

East St. Louis District 189 to join Great American Shakeout

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EAST ST. LOUIS - East St. Louis District 189 staff and students will join schools across the country Thursday, Oct. 19 by participating in the Great American ShakeOut earthquake preparedness program.



“Earthquakes do not only happen in California as some might assume. They happen in Southern Illinois as well,” said District 189 Director of Parent and Student Support Services, Dr. Tiffany Gholson. “Though the last earthquake near East St. Louis was a minor one in 2013, we sit on the New Madrid seismic zone and ground shaking could still create hazardous conditions such as road fissures, bridge failures, and road flooding

or impair buildings with aging infrastructure. As the Director of the District's Crisis Plan, it is my job to prepare the students, staff, and parents in our district for all kinds of crises ranging from violence, fires, and natural disasters.”

More than 38.5 million students will participate in the Great American ShakeOut nationwide. About 2.6 million of them are located in Midwestern states including Illinois.

James K. Joseph, Director of the Illinois Emergency Management Agency, said being prepared for an earthquake is a great idea for everyone in the state. But it is especially important for people in the southern half.

“Earthquakes occur without warning, so it’s important to know what to do as soon as you feel the earth shake,” said Joseph. “With two seismic zones in southern Illinois and residents who travel throughout the world, it’s important that everyone knows how to stay safe during an earthquake. The drill takes only a few minutes, but the lessons learned could save your life.”

The Great ShakeOut drill centers around the drop, cover and hold on actions: *Drop down* to the ground, *take cover* under a table or other piece of heavy furniture, and then *hold on* until the shaking stops.

Gholson said schools have taught students to be prepared for other emergencies, including tornadoes and fire drills in the past. Earthquakes can be just as dangerous and need to be taken equally seriously.

“Drills are important,” said Gholson. “For instance, everyone knows to ‘Stop, Drop, and Roll’ if you catch on fire because we were taught that repeatedly in drills. Now it's time we know how to ‘Stop, Cover, and Hold on.’ District 189 is excited to participate in this national earthquake drill!”

In 2016 more than 2.9 million people across the central U.S. participated in the Great American ShakeOut.

Some of the most destructive earthquakes in U.S. history happened over the winter of 1811-1812 in the New Madrid Seismic Zone which stretches from Missouri into southwestern Illinois. At the time, the region was sparsely populated. But if a similar series of quakes happened today, the loss of life and property could be devastating.

Sydney Stigge Kaufman, Director of Strategic Partnerships for District 189, said the school system's participation in the Great American ShakeOut is part of a broader effort to prepare students and staff members for any crisis that could arise.

“District 189 has school crisis teams which have been identified and received PREPARE training: School Crisis Prevention and Intervention Training at the beginning of the school year,” Stigge-Kaufman said. “These crisis teams are in the process of developing comprehensive plans. The safety of our students and staff is very important to us.”