

Considerations for Special Needs Students/Staff

Evacuation and relocation procedures will need to address mental, physical, motor, developmental, and sensory limitations. For example, individuals who use wheelchairs or other auxiliary aids will not be able to traverse the front steps of a building without substantial assistance. The following issues should be addressed:

- In some cases, individuals with disabilities may have limited mobility. In an evacuation there may not be enough time to move mobility impaired students and staff to traditional shelters. In addition, elevators may be inoperable due to power failures. It is important to identify alternative, accessible, safe shelter locations and to communicate these locations to emergency responders.
- Individuals with hearing disabilities may not be able to communicate verbally, to read lips, or to hear fire alarms or other emergency signals. Consider providing basic sign language training to designated school staff.
- Visual impairments might impede reading signs or traversing unfamiliar or altered terrain—consider whether debris might obstruct the evacuation of such staff and students and necessitate alternative shelter locations.
- Debris may obstruct the evacuation of individuals with mobility impairments. Be sure to assign sufficient staff to assist these individuals during a crisis or consider identifying alternative shelter locations.
- Are staff trained to assist students with developmental disabilities? These students may become upset if routine patterns of activity are disrupted.
- Do any students or staff have special needs for medicines, power supplies, or medical devices that are not likely to be available in emergency shelters? Consider what alternative arrangements can be made to provide these necessities.

This information was taken from “Practical Information on Crisis Planning: A Guide for Schools and Communities,” a January 2007 publication of the Office of Safe and Drug Free Schools, U.S. Department of Education.