



# SUCCESS STORIES



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## TEEN CERT CREDIT COURSE *Lincoln County School District*

### About the Practice

Lincoln County School District (Ore.) has developed a Teen CERT (Community Emergency Response Teams) class for high school students that trains teens in disaster preparedness and response skills and awards school credit for participation. The goal of the course is for youths to assist in the event of a large-scale emergency response before professional responders arrive on the scene, or in the event that they are delayed and not readily available. The content and format of this course is based on the adult CERT program sponsored by FEMA's Citizen Corps program. The first class took place in January 2010.

Lincoln County School District hosts monthly emergency management meetings, bringing together school principals; police, fire, and other first responders; and community partners. Discussion during one of these meetings focused on the lack of resources and manpower available to assist in the event of a major disaster. One answer to this issue was to use teens to help address these gaps. Staff included in their REMS grant proposal a plan to train teens in CERT. To garner local support for this effort, staff approached the administrators at each high school to propose hosting the CERT course at their school. After the grant was awarded, staff delivered a 15-minute PowerPoint presentation on the Teen CERT program that explained to administrators how the course could fit into the academic curriculum, and how valuable the information would be to other areas of learning.

Once administrators agreed to include the course in their curriculum, the next step was to identify a staff member at each site to champion the effort and determine how the class would fit in the school's for-credit curriculum. One school incorporated the course into the already-existing

Health Occupations class; two schools made it a stand-alone class (one taught by a science teacher aligning the course with state science standards for credit and the other taught by a health teacher for health credit). The course also was offered as an elective. For all schools, the curriculum was made to fit the semester-long schedule. Project staff then pitched the course to students at each participating high school. Interested students were asked to complete an application, and were accepted into the class based on criteria related to behavior, not academic performance.

Sue Graves, school district safety coordinator, used her contacts with the community, including the adult CERT program, in multiple ways to help launch the Teen CERT course. For one, she collaborated with local fire departments to help train the classroom teachers. "They helped us with the training, provided us facilities and let us use their resources and expertise," Graves explained. The local hospitals and Red Cross also contributed to the teacher training.

Another benefit of the collaboration is that community members serve as guest speakers in high school classes during the course. "It is really good to have guest speakers because kids are exposed to these different disciplines as possible careers," observed Graves.

Community partners also donate numerous resources to the courses, such as old blankets, sheets, mannequins and tools. In turn, the Teen CERT class members help the first responder partners with drills, serving as victims in an emergency. "The community is so excited about having the students being trained," said Graves, "and [the community partners] are so supportive."

One innovative aspect of this teen CERT effort is that staff took an existing program and tailored it to teenagers, from the recruitment process to the curriculum content itself.

### Overcoming Challenges

Some schools were initially resistant to implementing the course. However, once these schools saw the program being successfully implemented at other sites, they became interested in hosting it. Staff found it was also important to offer the course early enough in the academic year to enable students to register for it along with other courses.

When we were selling the course to students, we used pictures of teens in emergency gear doing emergency response actions, which made the [teen responders] look cool. Students could see themselves involved in something positive.

—Sue Graves, Lincoln County School District

### Replicating Success

Sue Graves, school district safety coordinator, gives the following advice to other institutions interested in replicating the program:

- Be patient, and allow enough time to get buy-in from the school administration.
- Carefully select the course instructor. It is important to get someone who is passionate about the subject, and who intends to be in the position for awhile.
- Connect teachers with local experts in the field who can serve as guest speakers.
- Train teachers thoroughly, as they will be teaching the core course concepts.

- Provide as much support to teachers as possible, especially during their first semester (e.g., ensure they have the supplies they need).

Based on their experience, Lincoln County School District staff believe that while a small amount of initial investment funds are needed to get the program going, little money is needed to keep the program going. Start-up costs include classroom training supplies, the backpack kits that students use to train, with flashlights, vests, and protective safety gear, and the cost of teacher time for training. However, all the supplies stay with the course, as does the instructor and his or her knowledge and expertise, so sustainability of the course should be low or no cost.

The Lincoln County School District program has a number of tools, presentations, forms, and exercises developed and available for sharing, including:

- Course application forms;
- Certificate of completion template;
- PowerPoint presentations for administrators, staff, and students; and,
- Course exercises, including ones tailored to help youths learn emergency response skills (triage, extrication, using a fire extinguisher, etc.).

### For More Information

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This *Success Stories* publication was written with the assistance of Sue Graves, Lincoln County School District safety coordinator, during the winter of 2010.

The REMS TA Center was established in October 2007 by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools (OSDFS). The center supports schools and school districts in developing and implementing comprehensive emergency management plans by providing technical assistance via trainings, publications, and individualized responses to requests. For additional information about school emergency management topics, visit the REMS TA Center at <http://rems.ed.gov> or call 1-866-540-REMS (7367). For information about the REMS grant program, contact Tara Hill ([tara.hill@ed.gov](mailto:tara.hill@ed.gov)).

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