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MEMORANDUM

TO: School District Superintendents
Charter School Leaders

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FROM: Jacob Oliva, Chancellor, Division of Public Schools
Dakeyan Graham, Executive Director, Office of Independent Education and Parental Choice
Damien Kelly, Executive Director, Office of Safe Schools

DATE: August 7, 2020

SUBJECT: Memo Regarding Emergency Drills

As schools throughout Florida approach the start of the 2020-2021 school year, the health and safety of our state's students, teachers and school staff remains of paramount importance. We know you are working diligently to prepare and that this year is presenting new challenges, particularly as you determine the best way to balance statutory requirements related to proactive safety drills while adhering to public health guidance. These safety and security protocols were put in statute because they are necessary to save lives; therefore, we are committed to supporting you in ensuring they take place, as required, in a manner that maintains the safety of our schools.

[Section 1006.07\(4\), F.S.](#), provides the statutory requirements for district school boards with regard to emergency drills and emergency procedures. These requirements and expectations have not changed or lessened; in fact, they may be more important than ever as it is possible those with malicious intent could view this time as an opportunity to endanger Florida's schools. For that reason, it is critical that all schools continue to conduct the emergency drills required by law, while following Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Florida Department of Health guidelines.

We recognize that in some cases this may require revisions to the way safety drills have been conducted in the past, which is why our Office of Safe Schools coordinated with Florida Chief Financial Officer (CFO) and State Fire Marshal Jimmy Patronis on guidance to help you safely plan these drills. On August 4, he signed [CFO Directive 2020-13](#), which provides Florida's K-12 schools with flexibility on the manner in which fire safety drills are conducted in order to allow for social distancing that is necessary during this time. We suggest you use this guidance

JACOB OLIVA
CHANCELLOR OF PUBLIC SCHOOLS

provided by the CFO as a reference as you plan for required safety drills, including drills for active shooter and hostage situations.

Schools may need to reconsider evacuation locations and emergency procedures, depending on the specific school or campus size, layout, and location. Some drills may be performed with discussion, demonstration, and simulations instead of having students closely gathered inside a classroom or other spaces. Below are some suggestions to help with drill planning and implementation:

- Review mandated drill requirements. Drills must continue to be held according to statute, but the way in which those drills are conducted may be adjusted in order to meet health and safety requirements.
- Discuss drills and drill requirements during staff meetings. Review the purpose of particular drills, and the processes in implementing them.
- Use scenarios, situational awareness videos, and/or tabletop exercises to engage staff and students at the secondary level. When possible, make them building specific.
- Involve families. Some of the safety drills (including fire, tornado or severe weather) and activities usually done in schools can also be shared and practiced at home. This may be a way to bring home and school safety together, and would be especially important for students engaged in distance learning.
- Evacuation drills will have to take social distancing into account. This might involve a rotation schedule, which would limit the number of students in hallways and exiting buildings at the same time. For this reason, these drills might take place on different days or at different times of the day in order to ensure all classrooms have the opportunity to participate in the drill safely.
- A variation to the rotation schedule might be a blocked schedule. For this option, each classroom would be instructed to participate in the evacuation drill 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.
- To conduct a lockdown drill while maintaining social distancing, consider setting a window of time that would allow for the teacher to send one student at a time into the safest area of the classroom, repeating until students have conducted the drill. Lockdown drills might be conducted where the teacher talks through the scenario that would lead to a lockdown, asking one student at a time or alternating students to demonstrate for the rest of the class what actions they would take, how they would proceed, and where they would go for the safest area of the classroom.

Ultimately, in planning for emergency drills in the current environment, many decisions will come down to reasonableness, common sense, and risk assessment within an emergency with full consideration of CDC guidelines and recommendations. Drills should be carried out as close to how they would be carried out in an actual emergency, while still allowing for social distancing.

It is important to note that disasters or emergencies may have to be triaged for priority. An actual fire or active threat situation poses an imminent or substantial threat to life and must take precedence over the possible health risk. Once there is no longer imminent or substantial threat to life, then federal and state health precautions should once again rise up in level of importance. This is similar to medical triage where there may be several inquiries or issues involving a patient. The most life threatening one is treated first until it is controlled or stopped and then the next most critical is addressed and so forth.

If you have additional questions regarding the requirements outlined in this letter, please contact the Office of Safe Schools at SafeSchools@fldoe.org and staff can work with you on your individual needs.