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AN EXAMINATION OF HOW SCHOOL CONTINUITY PLANS IN
NORTHEAST ARKANSAS ADDRESS THE POST-EMERGENCY
RESUMPTION OF THE EDUCATIONAL PROCESS

By

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Abstract

Planning for the resumption of the educational process in Arkansas public schools should be a part of every school's emergency continuity plan. The purpose of this study was to examine how public schools in Northeast Arkansas are prepared for a situation where education must resume outside of normal circumstances due to an emergency. A literature review determined that all Arkansas schools are required to have some form of continuity plan for their students, but the requirements are not always enforced or punishable if neglected. This creates an opportunity for school continuity plans to be disregarded and planning may only include the absolute basic requirements. For this study, in order to gain an idea of how Northeast Arkansas public schools are preparing for continuity after an emergency, a qualitative and quantitative method was used to study how schools are ready to resume the learning process after an emergency has disrupted normal day-to-day functions. If any of the participating schools in Northeast Arkansas were lacking a proper plan, the study should have encouraged those participants to take a closer look at their continuity plans where it concerns the resumption of the educational process.

Keywords: *emergency management; school continuity planning; emergency continuity planning; school emergency plans; Arkansas school law; Arkansas emergency planning; continuity of operations plans (COOP); school continuity standards*

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Chapter I: Introduction

The continuity of learning is the resumption or continuation of the educational process when there is an occurrence, which results in prolonged closure of a school or an event that results in students' absences for a long period of time (Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools, n.d.). A plan for the resumption of the educational process in schools should be a part of every school's emergency continuity plan. Emergency continuity plans are what allow many schools and businesses to function, possibly at a reduced level, immediately after an emergency (Webber, 2004).

When a school is equipped with an emergency continuity plan that can be put into action, it can provide the school with resilience that it would not possess otherwise. It can also provide schools with a plan or ideas for continuing the education of students even if normal classroom routines are disrupted (Fyfe, 2010). Emergency continuity plans offer a solid framework that is beneficial to implement once an emergency has negatively affected a school's normal day-to-day functions. Emergency continuity plans can provide stability and security for students, teachers, and faculty that has proven to be very critical once an emergency has occurred (Business Continuity Institute, 2014).

Every school district should have an emergency continuity plan that covers how a school should handle an emergency. The emergency continuity plan should include how to properly recover from such emergency, including the resumption of the learning process. Without this information, it could cause the school to suffer from prolonged closure (Laford, 2012). Not only would it hurt the education of the students while the school figures out how to react to the emergency, but it could also mean that school faculty would be without employment (U.S. Department of Education, 2007).

A part of a school's business continuity plan is the recovery phase, which should include the resumption of the educational process (Hopkins, 2009). School officials and educators are responsible for the planning and preparing of schools to meet the requirements for the students when a school is forced to deal with the challenges that an emergency presents to the educational process. Even though most school teachers and additional staff within the school are not emergency management officials, they must be able to make important decisions and effectively work to maintain safety and ensure the continuity of education in their school after an emergency. The characteristics of a school can also affect the outcome of a continuity plan for the educational process (Bourque, 2008). Characteristics can include size of student enrollment and location to resources. These characteristics are examples of factors that need to be considered when planning ideas to resume the educational process for students when normal day-to-day functions are disrupted.

Purpose of this Study

The purpose of this study was to research how Northeast Arkansas public schools' continuity plans prepare for post-emergency resumption of the educational process. Educators need to be made aware if they are neglecting to prepare for the possibility that they will have to resume teaching under different conditions such as at an alternate location or with different materials. Every school should and must have an emergency plan in the state of Arkansas (Bureau of Legislative Research, 2014), but the depth of the plan depends on the school's involvement and what they see as necessary regarding emergency continuity planning. It may possibly be that schools spend their time and effort focusing on other areas of the plan that may seem more important. This study will

give an idea of how the resumption of education following a disaster event is prepared for at many Arkansas schools located in the northeast portion of the state.

Significance of the Resumption of the Educational Process after an Emergency

It may not be known how and what Northeast Arkansas schools are doing to prepare for continuing education after an emergency. The attempt to resume the educational process after an emergency is part of the recovery process. Northeast Arkansas is subject to many risks including floods, tornadoes, wild fires, earthquakes, winter storms, and even terrorist attacks.

Without a plan in place to resume the educational process for students after an emergency, there is the possibility that students would be away from the learning environment for an extended period of time. This would be detrimental to the students' education and could result in the students being behind in their grade when compared to other school students who were not affected by an emergency, or had a continuity plan in place that accounted for continued education. By determining out how many Northeast Arkansas schools are prepared to resume teaching their students after an emergency, it can provide an example as to the preparedness of schools located in Northeast Arkansas. It is necessary to examine schools' disaster preparedness and emergency decision-making skills in order to see where improvement is needed (Miraglia, 2013). School continuity plans are important to emergency management since an emergency that affects the education process will also affect the community. Schools need to be active in every phase, including recovery of emergency management in order to achieve sustainability, not only for the students and faculty, but also for the community (Texas School Safety Center, 2013).

Perspective

In order to understand if Northeast Arkansas schools are prepared to resume the educational process, it is necessary to gather information regarding their ideas or plans for this portion of their emergency continuity plan. The ideas of school educators concerning the resumption of education after an emergency may vary greatly among the school districts. The findings from the literature review resulted in a significant amount of information regarding school continuity planning in general, but more focused areas, such as resumption of the education process were not as easily found. This study will provide an idea of how schools in Northeast Arkansas plan for resumption of education, if at all. If few schools have a strong plan for continuing the learning process, it could be due to monetary issues, time issues, or lack of interest.

Research Question

The research question for this study is: *How are schools in the northeast portion of the state of Arkansas prepared to address the emergency resumption of the educational process in their emergency continuity plans?*

Summary

Northeast Arkansas schools have been affected by emergencies and disasters in the past, and this study will allow information to be gathered regarding their preparedness for the next emergency or disaster that strikes this area. Prolonged school closure could cause students' education to suffer and a loss of employment for school faculty. The opportunity to ask school employees in Northeast Arkansas to complete a short questionnaire on their school's continuity plan and the resumption of education after an

emergency could result in getting some schools to understand the importance of

continuity plans and continuing education after an emergency.

Chapter II: Literature Review

An extensive internet search and library search was conducted to locate information regarding *Arkansas school's continuity planning regarding the resumption of the educational process*. Search engines used in this literature search included Google, Google Scholar, EBSCOhost, ProQuest, Arkansas State University Dean B. Ellis Library, Ross Pendergraft Library and Technology Center, and the Homeland Security Digital Library. A general literature search was conducted on emergency planning to gain knowledge and information on the process of emergency planning. The search was later narrowed to focus on school continuity planning, and later progressed to a search for school continuity planning in the state of Arkansas and education resumption. During the search, there was no found research regarding Northeast Arkansas high schools' continuity plans regarding the resumption of education after an emergency. Many general key terms were used to locate information. These key terms included *emergency management; school continuity planning; emergency continuity planning; school emergency plans; Arkansas school law; Arkansas emergency planning; continuity of operations plans (COOP);* and *school continuity standards*.

Upon completion of the internet and library search, it was determined that there was significantly higher amounts of information regarding the topic of school disaster preparedness and emergency planning rather than information regarding school continuity and education resumption after an emergency or disaster. Outlines or examples of school emergency plans in Arkansas were located by conducting a search using Google that resulted in detailed information regarding disaster preparedness, but slightly less information regarding school continuity. There were a few free examples

and templates available online for schools to use to create their own continuity plan. These templates were provided by sources that were found using the Google search engine. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) provides templates for business continuity plans, and it had a section for school emergency plans. Other templates or examples were mostly provided by other schools in the United States (U.S.) and United Kingdom (UK). These examples and templates were usually written to accommodate the school providing information, but could possibly be used as a helpful guide for other schools.

There was information available regarding resumption of education in schools. However, the information was usually repetitive or limited to only a few useful resources for this particular topic. In addition, more information was found from studies done in states other than Arkansas.

An additional search for school continuity plans in the state of Arkansas resulted in the location of a few online sources to school continuity plans already in place at schools located in Central Arkansas, but not Northeast Arkansas. These plans did not include information regarding resumption of education, but rather an emergency plan containing helpful information to follow during the emergency that could result in education disruption. Although these plans from schools in Central Arkansas did not contain a plan for the resumption of the educational process, they were good example of emergency plans that could lead to further plans to include continuity of the learning process.

Emergency Overview

An emergency is a dangerous event or situation which can normally be managed by the local level of government. It may, by the decision of the president be assisted by federal assistance. The federal assistance is used to supplement efforts by the state and local governments when their efforts can no longer assist in protecting health, safety, and property, or prevent a threatening situation (Ibrahim, 2011). An unexpected, sudden, or impending situation that could result in property damage, injury, loss of life, interference with normal activities or daily routines that require immediate attention and action can describe an emergency (Business Dictionary, 2016a). Some examples of emergencies can include natural disasters, acts of terrorism, man-made disasters, or disease outbreak (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2014).

A natural disaster can be described as a catastrophic event that is produced by nature or caused by the earth's natural processes. Natural events that are occurring in unpopulated areas are not considered natural disasters. This is because natural occurrences happening in unpopulated areas do not result in economic loss, lost lives, or the inability to rebuild (Bioexpedition, 2013). Examples of natural disasters can include drought, earthquakes, flooding, hurricanes, tornadoes, wildfires, volcanoes, tsunamis, extreme heat or cold, and other severe weather (Department of Homeland Security, 2016).

An act of terror, commonly referred to as a terrorist attack, is when the terror of violence for ideological or political motives or reasons is used. Terrorist attacks may also be done out of vengeance (Penuel, 2011). Acts of terrorism examples that can cause an

emergency may include biological threats, cyber-attacks, chemical threats, nuclear blasts, explosions, and radiological devices (Department of Homeland Security, 2016).

A man-made disaster is caused by the negligent or deliberate act or actions by one or more human beings that causes a disastrous event (Business Dictionary, 2016b). Examples of man-made disasters can include nuclear power plant incidents, power outages, hazardous materials incidents, and household chemical emergencies (Department of Homeland Security, 2016). Man-made disasters also include pollution issues, which can occur on land, maritime, or in the air, and transport accidents, which can occur by road, air, maritime, and railway (International Civil Defence Organisation, 2016).

Emergencies caused by disease outbreak can be diseases such as Ebola, Small Pox, influenza, Meningitis, Plague, Cholera, and Zika virus. There are many other diseases that can cause emergencies, but these are just examples of a few that could be a serious issue (World Health Organization, 2016a). Disease outbreak occurs when a disease spreads in an abnormally excessive amount for a community or geographical area. If a disease has been absent from a population for an extended period of time, or a new disease develops, it can be considered an emergency as well (World Health Organization, 2016b).

Emergency Management

Emergency management can be described as the practice of handling and avoiding risks. Emergency management has four phases: mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery (Hopson, 2012). Emergency management assists in promoting

safer communities by reducing vulnerability to hazards and improving ability to cope with disasters (International Association of Emergency Managers, 2007).

The first phase, mitigation, is when there is an effort to prevent risks from becoming real emergencies. Mitigation also works to reduce the effects of the hazard when it becomes an emergency. It also emphasizes on long term methods to reduce or eliminate risks (Hopson, 2012).

The second phase in emergency management is preparedness. Preparedness focuses on the development of emergency plans and the capabilities of producing an effective response to disasters (International Association of Emergency Managers, 2007). Preparedness includes planning, organizing, equipping, training, and improving to strengthen abilities to prevent, protect, respond, and recover from emergencies (Hopson, 2012).

The third phase is responding to an emergency. Responding to an emergency includes utilizing the emergency services and first responders that are necessary to deal with the emergency. In this phase, emergency workers must have discipline and structure to respond to the disaster, but they also need to be able to adapt to a situation and improvise if necessary to respond (Hopson, 2012).

The fourth and final phase is recovery. During the recovery phase, there is a goal to restore the area affected by the emergency to its previous state. This includes rebuilding, reemployment, and repair of important infrastructure. During the recovery phase there is a need to strengthen the area affected by the disaster and rebuild in a way that prevents the emergency from happening again (Hopson, 2012).

Every emergency planning team needs to consider these four phases when creating plans for use in emergency situations (Bauer, 2002). The emergency planning team may then want to seek assistance from emergency management officials, community participants, and county and city leaders to review the emergency plans to assure that these phases are covered in their plans (Sterling, 2015).

Emergency Planning Team

Planning for an emergency may be easier when using an emergency planning team. The members of an emergency planning team should be committed to participating in the decision making process. The emergency planning team needs to be willing to share information, and act in a professional sense to help make meetings run smoothly (FEMA, 2011).

School leaders must support a school's emergency planning team. The school leaders may include senior-level officials, such as the superintendent. This is to ensure the emergency planning team knows that they are supported and recognized by higher officials in the school (Esquith, 2013). The school's emergency planning team must also assess the circumstances and resources that are unique to the school. The information that is gathered from the assessment can be used to customize the school's emergency plans to better fit its needs. The members of the school's emergency planning team should also ensure they have considered all risks that could negatively impact the school (Esquith, 2013). An emergency planning team must also consider all times and all settings to include school functions on-and-off campus such as field trips and sporting events. There also needs to be collaboration between the members of the team to create and revise the school's emergency plan as needed (Esquith, 2013).

The first step to having a successful school emergency plan to is form the emergency planning team. Once the emergency planning team has been organized, the second step is to understand the situation. This is when the team members identify what threats and hazards may affect their school. These risks should then be assessed and prioritized. The third step should be to decide and develop objectives and goals to be completed by the emergency planning team. The team should then identify what courses of action they should take for their emergency plan as a fourth step. The fifth step would be to format, write, review, approve, and share the new emergency plan. The final sixth step that the team should do is to implement the plan and continue to update and revise the plan as needed (Esquith, 2013). The emergency planning team needs to consider the important of the resumption of education after an emergency when creating the continuity plan for their school (IFC, 2010).

Resumption of Educational Process after an Emergency Overview

In the United States, approximately fifty-five million students attend school every day (Collins, 2009). In many communities, it is believed that the school serves as a sort of hub or center of the community where people gather (Mutch, 2014). Schools can be a place for many different types of gatherings outside of the normal use. Every school in the state of Arkansas, not just Northeast Arkansas, is subject to negative impact by a number of threats, emergencies, hazards, or disasters. These events can disrupt everyday normal school operations and functions (Hull, 2010). Even though schools in Arkansas are vulnerable to such disruptions, many schools are not fully prepared. Many school officials believe that a disruption that could cause a prolonged closure to a school will not happen in their community (Hull, 2010).

The continuity of learning is the resumption or continuation of the educational process when there is an occurrence that results in prolonged closure of a school or an event that results in students' absence for a long period of time (Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools, n.d.). The resumption of education during an emergency is a new field operationally and when concerning evidence and research (Hine, 2015).

Nearly every day a school located in the United States is negatively impacted by some type of disaster. The disasters that affect schools across the country vary in severity (Della-Giustina, 1988). These disasters can be caused be a multitude of events such as tornadoes, hurricanes, flooding, fires, earthquakes, severe storms, shootings, water and power outages, gas leaks etc. Depending on the disaster, condition of the school, time it takes to recover, and the length of the school closure could vary greatly. The length of the school closure would be a deciding factor in whether or not the school continuity plan and resumption of the educational process needed to be implemented by the individual schools or districts (Della-Giustina, 1988).

Continuity plans need to provide education to students as soon as possible after an emergency or disaster, and this should be a high priority. Options within the continuity planning that need to be addressed include finding temporary shelters, alternate learning sites, and delivery of schoolwork, homework packets, information, and transportation to shelters and alternative sites (IFC, 2010). It is also important to remember that if a school suffers a prolonged closure due to a disaster or emergency, they probably will not have access to many important teaching materials. This will be an issue that should be raised during the planning process (IFC, 2010).

As mentioned previously, an issue to consider while planning to the resumption of education after a disaster is the possibility that a school may be needed to serve as an emergency shelter or center, which would further disrupt education for the students (IFC, 2010). In many communities, the school is the best location to gather a group of people and work together. This may be a reason that the school property is needed during an emergency to be used as an emergency shelter or headquarters to the community. Furthermore, a school may not have suffered any damage during an emergency or disaster, it does not mean that it will be clear of any disruption the daily operations. This needs to be considered when creating plans for school continuity and preparing continuation of the learning process for students affected by the displacement (IFC, 2010).

Any school continuity plan that could affect the resumption of the educational process needs to address important issues that will change the recovery efforts. The plans need to provide a location to be used if the school's own property is unavailable for an extended period of time. Another idea to implement in a school continuity plan is the creation of a registry that lists all the items that a school may need to be recorded for insurance purposes. This way if items are destroyed or are missing after a disaster or emergency, they can be replaced. Textbooks, computers, chairs and desks, calculators, and paper are example of items that will need to be replaced to resume education for the students. In addition, it is wise to back up all information of the school and its students at an off-site location (Clerk to Governors, 2013). Every school in the state of Arkansas has a responsibility to secure and identify essential data needed for the students and the school (McFadden, 2007). The backup of important information and documents may be

useful to education resumption during an emergency to keep up with students' progress and records. There should also be a plan to account for the possibility for a significant amount of absences of school staff during an emergency. These absences could hinder the resumption of the educational process if a plan for absences is not a part of the continuity plan (Clerk to Governors, 2013).

A school also needs to be sure that it has suitable insurance for the property and contents. Arkansas schools need to make sure that their insurance covers all the types of disasters that are a risk to their area. Risks such as flooding, earthquakes, and terrorism may not be covered under the standard insurance policy, but instead would need to be covered under a separate policy. Without proper coverage, schools may not be able to cover their losses after a disaster. There are state laws that provide regulations for Arkansas school continuity plans. It is a requirement that all schools in Arkansas must have insurance coverage. However, as stated above, any insurance coverage concerning earth movement, flood, and terrorism is considered optional coverage (Arkansas.gov, 2007).

School Emergency Plans

In order for a school to be as ready as possible for a disruption, they need to have a school safety plan that is based on the four phases of incident management (Hopkins, 2009). Mitigation is the first phase of emergency planning. Mitigation is the disaster prevention and loss reduction phase of the emergency plan. Mitigation is one of the phases that needs to be given the highest priority in the emergency plan (McEntire, 2007). This is due to the likelihood of an emergency or disaster that could disrupt the learning process is possibly lowered. The second phase, and the other phase that needs to

be given high priority, is preparedness. Preparedness refers to the efforts of emergency

managers to increase a school's readiness for a disaster (McEntire, 2007). If a school is

prepared then when an emergency or disaster does strike, the damage will be reduced and

hopefully allow for an easier response and recovery.

Response is the third phase of emergency management. The response phase is

where immediate activities are done after an emergency or disaster strikes to protect life

and property. The fourth and final stage of emergency management is recovery.

Recovery occurs when affected schools and communities begin attempting to return to

normal everyday activities. This is also a time when improvements concerning

mitigation can be made that could assist in preventing another emergency from

happening in that area of the same nature (McEntire, 2007). Recovery is a time when

schools can begin the process of resuming education for the students. To return to

normal school work and learning could help the students feel a since of normalcy and

stability after an emergency or disaster (FEMA, n. d.).

When it comes time for a school or district to begin preparing for emergencies,

there may be concerns raised by school officials as to the importance of the school

emergency plan. This can cause school officials to question certain aspects of their

emergency plan. It may be questioned whether plans will or will not benefit the school

financially in the future, if the plans save money, or if these plans really benefit the

students and community (Owens, 2013).

Communicating Emergency Plans

It is very important that everyone affected or involved in a school or district's

continuity and education resumption plan be aware of the plan and any changes, or

exercises that the school or district has created. People who need to understand the emergency plan include all school employees, parents, students, local community leaders and administrators, and first responders. In order for the plan to work effectively, it is important that everyone be very familiar with the plan (IFC, 2010).

It is important that school employees understand what is expected of them. Once an emergency or disaster occurs, they will need to have different questions answered including when are they supposed to report to work after the event, how are the shifts organized, who will not be able to assist in education resumption and school continuity, and how will they be notified of any instructions. They could be notified via school web page, automated phone messages, radio, posted notice, or telephone tree. They need to know which of these methods they need be aware of for after an emergency. It may be useful to use more than one of these methods to assure that as many people as possible get the information (IFC, 2010).

Parents are another highly important group that need to be involved in the education resumption process. Parents need to know what is expected of them and they also need to know that their children will be kept safe and cared for if they are at an alternative site or if there is a change in the day-to-day operations (IFC, 2010). Parents must know in advance of what the plan is for their children. If available, this information should be included in a copy of emergency plans provided to parents at the beginning of every school year. This is due to the unpredictability of how an emergency will affect an area, and the plan would need to be flexible (IFC, 2010).

Each school may need to find creative ways to get community members involved and interested in assisting their school during an emergency or disaster. Outside of

school, there may need to be an open, special meeting with the school or district's local

public safety officials. The meeting should also include the entire school community.

This would be a good opportunity to communicate plans and invite or request help,

participation, and support for the school and the students' education. It would also be

beneficial to relay this information in multiple ways such as in print, audio,

demonstrative, visual, etc. (IFC, 2010).

A new way that many schools may be able to communicate among everyone

involved would be to use social media. Social media is defined as social networking

sites, texting, messaging sites, other mobile or web-based technologies that are used to

support social interaction (Stephens, 2011). In recent years, social media has been a

growing trend that many internet and mobile users, young and old use on a daily basis.

The most popular and widely used social networking site is Facebook. Twitter is

currently the most popular messaging site used on a daily basis (Stephens, 2011). There

are many different ways that schools can use social media to relay critical information, if

necessary. Using social media can allow information to be distributed very fast and can

save valuable time for school officials. The information is posted immediately when

using social media and the information can be updated instantly and as often as needed.

When a school is trying to implement their continuity plans and are attempting to

continue the learning process for their students, social media can inform parents of any

changes or information that need to be shared in a timely manner. If a new location for

an alternative site needs to be posted for parents, or if there are changes in transportation

for the students, social media may help spread the information faster. Social media is a

new, and an effective way to establish a communication structure that allows for rapid

delivery of information. Kim Stephens researched the amount of families using social media and hand held communications in 2010. It was determined showed that eighty-one percent of parents used this type of technology and participated in social media (Stephens, 2011).

New Opportunities in School Continuity and the Resumption of Education

There are many new ideas that can be used in school continuity and resumption of the educational process. Additional ideas that may be considered to continue education include using television and radio options to deliver lessons to the students (IFC, 2010). There is also the option of distance learning. If the technology is available to the school and students, they could use computers and computer programs to continue their education temporarily. These new ideas could be beneficial when school staff and resources are limited (Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools Technical Assistance Center, n.d.).

Negative Impacts of Education Disruption

When students are forced to be out of school for an extended period of time, this results in an increase of dropout rates in the school. This also results in negative impacts that will usually follow the students for the rest of their lives (IFC, 2010). Students who drop out of school can have multiple problems later on in their lives. They could have problems finding gainful employment, continuing education later in their life, and it could have social and mental negative impacts on the students. In situations where children are subject to multiple and excessive school absences, they risk becoming more subject to receive lower test scores and over-all lower achievement growth in the year surrounding the absence from school (Grigg, 2012).

A school closure also results in unemployment for the school employees if the school cannot continue daily operations (IFC, 2010). It also affects the entire community negatively. Schools provide a place where parents can trust that their children are safe while they go to work or conduct other day-to-day business. If their children are prevented from going to school due to an emergency, they may not be able to go to work. This would then hurt the community when several of its employees cannot work due to the closure of their school (Mid-Altantic Equity Center, n.d.).

Government Roles in School Emergency Planning and School Continuity

Government at both the state and federal level have the responsibility to support emergency planning in school districts in the Unites States. Even though the federal government does have a role in school emergency planning, there are not any federal laws that require that all school districts have their own plans (Bureau of Legislative Research, 2014). This is because the federal government does not have the funds to implement a law for school emergency planning. However, the Department of Homeland Security and the Department of Education do provide funding that is available for school emergency planning (Ashby, 2007).

Every state in the United States requires that school districts create and practice a school safety policy. The state of Arkansas requires its school districts to create some form of emergency plan with assistance from the laws, policies, and rules created to assist in school safety. Many of the different policies in the state of Arkansas were applied at the school level, but not at the state level. Due to the state's regulations, there are certain actions that every school in Arkansas must take, but there is not a specific way each school and district must handle school safety. Even though there is not a specific,

uniform procedure for handling school safety, guidelines with planning and drill requirements with specific codes have been created to help schools and districts (Bureau of Legislative Research, 2014).

Arkansas Statutes Regarding Schools and Emergency Planning

Safe, Equitable and Accountable Public Schools, A.C.A. § 6-15-1005, mandates that all of the public schools in the state of Arkansas are required to have facilities that are safe and functional. These facilities must fulfill every existing federal and state requirement. Policies must be enforced by the schools and districts that protect and ensure safety for every student during school hours as well as events sponsored by the school. The policies must be enforced to provide a safe and orderly environment at Arkansas schools and districts. The state requires that the policies provide rules on areas such as violence, weapons, tobacco and other drugs, sexual harassment, and gangs (Bureau of Legislative Research, 2014). Although resumption of education is not mentioned directly in this statute, it requires a safe and orderly environment that should be included in planning for school continuity and the continuity of the learning process after an emergency.

The Safe Schools Initiative Act, A.C.A. § 6-15-1303, was put into action in 2013 by the Arkansas General Assembly. This requires that Arkansas schools and districts provide training for emergency response and prevention to all staff, teachers, and administrators. This training needs to be geared towards natural disasters as well as man-made emergencies (Bureau of Legislative Research, 2014). Again, this is another statute created to assist schools in preparedness for emergencies or disasters, but it does not

provide regulations for school continuity if the emergency created prolonged school closure even though every school should have a continuity plan.

Creation, Composition, Powers and Duties of Safe Schools Committee, A.C.A. § 6-15-1301, was created in 1997. It requires that the Arkansas Department of Education must create a Safe Schools Committee. The purpose of this committee would be to create procedures and policies that are directed at providing security for all students and for the school employees. This statute focused more on the awareness, intervention, and prevention in school safety issues. The Safe Schools Committee was scheduled to meet in December 2014, but before that time, the last meeting was in 1998. In 1998, it was noted that many Arkansas schools and districts had comprehensive safety policies and regulations in place, but the enforcement of these policies and regulations were not consistent across the state schools and districts (Bureau of Legislative Research, 2014). The fact that the Safe Schools Committee did not meet for over ten years even when they had discovered a flaw in school safety regulations across the state provides an example of why many disaster preparedness and emergency management issues may be neglected. This would mean that the resumption of education after an emergency in the state of Arkansas could be neglected as well.

Duty to Report and Investigate Criminal Acts, A.C.A. § 6-17-113, mandates that school officials are to take certain steps when there is evidence or report of a criminal act on property belonging to the school. Schools and districts in Arkansas must provide clear instructions if a criminal act was suspected or has happened. Such instructions include who must be contacted and the manner in which they are contacted (Bureau of

Legislative Research, 2014). Again, this statute is meant to assist schools and districts

with emergency management and does not address school continuity.

Tornado Safety Drills, A.C.A. § 6-10-121. This statute requires that every school

in the state of Arkansas has to implement tornado safety drills. The tornado drills must

take place at least three times a year. The statute specifically mentions having drills in

the month of September, January, and February. Upon completion of the required

tornado drills, the information must be reported within the Statewide Information System.

This report is then presented to the Arkansas Department of Education (Bureau of

Legislative Research, 2014). Once again, this statute is beneficial for school

preparedness in general, but it does not concern school continuity in the event that a

tornado resulted in prolonged school closure. It should also be known that even though

this statute exists to help to schools concerning their emergency preparedness, there is not

a penalty if a school does not follow this statute. In the 2013-2014 school year, two-

hundred fourteen schools in the state of Arkansas reported as having completed less than

three tornado drills (Bureau of Legislative Research, 2014).

Fire Drills, A.C.A. § 12-13-109, provides that every school, public and private,

were to conduct a minimum of one fire drill per month. This statute also provides that all

of the exits and doors should remain unlocked (from the inside) through school hours.

This statute shares many of the issues associated with the statute for tornado drills.

Reports for Arkansas schools' participation and results must also be provided to the

Arkansas Department of Education, but there is no penalty for non-compliance. The

report for the 2013-2014 school year resulted in fifty-nine schools across the state of

Arkansas conducting less than three fire drills for the school year (Bureau of Legislative

Research, 2014). Again, there is nothing in this statute that would encourage Arkansas schools and districts to create a plan for creating a continuity plan.

Fire Marshall Program, A.C.A. § 6-10-110, also attempts to assist schools and districts in preparing for a fire related emergency. This statute provides that there must be inspections of buildings for fire hazards, preventative education, and evacuation plans. If this statute is neglected the State Board of Education will withhold ten percent of state equalization aid. This withholding will remain in effect until any neglect by a school has been corrected (Bureau of Legislative Research, 2014). Having a penalty could encourage more schools and districts to participate in programs meant to prepare them for an emergency.

Emergency Plans for Terrorist Attacks, A.C.A. § 6-15-1302. Beginning in 2004, every school in the state was required to have plans concerning terrorist attacks. These plans are to provide safety for students and employees if there was a terrorist attack, including plans for a terrorist attack that involves a biological agent, chemical agent, or nerve gas. Schools are to have their students and faculty practice drills for terrorist attack emergency plans. The Arkansas Department of Education's Standard Assurance Unit checks to verify that emergency plans include provisions for terrorist attacks. Every school district in Arkansas must include these plans in their handbooks. Any school that does not include these plans in their handbook will be cited for non-compliance. In the 2013-2014 school year, there were no citations issued (Bureau of Legislative Research, 2014). Again, this is an important statute for emergency planning in Arkansas schools and districts, but it has nothing to promote school continuity after an emergency.

Unsafe School Choice Program, A.C.A. § 6-15-432, focuses on the safety of students who are victims or could be become victims due to conditions at their current school. It concerns the right for students who have been a victim of a violent criminal offense while on school property, or who may be attending a public school considered to be dangerous, to switch enrollment to a safe school in the local educational agency. Currently, no student has been moved under this statute (Bureau of Legislative Research, 2014).

None of these statutes directly address school continuity and the resumption of education after a disaster or emergency. These statutes are beneficial for schools and districts across the state of Arkansas. They will help to assure school safety and the responsibility of school emergency plans, but school continuity needs to be addressed as well.

Additional State Requirements

Arkansas state law mandates that all schools and school districts are responsible for creating emergency plans that are for the purpose of preventing and managing potential emergencies. Each school must meet the minimum requirements allowed by the Standards for Accreditation. In order for schools in Arkansas to meet all requirements, they have the option to accept an emergency operations plan (EOPs) and the continuity of operations plan (COOPs) (Bureau of Legislative Research, 2014).

COOPs are a development of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and these plans can be applied at the private, local, or state level. COOP plans are broad and can include ideas or provisions for continuing education for students after an emergency that disrupts the normal learning environment. COOP plans can also

provide provisions on transporting students in the event of an emergency. In June, 2014, the Arkansas Department of Education applied for a grant from the U. S. Department of Education to aid in the development of school emergency operations plans. Unfortunately, this grant was denied (Bureau of Legislative Research, 2014).

Arkansas Tech University offers assistance to schools regarding preparation of COOP plans and emergency response plans. Arkansas Tech University has assisted many Arkansas school districts in creating disaster plans, including continuity of operations planning (Arkansas Tech University [ATU], 2011). Arkansas Tech University will even go as far as to assist in exercising the emergency plan at the school or district twice a year. These plans are fee based and can be grant funded (Bureau of Legislative Research, 2014). Even though Arkansas Tech University offers these services to school in the state of Arkansas, not every school district takes advantage of this service. It may be that schools and districts across the state are not aware of this service. It could also be that many schools and districts are simply not interested in going beyond the minimum requirements. As of 2014, approximately twenty K-12 school districts have worked with Arkansas Tech University to create a continuity of operations plan or a comprehensive emergency operations plan (Bureau of Legislative Research, 2014). This is a very beneficial service offered by Arkansas Tech University that many school districts have taken advantage of, but most of these schools are in the central or northwest parts of the state.

Roles of School Administrators

Either a school's principal or another official should be chosen prior to the school closure, and should be responsible to assuming the leadership position during every

emergency that they may face. Additionally, the school board or superintendent of the

school, should be in charge of approving all plans and procedures for emergency

management planning (Della-Giustina, 1988). It depends on each school to decide who

will be in charge of certain tasks. It has been suggested in an emergency plan example

that ideas can include using custodians, instructional staff, and nurses to run operations.

In addition, administrative staff and clerical staff could be in control of running the

finance and administration areas of the school continuity plan, and the liaison could be

the assistant principal. It was also suggested that logistics could be conducted by

instructional, food services, and administrative staff members and planning and

intelligence could be implemented by instructional staff (Westlake Middle School, 2007).

Again, this is only an example of a school's idea of how to delegate roles. It is the

decision of each individual school or district to decide with staff is better suited for

certain roles to be implemented in an emergency on continuity plan. These roles will

need to be flexible so that they can be adjusted if there are many staff absences.

Substitute Personnel for School Continuity Roles

An area of school continuity and the resumption of education that may be

overlooked is the necessity of substitute personnel. It may be necessary or responsible

for schools and districts to consider the idea of choosing and training other school

employees to serve and replacements or substitutes in school roles in which they may not

be entirely familiar. Some officials in emergency management have raised concerns that

school faculty and administration may not be able to fulfill their designated roles

assigned to them during a disaster or emergency (Charvat, 2006). In the event that

certain school employees become unavailable to complete their duties, it could be helpful

to have other employees that can assume their role in the continuity plan and the resumption of education for the students. In other words, cross-training school employees will be helpful when it is time to implement a school continuity plan (Business Continuity After an Emergency, 2014).

Summary

The continuity of learning is the resumption or continuation of the educational process when there is an occurrence, which results in prolonged closure of a school or an event that results in students' absences for a long period of time (Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools, n.d.). There is still limited information on resumption of education in school continuity plans, but it is steadily growing to be a larger part of school emergency plans. There are many parts of a school continuity plan that could affect the learning process. Alternate learning sites, schoolwork packets, and method of teaching school lessons after an emergency are some examples of components that affect the learning process.

Communication is a very important component of school continuity plans. Many different entities need to be involved in the communication of emergency plans. All school employees, parents, students, local community officials or leaders, and first responders would benefit from knowing the plan in case of an emergency or disaster. Not only is it important for these entities to be aware of the school emergency plans and continuity plans, but also to know what role they will play in the plan.

In addition, the internet is full of important information regarding school disaster preparedness and emergency planning. The information for school continuity is slightly more limited, but still available. Templates for school continuity plans are readily

available for free for any interested school district to review. This proves that the help and information is available for schools and districts to use if they would gain an interest in creating a plan. Right now, there is a necessity to get schools and districts in Arkansas aware of the importance of school continuity plans that implement the resumption of the educational process.

There is not currently any federal laws that require that all schools in the United States have their own continuity plans in case of an emergency or disaster. Even though there is no federal law, the Department of Homeland Security and the U.S. Department of Education provide funding that is made available for school emergency planning. The federal government leaves it to the state governments to implement requirements for school emergency and continuity plans for their schools.

The Arkansas State Government requires that schools create emergency plans and have many statutes that serve as guidelines and rules for their plans. Even though there are requirements in the state of Arkansas, there is no specific way to implement emergency and continuity plans. It is up to each school or district to create a plan that is suitable for their schools. Of the many statutes that provide requirements for emergency plans, continuity and the resumption of the educational process is neglected.

Schools in Arkansas have the option of using an EOP or COOP plan to assist is assuring that they cover all of the requirements of the state. These plans are options, each school or district is responsible for deciding which option, and if they want to use one of the options provided to them. Arkansas Tech University provides a service that assists schools in creating emergency plans, but only a small portion of the schools in Arkansas take advantage of this service.

Schools are much like any other business. They must provide a service or product to be successful. A school's service is to provide education to its students. If this service is disrupted, it can cause problems, not only to the school, but to the community as well. Many businesses have begun to implement COOP plans, but COOP plans for K-12 schools have not been implemented in every school or district (Andreasen, 2011).

The lack of school continuity plan and resumption of the educational process can have ripple effect on communities. Schools across the state provide a place for parents to send their children to receive an education, but it is also a place for parents to send their children so that the parents or guardians can go to work and provide for their families. If children are kept from going to school due to a prolonged school closure, parents may not be able to go to work due to having to stay home with their children. This affects both parents and businesses.

Arkansas laws do attempt to get schools involved with emergency planning, but some of the laws not have any consequences for non-compliance. It is easy for Arkansas schools to possibly let their plans be neglected. Since it can be a challenge for some schools to have a successfully implemented emergency plan, it may be even more difficult to get schools interested in plans that are geared towards continuity and resumption of the educational process. To create these plans, it takes time, money, interest, and knowledgeable people who want to help with the emergency planning and continuity planning. Arkansas schools may need to realize that they are not immune to emergencies that could result in prolonged school closures. While many schools and districts in Arkansas may be working to create a continuity plan that includes a plan for resuming the learning process or already have this plan, there are many more that may

have failed to do so. It would be beneficial to see how many schools in the state of Arkansas actually have these plans ready to go in case there were to be an emergency. Sending out a survey or questionnaire to the schools in Arkansas may result in school officials realizing the flaws in their emergency plans. While trying to determine how many schools in Arkansas are prepared, these schools could also be learning about what their school needs by having it brought their attention.

Schools need to know of the risks their students and community may face if a school is subject to a prolonged closure after an emergency. Disruption in education for students could cause major setbacks in the students' lives by increasing the drop-out rate and lowering their testing scores. A disruption in education could also result in the loss of employment for school employees and parents who now must stay home with their school-aged children. Putting attention on these risks by questioning different schools' plans for resuming education could inspire many schools and districts to look into creating a plan. Every school in Arkansas needs an emergency continuity plan that aids in the process of promoting and maintaining the continuity of education in a situation that was caused by events, which makes it very difficult or nearly impossible for students and school employees to attend regular scheduled classes (Bates, 2013).

Chapter III: Methodology

The purpose of this study was to examine how Arkansas schools in the northeast portion of the state are prepared to continue the education of students after the school has been effected by an emergency. The literature review that was conducted revealed that some schools in Arkansas have a proposed plan for education resumption in their continuity plans. However, there were many schools in the state including Northeast Arkansas, that were not as prepared as other Arkansas schools.

For this study, a qualitative and quantitative approach was used. The objective was to contact school administrators or faculty members with knowledge of the school's continuity plan at public high schools in Northeast Arkansas, and have them complete a short questionnaire regarding their continuity plans. This study provides important information regarding how schools in Northeast Arkansas are prepared to address the resumption of the educational process in their emergency continuity plans.

Participants

The questionnaires were presented to each school and were be answered by any member of the administration or a faculty member who was knowledgeable about their school's continuity plan in case of an emergency. The Arkansas Department of Education provides a directory of each Arkansas school district including the main office address, telephone numbers, and email addresses for the superintendents and principal for each Arkansas school district (Arkansas Department of Education, 2014). For this particular study, emails were sent to specific high schools located in Northeast Arkansas. The email contained a request to be forwarded to the correct school employee if the individual receiving the email felt they were not qualified to answer the questionnaire.

Methodology and Data Collection

Both qualitative and qualitative methods were chosen to find information regarding the continuity of education after an emergency in Northeast Arkansas high schools. The reason both qualitative and quantitative methods were selected was that each school could provide information on how they are prepared for school continuity, but also the study could also provide how many schools were prepared concerning resumption of education. The results had the opportunity to produce different ideas concerning how Northeast Arkansas high schools are prepared for education continuity after an emergency. This included even more results on what part of their school continuity plans provided for the resumption of the educational process and what receives the most attention during the planning process. A list of the survey questions presented to the school officials in Arkansas is included as "Appendix A" of this thesis proposal. It is composed of short answer questions that should not have required respondents much time to complete.

When the questionnaires were completed, a list was compiled with all responses to show the results. Once the compiled list was completed, the responses were reviewed to provide more in-depth knowledge on what the participants knew concerning their school continuity plans. This produced beneficial and informative results from the research. The schools' identities have remained anonymous to respect their privacy and to avoid any problems that could arise from sharing this information publicly.

Even though this research was conducted using both qualitative and quantitative methods, there was a goal to keep the questionnaire as simple as possible. The reason for this was so that the participants did not feel as though this questionnaire would require

too much of their time. The idea behind this method was that participants might be more likely to respond if they do not have to spend considerable valuable time on their responses. The questionnaire was contained on a single-page with only a few questions, so that it appeared as a task that could be done quickly and easily without using too much of the participants' time.

As stated earlier, the names of the schools and participants were not to be placed on the questionnaire. This is so their personal information and responses remained anonymous. Even though many schools place their emergency plans on their school website and in rule/procedure books provided to parents each year, the participants may feel more comfortable knowing that their name or school's name was not provided in the results produced from this research.

The preferred method of distribution was to use school email addresses. The idea behind this decision was to produce fast results and save time and money spent on postage expenses. In addition, sending an email easily allowed the recipient to forward the questionnaire to the appropriate, knowledgeable person to answer the questionnaire if the original recipient did not choose to answer it. The use of email also allowed for participants to complete the questionnaire at the time of their choosing. This could have made it more convenient for their schedule.

A purposive sampling method was used to conduct the research. As of 2015, there were two hundred thirty-nine public school districts in the state of Arkansas (Meador, 2015). There were one-hundred and ninety-two private schools in Arkansas (Private School Review, 2015). For this study, the focus remained on public school districts in the northeast portion of the state of Arkansas.

Reason for Study

The reason a study for Northeast Arkansas schools' continuity plans regarding the resumption of the educational process was chosen was due to the repercussions of a child's education if it is disrupted for an extended period of time. It is important to preserve or reconstruct the learning environment after an emergency or disaster, and continue the educational process for students in order to provide the students with the knowledge and skills to achieve success later in their adulthood. If the school closure disrupts the student's ability to attend school for too long, they may have to repeat their current grade, or could cause the students to test at a lower level then other students at their grade level. Avoiding a prolonged disruption in the educational process could also reduce the chance for dropout rates in students affected by a school's extended closure due to an emergency.

Another reason to be concerned about resumption of the educational process involves the employment of teachers and other faculty members. Without school in session, these school employees may soon become unemployed. Not only would this hurt the school employees involved, but also the community surrounding the school since many of its members may be unemployed for an extended period of time, which takes money away from the community.

Summary

This study's purpose was to find out how northeast Arkansas schools are prepared to continue the educational process after an emergency when the normal learning environment is disrupted. Upon completion of this study, the participant at each

participating northeast Arkansas school may have realized areas in their continuity plan that need improvement, or they could have realized that they are on the right track for having a successful continuity pan for the resumption of education after an emergency. A primary reason for this study was to have northeast Arkansas schools consider taking a closer look at their continuity plans for the students' education. The qualitative and quantitative study provided different ideas and thoughts on how to plan for school continuity as well as how many schools were prepared in the northeast portion of the state. As long as they were familiar with their school's continuity plan, any faculty and administration member was be able to complete the form. The participants' names and the schools' name was confidential and not shared as part of the results. This was to protect the privacy of the school and the participant completing the form. The goal for this study was to see how Northeast Arkansas public schools plan for resumption of the educational process following a disaster event for a situation where resumption of the educational process under emergency circumstances is necessary.

Chapter IV: Results

The purpose of this section is to summarize the results from the questionnaire that were provided by the schools in Northeast Arkansas. Twenty-six Northeast Arkansas high schools were forwarded an email containing the questionnaire composed of eight questions concerning their continuity plan for the resumption of education after an emergency. Of those twenty-six schools, nine schools across Northeast Arkansas responded to the questionnaire. Six of the email addresses provided by the Arkansas Department of Education were invalid and a secondary email address was used by searching school websites. Of the nine completed questionnaires, all of the respondents were teachers rather than administrators.

Question 1:

Does your school currently have an updated school continuity plan?

The questionnaire first asked whether the school in question had an updated continuity plan (See Figure 1). Of the nine responses, 44.4% of the teachers answered yes, 33.3% teachers answered no, and 22.2% of teachers were unsure if their school had a continuity plan included in their school's emergency plans.
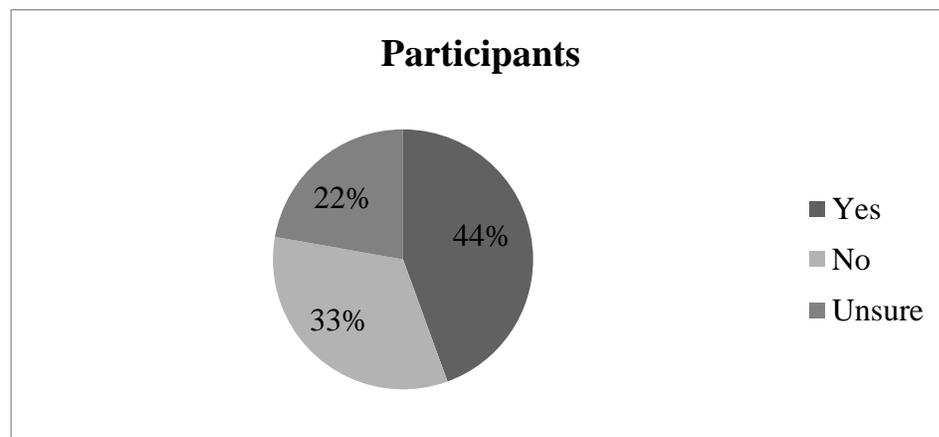

Figure 1. Results concerning updated continuity plan from participating schools in Northeast Arkansas.

Question 2:

Does your school have an emergency planning team or employee who is in charge of reviewing and updating your school continuity plans? If yes, how was this team, employee, or volunteer chosen? Do they have any experience in the emergency management field?

Participants were questioned regarding who was in charge of reviewing and updating their school continuity plan (See Figure 2). Of the participating schools, 56% of the participants answered that there was an employee or team in charge of reviewing and updating their school's continuity plan. Twenty-two percent of the participants answered that they did not know, and the remaining 22% answered that their school did not have someone in charge of reviewing and updating their school's continuity plan.
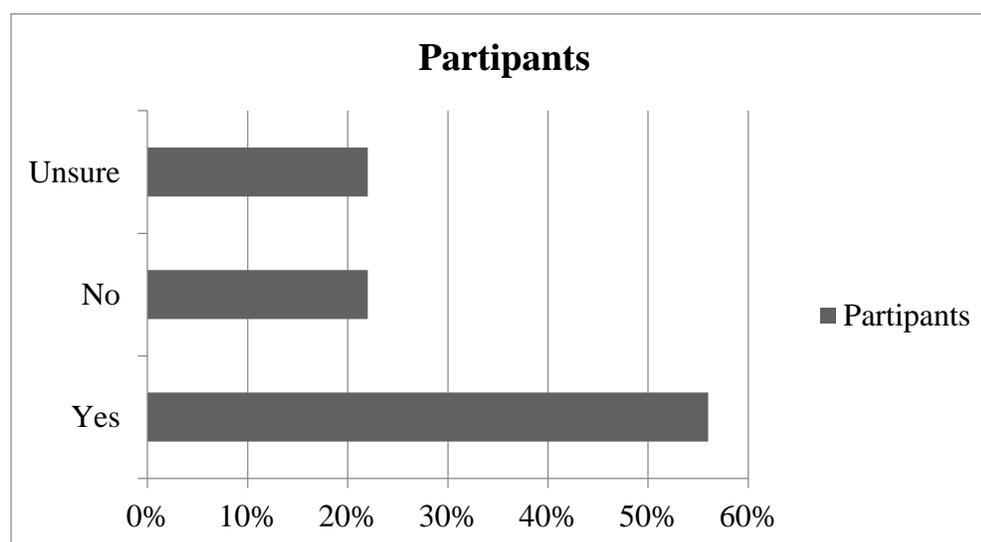

Figure 2: Results concerning participants' knowledge concerning if their school had a responsible employee or team in charge of continuity planning.

Question two from the questionnaire also asked participants to provide how the team, employee, or volunteer was chosen. Of these results, 44% of the participants stated they were unsure who was responsible for their school's continuity plan even though they

knew someone was appointed the responsibility. One of these participants further stated that they were unsure if they had anyone responsible for reviewing any portion of the emergency plan and handling any emergency at their school. Another participant advised that their high school principal was in charge of the continuity plan and employees were to follow the direction of the principal in any emergency situation, including school continuity. One other school participant included that their principal appointed someone for this responsibility, and one other participant had a district leadership team that selected someone to take charge of their school's continuity planning. The remainder of the participating schools, approximately 22% of the participant results, failed to answer this question.

Of the school employees in charge of reviewing and updating their school's emergency continuity plan, 55% of participants did not know if any of the employees were in charge of their school's continuity planning or had any background or experience in emergency management. Of the responses, one school had a former first responder on board to assist in reviewing emergency plans. A different school had emergency management team members who researched and put into practice skills they learned through researching emergencies to assist in creating successful emergency plans, including the resumption of education. There was also mention from another participant's school having an outside source review emergency plans to approve and make suggestions for change as needed.

Question 3:

> **How does your school continuity plan address the resumption of education**
>
> **after an emergency?**

When asked how their schools addressed the resumption of education after an emergency, 67% of the participants did not know or did not answer if their school did anything to address the resumption of education. Other participants had responses that were more informational such as their schools' research on emergency planning was ongoing and their plans changed to reflect their new findings, which may have come from experience or new information. A different participant further stated that their school plans were continuously improving and in the event of an emergency, they will simply carry on as best as they can manage.

Question 4:

> **If your school has an offsite location to hold school in the event that the**
>
> **school building must be closed for an extended period of time how was this**
>
> **location chosen?**

Figure 3 shows, of the nine participating schools, 33% of the schools had a plan of what to do if they needed to utilize an offsite location after an emergency. Information provided by a participant stated that children could be bused to alternate locations, to include nearby school districts, if necessary. The results also provided that there is a school in Northeast Arkansas that has a shelter built on-campus that the entire community can use. This building is where they intend to continue school if necessary. Having a memorandum of understanding was also an answer included in the responses by a participant. The remaining 67% of participants answered that they did not know what

their school would do, or they knew their school did not have an offsite location included in their continuity plans. None of the participants gave an answer as to how the location was chosen for their school in their school's continuity plan.
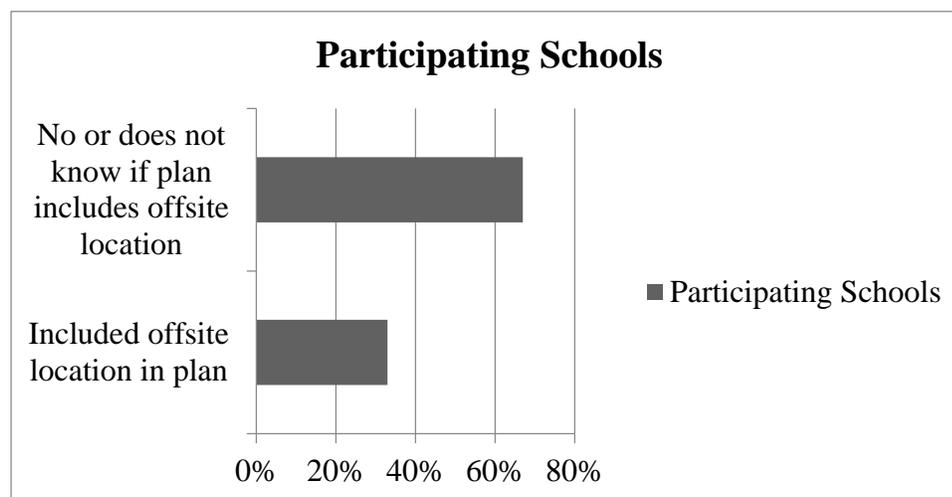

Figure 3. Percentages of participating schools whose continuity plan includes or does not include plans for offsite location to resume the learning process after an emergency.

Question 5:

How has your school planned for the loss of materials and lesson plans in the event of an emergency?

When the participants were questioned about their plans for loss of materials and lesson plans in the event of an emergency, there were 56% of the participants who were unsure of what they would do in that situation. The results also provided that 33% of the participants' responses indicated that as long as teachers at their school could have access to electricity, they could retrieve their lesson plans by using some form of electronic system set up by their school. It was also mentioned by a participant that access to the internet was very important to resuming the learning process after an emergency where

the normal learning environment had been altered. One participant answered they their school did have a plan for loss of materials and lesson plans in the event of an emergency, and did not elaborate on how the school had planned to handle it.

Question 6:

> **Does your school have a plan for notifying school employees and parents of any changes in location or bus routes after an emergency? If yes, how will they receive this information?**

When the participants were asked if their school had a plan for notifying school employees and parents of any changes in location or bus routes after an emergency, 100% of the school participants answered that they did have a notification plan in place. Every participating school had some form of a system such as a phone tree, automated phone calls, text system, or other information system in place to spread any news when needing to reach employees and parents of school conditions or changes in the ordinary schedule.

Question 7:

> **Has your school ever had to use their back-up facility or supplies due to an emergency?**

The participates were also questioned as to whether their school has ever had to use their back-up facility or supplies due to an emergency. Only two or 22% of participants responded that they have used either a back-up facility or supplies. One of these participant stated that this was due to a possible gas leak that took more than a couple of days to investigate. The other participant did not give the reason their school used either their back-up facilities or supplies. The other 78% of participants stated that

they had not or did not know if their school ever used a back-up facility or supplies due to an emergency.

Question 8:

What is the total student enrollment at your school?

The enrollment at each school varied with the smallest high school having approximately 260 students enrolled at the time of the questionnaire. The largest participating high school answered that it contained approximately 1,000 students at the time the questionnaire was completed. The remaining seven participating schools averaged somewhere between 350 and 750 students.

Summary

Of the twenty-six Northeast Arkansas schools that were contacted to participate in the research study, nine schools responded by completing the questionnaire provided to them. It was determined that of the nine participating schools, less than half of the participants responded that their school had a school continuity plan in place. Slightly more than half of the participants stated that a school employee or team was in place to manage their school's emergency continuity plans. More than half of the participants did not know what their school would do for the resumption of education after an emergency. More than half of the participants further responded that they did not have a plan for an offsite location or a plan for lost materials or plans needed for lessons. Every participating school had a plan in place to contact school employees and parents/legal guardians in the event of an emergency. Only two of the schools have had to use their back-up supplies or facilities due to an emergency.

Chapter V: Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to research how Northeast Arkansas schools' emergency continuity plans addressed the resumption of the education process. This included creating a continuity plan and addressed the resumption of education under circumstances created by emergencies. Out of twenty-six Northeast Arkansas high schools that were asked to participate in this study, nine schools responded. Even though less than half of the schools that were requested by email to participate in this study declined to do so, there are many questions and ideas that resulted from the questionnaires that were completed.

Methodological Insights

Upon completion of collecting the research for this study, it became apparent that there are other ideas that could focus the research to enhance the resumption of education after an emergency in Northeast Arkansas Schools. There are different ways to conduct research that may produce different results. By conducting the research using a different method, the results could be more substantial or deliver additional information not previously provided in this research.

When the emails were forwarded to Northeast Arkansas schools, they were sent to either a principal or superintendent. After an initial poor response, they were then forwarded to several teachers from different schools. As a result, all of the responses were completed by high school teachers rather than anyone in an administrative role. I believe that the results may have been better if participants were members of the administration, and they had completed the results. It is my belief that certain members of the administration, such as the principal or superintendent are responsible for insuring

that their school's faculty are aware of what the emergency plans contain and how to carry out the plan. If this is true, these administrators would know more about the emergency continuity plan and the resumption of education after an emergency.

The results from this study may have been more informative and produced more results for more participants if a different method was used for contacting the twenty-six Northeast Arkansas schools. For this particular study, email was the primary method used to contact the school participants. It is much easier to ignore or delete an email than it is to avoid someone during a face-to-face contact or through a telephone conversation. In addition, many school employees receive an abundance of emails each day, and it makes it easier to completely miss an email sent from an unknown email address. Had this study been conducted by changing the contact method to either telephone contact or face-to-face meeting, I believe the results could have produced more participants. Additionally, if a telephone conversation or face-to-face conversation had been conducted, the results may have been more in depth and produced stronger results.

Findings from Results

Slightly more than two thirds (77%) of the participants were unsure whether their school had continuity plans, or if they did, what it specifically addressed concerning the resumption of education. The teachers who did happen to be aware of their school's continuity plan were the same participants who indicated that their school had appointed teachers or administrators to maintain their school's emergency plans. If more teachers were involved in the creation of their school's continuity plan, they could provide ideas that could make the resumption of education easier, since they are a good source to give information on what their students need to make the plan successful.

By state law (The Safe Schools Initiative Act), teachers are required to be informed and trained in regards to their emergency management plans (Bureau of Legislative Research, 2014). However, this law does not mention continuity plans. Therefore, even though Arkansas schools are required by law to have emergency plans and be trained to implement these plans, based on these results, there may need to be a more raised awareness regarding the importance of the resumption of education in the Northeast Arkansas area. Without continuity plans that take into account students' education after an emergency, not only could the students risk losing the opportunity to be educated in a school setting, but it could also delay their expected graduation date. In addition, without the students' ability to return to school, the parents or legal guardians may suffer a negative impact due to time off from their employment to be home with their children or acquire new, unexpected childcare expenses.

The results from the participants who knew of their school's emergency plans indicated that their school had an individual, usually the principal, or a team that was responsible for emergency planning. Knowing who is responsible for this information can provide teachers and administrators with someone to present ideas or changes that need to be addressed to create a more resilient plan for their school. The results also provided that many of the responding schools were not sure if their appointed emergency management planner or team had any experience with emergency management. Even though many of these individuals had little or no experience, there are plenty of resources available to them through FEMA's website or through other internet sources that can assist in their emergency planning (FEMA, 2013). Even though this may appear as a setback, there are resources to assist in making sure that they can create a successful

emergency plan and continuity plan, but they must be aware that these resources are available to them.

In the event of an emergency when staff and students need to be contacted of new changes and instructions, every participant responded that they had a method of communication. Every participating school stated they either had a plan to contact necessary parties by phone or some other system in place at their school. This was the one question where every participant knew exactly what their school did for emergency situations. This may be due to the schools using this same communication method to relay any information needed to reach everyone, such as school closings or bus route changes. However, there was no secondary plan mentioned for communication in the results, which could cause issues if some students or school employees cannot be reached by phone. Additionally, every participant who responded that they had backup supplies or lesson plans relied greatly on technology. After an emergency, using the internet or their school's computers or files may not be optional, but none of the participants mentioned hard copies or any other way to access the materials they need to continue their lessons. Schools in the area may benefit from being made aware that it is beneficial to have a secondary plan in case technology is no longer available for their use after an emergency.

Looking Forward: Recommended Research

It would be beneficial to study different areas in the United States to see how schools in different locations across the country plan for school continuity in the event of an emergency. By compiling different ideas from different schools, it could assist any school needing help in creating a better and resilient continuity plan. Of course, it would

also be beneficial to seek help from surrounding Arkansas schools that do have a complete continuity plan that includes the resumption of education after an emergency. By reviewing and researching portions of other schools' plans, it could encourage unprepared schools revise their current plans.

Another place to conduct research to better school emergency plans is by getting feedback from parents and guardians of students. Finding out what opinions parents and guardians have for continuing their children's education could provide information on what would work better for the students. They could have opinions on how lessons should resume or the location if the original school building is not operational. By allowing parents and guardians to be a part of the research, it opens up ideas from a different viewpoint.

It would also be beneficial to further conduct research to find what resources are available for use in continuity planning in schools. Even though there is not significant research available for the resumption of education after an emergency as it is for general emergency continuity plans, there is always that possibility that new information could be found later. Any new information found could result in new resources that schools could use to create more functional plans for the resumption of education after an emergency.

Looking Forward: Recommended Practice

Now that this study has been completed, there are multiple practice ideas that schools in Northeast Arkansas can use to plan for the resumption of education after an emergency that would improve their continuity plans. A good starting point is to find employees at the school who are willing to spend time on emergency planning. If there is not already a team or individual assigned to the task, this should be a priority. If

someone is being held accountable for emergency planning, it provide motivation to make improvements.

As previously stated, there are free templates and ideas available to schools if they need assistance in planning. FEMA.gov is a good starting point if help is needed. An internet search should provide other assistance as well. The employees who agree to review and update their school's emergency plans may not have the experience that would be beneficial to plan, so these sources could be very helpful to guide the planning process. Speaking with the community can also be helpful. If the community has an emergency management office or preparedness office, they may provide ideas or information that could assist in emergency planning. They could also contact their local fire departments or police departments for advice on how to better their emergency plans.

Since many participants had a way to continue education after an emergency as long as they had electricity or internet, it would be wise for the schools to start creating a hard copy of lesson plans and other materials needed to resume education. It may further be helpful to store these hard copies at an offsite location in the event that the school is inaccessible. If storing hard copies of the necessary documents is not an option, the school may possibly use a generator, if one is available to the school to retrieve lesson plans and materials stored on an electronic source. There are different options available to prepare to retrieve teaching materials after an emergency, but each school is different and it is up to the emergency planners within their school to decide their best option.

Relevance to Emergency Management

In order for Northeast Arkansas schools to practice good emergency management, these schools must be prepared to handle the risks that could affect their day to day

operations. The four stages of emergency management are mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery. Schools need to consider all four stages when creating their school continuity plans. By considering how to continue education for students during the mitigation phase, it will help with the recovery phase. The more prepared schools are to handle an emergency the better off the school will be when something does happen.

Planning for the resumption of education after an emergency in continuity plans not only helps the students, but it also helps the community to be more resilient to emergencies. It provides teenagers a place to go during the day so that parents and guardians can continue working without worrying who is watching their children or where they are when the school is closed. This can help the recovery process for a community dealing with an emergency.

When it comes time for a school or district to begin preparing for emergencies, there may be concerns raised by school officials as to the important of the school emergency plan. Many schools in Northeast Arkansas may not be interest in devoting time to this type of project and sometimes, it is easy to see why when they do not feel they will ever have to use the plans. It may be that until a situation actually happens where school emergency planning, school continuity, and the resumption of the learning process is needed; the schools will want to focus their time on projects that have immediate positive outcomes. This study had the possibility of raising awareness as to the important of emergency planning in the minds of the teachers who completed the study.

Summary

Northeast Arkansas is subject to many different risks that could disrupt the normal learning environment for students. For example, some of these risks may include terrorists attacks, chemical and biological incidents, or natural disasters such as an earthquake or tornado. In a situation where the normal learning environment is inaccessible, it is beneficial to have a plan to carry on so that schools can return to a sense of normalcy, even if it requires some changes. Even though many participants did not provide much information regarding their continuity plans and the resumption of education after an emergency, the questionnaire provided to them could have possibly created much needed interest for their school's continuity plan. Every school should have an opportunity to move forward in their emergency planning to include the resumption of education after an emergency. A good starting place is to get the attention of individuals connected to the schools. With any luck, this study helped to create an interest in some of the participants that could benefit their continuity plans and the resumption of education after an emergency.

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Appendix A

Questionnaire Concerning Resumption of Education
after an Emergency

1. Does your school currently have an updated school continuity plan? Yes or No

2. Does your school have an emergency planning team or employee who is in charge
    of reviewing and updating your school continuity plans? Yes or No

    If yes, how was this team or employee volunteered or chosen? Do they

    have any experience in the emergency management field?

3. How does your school continuity plan address the resumption of education after

    an emergency?

4. If your school has an offsite location to hold school in the event that the school

    building must be closed for an extended period of time how was this location

    chosen?

5. How has your school planned for the loss of materials and lesson plans in the

    event of an emergency?

6. Does your school have a plan for notify school employees and parents of any

    changes in location or bus routes after an emergency? If yes, how will they

    receive this information?

7. Has your school ever had to use their back-up facility or supplies due to an

    emergency? Yes or No.

8. What is the total enrollment at your school?