Business Continuity Planning for Schools

This article is modified from the Business Continuity Plan Template from Safe Havens International

Whenever disaster strikes, the most critical asset that every school must protect from sudden loss is their human resources (the people that occupy the building) and their data.   No matter what happens, schools must be capable of maintaining operations no matter how sudden or how severe the damage or loss is. By creating a Business Continuity Plan schools are increasing their level of preparedness and maintaining a continuity of operations that is a basic requirement of any effective educational facility.

Scope of the Business Continuity Plan

The objective of School Business Continuity Planning (BCP) is to restore critical systems and the restore the learning environment immediately. Planning for the business continuity of a school system or a university in the aftermath of a disaster is a complex task. Preparation for, response to, and recovery from a disaster affecting administrative functions requires the cooperative efforts of many support organizations, in partnership with the functional areas supporting the "business" of your organization. The BCP outlines and coordinates all efforts to restore the staff & community of your organization post-disaster.

BCP Components

I   Outline of Technology Systems within the school (including back up systems)

II   Outline of essential data and activities necessary to maintain the school. This outline comprises the overall structure of BCP.

III   General responsibilities of the individual Information Technology Support Teams that together form the Business Continuity Management Team, emphasizing the function of each team and its preparation responsibilities in respect to restoring the essential functions outlines in Part II (above).

IV   Recovery actions for the Information Technology Support Teams and important checklists such as the notification list for a disaster and an inventory of resources required for the environment. [Note: If a "disaster" situation arises, Section IV of the Plan is the only section that needs to be referenced. It contains all of the procedures and support information for recovery.]

BCP Crisis Teams

The BCP Crisis Teams will be responsible for restoring systems either at the primary school site or at an off-site location, if necessary. The following teams will work in tandem after a disaster:
• Business Continuity Management Team
• Information Technology Support Teams
• Functional Area Recovery Management (FARM) Teams

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The objective of these teams is to carry out the BCP and provide the response activities as outlined below:

1. Detect and determine a disaster condition
2. Notify persons responsible for recovery
3. Initiate the school's Business Continuity Plan
4. Activate the designated hot site
5. Disseminate Public Information
6. Provide support services to aid recovery

Management and maintenance of the BCP is a comprehensive task that depends on a multi-disciplinary team. The Business Continuity Management Team is composed of upper-level managers in the school administration. The following is a list of each position on the Business Continuity Management Team, and a brief overview of each member's responsibilities:

Information Security Officer. As Co-Coordinator of the Business Continuity Management Team, provides liaison between the school's operational and management teams and the Information Technology teams in affected areas. Also responsible for ongoing maintenance, training and testing of the Business Continuity Plan. Coordinates the other Teams under the auspices of the Business Continuity Management Team.

Director, Operations and Systems. Coordinates support for data processing resources at the main data center and the designated recovery sites.

Director, Telecommunications Systems. Provides alternate voice and data communications capability in the event that normal telecommunication lines and equipment are disrupted by the disaster. Evaluates the requirements for and selects appropriate means of backing up the telecommunications network.

Campus Police. Provides for physical security and emergency support to affected areas and for notification mechanisms for problems that are or could be disasters. Extends a security perimeter around the functional area affected by the disaster.

Physical Plant. Coordinates all services for the restoration of plumbing, electrical, and other support systems as well as structural integrity. Assesses damage and makes a prognosis for occupancy of the structure affected by the disaster.

Insurance and Legal Affairs. Provides liaison to insurance carriers and claims adjusters. Coordinates insurance program with continuity planning programs.

Public Relations. Communicates with the news media, public, staff, faculty, and student body who are not involved in the recovery operation.

Personnel Department/HR. Provides support for human resources elements of recovery and staff notification through the school's emergency broadcast service.

Accounting Office. Represents the Superintendent for Financial Operations.

Audit Division. Provides audit support during the emergency. Makes recommendations on changes to the normal control procedures necessitated by the recovery process.

Safety Office. Coordinates risk reduction and avoidance activities and emergency response with the BCMT.

Crisis Response Team. Provides the initial response to the majority of campus emergencies.

Activation of a Designated Hot Site. The responsibility for activating any of the designated hot sites or back-up resources is delegated to the Information Systems Team.

Immediately after of the occurrence of a disaster, BCP Crisis Team should determine the prognosis for recovery of the damaged functional area through consultation with the Information Security Officer and the Damage Assessment Team, headed by Physical Plant, which also includes representatives from Operations and Systems, Telecommunications Systems and the functional areas affected as outlined in Part II of the BCP.

A BCP is crucial to the restoration and resumption of business after disaster strikes. It is important that the "business" of school operations is up and running immediately. Therefore, establishing a BCP is a paramount activity of crisis planning.

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