

Outside Classroom Options and Suggestions For School Security and Safety

During the opening of the 2020/2021 school year, Vermont schools are engaged in carrying out safeguards suggested in the latest guidance to open safely **(See CDC, Vermont Agency of Education, Vermont Department Health, and other guidance approved through State of Vermont Covid 19 Planning Teams)**.

One of the items being discussed is the creation of **Outdoor Classrooms** that will assist in providing options for social distancing when interior spaces may become too crowded. We have to recognize that we have always had outside classroom areas for; recess, physical education classes, Eco, art classes, building trades, after school co-curricular activities, and other similar activities. Creating an outdoor space that will be used during predictable and regularly scheduled times of the day adds its own security and safety challenges.

It is recognized that we must keep a realistic approach during our security safety planning while at the same time creating a productive and safe learning/teaching environment for our students and staff.

The following items are suggestions, options, and areas of concern to consider when creating an outdoor classroom:

1. Increase awareness, “Awareness, Referral, Follow-up” (A.R.F.) / “See Something Say Something”. Conduct regular mini awareness trainings for staff and students who use these areas. Play the “what if game” in an age appropriate manner with all grade levels.

Note: Stranger Danger discussion for younger grade levels and discussions concerning persons or items that look out of place for older students are example topic items for these trainings. This can include person(s) known to be under court ordered restraining orders to protect specific students or staff, aggressive or suspicious acting animals on school grounds, to other brainstormed concerns. An age appropriate checklist for agreed upon topics can be provided by the School Crisis Planning Team.

2. Create outdoor spaces close to regular school buildings that have a pass card access or a close-by staff secured entrance back into the main buildings in case potential threats were to occur. Identify potential run-to safe areas if a threat issue were to occur **(A.L.I.C.E. and Run, Hide, Fight Trainings)**.
3. Advance review of outside classroom areas by staff members is advised prior to student arrival to add to the potential security and safety for those using these areas.

4. Outside Classrooms should be created with a clear view to areas where potential threats could come from.
5. Exterior speakers that are working properly should be installed in the area of outside classrooms. Cell phones with reliable service or radios are recommended for direct contact to office/emergency personnel. **(This is an emergency discussion topic for the Public Crisis Planning Team).**
6. Staff should have **go-bags** or **emergency response kits** that contain suggested items listed in the Vermont School Safety Guide, the School Crisis Plan, and the School Security Safety Audit report provided by VSBIT. This bag can have items for emergency medical issues that have been identified for specific students needs.
7. Planning should occur with the **School Special Education Team** for any areas of potential need for specific students who may need to attend class in the outdoor classrooms. Close proximity to a re-entry door with a handicap ramp for students using wheel chairs is an example of this type planning.
8. **Outside Classrooms conducted off campus** have similar concerns as field trips and may have liability concerns **(See VSBIT professionals for discussion and opinions concerning this area).**
9. Review all Security/Safety information in your School Security Safety Audit Report that was provided by Secure Your Building Consulting LLC and Vermont School Boards Insurance Trust (VSBIT).
10. Work with your administrative team to develop and adapt guidelines for faculty, staff, and maintenance personnel dealing with COVID 19. You are referred to the Vermont Department of Health, CDC, and the Vermont Agency of Education (A.O.E.).
11. See the Vermont School Safety Center web-site and Vermont School Crisis Planning Guide for further information.
12. For VSBIT Multi-Line Safety Grant clients; when creating outside classroom areas, it is suggested that for specific concerns or requests for grant monies that an on-site visit by VSBIT professionals be requested.

Be Safe and Be Well.

For further information concerning Security and Safety Issues, contact me through the information below or contact:

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