



Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection

January 1, 2022

TO: Connecticut General Assembly
Education Committee
Public Safety and Security Committee

FROM: James C. Rovella, Commissioner,
Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection

Brenda M. Bergeron, Deputy Commissioner,
Division of Emergency Management and Homeland Security

RE: Annual Submission of School Security and Safety Plan Standards

Introduction and Background: In the wake of the Sandy Hook School homicides, the General Assembly enacted, and Governor Malloy signed into law, Public Act No.13-3, which included, among other provisions, a requirement that the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection (DESPP), in consultation with the Department of Education, develop school security and safety plan standards. This requirement was codified in Connecticut General Statutes Section 10-222n. In order to implement this legislation, the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection (DESPP), Division of Emergency Management and Homeland Security (DEMHS), has annually convened a multi-discipline, multi-jurisdictional working group to create, update and review the standards. The first set of plan standards was submitted in January of 2014, along with a plan template to aid schools in the development of a comprehensive school security and safety plan as required by Public Act 13-3 Section 87, now codified as Connecticut General Statutes Section 10-222m. In 2014, a school district plan template was also created, which allows a district to create one overall plan with an individual annex for each school in the district. The two plan templates and revised standards were submitted in January of 2015, under Connecticut General Statutes Section 10-222n(b), which requires that these standards be submitted annually to the Education and Public Safety and Security Committees of the Connecticut General Assembly, along with any recommendations for legislation regarding such standards.

In 2015, DESPP/DEMHS not only re-convened the working group in order to review the standards and make such changes as the group recommended, but also convened a subcommittee to review and make enhancements to two topics within the plan templates, which were identified by the working group at the end of 2014 as needing additional attention: recovery/reunification and mental health. Changes have been made to the plan templates to provide more resources for communities to address planning in these two areas. Some implementation issues were also addressed and clarified.

For the 2021-2022 school year, a new annex was included in the template. The new annex, titled “Emergency Plans for Students with Disabilities” builds on PA 19-183, requiring emergency communications plans for students that are deaf, hard of hearing, blind and/or visually impaired.

School Security Planning and Preparedness Program:

DEMHS maintains the state’s school security planning and preparedness program. As part of that program, DEMHS also convenes the school security working group which has been described above. The working group includes DEMHS, CT State Police, CT Commission on Fire Prevention and Control, the State Fire Marshal, representatives from state agencies such as the Department of Education, the Department of Public Health, and the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, as well as local representatives such as a school superintendent, fire chief, police chief, fire marshal, public health, and the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities. Each year, the group meets to review the standards and templates and address any emerging issues. The group has continued to meet or communicate as needed during the COVID-19 Pandemic in the years 2020 and 2021.

In accordance with PA 19-184, each student with hearing and/or vision needs must have an individualized emergency communications plan. DEMHS completed the template annex to the School Security Plan template to aid in this planning. The state school safety lead, who is also the Region 3 coordinator, continues to work with municipalities on policies, procedures, and equipment to assist with implementation of the law.

In addition, DEMHS regions, made up of the towns in the state, have established school safety working groups consisting of superintendents, principals, school resource officers, and school safety directors to address, share, and promote school safety initiatives, ideas, best practices, and regulatory compliance.

Since 2005, DEMHS has also offered Emergency Planning for Schools Workshops statewide to support schools in creating and refining their emergency plans. The workshops include Incident Command System (ICS) training, in order to educate school officials regarding the National Incident Management System (NIMS), which is the standard emergency management system used

in Connecticut and across the country. This training makes it easier for school officials to participate effectively in the management of an emergency that affects their communities. In 2014, the DEMHS school emergency planning workshops integrated the school emergency planning standards outlined in Public Act 13-3. The formal name of this FEMA-based class is G-364, Multi-Hazard Emergency Planning for Schools Course. In 2020, due to the exigent circumstances surrounding the COVID pandemic planning, response and recovery, many activities were scaled back as schools and town and state officials worked to address COVID-related issues. In 2021, many activities resumed, in a virtual environment.

In 2015, DEMHS, in partnership with the State Department of Education, received a grant (GSEM) from the federal Department of Education to continue school emergency planning and preparedness activities, with an emphasis on providing training and technical assistance to school districts across the state, with an additional emphasis on rural school districts. Even once the GSEM grant was exhausted, DEMHS has continued to provide emergency planning assistance for schools.

Department of Justice Grant to Support School Training by Sandy Hook Promise:

In the Fall of 2018, DEMHS applied for and received a Department of Justice grant for \$500,000 to fund training by Sandy Hook Promise (SHP) in schools across the state. This training is ongoing, and includes training to school students and professionals on topics ranging from recognizing the signs of at-risk behavior and suicide prevention to social inclusiveness and community connectedness. Although the training was paused temporarily in 2020 due to the pandemic, training has re-started in a virtual environment.

From January 1, 2020 – October 21, 2021, SHP delivered 231 *Start With Hello* trainings to 137 schools across CT, reaching approximately 67,599 students. These trainings were transitioned to virtual-live beginning in September 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, SHP delivered *Signs of Suicide* facilitator trainings in 2020 and 2021, reaching 128 schools and 436 adults who will implement this life-saving training to additional staff, students, and parents over the course of the STOP School Violence grant.

122 Schools have registered SAVE Clubs with more than 2,852 students participating. The SAVE clubs continue the “Stop Violence” messaging with the students themselves spreading the message.

State Competitive Grant Program:

DEMHS continues to administer the school security infrastructure competitive grant program, in consultation with the Department of Education, reimbursing municipalities for enhanced school security at over 1000 schools across the state, utilizing over \$63 million in funding, with an additional \$10 million passing the Bond Commission in December of 2020. The first round provided funding to public schools; the second round and each round thereafter expanded

eligibility to include private schools. This year, Round 5 is being implemented, which includes additional funding to provide a multi-media school safety program, so that schools can communicate directly with law enforcement in an emergency.

Student Tools for Emergency Planning (STEP)

DEMHS is continuing to work in collaboration with FEMA on the Student Tools for Emergency Planning (STEP) program. Since the program began in 2009, the program has been delivered to approximately 25,000 schools students across the state.

The STEP program is a curriculum for fourth- and fifth-grade students to teach them how to prepare for emergencies and disasters, and to train them to become leaders in family preparedness. The STEP program can help children and families be better prepared and more resilient should a disaster occur in their area.

In 2021, the STEP program reached 649 children in schools in 3 DEMHS Regions:

Region	Town	Number of Kits
Region 3	Avon	266
Region 4	Chaplin	30
Region 2	Shelton	380

Proposed Legislative Action: The School Security Working Group also discussed potential legislative action, and suggested that, in order to extend school security funding to more private schools, the General Assembly consider placing a cap on the amount that any one private school can be reimbursed.

Additional Action Steps: The DESPP/DEMHS school security program is assisting school districts and municipalities in understanding and implementing the standards and plan templates. In July 2021, DEMHS updated the All Hazards School Security and Safety Plan Standards which can be found here: https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/DEMHS/_docs/Plans-and-Publications/EHSP0091--School-Security-and-Safety-Plan-Standards-Final-July-2021.pdf

Following up on the discussion initiated by the implementation of Public Act 19-184, the School Security Working Group finalized a functional needs annex to the plan templates.

Please do not hesitate to contact Deputy Commissioner Brenda Bergeron with any questions you may have.