

City of Seattle School Contingency Planning and Seattle Public Schools Strike Virtual Activation

Background and Purpose

On Friday, August 21, 2015 the Seattle Office of Emergency Management (OEM) began a series of meetings to ensure a coordinated planning process in the event that Seattle Public Schools (SPS) did not begin as scheduled on Wednesday, September 9, 2015. Previous planning work had been conducted in 2013 and 2010, when Seattle Public Schools were in a similar position in negotiations with the Seattle Education Association (SEA).

To support working families, the City had developed a plan to provide Drop-in Centers for families who had no alternative means of childcare in the event school was not in session. One of the After Action items from 2013 determined that any services the City provided as a result of a school strike would not begin until the Monday following a strike.

For 2015, the initial strategy was to reconstitute much of the planning that had been done previously, where the City would activate the Seattle Emergency Operations Center (EOC) to provide operational and contingency support in the event Drop-In Center services were initiated on Monday, September 14, 2015. As the first scheduled day of school (September 9) moved closer, it became clear school would not begin on time and an additional contingency plan was developed to provide Day Camps for the first three days of a school strike (Wed-Fri).

Throughout the course of providing Day Camps for the first three days of the strike, Seattle OEM conducted a daily conference call with participating partners to ensure operations were running smoothly. As the strike moved into the second week and the City began expanding to Drop-in services, a decision was made not to activate the EOC; but rather simply continue the daily coordination calls. Effectively, the calls functioned as a virtual activation with standard Emergency Operations Center (EOC) tools, such as Consolidated Action Plans and Snap Shot Reports utilized, as well as a Washington State Emergency Management Division Mission number issued.

Pre-Event Planning and Operational Activity

Timeline and Key Highlights

The planning for this event developed in multiple phases:

- August 21 – Seattle OEM hosted an initial meeting with several stakeholders for a “School Calendar Adjustment” – a conversation primarily focused on issues previously identified in 2010 and 2013 and how they could be modified or enhanced for 2015.
- August 25 – Seattle OEM hosted a follow-up meeting to hear updates on issues identified from the previous meeting: Coordination, Feeding Plan, Food Vendors, Meal Distribution, Drop-in Sites, Licensed Child Care Resources, Communications, Budget, Staffing and EOC activation.

- Sept 1 – Seattle OEM issued an initial Consolidated Action Plan (CAP) for Drop-In Care to begin on Sept 14, and also defined Operational Objectives, Planning Assumptions and Departmental Responsibilities.
- Sept 4 – Seattle OEM issued a revised CAP based on the addition of providing Day Camps Sept 9-Sept 11, 2015.
- Sept 11 – Decision was made not to activate the EOC for Drop-In Care; instead, to continue City-wide coordination through daily conference calls.

Operational Objectives from Sept 4 CAP:

- 1 Support low-resourced families by providing Drop-In care and meals at 21 of 26 Community Centers throughout the City.
- 2 Coordinate communications between City departments, external agencies and the community.
- 3 Plan for contingencies with City departments and external agencies and develop strategies for emerging issues.

Planning Assumptions:

1. SPS and SEA would continue to meet with mediators in an attempt to reach an agreement.
2. Local 609, representing custodial, security and food service staff were not honoring the picket line.
3. SPS food services personnel, including drivers, were being used to prepare and deliver meals to Community Centers, in support of the City's plan.
4. Youth organizations extended their programming and services to accommodate increased demand.
5. Low-resourced families were most likely to need meal assistance or have fewer options for their children.
6. Maximum capacity for Day Camps was increased to 892 at 16 sites.
7. Maximum capacity for Drop-In services at Community Centers was 3,000 at 21 sites.
8. The City would support Drop-In Centers for students K-6 for a maximum of five days.
9. If the strike went beyond September 18, the Drop-in Program would be re-evaluated.
10. School start could be delayed an additional 24 hours even after an agreement was reached, due to staff notifications and other activities required to open buildings.

Planning Group Participants

Twenty agencies participated in the planning group:

- Boys & Girls Club of King County
- City Budget Office
- Customer Service Bureau
- Department of Education & Early Learning
- Department of Neighborhoods
- Facilities and Administrative Services – Purchasing
- Human Services Department
- Law Department
- Legislative Department
- Parks Department

Seattle Office of Emergency Management – After Action Report

- Public Health-Seattle & King County
- Seattle Public Libraries
- Seattle Center
- Office of Emergency Management
- Mayor's Office
- Office of Immigrant & Refugee Affairs
- Seattle Public Libraries
- Seattle Public Schools
- YMCA
- Seattle Auxiliary Communications Services

Operational Activity and Coordination Documents

Before and during the school strike, Seattle OEM conducted the following:

- 3 Planning Meetings
- 6 Coordinating Conference Calls

The following documents were issued:

- 1 Mayors Briefing
- 2 Consolidated Action Plans
- 7 Snap Shot Reports
- 6 Media Advisories and News Releases

Event Review

Day Camps – September 9, 10, 11

- On Thursday, September 3, Parks began notifying families already enrolled in before and after school care about Day Camp options in the event of a strike.
- On Friday, September 4, SPS began contacting school-based childcare providers and community-based organizations to determine how many may open during the strike. SPS sent a letter to parents to inform them about options.
- Day Camps ran from September 9 through September 11 at 16 Community Centers from 8 am to 5 pm.
- Day Camps were offered free of charge, with pre-registration required, and were intended for families already enrolled in Parks before and after school care.
- Enrollment and attendance during the three days:
 - September 9: 727 enrolled, 618 attended, 55 waitlisted.
 - September 10: 839 enrolled, 731 attended, 84 waitlisted.
 - September 11: 843 enrolled, 694 attended, 84 waitlisted.

Drop-In Program – September 14, 15, 16

- Drop-In program was open to any youth K-6.
- Pre-registration opened on Friday, September 4.
- 84 AmeriCorps City Year volunteers supplemented Parks staffing.
- Maximum number of children per site was 80-175; maximum for majority of sites: 150.

- A Feeding Plan was developed that provided breakfast, lunch and a snack – no hot meals, no nuts or pork.
- Parks estimated approximately 80% of children brought their own lunch.
- Cost for 1800 meals and snacks were \$4.00 per child. (\$3.25 = lunch, \$.75 = snack)
- Meals ordered over the course of three days:
 - September 14: 1800
 - September 15: 435
 - September 16: 200
- Parks provided breakfast. SPS made lunches and snacks. SPS drivers delivered meals to Community Center locations.
- Seattle ACS volunteers were on-call to provide inter-transfer of meals between Drop-in sites.
- Parks staff anticipated non-registered walk-ins and accommodated them.
- When sites reached capacity, Parks staff worked to find a suitable location at another site.
- Six to eight Public Health nurses were on-call to address health-related needs for duration of Drop-In program.
- Enrollment and attendance for the three days:
 - Sept 14: 2273 enrolled, 1652 attended.
 - Sept 15: 2477 enrolled, 1886 attended.
 - Sept 16: 2461 enrolled, 1798 attended.

Lessons Learned

A post-event survey was issued after the final coordinating conference call. Of those who responded to the survey, 100% indicated that the City of Seattle successfully achieved its overall objectives.

An in-person debrief was also held for participants to provide in-depth feedback on what worked and why, as well as to identify areas of concern and determine timelines for improvement.

Overall Observations on What Worked Well:

- City-wide objectives were clearly established and were successfully completed through the course of this event.
- Having the the City Budget Office engaged in the planning effort was essential. CBO's assurance that departments would be made whole for any costs incurred while providing Day Camp or Drop-In Centers made it easier to work for purchasing needed items through vendors.
- Having outside childcare providers and agencies involved in on-going planning and activities resulted in accommodating more families as well as consistent communication. Boys and Girls Clubs, YMCA and other youth organizations could better promote and expand their day camp programs to families at their locations.

Recommended Items for Follow-up

1. Limit the impacts that school closures have on licensed home childcare providers.

Problem Statement: School closure results in lost income for childcare providers because of limits on the number of children each provider can serve and how state subsidies are structured. I.e., when a

provider's own children stay at home, there are fewer openings for other children in the provider's household.

Action Item: DEEL and Parks will look at the current state reimbursement process to determine if a work-around currently exists, which it may.

Other Potential Action: If no work-around is available, have the Mayor request that the Governor waive reimbursement restrictions during a school closure.

- **Assigned to:** DEEL, Parks
- **Due Date:** January 31, 2016
- **Status:** DEEL, Parks to provide update by March 31, 2016.

2. Have an effective and timely way to collect and disseminate information regarding school closures to DEEL's list of 190 licensed childcare providers throughout the city.

Problem Statement: DEEL does not have a way to effectively communicate information about school issues with providers on its licensed childcare list. This is especially problematic for limited or non-English-speaking providers.

Action Item: DEEL will work with SPS to integrate DEELs provider list into SPS list so that providers can receive information through SPS on school impacts.

- **Assigned to:** DEEL, SPS
- **Due date:** November 30, 2015
- **Status:** DEEL, SPS to provide update by March 31, 2016.

3. Provide services to preschool age children when school is not in session.

Problem Statement: Preschool programs at Parks sites were displaced for the duration of the school strike because staffing was needed for Day Camps and Drop-In Centers.

Action Item: Parks will evaluate the options for maintaining preschool at some locations while also offering Day Camps and/or Drop-In Care. Potential solutions may include: closer coordination or contracting with other youth organizations; developing mutual aid agreements with other jurisdictions to supplement Seattle Parks staffing.

- **Assigned to:** Parks, DEEL
- **Due date:** January 31, 2016
- **Status:** Parks, DEEL to provide update by March 31, 2016.

4. Provide care for children with severe disabilities or children who require one-on-one care when school is not in session.

Problem statement: Parks is unable to accommodate children with severe disabilities that require one-on-one attention due to staffing limitations.

Action Item: Quantify percentage of K-6 children in Seattle Public Schools with severe disabilities or who require one-on-one care.

- **Assigned to:** SPS
- **Due date:** January 31, 2016
- **Status:** **SPS to provide update by March 31, 2016.**

Action Item: DEEL will work with Community Cares to determine if: 1) they can become a licensed provider and 2) they can serve as a regional model for special needs care.

- **Assigned to:** DEEL
- **Due date:** January 31, 2016
- **Status:** **DEEL to provide update by March 31, 2016.**

Action Item: Public Health will determine whether Public Health Nurses have surge capacity to assist with special needs care in the future.

- **Assigned to:** Public Health
- **Due date:** January 31, 2016
- **Status:** **Public Health to provide update by March 31, 2016.**

5. Develop an action plan for the next time the City coordinates a school contingency planning effort.

Problem Statement: Pre-existing documentation from previous school planning efforts was helpful, but did not comprehensively address all the issues necessary to implement Day Camps and Drop-In Centers.

Action Item: Write and finalize a City School Contingency Plan that incorporates all sub-plans, i.e., Day Camps Plan, Delayed School Start Plan, Feeding Plan, Public Health Nurse Support Plan, ACS Support Plan, etc.

- **Assigned to:** OEM
- **Due Date:** November 30, 2015
- **Status:** **In process, draft now being written. Out for review by March, 2016.**

6. Ensure clarity of messaging when issuing news releases.

Problem Statement: Messages were confusing to some refugee and immigrant communities. Some messaging was lost in translation.

Action Item: Establish a process to ensure messaging can be translated prior to releasing to general media and coordinate messaging with OIRA’s Ethnic Media Specialist. It often takes a full day to get messages translated.

- **Assigned to:** Mayor’s Office, OIRA
- **Due Date:** November 30, 2015
- **Status:** Mayor’s Office, OIRA to provide update by March 31, 2016.

7. Re-assess planning assumptions related to registration and attendance for Drop-In Care.

Problem Statement: Assumptions about attendance were not accurate. Lower-resourced areas experienced lower attendance, and higher-resourced areas experienced higher attendance.

Action Item: Parks and SPS will talk with families who did not use drop-in care and analyze if attendance in lower-resourced areas was related to lack of outreach, accessible messaging, and/or what other factors may have negatively affected their attendance.

- **Assigned to:** Parks, SPS
- **Due Date:** November 30, 2015
- **Status:** Parks, SPS to provide update by March 31, 2016.

8. Re-assess planning assumptions related to number of families who would not be able to provide lunch.

Problem Statement: Initial food orders were based on the assumption of full capacity and that 60% would not bring a lunch. However approximately 80% of attendees did bring lunch.

Action Item: Develop new assumptions for meal counts based on actual experience, i.e., of families who pre-register, 20% of attendees will not bring lunch with 80% of registrants attending.)

- **Assigned to:** HSD, Parks
- **Due Date:** November 30, 2015
- **Status:** Complete, will be captured as an assumption in future CAP.

9. Ensure availability of summer food drivers or develop other resources for delivering food to Drop-in locations.

Problem Statement: If SPS drivers had not been available, it would have been difficult for the City to provide drivers due to the complexities of recalling HSD summer food drivers.

Action Item: Explore the possibility of extending the time period for temporary assignment status of HSD summer food drivers in future contracts. This will allow for a quicker recall process.

- **Assigned to:** HSD
- **Due Date:** January 31, 2016 or when contract negotiations begin in 2018
- **Status:** **HSD to provide update by March 31, 2016.**

Action Item: Explore the possibility of working with the SPS Food Service Union to ensure that in the future, they agree to provide food service and cross picket lines.

- **Assigned to:** SPS, HSD
- **Due Date:** January 31, 2016 or when contract negotiations begin in 2018
- **Status:** **SPS, HSD to provide update by March 31, 2016.**

10. Establish a mutually beneficial deadline for receiving food orders for the next day.

Problem Statement: Placing accurate lunch orders was difficult because orders for the following day were expected at 11 a.m., but lunch for the current day was not over until 1pm.

Action Item: Move back the order time until after lunch to ensure more accurate orders.

- **Assigned to:** SPS, HSD
- **Due Date:** January 31, 2016
- **Status:** **Complete, will be incorporated into future CAP.**

11. Eliminate the need for meal transfers and develop a contingency plan in the event circumstances shift and meal transfer service becomes necessary.

Problem Statement: ACS volunteers were recruited to assist with meal transfers and stationed at community center locations; in actuality, no transfers were needed.

Action Item: Based on the experience of this event and the summer food program experience, it can be assumed that meal transfers will not be necessary. However a change in circumstances could result in transfers being needed and a capability to carry out transfers should available.

- **Assigned to:** HSD, OEM
- **Due Date:** January 31, 2016
- **Status:** **Complete, will be incorporated into future CAP.**