



The Road Back

Restart and Recovery Plan for Education New Jersey Department of Education



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Guidance on School Fire and Security Drills pursuant to N.J.S.A. 18A:41-1

Pursuant to N.J.S.A. 18A:41-1 (“Drill Law”), each public and nonpublic school must conduct at least one fire drill and one security drill each month during school hours. The New Jersey Department of Education (Department) understands that conducting fire drills and certain security drills in accordance with best practices involves behaviors inconsistent with the health and safety standards required for in-person instruction during the COVID-19 pandemic. This has caused several stakeholders to inquire as to whether the Department will offer flexibility from the requirements of the Drill Law in the 2020-2021 school year.

The requirements of the Drill Law remain in effect for the 2020-2021 school year, and schools should not anticipate any waiver from those requirements.¹ While reducing the spread of COVID-19 remains a paramount health and safety concern, it is equally important that when conducting drills, schools avoid enforcing counterproductive procedures that could compromise a school’s response to an actual emergency. This guidance details strategies for conducting fire and security drills during the public health emergency in a manner that satisfies the requirements of Drill Law, continues to hone school emergency preparedness, and avoids behaviors that risk greater COVID-19 transmission.

Security Drills

Pursuant to N.J.S.A. 18A:41-6, a school security drill is defined as “an exercise, other than a fire drill, to practice procedures that respond to an emergency situation including, but not limited to, a bomb threat, non-fire evacuation, lockdown, or active shooter situation and that is similar in duration to a fire drill.” Under the Drill Law, an actual school security emergency that includes activities equivalent to a drill qualifies as a drill.

The Department’s [School Security Drill Guide](#) identifies eleven types of drills that meet the definition of security drill. The degree to which proper execution of these security drills involves behaviors inconsistent

¹ On June 11, 2020, the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs (NJDC) Division of Fire Safety adopted a [rule waiver](#) that, in part, temporarily waived certain emergency evacuation drill requirements contained in NJDC’s regulations. That action did not waive the requirements of Drill Law.



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with COVID-19-related health and safety standards differs between drills. Each month, the Department will recommend a type of security drill and strategies for conducting that drill that adhere to both school emergency preparedness best practices and to COVID-19-related public health considerations. The Department's recommended drill schedule will consider the Department's guidance that schools should conduct two active shooter drills, two evacuation (non-fire) drills, two bomb threat drills, and two lockdown drills per year. For additional information on accessing the Department's monthly training, please email school.security@doe.nj.gov.

Fire Drills

Following consultation with the NJ Department of Community Affairs, Division of Fire Safety, the NJ Department of Education recommends that for the duration of the public health emergency, schools conduct fire drills in two phases as follows:

Phase One

On a class-by-class basis, school staff should conduct in-class training to describe expected steps and actions students should take prior to, and during, a fire-related evacuation. Staff should then escort students along the prescribed evacuation route to their designated assembly points. Such a "dry-run" will allow students and staff to rehearse fire drill evacuation procedures while observing health and safety standards (e.g. social distancing) and allow staff to instruct students in fire safety protocol (e.g. lining up, what to bring or leave behind, and evacuation routes). Staff and students should continue to observe health and safety standards at their designated assembly points. Schools should *not* activate the audible fire alarm prior to initiating a class evacuation rehearsal.

Phase Two

After the completion of Phase One, schools should schedule a specific time to briefly activate the school's audible fire alarm. Phase Two is designed strictly to verify that the alarm is operational, and that students and staff recognize the sound of the alarm; students and staff should not depart the building or initiate any evacuation procedures in response to the Phase Two alarm. To that end, schools must provide staff advanced notification of the time at which the alarm will be activated, make an announcement immediately prior to alarm activation notifying staff and students of the test and directing them to remain in place, and announce immediately upon alarm deactivation that the alarm was a test that does not require any evacuation procedures. During Phase Two, staff should remind students of the training they received during Phase One.

As an alternative to this two-phased approach, in instances where reduced building capacity permits adherence to health and safety standards during prompt evacuation, schools may implement traditional fire



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drill procedures. In accordance with N.J.S.A. 18A:41-1, an actual fire emergency that includes activities equivalent to a drill satisfies the requisite fire drill for the month.

Schools implementing the two-phased approach must ensure that each building occupant undergoes Phase One training prior to Phase Two participation. Schools must implement Phase Two each month while buildings are occupied. Students transitioning from all-remote learning models to in-person learning models must undergo a Phase One and Phase Two fire drill in the month of their return to in-person instruction.

Required Participation in Drills

To satisfy the Drill Law, a school must ensure that every building occupant undergoes the school's fire and security drill each month.² Therefore, schools that are entirely remote (for all students and staff) for the entire month are not required to conduct fire or security drills. Schools that are remote for students only (i.e. only staff are present in buildings) must perform fire and security drills in accordance with the Drill Law. If a school is implementing a hybrid or cohort-based learning model in which different groups of students or staff report to school buildings at assigned times, days, or weeks, each cohort must undergo a fire and security drill each month in accordance with the Drill Law.³ In accordance with the Department's School Security Drill Guide, schools transitioning from all-remote learning models to in-person models should conduct a school security drill within 15 calendar days of the start of in-person instruction.

² The Department understands that different types of security drills require varying degrees of participation for different groups of individuals. For example, only staff, not students, participate in communication drills. For such drills, only those individuals for whom the drill is designed must participate in the drill.

³ School should maintain accurate drill records, including drill type and the date on which each drill was conducted, to facilitate completion of the School Security Drill Statement of Assurance in the spring.