



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA
Department of Education

August 19, 2016

TO: Division Superintendents

FROM: Steven R. Staples, Superintendent of Public Instruction

SUBJECT: Frequency of Fire Drills and Lock-Down Drills During the 2016-17 School Year

In light of questions from numerous school divisions regarding the requirements for the number of fire drills and simulated lock-down drills that must be held during the 2016-17 school year, VDOE provides the following information for clarification purposes.

Fire Drills

House Bill 1279, which became effective on July 1, 2016, amended *Code of Virginia* § 22.1-137 to require that every public school conduct a fire drill at least twice during the first 20 days of school and conduct at least two additional fire drills during the remainder of the school year.

The Virginia *Statewide Fire Prevention Code (SFPC)* (Sections 404.2.3 and 405.1) has a more stringent requirement of an initial fire drill within the first 10 days of the school session and one fire drill per month. You may be aware that the State Fire Marshall at the Department of Housing and Community Development recently advised that a school that holds an initial fire drill within the first 10 days of the school session, another fire drill within the first 20 days of the school session, and one fire drill per month, will be in compliance with both the *Code of Virginia* and the *SFPC*.

However, Section 8VAC20-131-260 of the Board of Education's *Regulations Establishing Standards for Accrediting Public Schools in Virginia (Standards of Accreditation)* requires that every public school conduct fire drills at least once a week during the first month of school and at least once each month for the remainder of the school year. **Therefore, in order to comply with the *Standards of Accreditation*, every public school will still need to conduct at least one fire drill per week during the first month of school and at least one fire drill each month for the remainder of the 2016-17 school year.**

Lock-Down Drills

House Bill 1279 also amended *Code of Virginia* § 22.1-137.2 to require that every public school hold a lock-down drill at least twice during the first 20 days of school and hold at least two additional lock-down drills during the remainder of the school year. Section 22.1-137.2 of the *Code* further requires that lock-down plans and drills be in compliance with the *SFPC*.

However, Section 8VAC20-131-260 of the Standards of Accreditation requires that every public school conduct at least two simulated lock-down drills and crisis emergency evacuation activities each school year, one in September and one in January. **Therefore, in order to comply with the *Code of Virginia* and the *Standards of Accreditation*, every public school will need to conduct two lock-down drills during the first 20 days of school – one of which must occur in September – and two additional lock-down drills during the remainder of the school year - one of which must occur in January.**

The Board of Education is currently conducting a comprehensive review of the *Standards of Accreditation* and may consider amending Section 8VAC20-131-260 during the review process to comport with the *Code* and *SFPC*. If you have any questions or require additional information, please contact Vijay Ramnarain, director of the VDOE Office of Support Services, at vijay.ramnarain@doe.virginia.gov or (804) 225-2037.

SRS/AKR/aam