

SCHOOL SAFETY REFERENCE GUIDE

A quick guide to responsibilities under State law.



New York State
School Boards
Association

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, school districts have been dealing with a myriad of school shootings. The 2018 school shooting in Parkland, Florida reignited heated exchanges on gun control, mental health and school safety.

NYSSBA provides this Q&A primer on school safety as a quick reference for school board members and administrators. This Q&A outlines key aspects of school safety for school district leaders to review to ensure the safety and well-being of staff and students. Detailed information about school safety can be found at any of the provided reference web links and NYSSBA's *School Law* publication.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

The following is a guide to school safety terminology:

Shelter-in-place: Students and staff are required to remain indoors because it is safer inside the building or a room than outside (such as during a tornado or other severe weather).

Hold-in-place: Movement of students and staff is temporarily limited when an internal incident arises, such as a student fight, a medical emergency or a maintenance issue. This is initiated to keep students and staff away from the affected area.

Evacuation: Students and staff are required to be moved out of a building because it is safer outside than inside (as in the case of a fire, explosion or hazardous material spill).

Lockout: The school building is secured due to an imminent concern outside of the school building, such as a bear in the vicinity of a school. Regular activities may continue inside the school.

Lockdown: Students and staff take cover, remain silent and out of view. This occurs when an incident poses an immediate threat of violence in or around the school.

Source: www.nyssba.org/news/2015/03/12/on-board-online-march-16-2015/5-kinds-of-emergency-responses/

What must be included in a district-wide school safety plan?

The district-wide school safety plan sets policies and protocol for a multitude of safety issues including the naming of the chief emergency officer. These issues include:

- Reacting to threats or violence;
- Communication with law enforcement, parents and/or guardians;
- Establishment of prevention and intervention techniques to foster better communication efforts within the school community;
- Logistics concerning access, assistance, counsel, district resources and communication strategies;
- Yearly school safety training;
- School security staff and/or security tools;
- Safety drills;
- Distribution of early safety risk information to school staff and families as needed; and
- Hiring and training of school safety staff.¹

What must be included in a building-level emergency response plan?

The building-level emergency response plan has policies and protocols for crises that warrant “evacuation, sheltering and lockdown.” The building-level plan is a confidential plan. It can only be shared with authorized personnel such as the building-level emergency response team. The plan comprises components including, but not limited to, the following:

- school blueprints
- communication plans
- chain of command per incident command system

To see additional items for building-level plans, go to www.p12.nysed.gov/sss/documents/QuickGuideEmerPlanning-March2018_final.pdf.²

What recent changes have been made to school safety plans?

State lawmakers recently made several changes to school safety plan requirements, which are contained in New York State Education Law §2801-a. Those changes took effect in 2016. Many of these changes reflect a response to the growing threat of violence on school grounds and a lessening of the threat of fire hazards due to present-day fire safety measures.³

The changes can be summarized as follows:

- Districts must now name a chief emergency officer in district-wide safety plans, as well as identify the duties of that officer.
- Building-level emergency response plans must now have protocols for crises like “evacuation, sheltering and lockdown (evacuation routes, shelter sites, procedures for addressing medical needs, transportation and emergency notification of parents and guardians).”⁴
- Since building-level safety plans must be confidential, the public has no right to either view or comment upon them. However, school district safety plans must be shared with the public.

In addition, state lawmakers amended §807 of the Education Law, which deals with fire and emergency drills. Specifically, schools must now conduct 12 fire drills every school year. Four of these drills have to be lock-down drills, while the other eight have to be evacuation drills.⁵

For additional information about these and other amendments to Education Law §2801-a and Education Law §807, see www.p12.nysed.gov/sss/documents/NewSafetyLegis_Field-MemoFINAL.pdf.

PLAN REQUIREMENTS

¹ New York State Education Department. Quick Guide to Emergency Response Planning Requirements in Education Law §807 and 2801-a, and Commissioner’s Regulation §155.17. March 2018. www.p12.nysed.gov/sss/documents/QuickGuideEmerPlanningMarch2018_final.pdf.

² Ibid.

³ New York State Education Department. Recent Legislative Changes Related to School Emergency Response Planning. May 19, 2016. www.p12.nysed.gov/sss/documents/NewSafetyLegis_FieldMemoFINAL.pdf.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ New York State Education Department. Recent Legislative Changes Related to School Emergency Response Planning. May 19, 2016. www.p12.nysed.gov/sss/documents/NewSafetyLegis_FieldMemoFINAL.pdf.

Who is the Chief Emergency Officer and what does this person do?

A school district's superintendent or a designee of the superintendent acts as the Chief Emergency Officer for a school district. This appointee is chosen locally. Responsibilities of this position include the following: facilitate safety training for school district personnel, ensure the school's building-level emergency response plan is up-to-date each year, make sure drills (evacuation and lock down) occur as per Education Law §807, and aid in policy development and decision-making for security technology. The New York State Education Department (SED) advises that shelter-in-place as well as lock out protocol be evaluated on an annual basis.⁶

The Chief Emergency Officer is a required aspect of a school district's district-wide school safety plan, which is one of two school plans (the other is a building-level emergency response plan) to mitigate the deleterious effects of school crises and promote effective school-community communication and coordination of efforts during such crises.⁷

What are the various school safety and response teams under Education Law §2801-a and Commissioner's Regulation §155.17? How are they appointed and what are they responsible for?

Four teams comprise the school safety and response teams under Education Law §2801-a and Commissioner's Regulation §155.17. They are the district-wide school safety team, building-level emergency response team, emergency response team and post-incident response team.⁸

A district's school board (or the chancellor for a New York City school) picks members of the district-wide school safety team. These members are tasked with generating a district-wide school safety plan. The district-wide school safety team may, in part, include members of the school board, parent groups, school administrator groups or teacher groups and school safety staff. Students may also be on this safety team, provided they are not privy to confidential matters of this plan or of the entire building-level plan.⁹

A school's building principal chooses building-level emergency response team members (one team per school building) whose duties include creating an emergency response plan at the building-level and choosing members of both the emergency response and post-incident response teams. Members of the building-level emergency response team may, in part, include parent, school administrator and teacher groups, school safety staff, members of law enforcement and other first responders and members of the local community.¹⁰

The emergency response team (one per school building) carries out tasks in the midst of an emergency and the post-incident response team (one per school building) assists the school members after an emergency.¹¹

For more detailed information about district-wide school safety plans and building-level emergency response plans, go to www.p12.nysed.gov/sss/documents/QuickGuideEmerPlanning-March2018_final.pdf.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

⁶ New York State Education Department. Questions and Answers Regarding Recent Statutory and Regulatory Changes Related to School Emergency Response Planning. August 10, 2016. Revised August 29, 2016. www.p12.nysed.gov/sss/documents/EmergencyResponseLegRegChanges_QA_Final.pdf.

⁷ New York State Education Department. Quick Guide to Emergency Response Planning Requirements in Education Law §807 and 2801-a, and Commissioner's Regulation 155.17. March 2018. http://www.p12.nysed.gov/sss/documents/QuickGuideEmerPlanningMarch2018_final.pdf.

⁸⁻¹¹ Ibid.

What school emergency response training is available for school personnel?

The Federal Emergency Management Agency's Emergency Management Institute provides ICS training and other related training for school personnel who are involved in school emergency response. Information on these training courses is available at <https://training.fema.gov/programs/emischool/emischool.aspx>.

ICS training is also offered for school personnel for NIMS training. For training information, see www.dhess.ny.gov/oem/training/ics.cfm#resources.¹²

When do school staff members need to be trained on school safety plans?

School staff members need training on the emergency response plan by September 15 each year. This training covers aspects of violence prevention and also deals with mental health. For staff hired during other times of the school year, training needs to be complete within the first 30 days of employment.¹³

What resources are available to school districts regarding school crises, school safety plans, and emergency management?

There are several school safety resources available to school districts, including the following:

- New York State Police School and Community Outreach Coordinators provide crisis response planning assistance to school districts and BOCES.¹⁴ For a listing of these state-wide Outreach Coordinators, see www.troopers.ny.gov/Schools_and_Communities/.

- New York State Center for School Safety provides training and technical assistance to school staff to ensure school safety.¹⁵ A list of resources for schools, and relevant training courses is available at www.nyscfss.org/.
- New York State Department of Education – Student Support Services – School Safety. This webpage directs visitors to various school safety-related resources including Safe Schools Against Violence in Education (SAVE), which details up-to-date information about school safety plans. See www.p12.nysed.gov/sss/ssae/schoolsafety/.

What are best practices in school district communication and collaboration with first responders prior to a school safety crisis?

It is important that school personnel know the first responders. At the very least, school personnel should be introduced to first responders prior to a school safety emergency.¹⁶ While this may seem trite, it is an important aspect of relationship-building, effective communication and, ultimate, school safety.

Amanda Botelho Robbins, trust advisor at Zemcar, a safe transportation app-based service for young children, who has had extensive experience as a security and preparedness consultant to government and private organizations, agrees. "I think the most important thing to do with first responders is forge a relationship before an incident occurs. Include them on emergency planning and response teams, invite them to walk the school/campus to become familiar with the environment and layout, and provide them any emergency protocols that the school has in place (including floor plans)," she told NYSSBA.

TRAINING AND RESOURCES

¹² New York State School Boards Association. School Law 36th edition. 62:7.

¹³ Rider, Renee. Mental Health Education and Services in Schools. New York State Education Department. June 2017. www.p12.nysed.gov/sss/documents/MentalHealthinSchoolsJune2017.pdf.

¹⁴ New York State Education Department. Additional Guidance on Legislative Changes Related to School Emergency Response Planning. August 12, 2016. www.p12.nysed.gov/sss/documents/Memo_UpdateSafetyLegRegAug2016FINAL.pdf.

¹⁵ New York State Center for School Safety. www.nyscfss.org.

¹⁶ U.S. Office of Education. The Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools. Practical Information on Crisis Planning: A Guide for Schools and Communities. January 2007. www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/safety/emergencyplan/crisisplanning.pdf.



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