

**Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services
Center for School and Campus Safety**

Richmond, VA

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Memo No. VCSCS 20-001

MEMO To: Virginia Public School Division Superintendents and School Safety Audit Contacts
(Please share with other division staff, schools, and first responder partners as appropriate)

CC: VCSCS Staff

From: Shellie Evers, School Safety Audit and Conference Coordinator

Date: August 23, 2019

Subject: **2019-2020 Back to School Safety Message**

To coincide with the start of the 2019-2020 school year, the [Virginia Center for School and Campus Safety \(VCSCS\)](#) is providing some school safety information. The [VCSCS](#) is located in Richmond in the [Department of Criminal Justice Services \(DCJS\)](#), and staff stands ready to support division and school leaders, all school staff, School Security Officers, and School Resource Officers in their efforts to keep schools safe.

While some of you have started school already, and some won't start until after Labor Day, the start of school brings excitement, and for some, apprehension and a mix of other emotions, as students are welcomed to school to begin a new year. Our [Virginia Secondary School Climate Survey](#), the [2019 Technical Report](#), and research by the [UVA Curry School of Education](#) have shown that students thrive in an [authoritative climate](#) – one where there is high structure and high support. Authoritative schools also have [less teasing and bullying](#) and less student [aggression towards teachers](#).

Secondary school and division climate survey reports (where applicable) are available for review [here](#).

As is the case every year, schools and divisions have legislatively mandated responsibilities to enhance the safety, security, and emergency preparedness of the schools across the Commonwealth. The VCSCS has compiled a [Legislative Summary for Schools](#). Though not an exhaustive list, it should serve as an overview of safety-related items, and important dates that division and school leaders should be aware of and ensure completion of where appropriate. Highlights from the new school safety-related legislation, effective July 1, 2019 are also included.

Important 2019-2020 School Safety Information *(and dates where applicable):*

REQUIRED DRILLS: Virginia schools are required to conduct [evacuation \(fire\) drills](#), [tornado drills](#) and [lockdown drills](#), and are encouraged to practice other types of drills. For guidance on the number of evacuation and lockdown drills, when to conduct each type, and for additional information related to drill planning, please see the [Virginia Educators Guide for Planning and Conducting Emergency Drills](#).

CRITICAL INCIDENT RESPONSE: Speaking of lockdown, in recent years, many have altered traditional lockdown procedures in favor of options-based protocols in cases of critical, life-threatening situations such as an active shooter. These options-based protocols include: [Run, Hide, Fight](#), [C.R.A.S.E.](#) (built around the [Avoid, Deny, Defend](#) principles), [A.L.I.C.E.](#), or a combination of these approaches. Beyond the required drills, the ultimate decisions and responsibilities rest with individual divisions, so we strongly encourage divisions to: a) consult with your local law enforcement partners when determining which procedures are best, b) use plain language rather than codes, and c) keep the procedures as uniform as possible across the entire division so that no matter where law enforcement, staff, or students find themselves in the division, if an emergency occurs, the procedures will be known. Should an incident occur in a Virginia school that results in victims, please utilize [this guidance](#) to ensure adequate resources are provided.

Additionally, in 2013, DCJS was mandated, in cooperation with others, to create and provide the **Model Critical Incident Response** [manual](#) and [video](#). While there is no mandate for schools to utilize these materials, you may find them helpful when planning for this type of emergency.

THREAT ASSESMENT TEAMS and REPORTING: Virginia legislation, including [§ 22.1-79.4](#), requires a number of actions by local school divisions, campuses, and/or schools related to threat assessment in K12 schools and colleges. K12 legislation requires a threat assessment team to serve each school, report aberrant behavior, and collect data regarding the threat assessments. The [VCSCS/\(DCJS\)](#) offers [threat assessment model policies and protocols](#), as well as threat assessment [trainings](#) to support schools in these efforts. [Technical Assistance for Threat Assessment and Management Teams for Virginia Schools and Institutions of Higher Education](#) is also available upon request.

If you have new staff, or wish to show parents an overview of the threat assessment process – [this short video](#) is a great resource!

To further support schools in their efforts to keep schools safe and provide a climate conducive to learning, the [VCSCS](#) offers multiple conferences and many trainings on a plethora of topics each year. The current trainings, including two free threat assessment webinars can be found [here](#).

[Registration](#) for the [National Threat Assessment Conference](#), to be held November 4-6, 2019, in Richmond, VA is open and there is no cost to attend!

THE SCHOOL SAFETY AUDIT PROGRAM: The [School Safety Audit](#) is a cyclical process whereby schools and divisions review, through a series of protocols, the physical and emotional safety in their buildings. There are supports in place for each phase of the process and a webinar will be held in January 2020 to provide training for those tasked with all or part of the [School Safety Audit](#) process. Below are the components and the due dates for each:

- [School and Division Surveys](#) (due by September 30; *piloting schools have already completed this requirement*). Division leaders must also certify completion of their schools' surveys by September 30.
- [School Safety Inspection Checklist](#) (will be due again in 2020—was last due in 2017)
- [Secondary Climate Surveys](#) (will be conducted for affected high schools in early spring 2020; additional information to follow for division leaders and those school leaders soon)
- [Crisis Management Plan Certification](#) (due annually by August 31)
- [School Safety Audit Certification](#) (due annually by August 31). Suggested timeline for completion of the school's Audit review and submission to division offices is **December 31** of

each year. Superintendents or their designee are required to certify their division's [School Safety Audit](#) process annually by **August 31**.

Additional free VCSCS Resources can be found [here](#)

We appreciate your tireless efforts to ensure a safe learning environment, and will continue to assist you in your important role in any way we can.

Please contact me or one of my colleagues for technical assistance or to request a training. Thanks, and have a great 2019-2020 school year! --Shellie Evers

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