
OLR Bill Analysis

sHB 6846

AN ACT CONCERNING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF CRISIS RESPONSE DRILLS IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

SUMMARY

This bill reduces the number of fire drills and crisis response drills that local and regional boards of education must require their schools to hold each school year. It also makes changes in the law governing the standards that the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection (DESPP) must create for schools' security and safety plans, particularly relating to crisis response drill implementation by boards of education.

The bill also requires DESPP, in consultation with the State Department of Education (SDE), to evaluate the effectiveness of the bill's provisions that reduce the number and implementation of both fire drills and crisis response drills. DESPP must report its findings and any recommendations for legislation to the Education Committee by January 1, 2025.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2023

§ 1 — DRILL FREQUENCY AND FORMAT

Fire Drills

Under the bill, schools must hold two fire drills per school year, rather than at least one every month. By law and unchanged by the bill, schools must hold one fire drill within 30 days after the first day of the school year.

Crisis Response Drills

Under the bill, schools must hold one crisis response drill per school year, rather than one every three months instead of a fire drill. (Neither the bill nor current law or regulations define "crisis response drill.") By law and unchanged by the bill, a representative from the local law

enforcement agency may supervise and participate in the drill.

The bill eliminates the requirement that boards of education develop the crisis response drill format in consultation with the appropriate law enforcement agency. It replaces this with the requirement that boards follow DESPP's standards for crisis response drill protocols (see below).

§§ 2 & 3 — DESPP STANDARDS AND DRILL EVALUATION

School Safety and Security Plan Standards (§ 2)

By law, each local and regional board of education must develop and implement a school security and safety plan for each school under its jurisdiction, based on standards developed by DESPP in consultation with SDE (CGS § 10-222m).

Existing law requires DESPP's standards to outline "an all-hazards approach to emergencies at public schools." Current law requires these standards to (1) involve local officials and school leaders in developing school security and safety plans and (2) require each school to establish its own security and safety committee, among other things. The bill makes the following changes in this law:

1. removes from the standards the requirement that local law enforcement and other local public safety officials evaluate, score, and provide feedback on both fire and crisis response drills and
2. adds to the standards the requirement that all crisis response drills be conducted using protocols developed by the school's board of education in consultation with local law enforcement.

The bill requires boards to develop these crisis response drill protocols in time for the 2023-24 school year and annually update them for subsequent school years. The protocols must be trauma-informed, created with input from the school's administrators, and contain the following minimum requirements:

1. advance notice to students' parents and guardians, educators, local law enforcement, and other first responders at least seven days before the drill occurs;

2. the option for parents and guardians to opt their student out of participating in the drill;
3. accommodations for students who have past trauma, post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, or other relevant disabilities;
4. an age-appropriate explanation to students that includes a description of what the drill is and how the school security and safety plan will be implemented during an actual emergency;
5. information for students about the availability of student mental health counseling; and
6. prohibition against active shooter simulation in the school and crouching and huddling by students during the drill.

Evaluation of Bill Effectiveness (§ 3)

Under the bill, DESPP, in consultation with SDE, must do the following when evaluating the efficacy of the bill’s fire and crisis response drills provisions:

1. review the annual reports that each school board submits to DESPP as required under the department’s school security and safety plan standards;
2. analyze how the results of each board’s security and vulnerability assessments and school security and safety plans have been addressed and revised after the bill’s revisions to the drills’ frequency and implementation; and
3. assess how effectively school boards are conducting crisis response drills consistent with the protocols developed by each board and its law enforcement agency.

COMMITTEE ACTION

Education Committee

Joint Favorable Substitute
Yea 30 Nay 10 (03/17/2023)