are unfamiliar with the building.

In between the science rooms there is a storage area for chemicals utilized by the science classes. There were no markings on the exterior doors to this area indicating there were chemicals in that store room. Custodial staff was not familiar with what types of chemicals are kept on site for the science department. I was informed that the Science Department has an inventory list of their chemicals. This will be referenced later within this report.

The school has implemented the use of a telephone/smartphone application so that all staff can initiate a lockdown/lockout via their phone. They have added local law enforcement, and County Law Enforcement to the distribution list. If an evacuation is necessary, the fire alarm is utilized.

The school has a threat assessment team and a crisis team as is required to handle those situations as they arise.

A NOAA weather radio was observed in the school office during the visit.

## RANDOLPH ELEMENTARY SCHOOL SITE

At the Elementary facility, I met with Jeff Bermel, school district custodian and escorted around. The building appeared overall in good repair considering the age of the building.

As I entered the building, there was a video intercom system. The doors remained locked until you were “buzzed” in. In the main entry way of the school there were labeled photos of staff members hanging in the entry. That would make it relatively easy to identify faculty at the school. The entry way had another set of doors that could be manually secured to prevent further ingress into the school beyond the lobby. The administrative office has a pass through window.

As we toured the facility it was obvious that storage space was not readily available. Electrical panels in storage areas usually lacked the required 36 inches of clearance to the front of the panel. The storage areas were organized appropriately, but there was a lot of volume in them.

The electrical breaker boxes had what was believed to be original labels on them. Each breaker was labeled with the name of a faculty member that was teaching in the building when the system was installed according to Jeff. That labeling no longer corresponds to present day use. Custodial staff is working to identify breakers as time permits. Some electrical panels were labeled on the exterior and some were not. I would recommend labeling what you can and keeping a list up to date with known boxes and breakers.

This facility also houses a day care facility for younger children. The day care is separated from the Elementary portion of the building where possible.

On the top floor near the top of a stairwell sits a stair chair for transporting immobile students/staff up/down stairs in an urgent manner. The other stairwell is equipped with a handicapped chair lift. This offers two routes for handicap staff/students to access in the event of an emergency.

Each classroom I visited had the Fire and Tornado shelter information clearly posted in it.

At the bottom of each stairway there were spots for students to place items such as musical instruments. NFPA 1 Life Safety Code may require that based upon occupancy these areas be kept clear and storage not permitted. I would suggest consulting the Fire Marshall that does inspections for this building to determine if this needs modified.

The custodial supplies at this facility were minimal. The majority of supplies are kept at the High school and brought over as needed. Those supplies that are on site are kept in a locked room. The door to this area has no markings to communicate the hazard to responders. I would suggest looking at the NFPA 704 marking system for these types of rooms so that responders know there are potentially hazardous substances located inside.

SDS sheets for all the chemicals for both custodial and science materials are kept at the High school Office.

In the upstairs of the elementary I noticed a few classrooms that had a name plate outside the door with a room identifier and the teacher's name. Above the door and in the window of the classroom facing to the outside was a sheet with a numerical identifier. It appeared that some rooms had two different methods of identifying that room. Be sure that any plans or maps of the building consistently utilize a single identifier to avoid confusion. Avoid mixing and matching identifiers such as referring to room 23 as room 23 in one portion of the plan and in other documentation referring to it as room 428 or something similar.

The areas I observed all were posted with instructions for Fire and Tornado actions.

Students from this facility are bussed to the Jr-Sr. High School for meals. A Bus is not stored on site. There appears to be no other alternative to this situation. Security and threats that could be posed in this situation are outside the scope of this site visit as per guidance from the Nebraska Department of Education. In terms of safety, other than the occasional slip trip and fall hazard posed by winter weather it appears to be no issue with this situation.



## **GENERAL OBSERVATIONS/COMMENTS**

Both Facilities look to be in good condition. I was impressed with how neat and tidy everything looked. In both facilities I didn't observe much in the way of the usual slip trip and fall hazards. Cords were tidy, doors were unobstructed, railings were in the appropriate spot, and concrete seemed in good repair. The custodial staff appears to take pride in keeping the facility looking nice.

In the event of an incident at the school, outside resources would need to be brought in to assist. Knowing that Randolph is a smaller community you get a sense that the school is "one big family". Everybody knows everyone else and identification is not an issue. If there is a stranger in the area or if someone doesn't belong it would be very easy to detect for school staff. When you factor in bringing in people from outside the district such as Deputy Sheriff's and State Troopers to an incident at the school, it would be difficult for them to determine who belongs and who does not. There are several ways to solve this issue. You could utilize a photo ID for each teacher/staff member and have the teachers identify the students, you could have an identification card for every student and faculty member that they are required to carry at all times, you could have a photo directory similar to the yearbook that encompasses all students faculty, and staff or something similar. There needs to be something in place for rapid identification.

The school has an RFID entry control system on a few of its doors at both facilities. This is a good alternative to a traditional lock and key. It provides for accountability as to who entered a room and when. Access to a room could be granted/denied from a central computer in short order.

While I was on site a repair technician was in the building working on the boilers. I was informed that custodial staff usually take care of supervising repair technicians while on site and that should an evacuation order or Tornado warning be issued custodial staff will notify those repair technicians on site. In this example, the technician was working in the boiler room. The noise level in the boiler room was elevated, and I didn't observe an intercom. In addition the boiler room has lots of electrical wires, and concrete it was located in the lower level in an interior room. A room like this is can block cellphone signals. I suggest being sure you can reliably communicate to persons in areas like this. Be sure that everyone in your plan is aware of their roles and responsibilities. If thinks like this are not included in your plan, be sure to include them. Think of a plan B just in case Plan A doesn't work for a situation like this.

The school has a visitation check-in system, so visitors should have a name tag when they enter the building and the software will identify who is checked in at any given time.

The administration team has one member at each sporting event the school is involved in no matter if it is home or away. Should a threat arise, the administrator has the authority to determine the proper course of action.

There is the Ag/shop complex across the street from the High School. Students must go outside and across a public street to attend class in this building. Staff monitor the doors going in and out of the Jr/Sr High School when the students are crossing the street. The street is a lower traffic area part of town but the possibility of a student being struck by an automobile still exists. In addition it is difficult to secure the shop/ag building while students are inside. I was informed that the school is aware of this issue and is working on a solution. The security aspect of this observation is outside the scope of the rule 10 safety visit and will not be addressed further in this document. For the safety aspect, the area is clearly a school area and motorists should be aware that students could be present. I would suggest that school staff and local law enforcement observe the traffic patterns in this area and utilize additional signage or barricades if the situation warrants.

The school has numerous stop the bleed/First Aid kits scattered through the school. The kits appear very well put together and go beyond a basic first aid kit. The placement and quantity of the kits in addition to the contents are a good step toward providing life sustaining measures until Emergency Medical Services arrive.

For systems that are critical to the facility operation I would recommend some sort of documentation so that if something happened and the normal people can't be on site physically or virtually someone can safely operate the critical equipment.

I would suggest for both facilities that a three ring binder be compiled that is easily accessible in an Emergency that could be handed off to Fire, EMS or Law Enforcement as the situation warranted that contained important information such as where chemicals are stored, what chemicals are stored on site, where the fire alarm control panel is, instructions on how to disarm the fire alarm, building layout, location of power and gas main disconnects, etc.. In the event key staff were absent or the school had to evacuate this would be a tremendous help for Emergency Services responding to an incident.

For both facilities an Emergency Contact list would be helpful. Such a list along with a basic layout of the facility could be securely stored in the County 911 system and automatically become visible to the dispatcher should a 911 call originate from a number associated with the facility. With a commercial alarm company monitoring the fire alarm system, this would be very helpful for 911 dispatch should the alarm company be unable/unwilling to reach the contacts they have on file.

From the research I've done, one suggestion is that schools update their emergency plans utilizing the THIRA (Threat Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment) methodology.

An item for thought is the sharing of information among staff with a valid need to know. As an example, if the school receives information that a child is in a situation where parental rights have been altered by a court order, who is that information communicated to and when is it communicated? Does that child bus driver have a need to know? This is a decision left to the schools and/or their attorney.

Using the situation of a parent with a court modified parental rights situation, the parent threatens to physically remove the child from school or while in transport on a school vehicle. The school learns of this threat while the child is on a school vehicle being transported. State Law prohibits the use of cellular phones by bus drivers while the vehicle is in motion. How does the school get word to the driver? Another example is that a threat is received at the school prior to students arriving but while students are in transport. Again the bus driver can't utilize a cell phone. How is the bus driver alerted before arriving at school? These are just items to ponder and brainstorm about as you review your plans.

Both schools are very near US Highway 20 and near the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad track. There are Hazardous materials transported by both methods each day. In addition the TransCanada Pipeline runs just a couple miles east of town and the Jayhawk pipeline runs west of town about three miles. Based upon some very dated FEMA FIRM (Flood Insurance Rate Map), and recent history the school is near a flood zone, and has a high potential for having normal transportation routes for pupil transportation and school faculty/staff disrupted.

I would suggest having the school work with local Emergency Management to get an idea of what Hazardous Materials are normally transported through the corridor. I would suggest incorporating plans for sheltering in place and rapid evacuation in the event of a Hazardous Materials Incident into your disaster plan.

I inquired about First Aid and CPR training for staff supervising lunch times. I was informed that several staff members that regularly supervise lunch periods are trained in CPR/First Aid. Although not a requirement (at least that I could find in the NDE regulations) the school has gone above and beyond the regulations in this aspect to provide a safe environment for students.

FEMA and the Nebraska Department of Education both mandate that specific school staff have the basic Incident Command Training so they can integrate into the response structure. This is an online course. The links are provided below:

<https://www.firstrespondertraining.gov/frts/npccatalog?catalog=EMI>

<https://www.education.ne.gov/safety/nims-training-for-schools/>

I would suggest that periodically the schools find a time when the students are not at the school for area public safety volunteers/employees to pre-plan the school facilities. This provides them an opportunity to look at and document pertinent hazards related to their area of response and to develop a response plan for the facility in advance of an emergency. This pre plan should include all disciplines of public safety – State, County and Local. This is a common practice in the fire service for facilities with Hazardous Materials or larger businesses.

Some schools provide a log in to their video system to Law Enforcement to utilize in the event of an Emergency. Some schools are very opposed to this idea. Sometimes a compromise is that administrators can access it remotely via their school issued laptop or tablet and if needed can stand beside Law Enforcement viewing it with them should the need arise. Since there are many pros and cons to this concept, it is something that I recommend having a discussion first internally and then with stakeholders to determine if it should be implemented in some fashion.

For inclusion in the school plans should be guidance for staff regarding duties and responsibilities in the event of a threat occurring after normal school hours. An example might be a tornado watch or warning occurring during a track meet. Who is responsible for getting such notifications, when should they be disseminated, to whom should they be disseminated and who is to take what action. Think of it as a worst case scenario when all of the administration (superintendent and principals) are all unable to be contacted and not in attendance at the event.

The school should give some thought to communicating with staff in the event cellular telephones were not able to be utilized. Many people and facilities rely heavily upon technology and often the low tech gets ignored until the new high tech is unavailable. I suggest incorporating this into future plans. An example is In the event of a bomb threat you may not be able to utilize radios and cellular telephones.

I would suggest that the school administration and safety committee review the Cedar County Local Emergency Operations Plan (of which the school should have a copy) and see how the school fits into that plan on a larger scale. If there are additions or corrections to be made regarding the schools role and capabilities the suggestions should be forwarded to the County emergency manager so the plan can be revised.

The School has many resources at its disposal. The local Emergency Management staff have training in planning, and exercises. They also can help guide you through Hazard Mitigation planning and hazard Mitigation grants. They have access to bring in specialized training specific to schools at either no or minimal charge if desired. The training is usually high quality and instructed by TEEX, FEMA or one of the Rural Domestic Preparedness Consortium (RDPC) schools. Local and County Law Enforcement staff are well trained and bring a lot of experience to the table. Consider involving them once you are comfortable having them do so. These are just some examples, there are many more resources within the community.

In keeping with Nebraska 92NAC10 "Rule 10 from the Nebraska Department of Education", Sections 011.01B, 011.01C, and 011.01D each school must have a safety and security plan approved by the local governing body. It appears that the school has such plans in keeping with the regulations. In the preceding pages I have made various comments and suggestions for improvements to those plans, noted any obvious safety concerns and suggested best practices based upon my observations.

The School should be commended on constantly looking for ways to improve the facility safety and security each year. I enjoyed my visit to your facilities and hearing of the improvements that were made and the vision for the future to further the safety and security of the facilities.

My observations/suggestions/concerns for each facility reflect only my observations and opinions based upon my training, education, and experience. They only represent a snap shot of each facility for a given day at a given time. They are submitted for review and consideration of the appropriate staff and authorities having jurisdiction at Randolph Public Schools.

My observations/comments/suggestions are not final judgments and there is no legal requirement to implement any of them immediately, if at all.

I appreciate the time everyone took out of their busy schedule to accommodate my site visit.

Kevin Garvin