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## MEMORANDUM

TO: Superintendents, Independent School Heads, Principals, and School Safety Stakeholders

FROM: Heather Bouchey, Ph.D., Interim Secretary, Vermont Agency of Education and Michael Desrochers, Director, Division of Fire Safety, Vermont School Safety Center

SUBJECT: Guidance Regarding Egress Evacuation and Options Based Response Drills for the 2023-2024 Academic Year

DATE: September 5, 2023

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### Purpose

With the start of the school year, and the need to adapt to the ever-changing challenges faced by schools today, the Division of Fire Safety and the Vermont School Safety Center have developed this amended schedule for Emergency Egress and Options Based Drills.

The inclusion of this new schedule into the Schools Emergency Plan will fulfill the Emergency Egress Drill requirements outlined in the NFPA Life Safety Code, and the trauma-informed options-based drills required in Act 29, Title 16 VSA, Section 1481.

This process as outlined herein, will allow for fire egress drills to be conducted while affording school leadership discretion with regards to alternating between fire egress drills and relocation drills. Two Options Based Response to a Violent Intruder Drills are required, one in the fall semester and one in the spring semester.

### Fire/Evacuation Drills

- Emergency evacuation plans are designed to evacuate the school in the most efficient and safe manner without panic. Without practicing drills, occupants including faculty will not know how to implement their emergency action plans.
- School fires and other emergency conditions may arise warranting the complete evacuation of the school in a timely manner thus, schools must be prepared to initiate emergency evacuations.

**Egress (evacuation) drills** shall result in a complete evacuation of the school. The first two egress drills shall result in the complete evacuation of the school. The remaining four (4) fire drills, at the discretion of the school, may alternate between a relocation drill and an egress drill. The purpose of a



**Relocation Drill** is to provide schools with an opportunity for practicing the relocation of students to an alternate location (building) in the event the primary school building is compromised in such a way that it cannot safely be occupied.

**Relocation drills** can be coordinated for the end of the school day in such a manner where the school community can practice the relocation process and parents can become familiar with the process of picking up their children at this alternate site.

**Options Based Response to a Violent Intruder** – Since 2015, the Vermont School Safety Center has been strongly encouraging schools and school districts to move away from the traditional (Lockdown) approach to an active shooter. Act 29 of 2023 requires that these drills be age-appropriate and trauma-informed. In reviewing the different response methods and researching the data related to past active shooter incidents, we have learned that no one size response plan fits each active shooter incident and that teachers, administrators and students need to have an options-based response approach that is available to them, based on the specific set of circumstances they are dealing with at the time of the incident.

## **Guidelines**

During the months of September 2023, and January 2024, we require schools to conduct Options Based Response Drills where faculty, staff, and students demonstrate their ability to respond to these types of situations.

Prior to conducting these drills, school leadership teams should review the [Best Practice Considerations for Armed Assailant Drills in Schools](#) (produced by the National Association of School Psychologists and the National Association of School Resource Officers), and The National Child Traumatic Stress Network Guidance document, [“Creating School Active Shooter/Intruder Drills”](#) which states:

*“Safety drills need to incorporate a lockdown response but also an “option-based” approach. An option-based approach means that there are different actions educators and students can take if confronted by an active shooter/intruder (e.g., run away, keep out, and hide). The district needs to evaluate which approach is best and to adapt that approach to the developmental level of their students, including for students with disabilities, language barriers, and mobility needs.”*

By reviewing these resources, school leaders can ensure that all options-based drills are age appropriate and trauma informed.

## **Announcing Options-Based Response to a Violent Intruder Drills**

Act 29 of 2023 requires that all age-appropriate Options Based Response to a Violent Intruder Drills be announced to parents and guardians, “not later than one school day before an options-based response drill is conducted.” This will limit the anxiety

associated with these drills and ensure these drills are conducted in a safe and effective manner.

## **Announcing Fire Drills**

After consultation with the Vermont School Safety Center, the AOE recommends that fire and relocation drills should not be announced with specific details about the date and time of the drill. It is the opinion of the AOE that announcing the date and time of the drill creates an undue risk to students and school staff. Instead, the AOE and VSCC recommend that fire and relocation drills should be announced several days before the drill with a general statement that a drill will be held in the coming days, no later than X day. This approach is designed to balance the safety of students and school staff who participate in the drill with parents' need to be informed of an upcoming drill."

**When conducting all drills, schools have the flexibility to plan these drills for dates and times that minimize disruption to the academic day.**

## **Reporting Fire and Options-Based Drills**

Act 29 of 2023 requires that, "A superintendent shall report completion of the biannual drills to the Agency of Education in a format approved by the Secretary." In addition, by October 15, 2023, SU/SDs will assure that they will hold the drills as required by Act 29 in the 2023-2024 school year. The AOE will communicate the assurance and reporting mechanisms in subsequent guidance.

## **Recommendations for Age-Appropriate, Options-Based Drills in Response to a Violent Intruder**

While we are aware that some schools have adopted *A.L.I.C.E.* (Alert, Lockdown, Inform, Counter, Evacuate) or other response methodology, the Vermont School Safety Center and the Vermont School Crisis Planning Team strongly encourages all schools to adopt the *Run, Hide, Fight* methodology for responding to a Violent Intruder.

Schools shall take attendance once the building has been evacuated and shall retain records of the drills conducted for reporting purposes.

### **What is Run, Hide, Fight?**

**Run, Hide, Fight** is the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's recommended actions to be taken when responding to a Violent Intruder.

- Does **NOT** replace current safety protocols for evacuation, sheltering in place or other emergency response procedures.
- **DOES** give additional tools that may be used to respond to a Violent Intruder.

The **Run, Hide, Fight** concept is to:

**Run** – If you can safely escape the area of the threat, you must make a decision based on the best information available.

**Hide** – Find a safe location to hide and avoid detection and potentially reinforce and “harden” your location. **Take steps to barricade, reinforce, or fortify your location.**

**Fight** – When faced with no other option, you may need to confront an active threat with the resolve that you will survive the encounter.

### **Run**

- Can be faculty, staff or student initiated
- Have an escape route and plan that includes identified assembly areas located a safe distance away from the incident (Accountability)
- Leave personal belongings behind
- Must be prepared to change evacuation/run routes based on situational awareness
- Be prepared to transition to a hide or fight option based on situational awareness
- Keep your hands visible

### **Hide**

- Lock doors and use items such as desks, chairs, bookshelves to barricade the door
- Turn lights off
- Hide in an area out of the view of the potential threat (try to ensure students and staff are not all congregated in one area)
- If safe to do so, close all window shading
- Maintain silence
- Do not open the door
- Silence cell phones

### **Fight**

- Last option for survival
- Must assess individual capabilities
- Enhance survivability by utilizing available resources (fire extinguisher, books, heavy objects) to defend or protect yourself
- Consider developing a plan with others in your location to determine the best options for your survival (Swarming, distraction)

## **Vermont School Bus Evacuation Drill Guidance**

- Conduct the instruction and drill once at the beginning of the school year and once after the Winter Holiday Break.
- Have the driver conduct the actual drill and instruction. School Administration should be present and observe.

- Do front and rear exit drills.
- Show students how to use roof hatches and emergency exit windows.

Instruction should include:

- Emergency procedures
- Expected behavior on the bus and at bus stops
- Loading / Unloading procedures, including roadway crossing

Remember any student who will potentially ride a school bus **must** take part in these drills.

Vermont State Law Title 23 V.S.A. § 1285 requires school authorities conduct school bus evacuation drills twice a year for any student who is transported in a school bus. This includes students who ride the bus to and from home as well as those who may ride it during a field trip, sporting event, or other school related activity. The following are some guidelines to follow when instructing students on safe riding practices and conducting an evacuation drill.

For questions on any of the new drill guidance please contact Vermont’s School Safety Liaison Officer Rob Evans at [revans@cosecure.com](mailto:revans@cosecure.com) or (802) 839-0448 or School Safety Programs Manager, Sunni Eriksen at [sunni.eriksen@vermont.gov](mailto:sunni.eriksen@vermont.gov) or (802) 760-7117, or visit the [Vermont School Safety Center’s website](#).

## 2023/2024 Emergency Drill Schedule

Month	Egress Drill	Options Based Response Drills
September	<b>Required</b> Egress Only	<b>Required</b>
October	<b>Required</b> Egress Only	
November		
December	<b>Required</b> either Egress or Relocation	
January		<b>Required</b>
February	<b>Required</b> either Egress or Relocation	
March		
April	<b>Required</b> either Egress or Relocation	
May		

June	<b>Required</b> either Egress or Relocation	
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