HOMELAND SECURITY EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

NEW HAMPSHIRE DEPARTMENT OF SAFETY

SAFETY & DRILL PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

17 August 2020

District and School Safety Planning Guidance

We have experienced what will go down as perhaps the most challenging school year in history. We are now planning for the upcoming school year. Where we will be and how and when we will move forward all remain to be seen.

The NH Grades K-12 Back to School Guidance walks district and school staff through several reopening alternatives. It provides science-based guidance around addressing COVID-related safety issues. Reopening is a local decision on which options work best for individual locations and how those options will be implemented. There will be a wide range of implementation plans before we are all done.

The intent of this document is to provide guidance for safety and drill considerations for the upcoming school year. It will be important to be flexible and adapt past safety and drill considerations based on the individual reopening model for each school. Through additional planning and adaptations, we can accomplish the necessary drills while balancing the health and safety considerations for our students and staff.

District and School Emergency Safety Plans

Districts and schools are required by RSA 189:64 to have comprehensive school safety plans, aka Emergency Operations Plans, or **EOP**s. Comprehensive plans consider prevention, mitigation, protection, response and recovery from *all threats and hazards*, whether natural, biological, technological or manmade. Remember, each district or school EOP plan is designed for that particular location. Do not overlook the resources available for items such as student health and well-being. As well, knowing that there may be circumstances where our students are learning from home, consider appropriate safety planning for that environment, which may simply include educating students about safe practices.

Those items, and others, may be found at the [NH School Safety Resource Center](#).

In addition, based on our current COVID-19 experience, we know, first-hand, why Continuity of Operations Plans (**COOP**) are also an important component of an EOP/Safety Plan. Planning is a process. Now is a good time to review, revise, and in some cases, develop these appendixes in your EOP.

Communications

Communications processes are critically important moving forward. In recent months, everyone has likely experienced more and more varied forms of communications than ever before. With respect to safety planning, consider revisiting what is currently in place, updating and adding specific communications lines with your different stakeholders in mind. For example:

- Staff – update phone trees and text options; train on effective use of Zoom, Skype or other platforms used for meetings and trainings;
- First Responders – ensure that everyone knows and has access to appropriate contacts and protocols;
- For Families – as with staff, update family contact information; maintain an easily accessible web site; create a blind/dark page with emergency-specific information which can be made public quickly, as needed;

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- At Home – Encourage students and families to have and post current emergency contact lists; identify safe places within homes during emergencies, as well as safe family reunification points in and around neighborhoods.
- Be sure to accommodate the language needs of your families and students.
- Anonymous reporting – Provide call, text, web, resources for students, staff and families. Remember the old-fashioned "secret drop box" can also be an effective way for students to reach out for help.
- Media – Identify your district PIO; make sure that everyone knows whom this is and how to contact that person.

Assessments

Within a comprehensive safety plan, assessments are a key component for planning. Assessing physical surroundings (sites), the climate and culture, and the capacity to respond will help determine current and future needs. A Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) walk-around now might identify overgrown brush or broken playground equipment. It might uncover previously unknown broken windows or other danger warning signs. Survey staff to assess and compile their specific skill sets which would be useful in case of emergency. Identifying assets and resources within campus buildings and assess potential needs for the future.

For "assessing" at home, scavenger hunts can be both fun and educational for students. They can also help families find both those things they may want to do to keep their homes safer; they might even uncover hidden treasures families want to keep and use! Students and families can also build their own home "Go Kits". For Go kit supply suggestions go to https://www.readynh.gov/emergency-kits/

Drills

NH educational facilities (K-12th grade) are required to follow the State Fire Code (RSA 153) and RSA 189:64 related to emergency response drills. The law requires **six** fire evacuation drills and **four** all-hazard drills during the school year. With any in school reopening model these drills must be accomplished to maintain the health and safety of students and staff.

School Administrators should work closely with the local fire and police departments on creating flexibility to achieve the necessary drills based on the individual school reopening models. Drills need to include suitable procedures to ensure all persons participate. Emphasis needs to be placed on orderly evacuation rather than on speed.

IN SCHOOL: Reopening models that have students in school will likely follow regular emergency response drill schedules with adaptations for social distancing. Student movement for drills could follow practices for the start and end of the school day. Schools could consider running the drills by class, floor or section of a building. Evacuation/assembly points may need to be adjusted, which will require changes to onsite communications for accountability.

HYBRID: Reopening models that have a remote learning concept will likely have to add additional emergency response drills into the schedule. If students attend school on alternating days a schedule will need to be developed for each block of education. Considerations on how to conduct the drills would be the same as described for the in school model above.

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AT HOME: Home fire escape planning should also be encouraged. Teachers can share discussion ideas and age appropriate scenarios with families and with their students. Simple starters like, "What would you do if….?" Or "Who would you call if….?" will help. Students might enjoy **mapping** their house, their yard and even their neighborhood. This would also be a great time to check your smoke and carbon monoxide alarms.

Additional details can be found on the [Fire Drills and All Hazard Response Drills/Exercises in Schools](#) fact sheet available on the NH School Safety Resources website.

Digital Safety

Zoom, Skype and other platforms are filling in for in-person gatherings and meetings; they are becoming our new best ways of connecting with staff and parents. Within that context, the many reports of hacking and other cybercrimes make ensuring the safety and security of your district and school networks all the more critical. The [Department of Homeland Security Cybersecurity](#) page provides information and guidance.

Specifically with educators, parents and students in mind, the [Cyberbullying Research Center](#) and [StaySafeOnline](#) provide a wide array of resources to help keep kids safe.

Visitors

As the new school year begins, and as schools adjust to various schedules and safety accommodations, it is well to note that visitors will likely be arriving wearing masks of one kind or other. In addition, there may be unfamiliar faces coming to schools due to varying new work schedules for families. Adapt your plans to accommodate potential changes to visitor screening and sign-in procedures. It is highly recommended that visitors remain in the school office area and not be allowed to go throughout the building. For more information about School ID recommendations go to: [NH School Safety Resource Center](#)

Access

It is imperative that school security be considered and practices developed for any newly added locations (on-site & off-site), changes to entry/exit or policies, or permitting vendors or visitors to come into the school building(s). For more information about School Access Control go to: [NH School Safety Resource Center](#)

References

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