

TESTIMONY

Testimony To: Senate Committee on Education

Respectfully Submitted by: Courtney O'Brien, Interim Director of Operations

Subject: **An act relating to cardiac emergency response plans in schools**

Date: April 10, 2025

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on the topic of cardiac emergency response plans in schools. We appreciate your attention to the importance of cardiac response plans in schools, and we are eager to share some additional information and recommendations about how to achieve this work in a manner that is effective, efficient, and practical.

Background

Act 29 (2023), now [Title 16 V.S.A. § 1480](#), introduced new requirements for all public and Approved and Recognized Independent schools related to comprehensive, all-hazards Emergency Operations Plans (EOPs). The proposed language of H.247 closely resembles the existing requirements of Act 29 by proposing the following:

- Requirements for each school and district to develop and maintain a cardiac emergency response plan, inclusive of AED placement within each school, which addresses training requirements and assigns specific responsibility to staff in the event of a cardiac emergency.
- Requirements for schools and districts to work with their local emergency service providers to develop and integrate the plan.
- Requirements that each plan provide specific protocols for cardiac response in schools whether during or after the school day, requirements for exercising or practicing the plan, and annual plan review and update.

Act 29 (16 V.S.A. § 1480) requires that all schools and districts maintain a comprehensive Emergency Operations plan which is developed in partnership with local emergency management and response partners, is reviewed and updated at least once annually, and includes specific response and training protocols for all identified hazards. The AOE, in partnership with Vermont Emergency Management, developed both a [planning guide](#) and template EOP which provide sample language, formatting, a recommended list of priority hazards/threats, and instructions on how to build a hazard-specific annex. Medical Emergency, including Cardiac



Emergency Response Plan (CERP) and suspected overdose, is included as a recommended priority annex.

In addition, [Title 18 V.S.A. § 907](#) requires all schools that own and operate an AED to report to both VDH and the associated regional ambulance service or first responder service of the existence, location, and type of device the person possesses, and to maintain and test the device in accordance with the applicable standards of the manufacturer.

[Rule Series 5100, Rules Governing the Licensing of Educators and the Preparation of Educational Professionals](#), requires that Health Educators, PE Educators, School Nurses, and Associate School Nurses need to have current certificates in both cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and Automated External Defibrillator (AED) as part of comprehensive licensing requirements.

Lastly, 16 V.S.A. § 212 (18) provides that the Secretary of Education must “annually, inform superintendents and principals of regional resources available to assist schools to provide instruction in cardiopulmonary resuscitation and the use of automated external defibrillators and provide updated information to the education community regarding the provision of a comprehensive health education.” The VSSC is hosting targeted office hours on 3/20/25 to help districts build cardiac-specific EOP annexes. In support of this work, the American Heart Association has provided a planning guide for Cardiac Emergency Response Plan and Protocols (expected to be published on the AOE website following the office hours).

Completed Work

To support effective development of comprehensive EOPs, the AOE and VSSC have provided the following technical support and training opportunities to all public and Approved and Recognized Independent Schools:

- Release of the Planning Guide and EOP Template.
- EOP Webinar for Independent Schools (March 19, 2024) to review requirements and available resources.
- Delivery of free, day-long training on EOP development and implementation on 04/05/2023, 02/06/2024 (cancelled due to low registration), and 2/18/2025 provided through Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools (REMS).
- 2025 monthly office hours hosted by VSSC/VEM – office hours are designed to support specific annex development by topic, as well as offer general support.
- Regular engagement with schools by VSSC/VEM partners to review and exercise EOPs.

Recommendations

The Agency, as well as our partners from the Department of Public Safety in the VT School Safety Center (VSSC) agree that ensuring robust cardiac response plans in schools is important, and that good cardiac response plans are critical to providing life-saving measures. The existing requirements for EOPs are intended to allow schools to

be intentional and nimble with their emergency planning needs. Any requirements established for school emergency planning and preparedness need to be descriptive enough that schools can effectively carry out its intent, but not so prescriptive that regulation limits our collective ability to prioritize, and respond to, evolving hazards.

School EOPs reflect a number of life-saving emergency protocols, including, but not limited to, cardiac and related events. Including specific regulatory language for a single hazard, or threat, response plan is not an effective way to prioritize certain hazards over others. Instead, the AOE and VSSC strongly recommend that the Agency and VSSC modify the existing EOP planning guide and template to include specific recommendations for a cardiac response annex. As is our existing practice, our teams will work with experts in the cardiac response field to ensure that best practices are captured in a format that is consistent with VEM emergency response planning and can be duplicated by a school or district. This approach allows schools and districts to achieve the goal of developing robust cardiac response plans as part of their overall Emergency Response Plan, without duplicating resources or creating competing priorities among emergency response regulation.

In preparation for this testimony, the AOE Operations team and VSSC partners connected with representative partners in the education field and found that we share a similar commitment to prioritizing this work without creating conflicting priorities and challenges for our field partners through new regulation. If further testimony is requested, we recommend that this Committee connect with Jay Nichols, Executive Director, Vermont Principals' Association.