Drill Guidance
for School District Administrators
with COVID-19 Considerations
Introduction

District Administrators,

It is not lost on us that school drill planning is a huge undertaking for school districts. When thoughtfully constructed, drills can have tremendous benefits to elevate the preparedness posture of your district. Drills develop critical muscle memory and solidify essential procedures that mitigate the worst effects of your identified hazards.

This guidance document is written to help school district administrators in considering how to think about drills and questions to pose to your leadership team, not necessarily to dictate how drills are planned or conducted. Districts must consider their own resources before planning for drills. The information in this guidance document is therefore not exhaustive and not meant to direct the tactical details of a district drill program. It is also important to note that there is a significant difference between drills and exercises. This document may also be applicable to exercises but there are many more considerations for an exercise depending on what type of exercise is being conducted.

A drill is typically operations-based, is narrower in scope than an exercise, and is primarily designed to help employees practice specific tasks or routines related to their role or functional area.

Exercises are broader in scope. These typically present a hypothetical emergency scenario (hurricane, earthquake, large-scale terrorist attack, biochemical emergency, etc.) designed to encourage employees to think on their toes, work together, and apply lessons learned from drills. (Iverson 2002)

The Texas Education Agency (TEA) makes rules concerning the minimum number of school drills per year and is in the process of revising those rules. For more information, please refer to our COVID-19 Frequently Asked Questions page.

Districts should also consult their local fire marshal to ensure compliance with all local requirements. Please note that a district may be in more than one local fire marshal jurisdiction. It is important to inform the local fire marshal of the address of each campus or facility to determine appropriate jurisdiction and implication of any local rules.

For more information on drills please consult the TxSSC Training, Drilling, and Exercising Toolkit: https://txssc.txstate.edu/tools/tde-toolkit/

We welcome feedback and contributions to this document. Please contact the School Safety Readiness division at TxSSC_EOP@txstate.edu.

Texas School Safety Center

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COVID-19 Overlay
This version of the document includes considerations for COVID-19, but is otherwise identical to its parent document, *Drill Guidance for School District Administrators*. Any school activity conducted during a threat of communicable disease outbreak should be concerned with:

1. Physical distancing of at least six feet,
2. Face masks, and
3. Proper hygiene, including handwashing and disinfecting of surfaces in between contact.

You will find COVID-19 considerations as a subheading under each section of this document supplying context for the three general guidelines above.
Before a Drill

Identify and prepare your drill design team. Sources include but are not limited to:
- School Safety and Security Committee
- First Responders
- School Psychologist
- School Nurse
- Non-traditional teachers/coaches/trade instructors/custodians

Design the drill experience to be effective and inclusive.
- Consider Purpose, Goals, and Objectives
  - Why this drill?
  - What do we hope to accomplish? Consider the after-action report and improvement plan from prior drills.
  - How will we accomplish it?
- Identify specific items, procedures, and protocols that will be drilled
- Outline concepts of the drill, such as
  - Type of drill
  - Participants required
  - Date/Time – When will the drill take place?
- Identify special procedures for staff and students with access and functional needs or disabilities. If applicable ensure individual education plans address drills and actual emergencies.
- Maximize student learning, minimize fear and trauma
  - School administrators should clearly outline the district’s procedures for lockdown drills for an active threat (active shooter) scenario and be explicit about when drills will occur, how they will be handled, and what they hope to accomplish with each drill.
- Resource: TxSSC Pre-Drill Planning Form

Construct a drills timetable based on TEA mandates.
- When (date/time) will you schedule your drills?
  - Consider the minimum number of drills per school year established by the Texas Education Agency.

Prepare staff to be familiar with the drill elements and to think globally about preparing the school community.
- Organize an orientation prior to drill
  - Establish a no-fault tone and identify specific goals and objectives
- Train staff, faculty, substitutes, and evaluators on measures of drill success.

Prepare Materials
- Drill planning checklist, evaluator checklist, evacuation maps, SRP charts
- Prepare “go kits” for district staff based upon role:
  - Student and personnel accountability measures
  - Readily available medical supplies for students with medical conditions
Drill Guidance for School District Administrators

- Student information, among other things
- Training and Exercise Annex to the Emergency Operations Plan
  - Ensure drill procedures are included
- Methods for district administrators to produce public information
- Tools for communicating to school population (phone, social media, announcement)
- On the day of the drills have access to attendance rosters for teachers, including substitutes.

Review school safety procedures with the whole school community.

- Emergency Operations Plan
- Standard Response Protocol
- Standard Reunification method
- Evacuation Routes and Maps
  - Identify and practice primary and secondary evacuation routes.
  - Provide guidance for when students are outside the traditional classroom setting.
    - Are there exit routes on the way to the primary evacuation route?
- Limiting circumstances, such as
  - Site construction
  - Pandemic

Develop, review, and test communication/alert protocols.

- Regularly test the emergency alert system.
- Prepare external messaging strategy for local community.
- Prepare internal messaging strategy for school community.
  - Consider a social media monitor to provide factual information and dispel rumors.
  - How/when will you notify the media?
- Design parent notification messaging (who, what, where, when, why, how).
- Ensure directives can be heard/communicated everywhere on the school campus to include areas such as portable buildings, playgrounds, and gymnasiums.
- Develop an “All Clear” procedure specific to the threats at hand to stop the action so everyone can recognize the emergency has been resolved. This could either be an announcement or predetermined action based on the threat.
  - Lockdown procedures require all doors to remain secured until a District Administrator or a Law Enforcement Officer unlocks each individual classroom door.
- Consider notification practices for community members with access or functional needs.

Consult with your school nurses to decide what on-demand resources are needed during the drill for children with existing medical conditions.

- Encourage your school nurse to have a medical go-kit for drills.
- Consider supplying medical go-kits to faculty and staff.
Consult with your School Psychologist or counseling staff to consider what preparations might be necessary to avoid undue trauma during drill events.

- Consider asking the School Psychologist or counseling staff to train school staff on grounding and stabilization techniques.
- Consider the trauma experiences of persons taking part in the drill (NASP 2018).
  - Children can gain specific knowledge about the procedures of an intruder crisis drill through their participation in a brief training session that involves instructional components of verbal, cognitive, and behavioral techniques, followed by practice (Zhe and Nickerson, 2007).
  - Because active shooter drills can potentially increase fear among students, increase their perceived risk of victimization, and decrease their perceptions of school safety, policymakers and school administrators should focus on implementing drills that maximize student preparedness while minimizing the potential for these negative reactions (Huskey and Connell, 2020).

**COVID-19 Considerations for Before a Drill**

- When meeting with others in person, wear a face mask, physically distance at least six feet apart, and thoroughly disinfect any shared spaces in between use. Wash your hands after the meeting.
- Consider modifying drills to mitigate COVID-19 spread.
  - Consider planning for a scaled drill (focusing on all segments of the school community), or multiple versions of the drill (focusing on including all school personnel). For example, practice moving to a hard corner in a lockdown drill by having individual or small groups of a class move into the hard corner at a time to maintain physical distancing.
  - Form a consensus with local officials to establish acceptable drill modifications. Consider making them a part of your planning team. For example, with fire marshal approval, consider slowing down the fire evacuation drills to maintain social distancing and, or evacuating smaller portions of the building at a time.
  - Plan for extra time so that drill actions can be safely carried out without undue exposure to the communicable disease. For example, practice shelter in place for weather drills by having individual classes, instead of the entire school, move to the shelter locations to become familiar with how these areas are accessed.
- Prepare designated Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) go-kits for use during drills.
- Prepare your custodial staff to fully disinfect shared areas and common touchpoints after the drill has ended.
- Prepare messaging to set clear expectations for the drill under the conditions of the communicable disease outbreak. This might include an emphasis on exhibiting response protocols while taking the time to keep everyone physically distanced throughout the drill.
- Consider how you will include students and staff with access and functional needs or disabilities. Depending on the scale of your drill, this might include a buddy system or other accommodations as applicable.
- Consider how you will include staff who may be working remotely. For staff that are familiar with the building and protocols simple updates and reminders may be sufficient to prepare them to
return to the facility and be prepared for future drills. TxSSC has a Standard Response Protocol (SRP) video that may be helpful. For new staff the video is a good overview, but they may need more in-depth training and will need information on the district and campus protocols. One source of in-depth training is the TxSSC K-12 SRP toolkit

- Consider how you will include students who may be doing synchronous remote learning. How will the teacher convey the necessary information about drills; utilizing maps, showing the SRP video, showing the space in the classroom to move into during a lockdown. Remember for some of the students this may be a new campus so they may not know evacuation routes and shelter locations.

- Consider how you will include students who may be doing asynchronous remote learning. Since this may be recorded learning or a different teacher than the regular classroom teacher these students may need general guidelines and information such as the SRP video and district and campus protocols. These instructors may not be able to deliver specific information, such as evacuation routes and sheltering locations for specific classrooms. Consider having a remote meeting with the students assigned to each classroom to go over specific information applicable to their class, such as lockdown hidden corners, fire evacuation routes, and severe weather shelter locations.
During a Drill

Communicate clearly and effectively to your school community.

- Notify local first responders that a drill is beginning.
- Use plain, simple language to make emergency announcements.
  - Use official SRP terminology
    - Secure (Lockout)
    - Lockdown
    - Evacuation
    - Shelter-in-place
  - Refrain from using codes and signals.
- Make sure the emergency alerts/announcements are clearly communicated and easy to understand for different ages.
  - Emphasize the importance of following adult directions. Carefully consider the developmental appropriateness of safety vocabulary. For example, for young children, saying “go,” “get out,” and “evacuate” instead of “escape” or “run” may help support calm and orderly action and mitigate psychological impact of crisis (NASP 2018).
  - Communicate clearly during the lockdown whether there is imminent danger to the school. Conveying information as quickly as possible will minimize anxiety and fear.

Record drill observations. Topics include:

- Following procedures
  - Are students and staff secure and following procedures and protocols according to the school’s emergency procedures?
  - Are procedures for students and staff in hallways, bathrooms, and open areas being followed?
  - Are procedures for students and staff in the cafeteria, gym, and outside the building being followed?
- Communication, coordination
  - Do teachers/classrooms have a means/method to remain in communication with the central office/command post?
  - Are there supplies or resources needed that are currently not available?
- Staff modeling
  - Are staff members modeling a controlled response, or adding to confusion and concern? Consider professional development opportunities.
- Trauma-Informed discussion
  - Is any drill element visibly traumatic? Is the identified drill element necessary to establish essential capabilities to avoid the hazard?

Hold the school community accountable for drill participation.

- Set clear expectations that all available students, staff, and visitors will take part, including faculty during off periods.
Task specific staff members with posting visuals/posters to notify visitors trying to enter the building that a specific drill is taking place.

Set clear expectations about including all persons with disabilities or those with access or functional needs. They may require more help, and if this is not drilled it will be a surprise during a real emergency. This may include additional drill or practice opportunities and other accommodations as applicable.

Consider using materials to reinforce knowledge of evacuation routes.
  - Consult with your local Fire Marshal concerning your plans to test primary and secondary evacuation routes.

Empower the School Psychologist or counseling staff to be an active reviewer of the drill’s effect on the whole school community (Erbacher and Poland, 2019).

**COVID-19 Considerations for During a Drill**

- Set clear expectations for the school community to wear a face mask, physically distance at least six feet apart, and thoroughly disinfect any shared spaces in between use.
- If possible, include soft barriers to encourage physical distancing.
- Assign support staff, not otherwise responsible for vital drill elements, to help with coverage throughout the campus to ensure COVID-19 measures are being followed by students, staff, and visitors.
- Distribute PPE as needed.
- Have custodial staff standing by to fully disinfect shared areas and touch points as soon as practical.
- Consider limiting the number of touchpoints by propping or holding doors open.
- Consider providing hand sanitizer or handwashing stations after an evacuation drill, when the students have come back into the building.
- Notify staff that may be working remotely that a drill is taking place. If they happen to show up during a drill or hear about it some other way, they will know it is just a drill.
- Consider how you will include students who may be doing synchronous remote learning. For some drills they may just stay online and view what the rest of the class is doing. For some drills you may want to consider butting up some type of notification or slide advising that a drill is in progress and the estimated time to return.
- Consider how you will include students who may be doing asynchronous remote learning. If this is recorded learning it may not be necessary to have any type of notification if there will be no interruption in service or learning. If the asynchronous learning is being conducted by a teacher, you may consider having the teacher go over the protocols for the drill if it is something like a lockdown or lockout to remind students of the actions taken. If it is a drill where the teacher must leave, such as a fire evacuation drill consider a notification or slide advising that a drill is in progress and the estimated time to return.
After a Drill

Consider what messaging you might have for the community at the conclusion of the drill.
- Signal the end of the event and address the safety of community members.
- Practice to convey prompt and accurate info.

Decide whether elements reported as being traumatic can be changed without sacrificing the practiced actions to reduce hazard risk.
- Discuss with your planning team (including, if possible, your School Psychologist or counseling staff) whether elements can be changed.
- Create a course of action to change elements and test those modifications against the essential drill actions necessary to avoid a hazard.

Empower your School Psychologist/counselors to recognize trauma reactions and offer mental health crisis intervention aid.
- Provide parents or primary caregivers with guidance on how to talk with their children about their concerns or fears related to violence at school or in the community (NASP 2016).

Conduct an After-Action Review (AAR).
- Consider the three guiding questions for an AAR:
  - What did we want to happen?
  - What happened?
  - Why the difference?
- Conduct an immediate first briefing after the event.
  - Immediately following the drill or exercise, ask all drill design team members to attend a brief meeting to discuss observations and improvements.
- Conduct a formal AAR.
  - A more formal exercise debriefing can be scheduled a few days after the drill has taken place. This will allow facilitators, controllers, and evaluators time to collect their thoughts and conduct follow up activities, such as reviewing input received from teachers, staff, and substitutes.
  - Resource: Post-Drill Assessment Form (TxSSC)
- Encourage broad participation in the AAR.
  - Allow all participants, regardless of role, to take part in the AAR. Including but not limited to first responders, City/County leaders, community/business members, students/teachers, and auxiliary/support staff.
  - Provide teachers, staff, and substitutes an opportunity to share input about the drill from their vantage point, perhaps through a district form accessed online.
  - Ensure students, staff, teachers, and other participants finish the event encouraged and acknowledged for what they accomplished.
  - Resource: Post-Drill Campus Feedback Form (TxSSC)
Write an Improvement Plan.
- Identify what worked and what did not work from the drill experience. Include the Post Drill Assessment form and any other feedback.
- When planning for future drills utilize this plan to inform what needs to be emphasized or practiced.
- Assign roles to track improvement in areas that did not work. Establish a period for improvement.

Ensure that the drill is fully documented.
- Save data on drills and on AAR communication.
  - Assign someone to ensure all paperwork, rosters, drill materials, and financial documents are collected.
  - For fire drills, the local fire marshal may require a form to be completed and kept on file or sent to their office.

Recognize internal and external support.
- Make sure that all agencies and personnel are recognized for their participation in the drill. This could mean their continued support in the future.
- Encourage the media to run a positive story on the drill, emphasizing the collaborative work with outside resources. The story might focus on how hard your district is working to keep staff and students safe, as well as the effort being placed on including responding agencies for assistance and input. This is your story, so control the conversation.
- Make sure that all elected/appointed officials involved in supplying resources, support, or other input for the drill, or exercise, are recognized in the media release.

COVID-19 Considerations for After a Drill
- When meeting with others in person, wear a face mask, physically distance at least six feet apart, and thoroughly sanitize any shared spaces in between use.
- Consider virtual meetings for any supportive activity (e.g., immediate review, AAR, or status updates) that does not require in-person operations.
- Plan to use large spaces for the AAR.
- Include COVID-19 as a section in your written improvement plan and assess what might be areas for improvement for the next drill. Assign staff to track improvement.
- Ensure that your frequently touched surfaces have been fully disinfected with approved chemicals after the drill has concluded.
- Identify any adaptations needed for facial coverings, physical distancing, and disinfecting shared spaces during the actual drill.
- Identify any shortfalls in communication during drills due to facial coverings/physical distancing (i.e. hearing/understanding).
- Allow for washing/sanitizing of hands after the drill has concluded.
- Notify staff that may be working remotely when the drill is complete.
- Students doing synchronous remote learning will simply follow along with the class and be notified when the drill is complete. Ensure these students are offered services such as guidance for parent discussion and psychological services if applicable.
- Students doing asynchronous remote learning may not notice an interruption if they are working on a prerecorded or taped lesson. If they were working with a teacher that had to leave the room and there was a notification or slide the teacher should take a few minutes to discuss the protocols for the specific drill that was conducted.
References


