ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION No. 72

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

219th LEGISLATURE

PRE-FILED FOR INTRODUCTION IN THE 2020 SESSION

Sponsored by:
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District 38 (Bergen and Passaic)
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SYNOPSIS

Urges public and nonpublic schools to annually provide parents opportunity to observe school security drill.

CURRENT VERSION OF TEXT

Introduced Pending Technical Review by Legislative Counsel.

AN ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION urging public and nonpublic schools to annually provide parents an opportunity to observe a school security drill.

WHEREAS, Concern over the issue of school security has dramatically increased over the last 20 years as the number of school shooting incidents has tragically risen; and

WHEREAS, The events at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut on December 12, 2012 particularly shocked the conscience of the Nation and refocused the attention of law enforcement and school officials on additional actions that could be taken to upgrade the security of school buildings and prepare staff and students to protect themselves in the event of an active shooter situation; and

WHEREAS, This heightened concern led to the establishment of the New Jersey School Security Task Force pursuant to the Legislature's approval of P.L.2013, c.142. The task force was charged with identifying physical and cyber vulnerabilities and potential breaches of security in public schools, and to make recommendations to improve school safety and security; and

WHEREAS, While many of the task force recommendations were enacted, attention was particularly focused on the issue of school security drills and the training of school staff to ensure their ability and the ability of students to react swiftly and surely to a crisis situation; and

WHEREAS, State law at N.J.S.18A:41-1 requires each public and nonpublic school to conduct at least one school security drill each month within school hours, including any summer months during which the school is open for instructional purposes; and

WHEREAS, Pursuant to the report of the New Jersey School Security Task Force, in 2016 that section of law was amended to require that a law enforcement officer be present at a minimum of one school security drill in each school year in order to make recommendations on any improvements and changes to school security drill procedures that the officer may deem advisable; and

WHEREAS, State law at section 2 of P.L.2009, c.178 (C.18A:41-7) was also amended at that time to require that all school employees, rather than just teaching staff members, receive training on school safety and security that includes instruction on security drills. The annual training provided to school employees must be conducted collaboratively by the district or nonpublic school and emergency responders including law enforcement, fire, and emergency medical services personnel, in order to identify weaknesses in school safety and security policies and procedures and increase the effectiveness of emergency responders; and

WHEREAS, While the Centers for Disease Control found that in 2016, 90 percent of public schools had a plan in place to address the issue of active shooter situations, the anxiety of students and their parents and guardians has continued to escalate especially in light of the

recent school violence and accompanying loss of life in Parkland, Florida and Santa Fe, Texas; and

WHEREAS, As the emphasis on school security drills has increased, the question of the impact of unannounced drills on student anxiety has been raised and debated. While parents and guardians acknowledge the critical need for such drills, some have expressed concern that the unannounced drills are frightening, especially for younger students; and

WHEREAS, While school and law enforcement officials acknowledge this concern, they feel that students have proven resilient and that the value of these drills in preparing students and staff for crisis situations outweighs the concern and will serve to mitigate student panic in the case of an actual event; and

WHEREAS, It is possible that some degree of parental concern may be connected to the fact that parents are not familiar with the drill process. While parents are notified through email and other forms of communication after the drill has been conducted, this notification does not provide them with a complete understanding of drill procedures and what may be required of their child during a drill; and

WHEREAS, Annually offering parents and guardians an opportunity to observe a school security drill at such time as is determined appropriate by the public or nonpublic school could help to alleviate parental anxiety by educating parents on drill procedures and the actions taken by school staff to both protect and support students during these monthly drills; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED *by the General Assembly of the State of New Jersey:*

1. This House urges public and nonpublic schools to annually provide the parents and guardians of students enrolled in the school with the opportunity to observe a school security drill in order to allay their concerns in regard to any possible negative impact of the drills on students and to reinforce parental understanding of the importance and value of unannounced drills in preparing students and staff to effectively respond to crisis situations.

2. Copies of this resolution, as filed with the Secretary of State, shall be transmitted by the Clerk of the General Assembly to the Commissioner of Education who shall forward copies of the resolution to the board of education of each school district and the chief school administrator of each nonpublic school.

STATEMENT

This resolution urges public and nonpublic schools to annually provide the parents or guardians of students enrolled in the school

the opportunity to observe a school security drill. The purpose would be to allay the concerns of parents that unannounced school security drills may be frightening, especially for younger students, and have a negative impact on a student's sense of well-being. These parental concerns may be connected to the fact that parents are not familiar with the drill process. While parents are notified through email and other forms of communication after the drill has been conducted, this notification does not provide them with an understanding of drill procedures and what may be required of their child during a drill. While school and law enforcement officials acknowledge this concern, they feel that students have proven to be resilient and that the value of these drills in preparing students and staff for crisis situations outweighs these concerns and will serve to mitigate student panic in the case of an actual event. Annually offering parents and guardians an opportunity to observe a school security drill at such time as is determined appropriate by the public or nonpublic school could help to alleviate parental anxiety by educating parents on drill procedures and the actions taken by school staff to both protect and support students during these monthly drills.