

SCHOOL SAFETY-RELATED TERMS AND DRILLS

In a crisis, school can be the safest place for students. The buildings are solid, there's food and medical care, and there's plenty of adult supervision.

Severe weather, local police activity, or a perceived threat can make it necessary to keep all students, teachers, and staff members in school, even if our first instinct might be to send everyone home. In fact, dismissing students during, say, a tornado or police chase in the village could actually endanger them.

New Paltz Schools' District-Wide School Safety Plan outlines an array of "protective actions" to safeguard students, all designed to ensure that they are secure and accounted for while first responders, police, school officials, and other emergency personnel respond to a situation. Sometimes it may feel like a lockdown or evacuation is an overreaction, especially if the perceived threat turns out to be nonexistent. But it's always easier to downgrade or cancel a protective action than it is to try to elevate a response in the middle of an event.

Drills are a crucial part of school safety and are scheduled throughout the school year. Each is designed for a specific circumstance. Parents may worry that drills can be upsetting to their child, but teachers and staff are well equipped to handle these situations at each grade level. Also, drills make emergency response routine for children, bolstering their sense of confidence and safety.

Here are some of the protection actions discussed, and in some instances, practiced with your children.

LOCKDOWN

All students, staff, and visitors are kept behind locked doors while an incident is investigated or addressed. Hallways, bathrooms, and common areas are cleared and occupants are secured in the nearest lockable room. Classroom activities cease and students are trained to seek cover and remain silent until the drill is over. Exterior doors are locked, and students involved in activities outside of the building—such as recess or gym—are instructed to move to a secure area away from the building.

LOCKOUT

A lockout calls for all students involved in outside activities to be brought inside and all exterior doors and ground floor windows to be closed and locked. Classes will continue as usual within the building, with NO outside activities. Visitors in the building are asked to remain until the lockout is lifted. The main entrance is locked, and access is limited to emergency responders and, if circumstances permit, authorized persons. A lockout might be implemented when a situation such as a police investigation is occurring outside of the school building or in the vicinity of the school.

SHELTER IN PLACE

Students, staff, and visitors remain in the school buildings, possibly for an extended period of time, and may be provided with shelter, meals, and supervision. Sheltering occurs when it's determined that it is safer for students to remain at school rather than to return home or be evacuated. A severe or extended weather event might require sheltering. In the case of severe weather such as a tornado or a hurricane, students are instructed to move away from doors and windows and may be moved to the most structurally fortified areas of the school buildings.

BUILDING EVACUATION

Students and staff are moved to a predetermined location away from the building and may remain on school property or be evacuated to another predetermined off-site location. A fire alarm, bomb threat, gas leak, or hazardous material spill are events that might trigger a building evacuation. School buildings are evacuated in the shortest possible time, in the most orderly way possible. Students are trained to leave belongings behind, exit quickly and quietly, and listen for instructions. Teachers and staff are trained to lead students to an evacuation location and account for all students.

New Paltz Schools also execute the following drill:

EARLY EVACUATION DRILL: All schools countywide are dismissed, and students sent home approximately 15 minutes earlier than the regular dismissal time.

