

Addendum 8

Adapt, Advance, Achieve: Connecticut's Plan to Learn and Grow Together

Connecticut State Department of Education



Fire and School Safety During COVID-19

August 24, 2020

Fire Drills and Crisis Response Drills

Conducting drills (fire, crisis response, lockdown, etc.) is an important part of keeping students and staff safe in an emergency, and must be continued throughout the 2020–21 school year. Connecticut General Statutes (C.G.S.) Section 10-231 outlines the following requirements regarding fire drills and crisis response drills in schools:

C.G.S. Section 10-231. Fire drills. Crisis response drills. (a) *Each local and regional board of education shall provide for a fire drill to be held in the schools of such board not later than thirty days after the first day of each school year and at least once each month thereafter, except as provided in subsection (b) of this section.*

(b) *Each such board shall substitute a crisis response drill for a fire drill once every three months and shall develop the format of such crisis response drill in consultation with the appropriate local law enforcement agency. A representative of such agency may supervise and participate in any such crisis response drill.*

During the 2020–21 school year, it will be necessary for schools to continue to perform drills while managing social distancing during evacuation and at designated assembly locations. Students and staff should be instructed that during an actual emergency, evacuation and safety are the first priorities and social distancing should be enforced only once students are outside any threatened structure or area and in a safe location.

Fire Drills (i.e., building evacuations)

- Conduct fire/evacuation drills as required to ensure staff and students understand how best to exit the building as quickly as possible while ensuring mask wearing and minimizing contact between individuals in hallways and stairwells.
- Identify multiple designated assembly locations in safe areas that allow for students and adults to maintain social distancing while ensuring separation between cohort groups.

Lockdown Drills (i.e., shelter in place)

- Conduct lockdown drills in classroom settings while maintaining social distancing and using masks.
- Conduct lockdown drills in classrooms without hiding/sheltering in close proximity to each other but provide an overview of how to shelter or hide in the classroom during an actual emergency.
- Conduct lockdown drills on a staggered schedule with smaller numbers of students present to maintain social distancing. However, schools must be certain that all students are receiving instruction in emergency procedures and participating in drills while they are in attendance in person.

Other Drills

- Additional preparation and planning activities to address other crises and situations should also continue, including but not limited to: table top exercises, lock-out drills, chemical exposures, and situations related to COVID-19.

If conducting drills using a modified procedure, the drill must be conducted with all students in the school building on that school day and it may be necessary to conduct the drill during a class period that is extended for this purpose. If schools reopen with a hybrid in-person model, such as one in which students attend school on alternate school days to reduce the occupancy of the school building, schools must be certain that all students receive instruction in emergency procedures, and participate in drills while they are in attendance in-person.

Fire Doors

Fire doors must always remain closed unless equipped with a self-closing mechanism that activates when the fire alarm goes off:

Connecticut State Fire Safety Code: Chapter 15 — Existing Educational Occupancies, Section 15.3.6.1 Self-closing devices may be omitted on doors between corridors and classrooms, except rooms or areas used as shops or laboratories, where the facility has a written and practiced fire exit drill policy which provides for the closing of all corridor doors upon evacuation, and where said policy provides for doors to classrooms not in use to be kept closed.

Classroom Doors

Classroom doors can be open as long as: 1) the school building has a full sprinkler system; or, 2) the school safety plan includes language that these doors must be closed upon leaving the room.

For additional information, please see the [2018 Connecticut State Fire Safety Codes](#).

Room and Space Partitions and Dividers

The use of both rigid and flexible plastic material in schools and classrooms includes the extension of existing half-height walls, sub-dividing larger spaces, and other protective barriers between people. The Connecticut State Fire Marshal has indicated that these materials will be permitted with some limitations regarding the installation as outlined below.

Note: Shower Curtains and Shower Liners are not permitted

Rigid Material and Flexible Plastic (Polyethylene Sheeting):

- The use of fire-retardant polyethylene sheeting is recommended.
- The thickness should be sufficient for the intended application.
- The supporting method should ensure sufficient strength and stability.
- If hung from the ceiling, the material should allow a minimum of an 18" dropdown space from the ceiling to (a) assure proper air circulation (i.e., not impede the day to day air flow from the heating, ventilation and air-conditioning [HVAC] system), (b) so as not to affect automatic fire detection systems, (c) so as not to cause a sprinkler obstruction or delay in operation.
- If used as an extension of a half-height wall, the material should stop 18" from the ceiling for reasons stated above.

More information on partitions and dividers can be found in the [Office of the State Fire Marshal Memo to Local Fire Marshals](#).

Use of Tents and other Membrane Structures

[Chapter 31 of the 2015 International Fire Code Portion of Part III of the 2018 Connecticut State Fire Safety Code](#) addresses the requirements and restrictions for using tents or other membrane structures for use as classroom space or to provide shelter for staff and students outside the school building.

For additional resources and information, please visit the [Office of the State Fire Marshal website](#).

Contact Information

William E. Abbott
State Fire Marshal
Office of State Fire Marshal
Department of Administrative Services
450 Columbus Boulevard, Suite 1304
Hartford, CT 06103
Office: 860-713-5750
Mobile: 203-537-7707
William.Abbott@ct.gov

William Turley MS, AEM
Region 3 Coordinator
School Safety Program Lead
SEOC Ops Section Chief
Connecticut Division Emergency Management and Homeland Security
360 Broad Street
Hartford, CT 06105
Office: 860-529-6893
William.Turley@ct.gov