

August 24, 2021

Michigan Safety & Drill Planning Considerations for the 2021-2022 School Year

As most school districts return to in-person classes for the 2021-2022 school year, there will be new students and teachers in every school and those returning may have been away from the classroom for an extended amount of time. Because of this, it remains vitally important to conduct regulated safety drills and follow the requirements set forth in law. This guidance differentiates from schools educating at a distance, in-person, and in a hybrid format and is a collaboration among the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) and the Michigan Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs' (LARA) Bureau of Fire Services (BFS) and the State Fire Marshal to assist school administrators and staff in providing a safe learning environment.

While MDE does not have authority over emergency drill compliance, the department receives questions about conducting emergency drills safely during the COVID-19 pandemic. School districts are bound by emergency drill requirements, which may have to be adapted to changing conditions throughout the school year. While some drills may be simple to practice with measures in place for COVID-19, all will require additional planning and adaptations. Below are three different instructional models and how to potentially conduct drills during each.

Learning at a Distance:

If a school is operating fully remotely, it should be noted that at this time, there is not a legal mechanism to issue waivers from the drill requirements. A statutory change from the legislature is likely needed to provide additional flexibility.

In-person Instruction:

While drills will still need to be conducted, evacuation drills can take social distancing into account. Because everyone will need to evacuate the building when the fire alarm sounds, it may take more time to conduct the drill and accommodate the need for social distancing. That is ok! When the alarm sounds, you can stagger classrooms as they dismiss, allowing a small amount of time between each classroom's evacuation to accommodate social distancing. There may also need to be different evacuation locations for the various classes. Work with your local emergency manager and fire department to decide how best to conduct your drills so social distancing can be followed while still evacuating the entire building as needed.

Hybrid Instruction:

If groups of students attend school in-person on alternating days, there will need to be a drill schedule that accommodates this instructional model. Drills will need to be conducted with each group of students on their respective days in school. Per the State Fire Marshal, each drill conducted with a group may count as separate drills. For example, Group A attends in-person instruction on Monday and Tuesday. Group B attends in-person instruction on Thursday and Friday. School administration conducts drills with Group A on Tuesday and Group B on Thursday. This will count as *two drills*. The first set of three drills must be conducted before December 1. Each group must have at least one drill before the designated deadline.

Evacuation Locations for In-person and Hybrid Instruction:

While conducting drills, whether during in-person instruction or during hybrid instruction, schools will need to consider evacuation locations, space, and distancing depending on the specific size and layout of the school, campus, or community. Below are some suggestions to help with drill planning and implementation.

- Review mandated drill requirements.
- Discuss drills and drill requirements during staff meetings.
- Review the purpose of drills and the processes in implementing them.
- Use scenarios or tabletops with staff. Make them building specific.
- Build the results of staff discussions into classroom lessons. Talk with students about the why and how of safety drills.
- Schools are strongly encouraged to work with their special education directors and teachers to include considerations of students with special needs in their planning.
- Collaborate with local emergency managers and first responders to plan and problem solve. It may also be a good idea to work with your local fire safety inspector found on this interactive [map](#).
- Communicate and partner with families. Some safety drills and activities usually done in school can be shared and practiced at home. This may be an important way of bringing home and school safety together, especially for younger students.
- Encourage families to attend community days at their local first responders' buildings to give children a chance to meet local responders and check out the equipment. This may help alleviate the fear some children may feel if first responders need to come to their aid.
- Reunification planning will take some special consideration.
 - Location:
 - Inside/Outside: Will reunification take place from within the school itself, or will it take place at 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 receive them? Is it safe and secure? Is it currently accessible to 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, many decisions in district or school planning for these topics in the current pandemic environment will come down to reasonableness, common sense, and risk assessment *within* an emergency *within* the pandemic. Collaborating with families and community partners is critical!

Alcohol-based Hand Rub (Sanitizer):

With an increase in the amount of sanitizer being kept and used in schools, it is important to remember that alcohol-based hand rub (ABHR) is a flammable liquid and requires careful storage and use. NFPA 101, Life Safety Code, 2012 Edition is referenced by the [New and Existing School, College, and University Fire Safety](#) rules and has specific requirements for use of ABHR as follows:

- Dispensers shall be installed in rooms or spaces separated from corridors and exits and are NOT permitted in corridors.
- The maximum individual dispenser fluid capacity shall be as follows:
 - 0.32 gal (1.2 L) for dispensers in rooms.
 - 0.53 gal (2.0 L) for dispensers in suites of rooms.
- The dispensers shall be separated from each other by horizontal spacing of not less than 48 inches (1,220 mm).
- The dispensers shall not be installed over, or directly adjacent to, an ignition source such as light switches or receptacles.
- Dispensers installed directly over carpeted floors shall be permitted only in sprinklered rooms or spaces.
- The storage of ABHR is strictly regulated due to its flammability; storage of more than five gallons is required to meet the following conditions:
 - ABHR may not be stored in a basement.
 - Quantities of more than five gallons shall be stored in a listed flammable liquids storage cabinet.
- If the above criteria cannot be met, the ABHR should be stored in a separate building from the school and only dispensed as needed.

If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact the LARA Bureau of Fire Services at lara-bfs@michigan.gov or 517-388-1761 or Mary Teachout at the Michigan Department of Education at TeachoutM@Michigan.gov.