
TESTIMONY

Testimony To: House Committee on Education
Respectfully Submitted by: Daniel M. French, Ed.D., Secretary of Education
Subject: School Safety Policy Initiative
Date: January 26, 2023

Background:

The School Safety Advisory Group (SSAG) was established in Act 190 (herein referred to as “the Act”) of the 2018 Legislative Session. The Act directed the SSAG “to develop statewide guidelines and best practices concerning school safety and the prevention of school shootings”.

In its 2018 report, the SSAG made a series of recommendations for policy changes. The following initiatives are adapted from that report for consideration in a bill to be introduced in the 2023 legislative session.

Recommendations:

1. Required policy – Options-Based Response Drills - Effective August 1, 2023
 - Drill to be conducted in fall and spring annually
 - Replaces annual egress/lockdown drills
 - Follow templates from VSSC and VSCP
 - SU/SD shall report completion of drill to AOE
 - Annually, VSSC and AOE will review reports to ensure compliance and identify future planning and training needs
2. Require SU/SD to adopt an all-hazards Emergency Operations Plan that “is at least as comprehensive” as the template maintained by the Vermont School Crisis Planning Team – Effective July 1, 2024
 - SBE Rule 4102 requires SU/SDs to develop a comprehensive emergency plan for each school that is updated and tested annually. There is no standard plan format required, although many SU/SDs utilize the Vermont School Crisis Guide
 - VSSC and Vermont School Crisis Planning Team will maintain the template and update as appropriate
 - SU/SD must update local plan on an annual basis, including revisions in collaboration with local emergency first responders and emergency management officials



3. Required Policy – Access Control and Visitor Management – Effective August 1, 2023
 - At minimum, requires visitors to sign in at a centralized location at each school site prior to gaining access to the school
 - At minimum, exterior doors should be locked during the school day
4. Require each SU/SD to maintain a Behavioral Threat Assessment Team – Effective July 1, 2024
 - Team to be comprised of, at minimum: administrators, mental health professionals, school counselor, school nurse, local law enforcement.
 - Duties of the team are to evaluate concerning behaviors, social media posts, verbal or written threats or other actions displayed by students, faculty, staff or others that may have a negative impact on the school. Members should be trained on at least an annual basis in how to conduct BTA.
 - SU/SD must report members of the team and training on an annual basis to AOE.
 - SU/SD must report data on BTAs in a form determined by the Secretary.

Language:

The Agency of Education proposes the following changes to statute:

1. Re-write 16 V.S.A. 1481 (Fire and emergency preparedness drills)

~~(a) The principal or person in charge of a public or independent school or another educational institution, other than a university or college, shall drill the students so they are able to leave the school building or perform other procedures described in the school's emergency preparedness plan, or both, in the shortest possible time and without panic or confusion. Each Supervisory Union or Supervisory District that operates a school shall adopt a policy mandating each school site to conduct an options-based response drill each year in the fall and the spring of the academic year. The policy shall require that drills be conducted following the template developed by the Vermont School Safety Center jointly with the Vermont School Crisis Planning Team. A superintendent shall report completion of the bi-annual drills to the Agency of Education in a format approved by the Secretary.~~

~~(b) A drill shall be held at least once in each month during the school year and a record of the date and time of the drill, together with the time consumed in completing the procedure, shall be kept in the official school register, and such register shall be open at all times for inspection by representatives from the Fire Safety Division of the Department of Public Safety or the Agency of Education. Each approved or recognized independent school or other educational institution, other than a university or college, shall conduct an options-based response drill each year in the fall and the spring of the academic year. Drills shall be conducted following the template developed by the Vermont School Safety Center jointly with the Vermont School Crisis Planning Team. The head of school shall report completion of the bi-annual drills to the Agency of Education in a format approved by the Secretary.~~

(c) Annually, the Vermont School Safety Center and Agency of Education shall review the reports submitted according to this section and shall ensure compliance and identify future planning and training needs.

(e d) A school district, independent school, or educational institution whose administrative personnel neglect to comply with the provisions of this section shall be fined not more than \$500.00.

Effective date: August 1, 2023

2. Add new section related to EOPs

16 V.S.A. 1480. Emergency Operations Plans

(a) Each Supervisory Union or Supervisory District shall adopt an all-hazards emergency operations plan that is at least as comprehensive as the template maintained by the Vermont School Crisis Planning Team. The plan shall be updated on an annual basis, including collaboration with local emergency first responders and emergency management officials.

(b) The Vermont School Crisis Planning Team shall maintain a template emergency operations plan and update the template as appropriate.

Effective date: July 1, 2024

3. Add new section related to Access Control and Visitor Management Policy

16 V.S.A. 1482. Access Control and Visitor Management Policy

(a) Each Supervisory Union or Supervisory District shall adopt a policy that, at minimum, requires that all school sites and supervisory union/district offices lock exterior doors during the school day. The policy shall require that all visitors sign in at a centralized location prior to gaining full access to the school or office site.

(b) Each approved independent school shall adopt written procedures consistent with the requirements in subsection (a) of this section.

Effective date: August 1, 2023

4. Add new section related to Behavioral Threat Assessment Teams

16 V.S.A. 1484. Behavioral Threat Assessment Teams

(a) Each Supervisory Union or Supervisory District and each approved independent school shall appoint a behavioral threat assessment team to be comprised of, at minimum, administrators, mental health professionals, a school counselor, a school nurse, and local law enforcement officials. Members of the team shall be trained at least annually in best practices of conducting behavioral threat assessments.

Superintendents and heads of independent schools shall report data related to

behavioral threat assessment results to the Agency in a format approved by the Secretary.

(b) Annually, each supervisory union, supervisory district or approved independent school shall report the names of the members of its behavioral threat assessment team to the Agency of Education in a format approved by the Secretary.

Effective date: July 1, 2024