

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

Richmond, VA

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Memo No. VCSCS 21-001

**MEMO To:** Virginia Public School Superintendents, Administrators, SROs, and Crisis Management Team Members

**From:** Donna Michaelis

**Date:** July 17, 2020

**Subject:** **School Drills and the Impact of COVID-19**

The Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) has shared guidance for the reopening of K–12 schools as a part of its [Recover, Redesign, and Restart 2020](#) plan. This guidance and plan for returning to in-person learning aligns with the phases established by the [Governor's School Announcement](#) in June.

Along with in-person learning comes a return to practicing safe responses to lock-down, evacuation, and shelter in place in the form of mandated drills. Since emergencies still pose a risk—even during a pandemic—practicing a safe response remains a valuable and necessary activity in our schools.

During normal school activities, VDOE encourages schools to aim for six feet of physical distance to the greatest extent possible. VDOE notes that if, however, six feet of distance is not feasible (inclusive of buildings and school buses), schools should implement a combination of face coverings and a minimum of three feet distance between everyone present.

Recognizing the increased chance of close contact during a drill, school administrators should ensure each student has access to a face mask within reach at their desk, in order to mitigate this risk. When the drill is initiated, **students and staff should first put on their mask**, then proceed with the drill as outlined in the school's emergency response plan.

#### **Evacuation Drills**

For evacuation drills, school administrators should work with their crisis management team to determine how to socially distance students during evacuation of the building and when assembled outside of the building. Evacuation drills should adhere to the requirements outlined in the Statewide Fire Prevention Code.

Additional guidance from the Fire Marshal's Office can be found [here](#).

## Lock-down Drills

In 2020, the General Assembly maintained the requirement of holding a lock-down drill at least twice during the first 20 school days, but amended the Virginia Code to require at least one lock-down drill after the first 60 days of the school session. In addition to amending the number and timing of the lock-down drills, House Bill 270 and House Bill 402, amended § 22.1-137.2 of the *Code of Virginia*, to exempt pre-kindergarten and kindergarten students from the mandatory participation in lock-down drills during the first 60 days of the school session and required schools provide parents notice of the lock-down drills. See the new language highlighted in yellow:

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:

1. That § 22.1-137.2 of the *Code of Virginia* is amended and reenacted as follows:

§ 22.1-137.2. Lock-down drills.

A. In every public school there shall be a lock-down drill at least twice during the first 20 school days of each school session, in order that students and teachers may be thoroughly practiced in such drills. Every public school shall hold at least one additional lock-down drill after the first 60 days of the school session. Every public school shall provide the parents of enrolled students with at least 24 hours' notice before the school conducts any lock-down drill, provided, however, that nothing in this section shall be construed to require such notice to include the exact date and time of the lock-down drill.

B. Pre-kindergarten and kindergarten students shall be exempt from mandatory participation in lock-down drills during the first 60 days of the school session. Local school boards shall develop policies to implement such exemption. Notwithstanding the foregoing provisions of this subsection, each pre-kindergarten and kindergarten student shall participate in each lock-down drill after the first 60 days of each school session.

Schools are encouraged to work with first responder partners to optimize the safety and effectiveness of all drills as well. As always, the Virginia Center for School and Campus Safety staff is also here to assist. Please feel free to reach out to Virginia Center for School and Campus Safety staff with any questions. Have a safe and productive school year.

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