

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

Richmond, VA

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To: Virginia Public School Division Superintendents and School Safety Audit Contacts
From: Donna Michaelis, Division Director
Date: September 23, 2021
Subject: **2021–2022 Back to School Safety Message**

To coincide with the start of the 2021–2022 school year, the [Virginia Center for School and Campus Safety \(VCSCS\)](#) is providing school safety information and updates. The VCSCS is part of the Commonwealth of Virginia’s [Department of Criminal Justice Services \(DCJS\)](#) and provides training, resources, and technical assistance to all school personnel and law enforcement. While this school year begins with a degree of uncertainty and transitional challenges, the return to a traditional school routine will likely be an adjustment for students, staff, and parents. The VCSCS staff is ready to support division and school leaders, teachers and staff, and school resource officers in their efforts to keep schools safe and secure.

School Climate

In many cases, students and staff have not been in a traditional classroom in over a year. This transition will require all stakeholders to be extra vigilant in monitoring the needs of students and intervening as appropriate. Creating a structured and supportive school climate remains critical to everyone’s safety. For middle and high schools, the VCSCS provides a school specific report based on the results of the Virginia Secondary School Climate Survey. In an effort to reduce multiple surveys, the VCSCS partnered with the Virginia Department of Education to combine the Virginia Secondary School Climate Survey and the Staff Working Conditions Survey into the Virginia School Survey of Climate and Working Conditions. These legislatively mandated surveys were combined and administered in the spring of 2021 to middle school students and staff. Despite the significant changes to where learning occurred during the past year, the data is still valuable to measure staff and student perception and implement strategies based on those findings in the division and/or school. Secondary school and division climate survey reports (where applicable) are available for review [here](#).

Legislative Mandates

Schools and divisions continue to have legislatively mandated responsibilities to enhance safety, security, and emergency preparedness. The VCSCS has compiled a [Legislative Summary for Schools](#) to highlight those pertinent Code of Virginia sections. Though not an exhaustive list, it should serve as an overview of safety-related items. Highlights from the new school safety-related legislation, effective July 1, 2021, are also included.

Critical Incident Response

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 attacker. 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 school divisions. Therefore, 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.

It is important 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.

Resources

During the past year, the VCSCS has been focusing on updating many of our [current resources](#) to align with changes to legislation, as well as current best practices from the field. We anticipate these updated resources will be available within the next few months. Updates include:

- ***School Crisis, Emergency Management, and Medical Emergency Response Plan:*** Update incorporates crisis planning documents, adds the consideration of planning for individuals with disabilities, and incorporates the most recent best practices for responding to a crisis.
- ***Virginia Educators Guide for Planning and Conducting Emergency Drills:*** Update incorporates the latest legislative changes and provide guidance that complements the School Crisis, Emergency Management, and Medical Emergency Response Plan.
- ***School-Law Enforcement Partnership Guide:*** Update includes recent legislative changes and current data.

Threat Assessment Teams

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 K–12 schools and colleges. K–12 legislation requires a threat assessment team to serve each school, report aberrant behavior, and collect data regarding threat assessments. The VCSCS 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.

The VCSCS is also pleased to announce the release of the first edition of the “[Essential Elements: School Threat Assessment and Management Model Policies and Procedures.](#)” Since

2013, when the Virginia General Assembly enacted legislation requiring threat assessment teams in public schools, the VCSCS has provided training, resources, guidance, and technical assistance for school and law enforcement personnel across Virginia. The Code of Virginia § 22.1-79.4 states:

“Each local school board shall adopt policies for the establishment of threat assessment teams, including the assessment of and intervention with individuals whose behavior may pose a threat to the safety of school staff or students consistent with the model policies developed by the Virginia Center for School and Campus Safety (the Center) in accordance with § 9.1-184.”

The Code requires school boards to adopt threat assessment policies to be consistent with the model policies developed by VCSCS. The purpose of this [Essential Elements](#) document is to help school boards and their threat assessment teams gauge their consistency with the model policies, procedures, and guidelines established by Code.

Additionally, the VCSCS developed and released “[Frequently Asked Questions about K–12 Threat Assessment and Management](#)” to assist school divisions. School divisions can also request full-day K–12 Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management Basic Training in a virtual (online) or in-person format by completing the [Request a Training](#) form. If you have new staff, or wish to show parents an overview of the threat assessment process, [this short video](#) is a great resource! 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 us for technical assistance or to request a training. Thank you, and have a great 2021–2022 school year!

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