

RESOURCE:

Considerations for Education Leaders in Preparing for Active Shooter Drills in Schools

Every year schools and other educational institutions prepare to respond to active shooter situations. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) defines an "active shooter" as one or more individuals actively engaged in killing or attempting to kill people in a populated area.¹ In most cases, active shooters or armed assailants use firearms, and there is no pattern or method to their selection of victims.² When emergency circumstances arise in schools, teachers and other school staff are forced to react in the moment. Schools across the country are going to great lengths to assuage safety concerns by taking action to prevent gun violence and to carefully prepare for active shooter incidents should the worst happen in their buildings. While most students go to school without ever experiencing an active shooter incident, we cannot ignore the all-too-real fear of gun violence that many students, families, and school staff feel as they enter school each day to learn and grow. Exposure to gun violence takes a terrible toll on the entire school community.

Since the mass shooting at Columbine High School in Colorado in 1999, estimates show there has been over an 400 school shootings that exposed more than 390,000 students to gun violence.³ The K-12 School Shooting database also shows a rise in school shootings since 2018. A nationally representative study found that 51 percent of 14- to 17-year-olds in the United States worry about school shootings.⁴ According to the [Youth Risk Behavior Survey Data Summary & Trends Report: 2013–2023](#), 13 percent of high school students did not go to school because they felt unsafe either at school or on their way to or from school at least once during the past 30 days. Many parents of school-aged children in the United States remain apprehensive about their child's physical safety at school, with 44 percent saying they fear for their child's safety.⁵ Additionally, 59 percent of teachers worry about the possibility of a shooting happening at their school.⁶

To address these concerns, 98 percent of public schools reported having written procedures for active shooter drills in the 2023–24 school year, according to the most recent federal data.⁷ Despite how common active shooter drills are, more research is needed to conclusively determine if and how effective these drills are at preparing schools for active shooter incidents, preventing injuries and fatalities, and minimizing any associated psychological impacts or traumas from either the drills or the incidents.⁸ The goal of an active shooter drill is to ensure staff and students understand the safety procedures and know how to implement them to stay safe in the event of a real incident. The following considerations are designed to assist educational institutions in developing active shooter drills that prioritize the physical safety and psychological well-being of the entire school community. As always, school districts receiving federal financial assistance must comply with civil rights laws prohibiting discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, and disability in carrying out these activities.⁹

This document provides considerations for before, during, and after drills, each of which is further described below.

Pre-Drill Considerations

- **Develop comprehensive, high-quality Emergency Operations Plans (EOPs), and train all staff on their use.**
- **Train school safety staff on how to use EOPs.**
- **Take steps to foster a safe and supportive school climate, as a means of strengthening violence prevention, emergency preparedness, and crisis response.**
- **Be mindful of students' mental and emotional health prior to, during, and after safety drills, and prepare to provide mental health and emotional supports following drills.**
- **Avoid simulated violence in active shooter drills, including highly sensorial elements like fake firearms, gunfire sounds, blood, assailants, and/or injuries.**
- **Provide advanced notice about active shooter drills to school staff, students, families and caregivers, and other members of the school community.**
- **Ensure that all students and staff in public elementary and secondary schools, including students who are English learners (ELs) and students with disabilities, are provided an equal opportunity to receive any related information and participate in safety drills.**
- **Provide opportunities for staff, students, families, and school communities to provide input, ask questions, and voice concerns about active shooter drills.**
- **Plan drills that meet the needs of the entire school community – including throughout school buildings and in communities where there is possible exposure to gun violence outside the school building.**
- **Ensure that all students, staff members, and members of the school community have access to active shooter protocols – including visitors and those who are new to the building.**

Considerations During the Drill

- **Always provide a clear, consistent message accessible to all students and staff that the event is a drill.**
- **Direct members of the multidisciplinary school safety team to monitor and provide support during the drill.**

Post-Drill Considerations

- **Provide opportunities for all students and staff to debrief the drill experience and seek additional supports if needed.**
- **Perform an after-action review with opportunities for staff and student input, and refine school EOPs if needed based on lessons identified.**
- **Communicate with families and caregivers again after the drill and solicit their feedback and observations (e.g., from parents speaking with their children).**

Pre-Drill Considerations

Develop comprehensive, high-quality Emergency Operations Plans (EOPs), and train all staff on their use.

In collaboration with local government leaders, first responders, and community partners (e.g., law enforcement officers, fire officials, emergency medical services personnel, and public and mental health professionals), schools should prepare for potential emergencies, including active shooters, through the creation of EOPs outlining the procedures and responsibilities a school will follow during an emergency, and detailing how they will respond, manage resources, and coordinate actions internally and externally to ensure safety and minimize physical and psychological harm.¹⁰ An EOP should address the needs of all staff, students, and families, including those that require special considerations and/or accommodations (e.g., students with disabilities and students who are ELs and address a variety of emergency and exigent scenarios both on and off school grounds (e.g., including on field trips) that could arise before, during, or after the school day).

Train school safety staff on how to use EOPs.

Every member of the school community should be prepared to respond in a manner that increases safety and minimizes harm. Therefore, all school staff should be actively involved in the development of their school's EOPs. This includes staff who are permanent in the school, as well as those who might be itinerant (e.g., traveling between schools and/or campuses) or those who are new or temporary to a school building (e.g., a substitute teacher). Students look to and follow trusted adults in a time of crisis. When all adults are properly trained, know the safety procedures, and have opportunities to practice, they are more likely to have the tools to guide students to safety during a crisis.

Ensure drills are aligned to the school's EOP. Through active shooter drills and emergency planning, school staff should be well-trained to lead all students to safety through a range of scenarios, monitor their responses, and support individual student needs, including individualized needs of students with disabilities and students who are ELs. All school staff should be involved in school safety training. Schools should develop a multidisciplinary school safety team to develop, refine, and drive implementation of EOPs. Teams should include administrators, school mental health professionals, school nurses, school-based law enforcement or security, teachers, maintenance or custodial staff, parents, students (where appropriate), and first responder representatives (e.g., fire departments, law enforcement agencies, medical professionals, and other emergency services). The Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools (REMS) Technical Assistance Center, funded by the U.S. Department of Education (the Department), offers a [six-step planning process](#) to aid districts and schools with developing high-quality EOPs. Additional resources can be found at SchoolSafety.gov.

Take steps to foster a safe and supportive school climate, as a means of strengthening violence prevention, emergency preparedness, and crisis response.

Creating a safe, inclusive, and supportive school climate makes students less likely to bring weapons to school and more likely to encourage students to report safety concerns.¹¹ EOPs should include proactive preventative actions (e.g., positive behavior management strategies, peer-to-peer support programs, and [safe firearm storage](#) information) that schools can take every day to help ensure all school community members remain safe. These efforts often prove more cost-effective than reactive measures,

while also fostering a positive school climate that benefits all students, staff, and parents, including preventing violence.¹²

In October 2022, the Department-funded Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) published [*Supporting Schools During and After Crisis: A Guide to Supporting States, Districts, Schools, Educators, and Students through a Multi-Tiered Systems of Support Framework*](#) to provide information on how to use a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) framework to support students, families, and educators throughout the phases of crisis response and recovery in a manner that prioritizes their health and safety, mental health and well-being, and academic growth. By investing in a positive school climate, leaders can contribute directly to physical safety, limiting the likelihood of school violence, and also create conditions for students and educators to practice safety drills while feeling safe, respected, valued, and trusted. Additionally, the Department’s technical assistance centers have issued guidance [documents](#) about how to implement physical safety measures effectively at schools, which schools can use in their development of EOPs and other emergency protocols.

Be mindful of students’ mental and emotional health prior to, during, and after safety drills, and prepare to provide mental health and emotional supports following drills.

Evidence suggests that students may experience increased stress, anxiety, and depression after active shooter drills.¹³ By actively integrating mental and emotional health considerations into EOPs – including providing supports like crisis counseling, educating staff and students on recognizing common trauma reactions and coping mechanisms, incorporating mental health awareness into drills, including drill preparation, and establishing partnerships with local mental health providers – schools can better support students’ emotional well-being during and following a crisis, promoting resilience and recovery. As appropriate, the disability-based needs of students identified as a student with a mental health disability under Section 504, or a student identified as a child with a disability under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), may need to be considered on an individualized basis, both at the planning stage and the post-drill stage. The National Child Traumatic Stress Network developed [A Checklist for School Personnel to Evaluate and Implement the Mental Health Component of Your School Crisis and Emergency Plan](#), a guide that multidisciplinary school safety teams can use to determine how well their school is prepared to respond to the immediate and long-term psychological effects of a crisis or disaster on students, their families, and staff. It offers many practical suggestions for developing procedures and plans for mitigation, prevention, preparation, response, and recovery.

Avoid simulated violence in active shooter drills, including highly sensorial elements like fake firearms, gunfire sounds, blood, assailants, and/or injuries.

Drills should be age-appropriate, and school leaders should approach safety instruction in similar ways that they teach academic content to students, focusing on building conceptual understanding and developing skills, so that students and staff alike understand how they should respond during an emergency scenario. Before conducting a drill, schools should prioritize training for students and staff that emphasizes the “what” and “why” behind safety procedures in an age-appropriate manner and facilitates exercises (e.g., tabletop activities, scenario-based discussions, and walkthroughs) that enable practicing emergency preparedness procedures in a safe and supportive environment.¹⁴

Schools have implemented different types of safety drills such as shelter in place and fire drills without causing unnecessary harm or distress for children for decades. For example, staff typically do not use

simulated smoke or fire in school buildings to perform fire drills. Similarly, schools should not design active shooter drills that mimic the experience of a real active shooter and gunfire scenarios (e.g., replica weapons, fake blood, fake assailants, sound of gun fire over school public announcement systems), and should limit the amount of time spent on participation in active shooter exercises that have the potential to raise significant fears among students and school staff members.¹⁵ There is no evidence that simulation drills with use of graphic, gory, or highly sensorial elements are essential to effectively preparing school communities for active shooter incidents; in fact, they have been shown to negatively impact students' mental health.¹⁶ While such drills may possibly be appropriate for law enforcement or other adults, there are several other approaches that schools can prioritize over these highly sensorial drills – see the Active Shooter Landscape Assessment for additional information. If community first responders (e.g., fire departments, law enforcement agencies, and other emergency services) are invited to participate in school drills, school leaders may want to discuss with them omitting sensorial elements (e.g., emergency sirens or lights, visible weapons) to reduce the appearance of a real crisis. In addition, if the school determines that participation in the drill would likely result in discrimination on the basis of disability because it would cause harm to an individual student by exacerbating a student's underlying mental health disability, such as anxiety or depression, under Section 504, the school must provide the student alternative means of participation.

The National Association of School Psychologists, National Association of School Resource Officers, and Safe and Sound Schools published [Best Practices for Schools in Active Shooter and Other Armed Assailant Drills](#), which offers a continuum of safe and appropriate options for schools to consider when preparing for an active shooter situation – including everything from orientation activities, workshops, and tabletop drills, to full-scale drills. Please also see the resource published by DHS titled *CISA Active Shooter Landscape Assessment* for additional information.

Provide advanced notice about active shooter drills to school staff, students, families and caregivers, and other members of the school community.

Schools should provide students, families, and staff – including maintenance staff, bus drivers, substitute teachers, part-time staff, and anyone who regularly comes to the school site – with an overview of the purpose of the drill and what to expect several days prior to the drill.¹⁷ Schools may still choose to implement “unplanned” drills, in which students and staff do not know the precise timing that a drill will take place. However, all school community members should be given prior notice of upcoming drills to avoid the false impression of an active shooter scenario during the drill. Additionally, schools should provide advanced notice of upcoming drills to other leaders in the area, such as other school leaders, local fire departments and law enforcement, and other community partners who may benefit from knowing that the school is conducting a drill.

While parents and caregivers do not participate in active shooter drills, they can play an important role in reinforcing school safety procedures. When providing parents and caregivers with advanced notice of an upcoming drill, schools should also offer information on the purpose of the drill and what their child will experience, how to talk with their child both before and after a drill, and procedural information in the event of a real active shooter situation. Schools should also provide contact information for the appropriate point of contact on the multidisciplinary school safety team for parents and caregivers to ask any questions or voice concerns before or after a drill. Developed by the REMS Technical Assistance Center, the fact sheet titled [Families and Caregivers as Partners in School Emergency Management](#)

provides strategies for forming partnerships and communicating with families, and for including them in efforts to develop, enhance, and maintain high-quality school EOPs. To ensure families and community members with limited English proficiency (LEP) have the opportunity to participate, schools must provide free and effective language assistance—such as translated materials, multilingual sessions, or an appropriate and competent interpreter—to comply with relevant civil rights requirements.¹⁸ Similarly, communications with parents and caregivers with disabilities that affect their ability to communicate must comply with relevant civil rights laws.¹⁹

Ensure that all students and staff in public elementary and secondary schools, including students who are ELs and students with disabilities, are provided an equal opportunity to receive any related information and participate in safety drills.

Where civil rights laws or other laws require that schools provide students modifications, services, and supports for safety drills to prepare for active shooter situations, as well as actual active shooter situations, students and staff members must not be excluded from knowing and practicing safety procedures and practicing with the accommodations, modifications, services, and supports needed should a crisis occur.

Schools should also take care to meet communication-related needs of students and staff (e.g., communicating in a manner and language that students are able to understand). Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Title VI) requires elementary and secondary schools to provide appropriate language assistance to students who are ELs that enable them to participate equally and meaningfully in all of a school's programs and activities.²⁰ This includes ensuring that students who are ELs are provided a meaningful opportunity to participate in active shooter drills. Schools should also consider the needs of students who are ELs in the planning and post-drill stage to ensure students and their families receive adequate information, including appropriate language assistance, and there are otherwise no barriers to participation. Under Section 504, schools must ensure that their plan provides an equal opportunity to persons with disabilities by meeting the communication needs of students, staff, and others at the school who have disabilities that affect communication.²¹ For example, if the plan is to provide instructions about evacuation using hand signals, how will blind students know what to do? If the plan is to provide verbal instructions, how will deaf students know what to do? Under the IDEA, when developing, reviewing, or revising an individualized education program (IEP) for a child with a disability, the IEP Team is required to consider a variety of special factors, including, but not limited to, the communication needs of the child.²²

In the planning process, schools must consider whether there are barriers to the participation of students with mobility disabilities in safety drills, and, if so, take appropriate action to ensure that these students are not excluded on the basis of disability. For example, if a closet in a classroom is identified as the space to hide, for students who are in that classroom during the drill, is there room for all students and personnel, including a student who uses a wheelchair? If not, the school is required to take appropriate action to ensure equal access for the student who uses a wheelchair.

Section 504 requires public elementary and secondary schools to provide a free appropriate public education (FAPE) that, among other things, is designed to meet the educational needs of students with disabilities as adequately as students without disabilities.²³ IDEA requires that FAPE be made available to every eligible child with a disability, through an appropriately developed IEP, that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet the child's unique needs.²⁴ In some cases,

modifications, supports, and services for safety drills are included in a student's IEP or Section 504 plan, and, thus, are required. While planning for a drill, multidisciplinary school safety teams should work with IEP Teams, Section 504 teams, and others to plan for students requiring accommodations, in consultation with families and key school staff. This collaboration will help to identify issues that may require additional advanced planning to address barriers to participation. For example, if the plan is for students in a classroom to hide in a closet in silence, and if one of the students has a disability that affects the student's ability to understand directions, what steps can the school take in advance to prepare the student with a disability to participate in the drill?

The EOP for students requiring accommodations should be sufficiently detailed to identify: 1) any student or staff with mobility, communication, intellectual, or sensory disabilities, or other disabilities that may affect a student's participation in safety drills; 2) the modifications, supports, and services, and other considerations needed by each student or staff member during the safety drills; 3) the staff member who is responsible for providing the modifications, supports, and services to, or addressing other considerations for, each student and staff member, as appropriate; and 4) a plan to provide the modifications, supports, and services, and to address other considerations for each student or staff member as appropriate during an actual emergency. For students, school leadership should assign a trained adult staff member and trained back-up, who are known to the child, to assist identified students, including by providing any required modifications, supports, and services, and addressing other considerations, during an emergency. All students, including those with disabilities, should be taught safety procedures in a manner and format that aligns to their needs. If aspects of a safety drill are not appropriate to a student, schools should arrange alternative opportunities to practice emergency procedures. [*Inclusive Emergency Planning: Strategies and Resources for K-12 Schools and School Districts*](#) is a guide that articulates ways in which schools can incorporate emergency planning accommodations to address individual access and functional needs.

Provide opportunities for staff, students, families, and school communities to provide input, ask questions, and voice concerns about active shooter drills.

Educators, students, and families share a concern for school safety. Although similar data are not available for parents and students, about 40 percent of teachers surveyed in 2024 reported feeling their school has done only a "fair" or "poor" job of providing them with the training and resources to deal with a potential active shooter.²⁵ Efforts to engage with all members of the school community, increasing their understanding of school safety procedures and providing opportunities for input and clarification, can promote more positive engagement with school safety efforts.

Consider soliciting feedback from school communities, and then share back with school communities what they shared and how that feedback will be incorporated into active shooter drills. In particular, ask members of the school community – including students, parents, and staff – what their concerns are about active shooter drills, and use that information to make drills more effective and successful.

There is added value in continuing to engage students about active shooter drills over time, revisiting exercises as students move up in school, and reminding them that suggested responses may vary by school/grade level. Similarly, educators and school staff are eyes and ears throughout the school building and community and may hear directly and indirectly the concerns of parents, teachers, or their peers. Having regular dialogue with educators and staff about emergency response protocols is essential to successfully implementing these protocols and to ensuring safety in exigent scenarios.

Plan drills that meet the needs of the entire school community – including throughout school buildings and in communities where there is possible exposure to gun violence outside the school building.

School leaders should consider a broad range of factors when planning for safety drills, including, but not limited to, recent incidents of violence at school and in the community, impact on valuable instructional time, and availability of staff to provide support. If there has been recent or frequent violence in the community or nationally publicized school crises, it is generally recommended not to conduct a school safety drill immediately, as it could potentially exacerbate anxiety and trauma among students and staff and may be counterproductive to the goal of creating a safe learning environment.²⁶ Instead, school leaders should reschedule safety drills and consider alternative exercises like presentations and tabletop exercises to address safety concerns while prioritizing mental health support.

Like any noninstructional activities that occur during the school day, drills can take away time from instructional time, which has potential to impact student learning.²⁷ Many states and districts require a certain number of drills each semester or year; however, there is not conclusive evidence suggesting the right frequency or length of these drills by grade or age. To conduct school safety drills while maintaining the continuity of instructional time, schools should consider announcing drills to the school community well in advance, incorporating drills into existing lesson plans, limiting the drills to be only as long as absolutely necessary, and varying the timing of drills throughout the day to ensure school communities know what to do in a range of situations, time periods, and places throughout school grounds. School leaders should also consider the instructional schedule, avoiding major test or exam days.

Educators and students should know the safety procedures no matter where they are (e.g., in hallways during passing time, in the cafeteria during lunch time, in the auditorium during an assembly, in the parking lot at dismissal, on the playground, or during a school field trip). For this reason, there is significant benefit to practicing active shooter response drills in school spaces other than the classroom, such as those listed above. No matter when or where a drill takes place, members of the multidisciplinary school safety team should be available to support students and other members of the school community as needed.

Ensure that all students, staff members, and members of the school community have access to active shooter protocols – including visitors and those who are new to the building.

Not everyone present during an actual emergency will have had the benefit of being part of a training drill beforehand. Consider providing additional information to those who may not have been present during active shooter drills, including through posters near school doors or sign-in tables, written safety protocols to staff, and make-up opportunities for drills. These supplemental resources should be made available to staff who might be itinerant in a building (e.g., traveling between schools and/or campuses) or those who are new or temporary to a school building (e.g., a substitute teacher or a new student). Additionally, school leaders should include all school staff in active shooter drills and training – including all key support staff working with students (e.g., paraprofessionals).

Considerations During the Drill

Always provide a clear, consistent message accessible to all students and staff that the event is a drill.

School leadership should clearly announce drills when they are happening. A potential pre-drill announcement could include messages such as: “This is a safety drill, not an actual emergency. This is a

drill. We are now practicing how to keep safe in the event of a real emergency. This is a drill.” Compliance with the civil rights laws requires that communications throughout the drill must meet the needs of students who are ELs and the disability-based communication needs of students with disabilities, such as persons who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Clear communication should continue throughout the exercise. Some schools have found it helpful to have a staff member calmly talk through procedures reminding students of the importance of the drill. If students are practicing a lockdown drill, communication should be consistent throughout the lockdown to assure students they are only practicing. Prolonged lockdown drills can cause students to question their safety or promote anxiety. Lockdown drills should be limited to only as long as necessary to practice the procedure and ensure students know what to do in case of a crisis.

If community first responders will participate in school drills, it is especially important to provide continued assurance to staff and students that the event is a drill to protect students and staff from unintentional fear, anxiety, and stress. School leaders should communicate with community crisis response and first responders to share planned drill procedures and updates on school drills, noting any special circumstances or concerns so that these community responders will have this knowledge in the event of a real emergency.

Additionally, students and staff should be clearly told when the drill is over. They should also be taught that in the event of an actual crisis, school communications may be delayed but will be continued as soon as it is safe.

Direct members of the multidisciplinary school safety team to monitor and provide support during the drill.

All school staff, including members of the multidisciplinary school safety team, should assure students that they are participating in a safety drill, remind them of the drill procedures, and facilitate calm adherence to procedures. School staff should be knowledgeable about students in their assigned area who may require additional supports, such as those who have had a recent trauma and those who are ELs or have disabilities. Visibility of, and access to, members of the multidisciplinary school safety team is important to ensure students are following the drill procedures as designed and to monitor students and staff for signs of stress or needed supports.

Multidisciplinary school safety teams should ensure that students and staff have access to trained adults who can provide support during the drill, including coping strategies for those experiencing distress. This includes students and staff who require specific accommodations (e.g., due to disabilities or limited English proficiency) or should be provided additional modifications, services, and supports, in order to participate in a safety drill.

A key component of drills is the learning that comes from them. Therefore, having staff dedicated to understanding where plans were followed and where they fell short is key to future emergency planning. For example, some classroom teachers may determine, based on student needs and necessary accommodations, that additional staff support is needed for their classroom during drills. These classrooms should be noted in the school’s drill plans and EOPs. Formal after-action reviews are an important component of ensuring that schools remain ready and nimble in the event of an emergency.

Post Drill Considerations

Provide opportunities for all students and staff to debrief the drill experience and seek additional supports if needed.

School staff should facilitate brief conversations to give students an opportunity to reflect on the drill and help them transition back to regular activities. When talking to students after a safety drill, it is important to acknowledge their feelings, validate any concerns they may have, reiterate the purpose of the drill as a safety measure, and provide an open space for questions while emphasizing the importance of following procedures during a real emergency.²⁸ This is also an opportunity to share with students how they can receive additional support if needed to address concerns and fears regarding school shootings. Schools should ensure that mental health providers are on hand after safety drills to provide counseling support if needed or provide referrals to community-based mental health providers.

Content of the discussion should include as is appropriate with age: 1) reminding students of the importance of practicing what to do in case of a real emergency; 2) asking students their opinions on how the drill went, what was done well, and what needs to be improved; 3) addressing concerns or questions; and 4) asking if any students feel the need for additional time or supports prior to returning to planned activities to process the drill and 5) making clear to all students how they can access additional support. During this discussion, school staff should monitor for signs of distress and dysregulation to determine if any students need additional supports. If there is reason to believe that participation in a drill caused harm to a student on the basis of disability, for example, triggering a mental health crisis for a student with a mental health disability, the school must take appropriate steps to address the harm and to minimize any harm in connection with the student's participation in any future drill.

Developed by The National Child Traumatic Stress Network, [Creating School Active Shooter/Intruder Drills](#) provides information on how to debrief with students, families, and staff after a safety drill. Schools should develop a process for consistently and thoroughly documenting student feedback and noting any student concerns or needs to share with school leaders and the safety team (e.g., an online form or template). Multidisciplinary school safety teams should conduct these feedback sessions in a reasonable time after the drill and update EOPs in response to feedback as appropriate.

Perform an after-action review, with opportunities for staff and student input, and refine school EOPs if needed based on lessons identified.

Immediately after the drill, in addition to student-level debriefing, school leadership and multidisciplinary school safety teams should jointly discuss how the school performed during the active shooter drill. Schools may use an after-action review, which refers to an analysis conducted after the school safety exercise where participants discuss what went well, what could be improved, and how to refine emergency response procedures based on their experiences during the drill, with the primary focus on identifying and addressing safety concerns.²⁹ School leaders should also schedule a meeting with district and community crisis response leaders to discuss key takeaways, needs, or concerns and to strengthen future emergency planning.

Multidisciplinary school safety teams should have a process for addressing any concerns, determining needed changes, incorporating needed changes into drills, and communicating changes to staff, students, and families when appropriate. Schools should review, update, and refine EOPs as appropriate based on the after-action reviews, and staff and students should have an opportunity to learn about procedure changes prior to subsequent safety drills. This fact sheet developed by the REMS Technical Assistance Center, [After-Action Reports: Capturing Lessons Learned and Identifying Areas of Improvement](#), outlines best practices for conducting after-action reviews.

Communicate with families and caregivers again after the drill and solicit their feedback and observations (e.g., from parents speaking with their children).

School leadership should communicate with families as soon as possible following a school-wide drill. The communication must comply with relevant civil rights requirements pertaining to communication with persons who have LEP and persons with disability-based communication needs, and should include:

- Recognition of the drill and why the drill is important. For example: “Today we had a schoolwide safety drill to ensure staff and students know what to do in case a real emergency occurs.”
- Recognition of how the drill went. For example: “Our staff and students calmly demonstrated their knowledge of the procedures.” If noticeable problems or concerns were noted, they should be shared, “Several classes were in the cafeteria when the drill occurred. We will continue to work on making sure students know the procedures if they are not in their classrooms.”
- Resources for additional support to both students and parents. For example: “Your student had a debrief in their classroom and was told how to access additional supports if needed. You may also access the same resources at X.” Schools should also provide information on how to share concerns. For example: “If you have any concerns or questions about the drill or our safety procedures, please contact X.”

Legal Disclaimer

For the reader’s convenience, this document contains examples and information from outside organizations. Inclusion does not constitute an endorsement by the U.S. Department of Education of any outside organization, or the products or services offered, or views expressed. Other than statutory and regulatory requirements included in the document, the contents of this guidance do not have the force and effect of law and are not meant to bind the public in any way. This document is intended to provide clarity to the public regarding best policies, practices, and existing requirements under the law or agency policies.

¹ Federal Bureau of Investigation. *FBI Active Shooter Safety Resources*. <https://www.fbi.gov/how-we-can-help-you/active-shooter-safety-resources>

² Washington Post. (n.d.). School shootings database. The Washington Post. Retrieved December 11, 2024, from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/interactive/school-shootings-database/>

³ Cox, J.W., Rich, S., Trevor, L., Muyskens, J., and Ulmanu M. (2024, September 6). *More than 383,000 students have experienced gun violence at school since Columbine*. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/interactive/school-shootings-database/>

⁴ Everytown for Gun Safety. Polarization and Extremism Research and Innovation Lab (PERIL). Southern Poverty Law Center. *U.S. Youth Attitudes on Guns: Quantitative Survey Findings Report and Preliminary Qualitative Focus Group Findings* (July 2023). <https://everytownsupportfund.org/report/youth-attitudes-on-guns/>

⁵ Gallup Organization. (2024). Gallup 2023-2024 Work and Education surveys. https://news.gallup.com/file/poll/649394/2024_08_28_Education.pdf

⁶ Pew Research Center Survey. (April 2024). *About 1 in 4 U.S. teachers say their school went into a gun-related lockdown in the last school year.* <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2024/04/11/about-1-in-4-us-teachers-say-their-school-went-into-a-gun-related-lockdown-in-the-last-school-year/#:~:text=Another%2031%25%20of%20teachers%20say,topic%20in%202024%20election%20campaigns>

⁷ U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, School Pulse Panel 2021–22, 2022–23, 2023–24, and 2024–25. (SSOCS). (January 2023). https://nces.ed.gov/whatsnew/press_releases/1_12_2023.asp

⁸ ElSherief, M., Saha, K., Gupta, P., Mishra, S., Seybolt, J., Xie, J., O’Toole, M., Burd-Sharps, S. and De Choudhury, M. (2021). *Impacts of school shooter drills on the psychological well-being of American K-12 school communities: a social media study.* *Nature Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 8(1). <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41599-021-00993-6>

⁹ Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin; see 34 C.F.R. Part 100. Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex; see 34 C.F.R. Part 106. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability; see 34 C.F.R. Part 104. In addition to the civil rights laws prohibiting discrimination in federally assisted programs and activities, the U.S. Department of Education shares enforcement, with the U.S. Department of Justice, for certain educational entities, of Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act, which prohibits disability discrimination by State and local public entities regardless of receipt of federal financial assistance; see 28 C.F.R. Part 35. This document does not provide a comprehensive explanation of civil rights requirements in the context of active shooter safety drills or otherwise. For more information see the website of the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) of the U.S. Department of Education: [Civil Rights Laws | U.S. Department of Education](#). Schools and other interested parties may request technical assistance from OCR.

¹⁰ U.S. Department of Education, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, Office of Safe and Healthy Students. (2013). *Guide for Developing High-Quality School Emergency Operations Plans.* https://rems.ed.gov/docs/rems_k-12_guide_508.pdf

¹¹ Valido, A., Ingram, K., Espelage, D.L. et al. (2021). *Intra-familial Violence and Peer Aggression Among Early Adolescents: Moderating Role of School Sense of Belonging.* *J Fam Viol* 36, 87–98. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10896-020-00142-8>

¹² Ehiri, J. E., Hitchcock, L. I., Ejere, H. O. D., & Mytton, J. A. (2017). *Primary prevention interventions for reducing school violence.* *The Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews*, 2017(3), CD006347. <https://doi.org/10.1002/14651858.CD006347.pub2>

¹³ ElSherief, M., Saha, K., Gupta, P., Mishra, S., Seybolt, J., Xie, J., O’Toole, M., Burd-Sharps, S. and De Choudhury, M. (2021). *Impacts of school shooter drills on the psychological well-being of American K-12 school communities: a social media study.* *Nature Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 8(1). <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41599-021-00993-6>

¹⁴ National Association of School Psychologists (NASP). National Association of School Resource Officers (NASRO). *Safe and Sound Schools.* (2021). *Best practices for schools in active shooter and other armed assailant drills.* <https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/school-safety-and-crisis/systems-level-prevention/best-practice-considerations-for-armed-assailant-drills-in-schools>

¹⁵ ElSherief, M., Saha, K., Gupta, P., Mishra, S., Seybolt, J., Xie, J., O’Toole, M., Burd-Sharps, S. and De Choudhury, M. (2021). *Impacts of school shooter drills on the psychological well-being of American K-12 school communities: a social media study.* *Nature Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 8(1). <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41599-021-00993-6>

¹⁶ ElSherief, M., Saha, K., Gupta, P., Mishra, S., Seybolt, J., Xie, J., O’Toole, M., Burd-Sharps, S. and De Choudhury, M. (2021). *Impacts of school shooter drills on the psychological well-being of American K-12 school communities: a*

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¹⁷ National Association of School Psychologists (NASP). National Association of School Resource officers (NASRO). Safe and Sound Schools. (2021). *Best practices for schools in active shooter and other armed assailant drills*.

<https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/school-safety-and-crisis/systems-level-prevention/best-practice-considerations-for-armed-assailant-drills-in-schools>

¹⁸ Title VI requires that elementary and secondary schools ensure meaningful communication with parents and guardians who have limited English proficiency (LEP) in a language they can understand. Elementary and secondary schools may take steps to provide effective language assistance to parents and guardians who have LEP by providing accurate written translations or oral interpretation. See *Lau v. Nichols*, 414 U.S. 563 (1974); *Castañeda v. Pickard*, 648 F.2d 989 (5th Cir. 1981); 42 U.S.C. § 2000d to d-7 (prohibiting race, color, and national origin discrimination in any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance); U.S. Dep't of Educ., U.S. Dep't of Just., Ensuring English Learner Students Can Participate Meaningfully and Equally in Educational Programs, <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/dcl-factsheet-el-students-201501.pdf>

¹⁹ 34 C.F.R. § 104.4. For more information see [Frequently Asked Questions on Effective Communication for Students with Hearing, Vision, or Speech Disabilities in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools](#), U.S. Dep't of Educ., U.S. Dep't of Just. (Nov. 2014).

²⁰ See *Lau v. Nichols*, 414 U.S. 563 (1974); *Castañeda v. Pickard*, 648 F.2d 989 (5th Cir. 1981); 42 U.S.C. § 2000d to d-7 (prohibiting race, color, and national origin discrimination in any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance); U.S. Dep't of Educ., U.S. Dep't of Just., [Dear Colleague Letter on English Learner Students and Limited English Proficient Parents](#) (Jan. 2015).

²¹ 34 C.F.R. §§ 104.4, 104.33(a)-(c), 104.35(d). For more information see [Frequently Asked Questions on Effective Communication for Students with Hearing, Vision, or Speech Disabilities in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools](#), U.S. Dep't of Educ., U.S. Dep't of Just. (Nov. 2014).

²² 34 C.F.R. § 300.324(a)(2)(iv).

²³ 34 C.F.R. § 104.33(a)-(b).

²⁴ 34 C.F.R. §§ 300.17, 300.101, 300.201, 300.320-300.324. See also 34 C.F.R. § 300.107.

²⁵ Pew Research Center Survey. (April 2024). *About 1 in 4 U.S. teachers say their school went into a gun-related lockdown in the last school year*. <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2024/04/11/about-1-in-4-us-teachers-say-their-school-went-into-a-gun-related-lockdown-in-the-last-school-year/#:~:text=Another%2031%25%20of%20teachers%20say,topic%20in%202024%20election%20campaigns>

²⁶ ElSherief, M., Saha, K., Gupta, P., Mishra, S., Seybolt, J., Xie, J., O'Toole, M., Burd-Sharps, S. and De Choudhury, M. (2021). *Impacts of school shooter drills on the psychological well-being of American K-12 school communities: a social media study*. Nature Humanities and Social Sciences Communications, 8(1).

<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41599-021-00993-6>

²⁷ Marcotte, D.E., Hemelt, S.W. (2008). *Unscheduled School Closings and Student Performance*. Education Finance and Policy, 3(3): 316–338. <https://doi.org/10.1162/edfp.2008.3.3.316>

²⁸The National Child Traumatic Stress Network. *Helping Youth after Community Trauma: Tips for Educators*.

https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/tip-sheet/helping_youth_after_community_trauma_for_educators_final_explosions.pdf

²⁹ Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools Technical Assistance Center. *After-Action Reports: Capturing Lessons Learned and Identifying Areas of Improvement*.

https://rems.ed.gov/docs/AfterActionReportsFactSheet_508C.pdf