
MEMORANDUM

TO: Vermont Superintendents and School Boards
FROM: Heather A. Bouchey, Ph.D. Interim Secretary of Education
SUBJECT: School Safety Act Update and Implementation Dates
DATE: June 7, 2023

First and foremost, thank you for your work this school year. The challenges of the pandemic still weigh heavily on schools, and we commend you for showing up every day for your communities. During the 2023 legislative session there were many efforts made to address these challenges. [Act 29 of 2023 \(S.138\) - An act relating to school safety](#), was one piece of legislation intended to make schools and students safer. We are happy to report that the bill passed the House and Senate and was signed by the Governor last week.

Act 29 provides structure and consistency to how schools across the state handle visitors, secure their campuses and approach troubling student behavior through early intervention and a team of adults to support them. The goal of this legislation is to ensure the safety of every student and staff member by codifying common best practices into law and ensuring that all supervisory unions (SU/SDs) and independent schools are implementing them correctly.

This is likely to be the first of several memos regarding this act – in particular Section 4 (Behavioral Threat Assessment Teams) is a complex policy that will require significant communication, engagement and support to ensure implementation. These communications will come in due course, as the Agency is still in the planning and project process with our colleagues at the Department of Public Safety. However, I am writing to you today earlier than intended to specifically address several urgent concerns about the [implementation timelines](#) for two sections.

Summary of the Act

Act 29 aims to bolster school safety measures across the state. Its primary objectives include the implementation of comprehensive emergency preparedness plans, options-based response drills (Section 1, effective August 2023) and the establishment of behavioral threat assessment teams (Section 4, effective July 2025). The legislation mandates that each school site conducts drills



in accordance with guidance provided by the Vermont School Safety Center and the Vermont School Crisis Planning Team. It further requires the adoption of robust access control and visitor management policies (Section 3, effective August 2023), along with the development and upkeep of all-hazards emergency operations plans (Section 2, effective July 2024).

Finally, significant emphasis is placed on training team members in conducting behavioral threat assessments, while also incorporating provisions to minimize unnecessary exclusion or referrals to law enforcement, specifically for students in historically marginalized groups. To ensure adherence and foster ongoing improvement, the legislation incorporates various reporting and data collection requirements to facilitate a proactive approach to future planning and training needs. The Agency anticipates significant future communications related to Section 4 and its implementation provisions in Section 5.

Implementation Timeline

One element of the act that has been flagged as troubling to us by our partners in school communities is the implementation deadline and effective dates of Sections 1 and 3.

[Section 1](#) mandates that district school boards implement a policy mandating options-based response drills at each school site in the fall and spring, incorporating trauma-informed best practices, and notifying parents in advance, with completion reports submitted to the AOE. This policy must be in place by August 1, 2023.

[Section 3](#) requires each SU/SD and school district board where applicable adopt an access control and visitor management policy that mandates locking exterior doors during the school day, centralized visitor sign-in, with justifiable exceptions for leaving specific structures unlocked for purposes related to the school's mission or curriculum. This policy must also be in place August 1, 2023.

Both the Agency and several of the education associations flagged this deadline as a concern early on in the legislative session, however ultimately these dates were not changed.

We are cognizant of the difficulties these August 1 deadlines create for boards and administrators and recognize that in some cases the deadlines may be impossible. We do however urge you to move as quickly as possible. While we know that important work takes time, we hope that policies will be in place for the beginning of the 2023-2024 school year.

Resources

Given the difficult timeline we have provided some [resources](#) from the Vermont School Safety Center. These are considered best practice; however, you should tailor your own policies to your own circumstances.

- [Drill Guidance 2022-2023](#)
- [Crisis Communication Resources](#)
- [Best Practice in Active Shooter Drills](#)
- [Preventing and Responding to School Violence](#)
- [Egress and Lockdown Drills](#)
- [Talking to Children About Violence](#)