

School Crisis Response Drills Working Group



Final Report February 19, 2025



State of Connecticut
GENERAL ASSEMBLY
STATE CAPITOL
HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT 06106-1591

February 19, 2025

Joint Committee on Education
Connecticut General Assembly
Legislative Office Building, Room 3100
300 Capitol Avenue
Hartford, CT 06106

Dear Education Committee Members,

On behalf of the members of the School Crisis Response Drills Working Group we are submitting to the committee our Final Report and recommendations. This working group convened to study the effectiveness of the implementation of crisis response drills in public schools and their effect on children's mental health and wellbeing. This working group began July 31, 2024 holding a total of 8 meetings that have been broadcast to the public on the CTN Government Network. Our 25 members who have met these past seven months reflect a wide array of state agency staff, public safety personnel, school administrators, teachers, public policy, school safety, and mental health professionals.

When we convened our meetings, we started with the stated goal and mission of addressing policy changes for the planning and implementation of school crisis response drills by local school districts. This was done so with a focus on:

- hearing from experts on their efficacy/effectiveness
- building the optimal emergency response team
- best practices for community communication around school emergencies and preparation
- optimal frequency of school emergency/crisis response drills and
- analysis of the benefit or adverse impacts on the safety and mental health of children and staff
- consistency of language conventions, training, practice, and implementation across districts
- striking a balance between ensuring the physical safety of children and staff while also prioritizing their psychological well-being

We hope that the Education Committee will find this Final Report, which includes a list of our members, links to all our meeting agendas, recordings, presentations, and consensus recommendations useful for future policy considerations.

Sincerely,

Rep. Jennifer Leeper, Co-Chair
Education Committee
132nd House District

Rep. Greg Howard, Ranking Member
Public Safety & Security Committee
43rd House District

Dr. Amery Bernhardt, Director
Connecticut Center for School
Safety and Crisis Preparation

Working Group Members

Jennifer Leeper, Tri-Chair
Vice Chair, Education Committee
132nd House District

Greg Howard, Tri-Chair
Vice Chair, Public Safety and Security Committee
43rd House District

Amery Bernhardt, Tri-Chair
Director, Connecticut Center for School
Safety and Crisis Preparation

Jan Perruccio, Superintendent
Old Saybrook Public Schools

James White, Trooper First Class
CT State Police State-wide DARE Coordinator

Marc Donald, Director
Catalyst CT

Stacy Butkus, Director of Athletics & Student Activities
CT Technical Education and Career System

TJ Nuccio, Analyst
Commission on Women, Children and Seniors, Equity & Opportunity

Paula Gill-Lopez, Director, School Psychology Program
Fairfield University

Eddie Weihe, Deputy Chief
Fairfield PD (former head of School Safety Division)

William Turley, Manager Training & Exercise
School Safety Program Lead, DESPP

Chlo-Anne Bobrowski, Education Manger
State Department of Education

Josh Zabin, Director of Safety and Security
Ridgefield Public Schools

Roger Nelson, Vice President & Co-Legislative Representative
Connecticut Fire Marshall's Association

Trent Harrison, President
Newtown Federation of Teachers Local 1727

Gabe Lomas, Founder
CT Center for School Safety

Chris Olsen, Director of Safety and Security
East Lyme Public Schools

Tanya Iacono, Regional School Safety Coordinator
CT Center for School Safety

Dana Bossio, Trauma Coordinator
Cooperative Educational Services (CES)

Sadie Witherspoon, Regional School Safety Coordinator
CT Center for School Safety

Corinne Ofgang, Researcher
CT Center for School Safety

Kim Myers, Regional School Safety Coordinator
CT Center for School Safety

Tara Lawrie, Special Education Teacher
Clinton Public Schools

Kiley Young, Regional School Safety Coordinator
CT Center for School Safety

William Chapman, Sergeant
Newton Police Department

Kimberly Zigich, Attorney
Division of Emergency Management and Homeland Security

Working Group Meetings

Meeting 1

July 31, 2024

[Agenda](#)

[Video](#)

Meeting 2

August 28, 2024

[Agenda](#)

[Video](#)

Meeting 3

September 25, 2024

[Agenda](#)

[Video](#)

[Attachment](#)

School Security & Safety Plan Standards
July 2024

Meeting 4

November 13, 2024

[Agenda](#)

[Video](#)

[Presentation](#)

“Thought Exchange Results”
Dr. Amery Bernhardt
Director, Connecticut Center for School
Safety and Crisis Preparation

Meeting 5

November 20, 2024

[Agenda](#)

[Video](#)

Meeting 6

December 18, 2024

[Agenda](#)

[Video](#)

New York Standard
Response Protocol

[Link](#)

[Attachment](#)

[Presentation](#)

“Trauma-Informed Lockdown Drills: What Does The Evidence Show?”
Dr. Jaclyn Schildkraut And Dr. Amanda B. Nickerson

“Can School Lockdowns Save Lives? An Assessment of Drills and Use in Real-World Events”

[Presentation](#)

“Emergency Preparedness Drills for Active and Mass Shootings in Schools”

Meeting 7

February 4 , 2025

[Agenda](#)

[Video](#)

[Presentation](#) Dr. Christina Cipriano, Ph.D., Ed.M. Associate Professor
Yale Child Study Center Director, Education Collaboratory at Yale

“The Politicization of Prevention Science and Our Responsibility to Advance Evidence-Based Practice in our Schools”

Meeting 8

February 19, 2025

[Agenda](#)

[Video](#)

Final Recommendations

Members of the School Crisis Response Drills Working Group have unanimously adopted the following consensus recommendations:

1. A clear definition of crisis drills will be established by DESPP in collaboration with the CT Center for School Safety and Crisis Preparation.
2. DESPP in collaboration with the CT Center for School Safety and Crisis Preparation shall provide standardized terminology for crisis drills.
3. DESPP in collaboration with the CT Center for School Safety and Crisis Preparation shall provide guidance on standardized responses to crises.
4. DESPP in collaboration with the CT Center for School Safety and Crisis Preparation shall provide guidance on standardized debriefing after a crisis.
5. Schools shall share overall district-wide safety planning with the school community. However, individual school emergency plans, blueprints, floor plans, and other details that may compromise school safety shall remain confidential.
6. The school climate committee, as defined under CGS 10-222ff, should collaborate with the school safety committee, as defined under CGS 10-222m(b), to plan drills that prioritize physical and psychological safety.
7. Crisis drills shall be trauma-informed. Trauma-informed refers to an approach that takes into account prior traumatic experiences, ensuring drills are designed to prevent emotional harm and support psychological safety with mental health professionals integrated into every stage.
8. Schools must provide age appropriate education and training before drills, allowing staff and students to build knowledge and skill to reduce the potential for confusion or emotional distress. For example, a review of the purpose and procedures for all drills prior to the execution of the first drill of the year.
9. Districts shall evaluate each drill using a template which will be developed by DESPP in collaboration with the CT Center for School Safety and Crisis Preparation. The purpose of the evaluation of drills is to allow districts to use feedback from participants to assess efficacy and make adjustments, as needed, to improve preparedness while doing no harm.
10. Schools should communicate the nature and purpose of drills with parents using clear language to ensure understanding.
11. Communication regarding drills should be provided in the appropriate languages to accommodate non-English speaking families of the school community.
12. Staff and students shall be notified that they are participating in a drill to avoid confusion over a real world emergency.
13. Staff, students, and families will be notified one week before upcoming drills.
14. Current legislation shall remain that reads: 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.
15. Schools must consider accommodations for students with cognitive, physical, or sensory disabilities, ensuring their safety and participation in crisis drills.
16. Schools shall not use active assailant simulations with students. However, this does not preclude exercises from being conducted with first responders and school volunteers outside of normal school operating times.
17. The CT Center for School Safety and Crisis Preparation, in partnership with DESPP and CSDE, will research the impact of crisis drills on the school community.