

Drills and Exercises

While drills are an important part of school safety and security, they are not a one-stop solution to preparedness. Drills are a set of tools that campus administrators can use to ensure that plans and procedures are tailored to the unique needs of students and staff on campus and to the hazards to which the campus most likely is exposed. Drills are only as valuable as the willingness of campus administrators to seek feedback from staff and students and to share lessons learned not only with the campus and its stakeholders, but also with District administration and other campuses.

Lessons learned from drills should be used to update plans and procedures. They also should be used as the first step in a larger preparedness process that includes tabletop and functional exercises designed to improve coordination, clarify roles and responsibilities, improve individual performance and manage expectation. Exercises can be based upon any of a number of scenarios and expand beyond the single skill set practiced during drills. Exercises can be conducted in tandem with drills or as separate sessions that are part of in-service training, staff development and team meetings or in conjunction with exercises being conducted by local government or first responders. As with drills, feedback and lessons from exercises should be used to update plans and procedures.

Why are schools required to conduct emergency drills?

The purpose of drills is to save lives and property. An Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) is only as good as the ability of students, faculty and staff to execute it. Following the established plan requires a quick but careful assessment of the situation and practiced decisions as to the best course of action.

When everyone at the campus regularly practices the plan, school personnel are more confident in making decisions to effectively and efficiently manage an emergency or major event. With good training and practice, everyone involved will be better able to react appropriately to emergency events.

The safety and security of students and staff depends upon everyone knowing, to the extent possible, what to do when an actual incident occurs. Minutes or even seconds often can make a critical difference in saving lives.

Conducting drills strengthens schools as learning organizations by empowering and creating a culture of preparedness. Drills allow administrators; staff and students to better prevent, mitigate, prepare for and recover from a variety of incidents.

Action plans derived from drills allow schools to translate lessons learned and best practices into specific corrective steps and measures to continually improve the safety and security of schools. In addition to these benefits, drills are mandated by Texas law.

Drills are intended to practice and refine a single emergency response, such as evacuating for fire or locking down from a threat. The purpose of a drill is to concentrate on that single function in order to strengthen skills and identify areas where improvements are needed in practices, procedures or plans. This is particularly important in a school setting where considerations need to be made for class schedules, student needs, substitute teachers and student accountability.

Drills offer students and staff hands-on experience to achieve and maintain proficiency with emergency functions. To be effective, drills need discussion with participants, including students, so that everyone understands what is being done and what improvements still are needed. A drill is not truly complete until it has been evaluated by school district personnel who have documented both lessons learned and best practices.

Although drills may not always involve participation by other agencies; periodically involving first responders, community partners such as local emergency managers and/or District administrators is beneficial. This insight and feedback is valuable and allows the drill to become a teachable moment for these participants as they experience first-hand the many challenges campuses face in order to educate students in a safe and healthy environment.

Since drills easily can become routine, it is important throughout the school year to seek feedback from staff to identify what works and what parts of the EOP need to be practiced in future drills. The School Safety and Security Committee should ensure that all drills are conducted, documented, and that follow-up action plans are developed and acted upon in a timely fashion.

What types of drills should be conducted?

Drill scenarios should mirror the procedures outlined in campus and district plans, and drill priority should be based upon the hazards the campus is most likely to encounter. The protocols tested in each drill should be based upon feedback from campus faculty and staff to reflect the characteristics of the school and its surroundings. Additionally, drills should be conducted for summer school and after school programs as well as for regular school schedules. Students with special needs should be included in drills, especially because they may require additional assistance.

To meet the requirements of conducting multiple drills while minimizing the impact upon instructional time, a campus may combine different drills into a larger scenario, e.g. a lockdown drill may be cleared by evacuating. Also, the drill may, on occasion, focus on a specific population or vulnerability, rather than the entire student body and faculty. For instance, a lockdown drill might involve only the cafeteria during lunch hour.

All drills require advance planning to determine scenario and methods for evaluation. Each drill should employ protective measures for students and staff and encourage feedback from all participants, including students. Below is general guidance to prepare staff and students for drills. Additional teacher specific guidance can be found in Job Aid 4.

Fire Drill Guidelines:

- In each classroom, evacuation maps should be posted on the inside of the door or adjacent to the doorframe.
- Students should know the primary and secondary directions to exit their classroom.
- Students should know to use the nearest exit if they are not in their classroom and to report to the first teacher or administrator they encounter.
- Fire drills at the start of each semester should be announced to all students and staff; subsequent drills should be unannounced and be conducted at varying times of the day.
- Fire alarm pull stations should be used so students know what the alarm sounds like.
 - Drills using the alarms must be coordinated with the fire department and district administration to avoid triggering an actual response.
 - Fire drill schedules should vary and not only occur during regular class time. Some drills should be held during lunch, passing period or at the start or end of the school day.

At least once each semester the campus should conduct an obstructed fire drill by blocking at least one primary exit. This may be accomplished by standing in a hallway with a sign or other obstruction to force students and staff to seek alternate exits.

Evacuation Guidelines:

- Exit from the classroom should mirror that of fire drills.
- Evacuation drills should test a component not central to a fire drill, such as preparing students to be moved to a loading area as though to board buses or practicing an extended evacuation that would move them off campus toward a secondary safe location.

Lockdown Guidelines:

- Areas of campus that cannot be secured should be evaluated for additional actions that allow vulnerable areas to be evacuated quickly and efficiently.
- Conduct at least one lockdown drill in areas other than classrooms, such as outside or in the cafeteria, to encourage fast and effective decision-making.
- Place a sign on the main entry notifying parents and other visitors that the drill is in progress and that their access is restricted until the drill is over. Have a staff member standing by to field questions and concerns.
- *Do not* use role players or explosive sounds to enhance or simulate an attack.
- Designate time after the drill for teachers to talk with students about options and safety.
- At least annually, campus and district administrators should conduct a review of options and safety considerations in collaboration with local first responders.

Secure:

- Secure is designed to move people who are outside to safety inside, away from potential threats. Incidents such as: lightning, vicious animals or bats in the vicinity or a car accident near the school may only require that students be brought inside rapidly. Events where a crime or threat is involved should include ensuring that the doors are locked and

that staff monitor all doors. All staff should be prepared for further protective measures.

Reverse Evacuation often is the first step to protective measures for various external threats; consequently consider combining Shelter-in-Place, Severe Weather or Lockdown with Reverse Evacuation.

Severe Weather Guidelines:

- *Do not* conduct weather drills on days when severe weather is expected or threatens.
- Identify good locations to protect from severe weather. Generally, the most dangerous locations are large rooms with expansive roofs such as cafeterias, gymnasiums, libraries and auditoriums. Rooms with large windows that may shatter can be extremely dangerous.
- Safer areas include: small interior rooms (with short roof spans), bathrooms, and interior hallways away from exterior doors and that have interior load-bearing walls. If the building has multiple levels, evacuate the upper levels. The lowest level is the safest.
- Consider placing small signs on the doors of safer areas.
- Use a floor plan to indicate the areas where people are to seek protection from severe weather. During drills have students practice moving to those places.
- Have students sit and face the walls. Instruct them to crouch and cover the back of their head and neck, linking their fingers. Demonstrate the protective posture and have them practice it. Do not expect them to hold the posture for long periods unless threat is eminent.
- Designated staff members should demonstrate knowledge of the location of the main shut off for gas and electricity so that in an actual occurrence they will be able to direct first responders to that location or complete the shut off themselves. However, during a drill they should not shut down the system.

Shelter Guidelines:

- Shelter is designed to quickly protect students in areas that can be sealed from outside contaminants.
- Students and staff should be moved from large common areas such as cafeterias and gymnasiums into classrooms and other areas that can be sealed.
- Close doors and windows; turn off fans and other ventilation for the classroom.
- Designated staff members should demonstrate knowledge of the location of the main shut off valves for HVAC or the number to call to have the system turned off remotely. However, during a drill they should not shut down the system.
- Remind staff and students that if an odor were entering their classroom or they felt the effects of a chemical, they should use duct or painters tape to seal the gap around the doorway and place towels or paper along the door sill.
- Complete a Shelter-in-Place drill with an evacuation, which would be the next step in the sheltering process (this also will allow credit for a fire/evacuation drill).