**DATE: July 11, 2022**

**TO: Superintendents, Principals and School Safety Stakeholders**

**FROM: Daniel French, Secretary, Vermont Agency of Education**

**Michael Desrochers, Director, Division of Fire Safety**

**SUBJECT: New Guidance regarding Egress Evacuation and Options Based Response Drills**

**SCOPE:**

With the 2022/23 school year rapidly approaching, updated guidance is being provided pursuant to (Evacuation) Fire Drills and (Lockdown) drills. The updated guidance is a departure from the COVID pandemic operational stance and will be a return to the pre-pandemic drill process and schedule. 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 lockdown or shelter in place drills. Violent Intruder Drills will still be required to be conducted within 30 days of the start of the fall and spring semesters and could be discussion/instructional based.

**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.

**Guidelines:**

In order to adapt to the ever-changing challenges faced by schools today, the Division of Fire Safety and the Vermont School Crisis Planning Team has developed this amended schedule for Emergency Egress and Lockdown 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 Title 16 VSA, Section 1481.

This schedule must be followed in all schools whether private or public. Records must be kept of all such drills and be available upon request for review.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Month** | **Egress Drill** | **Lockdown Drill** |
| September | X | X |
| October | X |  |
| November |  | X |
| December | X |  |
| January |  | X |
| February | X |  |
| March |  | X |
| April | X |  |
| May |  | X |
| June | X |  |

\*\*Note: Egress (evacuation) drills shall result in complete evacuation of the school. The first two egress drills shall result in the complete evacuation of the school. The remaining four (4) egress drills may alternate between a relocation drill and an egress drill

**Options Based Drills for Potentially Violent Situations**

**Guidelines:**

1. During the month of May, we encourage schools to build upon their previously required discussion based drills, and conduct an “options based response drills” that requires faculty, staff and students to demonstrate their ability to respond to these types of situations.

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network Guidance document, “Creating School Active Shooter/Intruder Drills” 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.”* We encourage all school administrators to review the document mentioned above for best practice information on the development, delivery, evaluation and mental health support when developing your future school safety drill initiatives: <https://www.nctsn.org/resources/creating-school-active-shooter-intruder-drills>

For those schools utilizing a traditional “**Lockdown”** approach to a Violent Intruder, we recommend the following instructional guidance:

The term LOCKDOWN means “LOCKS, LIGHTS, OUT OF SIGHT”

Students, faculty and staff (full and part-time) should be trained to:

• Move out of the line of sight of the doorway and windows

• Maintain silence

* Turn off cell phones

Teachers/staff (full and part-time) should be trained to:

• Lock classroom door(s)

• Turn lights off

• Move out of the line of sight of the doorway and windows

• Maintain silence

• Do not open the door

• Take roll, account for students (if safe to do so)

**For those schools who utilize the Run, Hide, Fight – A.L.I.C.E or other methodologies for response to a Violent Intruder:**

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

**Run, Hide, Fight** is the US 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 Intuder.
* 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 “harden” 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 lockdown /hide or fight option based or situational awareness
  + Keep your hands visible

**Hide and Reinforce - Take steps to barricade, reinforce or fortify your location**

* + Hide in an area out of the view of the potential threat
  + Lock doors and use items such as desks, chairs, bookshelves to barricade 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**

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.

* + 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.

For questions on any of the new drill guidance please contact Vermont’s School Safety Liaison Officer Rob Evans at [revans@margolishealy.com](mailto:revans@margolishealy.com) or (802) 839-0448 or visit the Vermont School Safety Center’s website at: <http://schoolsafety.vermont.gov/>