

MEMORANDUM

TO: Superintendents and Independent School Heads

FROM: Zoie Saunders, Interim Secretary, Vermont Agency of Education;
Michael Desrochers, Director, Division of Fire Safety; Vermont School
Safety Center

SUBJECT: School Safety Drill Guidance

DATE: August 12, 2024

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 amended schedules for school safety drills for the 2024-2025 school year.

The completion of these drills will fulfill the egress drill requirements in the NFPA Life Safety Code, trauma-informed, options-based drills in Act 29 of 2023, Title 16 VSA, Section 1481, and bus evacuation drill requirements for Title 23 V.S.A. § 1285. Under Act 29 of 2023, a section of the All-Hazards Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) template requires compliance with AOE and DPS/DFS drill requirements.

In total, there are **ten** required drills that schools must complete for the 2024-2025 school year: six emergency egress and/or relocation drills, two Options-Based Response to a Violent Intruder drills, and two bus evacuation drills.

Emergency Egress and Relocation Drills

Under the National Fire Prevention Association (NFPA) Life Safety Code, schools must complete emergency egress drills. Under the code, schools are required to complete the minimum number of drills and method of drills detailed below. For the 2024-2025 school year, the code includes a recommended schedule of Egress and Relocation Drill completion dates and drill methods.

Egress (“fire”) drills result in a complete evacuation of the school. Two egress drills per school year are required. The remaining four drills, at the discretion of the school, may alternate between a relocation drill and an egress drill.



Relocation drills provide schools with an opportunity to practice the relocation of students to an alternate building in the event the primary school building is compromised in such a way that it cannot safely be occupied. These drills can be coordinated for the end of the school day in such a manner that 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.

Announcing Egress and Relocation Drills

Act 29 16 V.S.A. § 1481 requires that all drills must be age appropriate, and trauma informed. To align with trauma-informed best practices, the AOE recommends that egress and relocation drills should not be announced with specific details about the date and time of the drill. Instead, the AOE and VSCC recommend that egress 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.

Recommended Schedule for Emergency Egress and Relocation Drills for 2024-2025 School Year

To meet the requirements of the NFPA Life Safety Code, schools must complete the six required drills and method of drills listed below. Schools may choose to complete additional drills at their discretion. As a reminder, schools shall take attendance once the building has been evacuated and shall retain records of the drills conducted for reporting purposes.

Month	Egress/Relocation Drill
September	Required Egress Only
October	Required Egress Only
November	
December	Required either Egress or Relocation
January	
February	Required either Egress or Relocation
March	

April	Required Egress Only
May	
June	Required either Egress or Relocation

Options-Based Response to a Violent Intruder Drills

Under Act 29, Title 16 VSA, Section 1481, schools are required to complete two age-appropriate, trauma-informed, Options-Based Response to Violent Intruder drills each school year, one drill per semester. For more information about options-based response drills, please see the [Vermont School Safety Center website](#).

Guidelines for Conducting Options-Based Response to a Violent Intruder Drills

Prior to conducting these drills, school leadership teams should review the below resources to help ensure that all options-based drills are age-appropriate and trauma-informed:

- [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
- [Creating School Active Shooter/Intruder Drills](#), produced by the National Child Traumatic Stress Network

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

The VSSC and the Vermont School Crisis Planning Team strongly encourage all schools to adopt the *Run, Hide, Fight* methodology for responding to a violent intruder, as recommended by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. It does **not** replace current safety protocols for evacuation, sheltering in place or other emergency response procedures. More information can be found on the [Vermont School Safety Center website](#).

Recommended Schedule for Options-Based Response to Violent Intruder Drills for 2024-2025 School Year

Though Act 29 does not specify the exact timing of these required drills, the Vermont School Safety Center strongly recommends that schools complete these drills according to the schedule below.

Month	Options-Based Response Drills
September	Required once per semester Recommended start of semester
October	
November	
December	
January	Required once per semester Recommended start of semester
February	
March	
April	
May	
June	

Vermont School Bus Evacuation Drill Guidance

Vermont State Law Title 23 V.S.A. § 1285 requires school authorities to 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 guidelines for safe riding practices and conducting an evacuation drill:

- Have the driver provide safe riding instruction and conduct the drill, with school administration present.
- Safe riding instruction should include:
 - Expected behavior on the bus and at bus stops

- Loading / Unloading procedures, including roadway crossing
- Drill procedures should include:
 - Emergency procedures
 - Front and rear exit drills
 - Showing students how to use roof hatches and emergency exit windows

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

Recommended Schedule for Bus Evacuation Drills for 2024-2025 School Year

Though Title 23 does not specify the exact timing of these required drills, it is strongly recommended that schools complete these drills according to the schedule below. As a reminder, schools shall retain records of the drills conducted for reporting purposes.

Month	Bus Evacuation Drills
September	Required twice per year Recommended start of semester
October	
November	
December	
January	Required twice per year Recommended start of semester
February	
March	
April	
May	
June	

Drill Reporting

All drills conducted throughout the school year must be reported to the AOE via the [Drill Reporting Tool](#). The AOE recommends that drills are reported biannually, but drills can be reported as they occur. In addition, a drill log of completed egress/evacuation drills shall be kept on site and presented to Division of Fire Safety Inspectors upon request.

Contact

For questions regarding the requirements of Act 29 or the AOE's Drill Reporting Tool, please contact Taylor Goodwin, Agency of Education, at taylor.goodwin@vermont.gov.

For technical questions on drill recommendations by the Vermont School Safety Center, please contact Vermont's School Safety Liaison Officer Rob Evans (revans@cosecure.com), School Safety Programs Manager Sunni Eriksen (sunni.eriksen@vermont.gov), or visit the [Vermont School Safety Center's website](#).

For technical questions pertaining to fire egress or relocation drills, please contact the Division of Fire Safety School Safety Representative – Ben Moffatt (benjamin.moffatt@vermont.gov),