State Emergency Response Application Implementation

Cross-Boundary Collaboration & Partnerships

North Carolina

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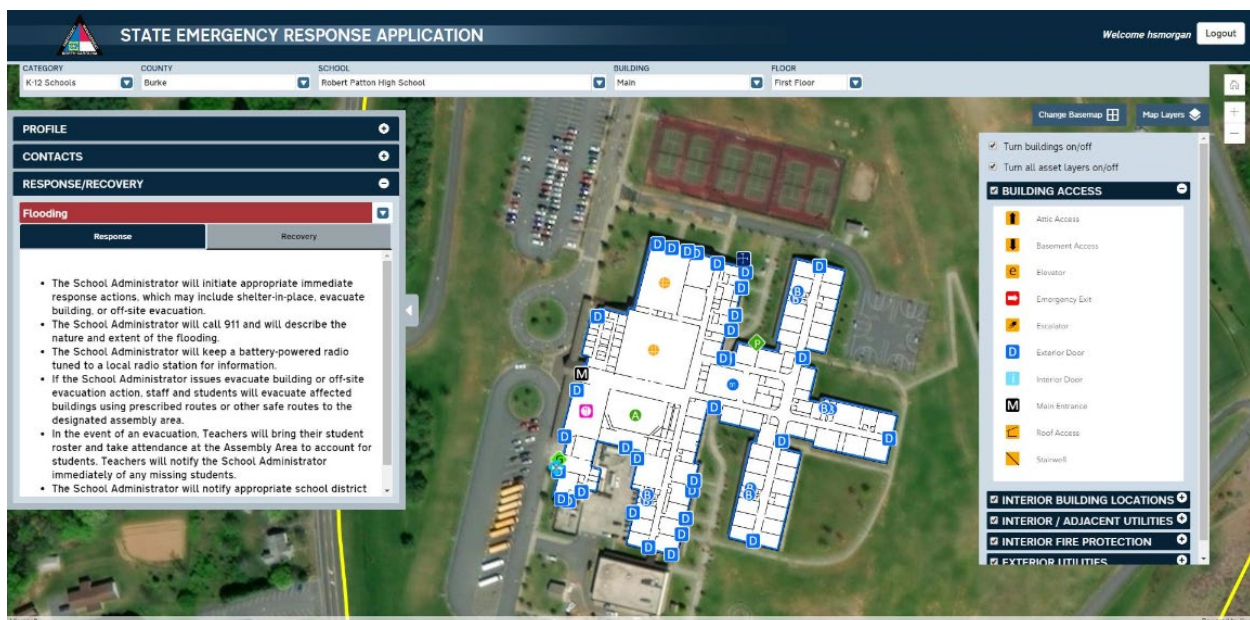
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

There are 1.5 million k-12 public school students and nearly 237,000 students at public universities in North Carolina. The state is responsible for providing them with safe learning environments, which requires collaboration between state and local governments, local county and state law enforcement, and educators.

The General Assembly passed Session Law 2015-241, requiring a statewide School Risk and Response Management System with two foundational components: a Digital School Risk Management Planning Tool (SRMP) and a School Emergency Response Application (SERA).

The SRMP application is a web-based, wizard-style tool that guides school officials, in concert with first responders, law enforcement, and emergency management, through the creation of a digital school risk management plan required of all North Carolina k-12 public schools.

SERA is a web-based, secure application designed to assist first responders, law enforcement, and emergency managers in efficiently responding to emergencies, hazards, and threats at school facilities. Leveraging data and information documented in SRMP, SERA efficiently presents profile and process information and spatially displays school floor plans, key assets, and vulnerabilities.

The North Carolina Department of Public Safety Division of Emergency Management (NCEM) worked closely with the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (DPI) and local school districts to create these applications. Members of law enforcement, emergency management, and local education authorities all participated in work sessions to establish what should be included. These sessions ensured that each group was ultimately getting the information they needed out of the system and knew how to share, communicate, and collaborate going forward. This was critical when trying to ensure a faster and safer response to the wide variety of emergencies that can occur in our schools.

When there is an emergency, every second counts. Through the collaborative efforts of NCEM, DPI, and local entities, North Carolina can now provide first responders with crucial, real time information about facilities including floor plans, campus landscape, and the location of key assets.

CONCEPT

North Carolina is working hard to provide resources to ensure the safety of our schools. In recent years North Carolina has established grants for local school districts to increase the number of resource officers and mental health workers. While we believe that these additional resources will help to promote safer learning environments, we must also prepare for worst-case scenarios.

> *"When parents send their kids to school, they expect them to be out of harm's way, and we owe it to these kids and their families to make sure our schools are safe environments for learning."*
>
> *- NC Governor, Roy Cooper*

School safety is a multi-jurisdictional issue; in order to better manage safety concerns, the state needs to empower schools, local emergency management, and law enforcement entities by creating tools through which they can share and collaborate. With this in mind, the General Assembly passed Session Law 2015-241, requiring a statewide School Risk and Response Management System with the following components:

- Digital School Risk Management Planning Tool (SRMP)
- School Emergency Response Application (SERA)
- Anonymous School Safety Tip
- Panic Alarm Application

While each of these components will play a critical role in the success of the overall system, SRMP and SERA are foundational to the overall success. The North Carolina Department of Public Safety Division of Emergency Management (NCEM) worked closely with the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (DPI), 115 local school districts, local governments, and law enforcement agencies to create these applications.

When all four components are implemented, the system will provide a seamless, digital solution that will allow first responders to handle emergency situations more effectively and efficiently, ultimately enabling them to save more lives.

What is the School Risk Management Planning Tool (SRMP)?

Per S.L. 2015-241, all North Carolina public schools (approximately 2,400) are required to create a school risk management plan. These plans are created and stored in the SRMP application. The system interface was designed to walk users through various steps and categories to create a comprehensive risk management plan for their facility. SRMP allows the upload of floor plans as well as building and campus information graphics. SRMP also allows users to document a school's profile, pertinent assets and vulnerabilities, and procedures for managing various natural hazards, threats, and emergencies, and archive all materials for future audits. Authorized users access the tool using the state's centralized identity and access management service, ensuring security and accountability.

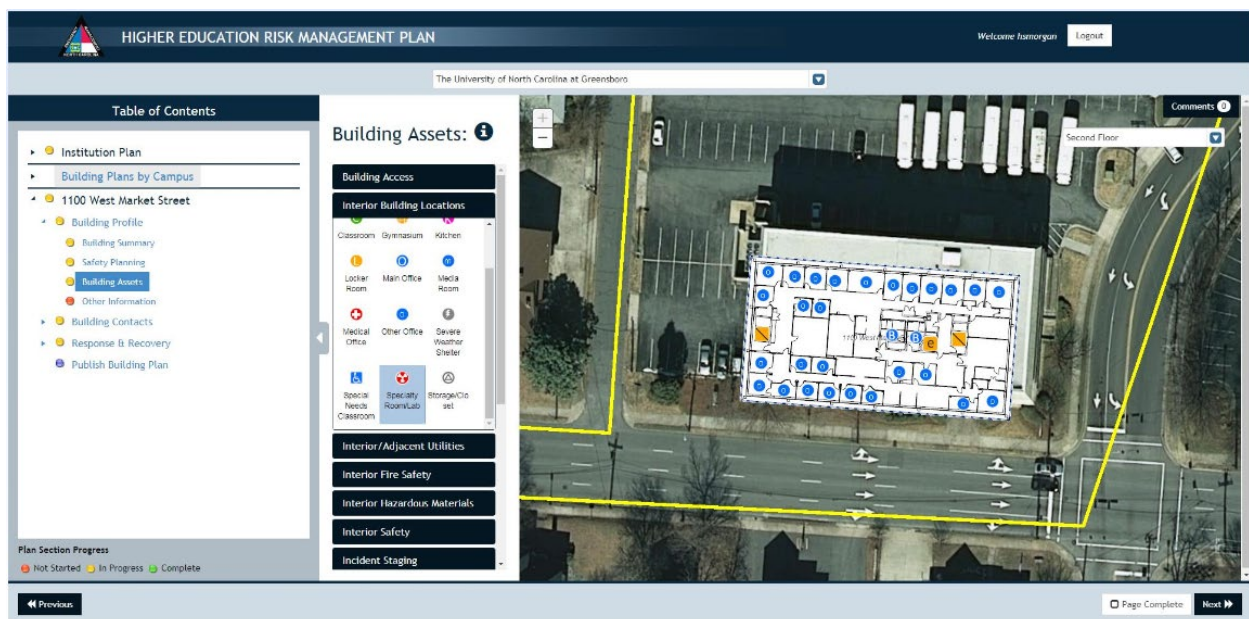**What is the State Emergency Response Application (SERA)?**

The School Emergency Response Application (SERA) is a secure, web-based application accessible on multiple devices (phones, tablets, computers). It is designed to assist first responders, law enforcement, and emergency managers in effectively and efficiently responding to hazards and threats at school

facilities. While originally designed for public schools, the state quickly recognized the power of this application and expanded it to include community colleges, universities, and dams. The application was subsequently renamed the **State Emergency Response Application (SERA)**.

SERA relies on data from a several risk management systems, including the SRMP application and the Higher Education Risk Management Plan (HERMP) application. The HERMP application is used by community colleges, technical institutes, and universities to input their risk management plans. HERMP includes slightly different information from SRMP, specific to institutes of higher education (for example, full campus versus individual building views). Information in both of these applications is entered and managed by institute administrators (principals or their designees, chancellors or their designees, etc.).

SERA presents profile and process information and spatially displays school floor plans, aerial imagery and oblique imagery, key assets and vulnerabilities. SERA is updated in real-time when changes are made to risk management plans, ensuring the information remains accurate.

Currently SERA contains floor plan schematics for all k-12 public schools (more than 2,400 facilities), all 16 state universities, and 70 percent of the community colleges.

Collaboration is key.

SERA can be successful only with the complete cooperation and willingness of all entities to come together with a unified approach. NCEM has established partnerships with DPI, the University of North Carolina system, the NC Community College system and the NCDPS Division of Adult Correction and Juvenile Justice to add floorplans from all public schools, state universities, community colleges, adult and juvenile correctional facilities.

NCEM worked with all 115 school districts, local law enforcement, and DPI to create these applications. The partnerships with the school districts and local governments were especially important. Members of law enforcement, emergency management, and local school districts all worked together to determine

what should be included. All stakeholders worked to ensure that the system would provide them with the information they needed, and established strong channels of communication and collaboration.

Rolling this initiative out to all public schools, universities, and the community college system is an extremely large endeavor. All public schools are required to have a School Risk Management Plan, but NCEM had to conduct training sessions so that each school knew how to develop and input their plan into the system. This training was also held for the universities and community colleges. In addition, local law enforcement across the state had to be trained on the SERA application so that it could be used correctly in case of emergency.

SIGNIFICANCE AND IMPACT

Using the data collected through the SRMP and HERMP applications, SERA provides local law enforcement with information on all public school facilities, all 16 public universities, and currently 50 out of the 68 public community colleges. This required comprehensive collaboration between schools, law enforcement, and emergency management for public schools and university risk management plans. Below is a list of the items that are currently active in SERA:

North Carolina Public Schools

- All 2,400 North Carolina public schools have submitted floor plans to be stored in SRMP as part of the risk management plan; law enforcement and first responders can access the floor plans through SERA.
- There are more than 240,000 assets documented in the risk management plans.

Universities and Community Colleges

- All state-supported university facilities use HERMP, which populates SERA. SERA uses the UNC system's Data Additions Validations Edits (DAVE) system for validation.
- The community colleges and technical institutes are in the process of adding their facilities. To date, 50 of the 64 entities have provided data.
- At the college or university level, users can access external gathering points, procedures for outdoor locations, and contacts for the outdoor locations. Users can also access building-level information, including assets, and building-specific procedures and contact information.

In order to prepare information for SERA, public school leaders must develop and regularly update their individualized school risk management plans. This requirement has forced school administrators to collaborate and plan with school personnel and community leaders, think through what they would do in emergency situations, and plan accordingly. As a result, school administrators and teachers are more prepared in case of an emergency.

This project has created the opportunity for true collaboration between state and local entities in both public safety and public education. This collaboration will only increase as the program expands. The more we communicate and share information, the more we will be able to prepare for and prevent emergencies. Based on the success we have seen with public schools, community colleges, and universities, we have begun implementing SERA for the state's dams and correctional facilities, and will incorporate other public buildings going forward.