

Fire Drills and School Bus Evacuations

24 P.S. §§ 15-1517, 15-1518

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PURPOSE

The purpose of this Basic Education Circular (BEC) is to outline the requirements of public school entities to conduct fire drills and emergency school bus evacuation drills and to set forth a process for the reporting of those drills to the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE). BECs provide guidance and do not establish binding norms or requirements. Please consult the applicable statutes, regulations, or case law for additional information concerning the matters discussed in this BEC.

Fire Drills and School Security Drills

The Pennsylvania Public School Code requires that fire drills be conducted in every school building of a school entity at least once a month while school is in session. School entities include school districts, intermediate units, career and technical education centers, charter schools, and regional charter schools. Fire drills must include the removal of teachers and students from the building to a place of safety on the ground outside. Schools not required by law to maintain fire escapes, fire extinguishers, and fire exits may not be required to conduct fire drills but are strongly encouraged to do so. PDE will not require school entities to report fire drills for those months when school is in session for less than seven days.

Beginning with the 2018-2019 school year, school entities may conduct one school security drill per school year in each school building in lieu of a required fire drill. The school security drill must be conducted within 90 days of the commencement of the school year. The school security drill should be conducted while school is in session and students are present and the chief school administrator or a designee must oversee the instruction and training of students and employees in the procedures to be followed during the school security drill. The chief school administrator must notify and request assistance from the local law enforcement agency and emergency management agency before conducting the school security drill. Additionally, the chief school administrator must provide advance notice to parents/guardians that the school security drill will be held.

PDE requires each school entity to submit an annual certification related to the completion of these drills. Beginning with the 2018-2019 school year, by April 10 of each school year, each school entity that conducts a school security drill must submit a report in the Pennsylvania Information Management System (PIMS) related to the completion of the school security drill. This report will be contemporaneous with the school entity's annual certification related to the completion of emergency

school bus evacuation drills discussed below. By July 31 following the end of a school year, each school entity must submit a report in PIMS that includes the date on which each monthly fire drill—or, beginning with the 2018-2019 school year, one school security drill— was held.

Within 30 days of submission of each report into PIMS, a printed, signed original of the accuracy certification statement must be sent to PDE’s Office for Safe Schools.

In the fall of each year, PDE will report on its publicly accessible website a listing of the school entities that have not complied with the reporting requirements for the previous school year.

Bus Evacuations

The Pennsylvania School Code requires that all school entities, including school districts, charter schools, regional charter schools, career and technology centers, and intermediate units, that use or contract school buses for transportation of students shall conduct two emergency school bus evacuation drills during each school year. The first drill must be conducted during the first week of the school term and the second during the month of March. Each bus evacuation drill must include instruction on the location and use of emergency exit doors and fire extinguishers and the proper evacuation of the bus. *See* 24 P.S. §§ 15-1517, 17-1732-A.

The Pennsylvania Vehicle Code defines “school bus” as a vehicle designed to carry 11 or more passengers, including the driver, and which is used for the transportation of pre-primary, primary or secondary school students to or from public, private, or parochial schools or events related to such schools or school-related activities. *See* 75 Pa.C.S. § 102.

Each school is required to submit an annual certification related to the completion of each emergency school bus evacuation drill. Reporting of school bus evacuation drills is done through PIMS and required information must be submitted by April 10 of every year.

In the fall of each year, PDE will report on its publicly accessible website a listing of those school entities that have not complied with the reporting requirements for the previous school year.

REFERENCES

Purdon's Statutes

- 24 P.S. § 15-1517
- 24 P.S. § 15-1518
- 24 P.S. § 17-1732-A
- 24 P.S. § 17-1749-A
- 75 Pa. C.S. § 102

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