

# Defining Recovery: Across all Hazards in K12 Schools

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## INTRODUCTION

- Kindergarten through twelfth grade (K12) schools in the United States experience, and recover from, hazards that can be natural or human caused.
- Recovery is already understood by researchers as a social process with multiple ascribed or implied meanings (Phillips, Neal, and Webb 2021).
- The recovery of US K12 schools from hazards is significantly under researched.
- How school faculty and staff define their recovery process, as well as those of students and the community is important for understanding how to help.

### Research Question

- Is there a common understanding of recovery for American K12 schools that are in the recovery process, and for those that will experience recovery from hazards in the future?

## METHODS

### Interviews

- Thus far seven semi-structured interviews have been conducted.
- Most, if not all, of these interviews were over an hour in length.
- Those interviewed have been current or former school principals, as well as emergency management (EM) professionals at the state level from across different states.
- Most of those interviewed have experienced at least one death or injury as a result of a hazard or event that took place at a school.

## PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

### RECOVERY DOES NOT OCCUR

#### “There is no recovery.”

- This theme, and statement, were common across multiple interview subjects, especially for those interviewed who experienced death(s) at school.
- The meaning is clear. There is no resumption of normalcy even years after the hazard occurred.
- Despite the resumption of operations, practices, drills, and even language change to reflect that trauma has no clear recovery.

### RECOVERY DOES NOT END

#### “Recovery is a process that doesn’t have an endpoint.”

- This was another common theme across multiple interviews.
- The implications here are that recovery does not end after the emergency response and reconstruction phases. Recovery is an ongoing yearslong process to for students, staff, and community members to process trauma.

### RECOVERY IS LINKED TO STUDENT PROGRESS

#### “After all the students who were there to experience the event have left [graduated, aged out, etc.]”

- This point occurred in a single interview, and it should be noted that the school district of the interview subject only experienced an injury rather than death(s).
- The idea here is the recovery process has a potential endpoint for students. When all the students who experienced the hazard have left the school, the school itself may be recovering/recovered.

## CONCLUSION

### Recovery as a process

- The definition of recovery from stakeholders is varied, but thus far argues that recovery is a process that starts with initial response.
- Recovery can last for years beyond response, most frequently appearing to have no clear endpoint or expectation to resume a sense of normalcy.

### Needing to change existing definitions

- The National Disaster Recovery Framework defines recovery as “capabilities necessary to assist communities affected by an incident to recover effectively, including, [...] restoring health, social, and community services; promoting economic development; and restoring natural and cultural resources.” (FEMA, 2011, p.81)
- The existing federal definition focuses on recovery as restoration to close to, or at a pre-event level.
- The experiences of those interviewed show that this definition of recovery is not shared by those who have experienced hazards.
- Recovery as restoration may not even be possible.

## NEXT STEPS

- Broadly speaking, the recovery process of schools from hazards needs more research, especially when considering long term recovery.
- Regarding this project, more interviews are needed in to further understand the issue of how stakeholders in and around education define recovery.
- Interviews with different stakeholders within schools (e.g., teachers, guidance counselors) and interviews from schools facing hazards or events other than targeted violence are needed.
- These additional interviews are a part of the next stage of data collection for this project.