

SAFETY & DRILL PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE 2020–2021 SCHOOL YEAR

We have experienced what will go down as perhaps the most challenging school year in history. We are now planning for the coming school year. Where we will be, and how and when we will move forward all remain to be seen.

The OSPI [Reopening Planning Guide](#) walks district and school staff through several reopening alternatives. It provides science-based guidance around addressing COVID-related safety issues. Reopening is a local decision on which options work best for individual locations and how those options will be implemented. There will be a wide range of implementation plans before we are all done.

Incorporating the DOH Health and Safety Requirements listed within the [Reopening Planning Guide](#), let's take a look at some **safety-planning actions** we can take now to carry districts and schools into that future. These suggestions are made with district, school, classroom and home activities in mind.

The most frequently asked question recently has been around the requirement to practice [emergency drills](#). We are all still bound by the drill requirements, but these, too, will have to be adapted to the new conditions. Some drills may be fairly easy to practice with different reopening models. But all will require some additional planning and adaptations.

For example, evacuation drills will have to take social distancing into account. There may also be a need for more drills so that every student has a chance to practice during a time when he/she is in school. If a school plans for alternating day schedules, there would be the need to build a drill schedule which accommodates that schedule. One possibility might involve a *rotation schedule*. The rotation schedule would limit the number of students in hallways and exiting the buildings at the same time. The rotation schedule might involve two or more groups. By way of example: Group A could include all odd numbered classrooms and Group B could include all even numbered classrooms. Drills might take place on different days or at different times of day.

A variation to rotation might be a *blocked schedule*. This format would allow each classroom to perform the evacuation separately. Each classroom would follow the normal exit as determined by the school's safe zone exit plan, explaining to the students where they would go in the case of a real emergency.

In addition, there will likely be a need to reconsider evacuation locations, space, distancing, etc., all dependent on the specific school/campus size, layout, etc.



The following are some suggestions to help drill planning and implementation:

- Review mandated [drill requirements](#).
- Discuss drills and drill requirements during staff meetings.
- Review the **purpose** of particular drills, and the **processes** in implementing them.

(We often just take these things for granted.)

- Use **scenarios** or **table tops** with staff. Make them building specific.
- Build the results of staff discussions into **classroom lessons**.

Talk with students about the whys and hows of safety drills.

- Include and involve **1st responders** in conversations and planning around all this.
- **AT HOME:** Include and involve **families**. Some of the safety drills and activities usually done in schools can also be shared and practiced AT HOME. This may be a very important way of bringing home and school safety together.

Consider earthquake drop, cover, hold on drills, for example. It'd be good for families to understand that – and to not stand in doorways, for example.)

- **Reunification** planning will take some special consideration:
 - Location:
 - inside/outside: Will reunification take place from within the school, itself, or will take place from a campus site outside of the school?
 - on-site/remote: If an evacuation moves staff and students to an off-site location, will that site be prepared to take them in? Is it safe and secure? Is it currently accessible?
 - Vehicles:
 - traffic flow: How will traffic be accommodated to ensure safety, and distancing?
 - How will drivers be identified if they are wearing masks?
 - Sign-in/sign-out: How will this be accomplished while adapting to current safety guidelines?

Ultimately, in district/school planning for these things in the current environment, many decisions will come down to reasonableness, common sense, risk assessment *within* an emergency *within* COVID. And, it almost goes without saying, but involving families and community partners is more important than ever!

Comprehensive District and School Safety Planning

Comprehensive Safety Plans. Districts and schools are required to have comprehensive school safety plans ([RCW 28A.320.125](#)), aka emergency operations plans or **EOPs**.

Comprehensive plans consider prevention, mitigation, protection, response and recovery from



all threats and hazards, natural, biological, technological or manmade. Remember, each district or school EOP plan is designed for that particular location. Remember, too, that many of the topics which often viewed *separately* (things like [behavioral threat assessment](#), [suicide prevention](#), and student health and well-being) *should be addressed and included* as part of the overarching comprehensive plan.

In addition, based our current COVID experience, we know, first-hand, why [continuity of operations planning \(COOP\)](#) is also an important component of an EOP/safety plan. Planning is process. Now is a good time to review, revise, and in some cases, develop your EOP with the future in mind.

AT HOME: Safety planning involving students in a virtual classroom might have teachers asking students where they feel most comfortable and safe AT HOME. They might ask who they would call in case of an emergency. They could discuss where they planned to drop, cover and hold on, or who they could talk to if they feel threatened, bullied, or sick. As an assignment, teachers might suggest that students and their families develop a emergency contact list and posting the list on the refrigerator. They might also discuss everyday safety precautions such as wearing a bike helmet, not sharing passwords or talking to strangers – along with **wearing a mask** and **social distancing** when going out.

Communications

Communications processes are critically important moving forward. In recent months, everyone has likely experienced more and more varied forms of communications than ever before. With respect to safety planning, consider revisiting what is currently in place, updating and adding specific communications lines with your different stakeholders in mind. By way of example:

- Staff – update phone trees and text options; train on effective use of Zoom, Skype or other platforms used for meetings and trainings;
- 1st Responders – ensure that everyone knows and has access to appropriate contacts and protocols;
- For Families – as with staff, update family contact information; maintain an easily accessible web site; create a blind/dark page with emergency-specific information which can be made public quickly, as needed;

AT HOME: Encourage students and families to have and post current emergency contact lists; identify safe places within homes during emergencies, as well as safe family reunification points in and around neighborhoods.

- Anonymous reporting – Provide call, text, web, resources for students, staff and families. Remember the old-fashioned “secret drop box” can also be an effective way for students to reach out for help.



- Media – Identify your district PIO; make sure that everyone knows who this is and how to contact that person.

Assessments

Within a comprehensive safety plan, assessments are a key component for planning. Assessing physical surroundings (sites), the climate and culture, and the capacity to respond will help determine current and future needs. A CPTED-walk around now might identify overgrown brush or broken playground equipment. It might uncover previously unknown broken windows or other danger warning signs. Survey staff to assess and compile their specific skill sets which would be useful in case of emergency. Identifying assets and resources within campus buildings and assess potential needs for the future.

AT HOME: For “assessing” AT HOME, scavenger hunts can be both fun and educational for students. They can also help families find both those things they may want to do to keep their homes safer; they might even uncover hidden treasures families want to keep and use! Students and families can also build their own home “[Go Kits](#)”.

Drills

Some drill considerations were discussed above. Schools are required to do [drills every month](#) that students are in the building. Although all students may not be in the school building at the same time, this is a good time to plan drills for the coming year. It is also a good opportunity to *discuss* those drills with staff. Take some time during staff meetings, both virtual and in-person, to talk about why drills are required, how they are carried out, and what changes may be needed. Use scenarios and tabletop exercises (**TTX**) to simulate actual situations to prepare for.

AT HOME: This can also be done AT HOME. Teachers can share discussion ideas and age appropriate scenarios with families and with their students. Simple starters like, “What would you do if....?” Or “Who would you call if....?” will help. Students might enjoy **mapping** their house, their yard and even their neighborhood.

Digital Safety

[Zoom](#), Skype and other platforms are filling in for in-person gatherings and meetings; they are becoming our new best ways of connecting with staff and friends. Within that context, the many reports of hacking and other cybercrimes, make ensuring the safety and security of your district and school networks all the more critical. The [Department of Homeland Security Cybersecurity](#) page provides information and guidance.

Specifically with educators, parents and students in mind, the [Cyberbullying Research Center](#) and [StaySafeOnline](#) provide a wide array of resources to help keep kids safe.



AT HOME: For home, links and pages from these sites can be shared with student and families. It is important to keep in mind that most young people are safe and productive online most of the time. However, given the amount of time and number of activities students are online, it is also important for all the adults to be well aware of students' time and activities, and to be prepared to step in to keep them safe.

Visitors

As the new school year begins, and as schools adjust to various schedules and safety accommodations, it is well to note that visitors will be arriving wearing masks of one kind or other. In addition, with varying new work schedules for families, not everyone coming to school may be a familiar face. Adapt your plans to accommodate potential changes to visitor screening and sign-in procedures.

Finally, in planning for the safety and security of students and staff, be sure to include deliberate, focused self-care in the process. We can't take care of others if we don't take care of ourselves.

