
OLR Bill Analysis

sHB 6846 (as amended by House "A")*

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

SUMMARY

This bill reduces the number of crisis response drills that local and regional boards of education must require their schools to hold each school year. It changes requirements for the crisis response drill format, including those in the law governing the standards that the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection (DESPP) must create for schools' security and safety plans. It also gives school boards more discretion in scheduling these drills and required fire drills throughout the school year.

The bill also requires DESPP, in consultation with the State Department of Education (SDE), to evaluate the effectiveness of the bill's provisions on 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.

*House Amendment "A" (1) increases the number of required crisis response drills in the underlying bill from one to two by requiring a separate drill only for school staff at the beginning of the school year; (2) eliminates provisions that would have reduced the number of required fire drills to two per school year, instead requiring seven per year; and (3) requires boards of education to adopt policies with additional protocols for staff-only and whole-school crisis response drills.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2023

§ 1 — DRILL FREQUENCY AND FORMAT

Fire Drills

Current law requires schools to hold one fire drill within 30 days after the first day of the school year, followed by a fire drill at least monthly; however, every third month a crisis response drill must be substituted for a fire drill. This results in approximately seven fire drills per school year.

The bill specifies that schools must hold at least seven fire drills per school year, beginning at least 30 days after the first day of the school year as under current law. However, it removes the requirements that they (1) occur at a monthly rate and (2) be swapped for a crisis response drill every third month.

Crisis Response Drills

Under the bill, schools must hold two crisis response drills 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.”) At least one of the crisis response drills must be a staff-only drill, held within 30 days after the school year begins.

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 minimum requirements for a staff-only drill and a separate whole-school drill.

Staff-Only Drill. For the staff-only crisis response drill, the board-created protocols must at least:

1. be designed and conducted to prepare administrators, educators, and other staff on their roles and responsibilities during an actual emergency, including a drill walk-through;
2. include a discussion of how to (a) implement the board's protocols for whole-school crisis response drills and (b) conduct a whole-school drill with students using these protocols; and
3. allow a local law enforcement agency representative to supervise and participate in the staff-only drill.

Whole-School Drill. For the whole-school crisis response drill, the board-created protocols must at least:

1. allow advance notice to be given to students' parents and guardians, educators, local law enforcement, and other first responders at any point during the three days before the drill;
2. allow parents and guardians to opt their student out of participating in the drill;

3. accommodate students who have past trauma, post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, or other relevant disabilities;
4. give 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. give information to students about the availability of student mental health counseling;
6. prohibit active shooter simulation in the school and crouching and huddling by students during the drill; and
7. allow a local law enforcement agency representative to supervise and participate in 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)