I. Purpose

The purpose of this regulation is to establish guidelines for promoting fire safety awareness, practices, and policies to ensure a safe school environment for students, employees, and the public.

II. Scope

This regulation outlines procedures to be followed for fire drills, fire evacuations for persons with disabilities, fire lanes, special events and activities, decorations, lights, and special effects for all school events.

III. Fire Drills

A. To maintain crisis readiness, schools shall conduct drills as required by the “Code of Virginia,” the “Virginia Statewide Fire Prevention Code” (SFPC), the Virginia Board of Education, and Regulation 401.01-2, “Crisis Management Readiness.” (See Regulation 401.01-2, “Crisis Management Readiness,” for fire drill requirements and the “Drills Conducted Ledger.”)

1. Fire drills may only be postponed with the permission of the Prince William County Fire Marshal’s Office (FMO).

2. Fire drills shall not be held during inappropriate times such as when the schools are being used as polling places, during standardized testing, during inclement weather, etc.

B. If the building’s alarm system is monitored by a central station, notify the central station prior to calling 911 to inform them that a fire drill is being conducted.

C. A designated staff member shall call 911 prior to conducting the fire drill and shall provide dispatcher with the following information:

1. Name of school;
2. Address of school;
3. Name of caller; and
4. Time of drill.
D. After the fire drill, the principal, or designee, shall complete the appropriate entry on the “Drills Conducted Ledger.” (See Regulation 401.01-2, “Crisis Management Readiness.”) This ledger shall be maintained at the school and contain the following information:

1. Name of dispatcher receiving the call;
2. Date and time of drill;
3. Weather conditions at the time of evacuation;
4. Number of occupants evacuated;
5. Total time for evacuation; and
6. Other relevant comments.

E. Daily inspections for fire and safety hazards shall be the responsibility of all Prince William County Public Schools (PWCS) staff.

IV. Fire Evacuation for Persons with Disabilities

A. Special consideration shall be taken for the safety of persons with disabilities, and the staff members assisting such persons during emergency evacuations. Students and employees with temporary or permanent mobility issues may require assistance to evacuate during an emergency.

B. The FMO has agreed to allow schools equipped with elevators to use them as a safe means to evacuate students and employees with temporary or permanent mobility issues. This agreement was made with the following understandings:

1. All elevator emergency relief valves must be clearly identified.

2. Key school personnel shall be identified and trained annually by safety personnel from the Office of Risk Management and Security Services on the use and operation of the fire department’s override operation in the event of an actual emergency. In addition to annual training, key school personnel shall perform elevator evacuation drills in conjunction with school fire drills.

3. In the event of an actual emergency or during training drills, a designated staff member shall be present at each level of access to the elevator to ensure that no dangerous hazardous condition is present (e.g., fire or smoke) on that floor level. School administration shall be accountable for informing the first responder from the fire department of the location of any occupant requiring assistance to evacuate.
4. It is agreed that during a drill or non-emergency, key school personnel shall perform the fire department’s override operation—**not the relief valve’s operation**. The Prince William County Fire Department and certified elevator technicians are trained on the use of the relief valve.

5. In emergency situations, the Prince William County Fire Department shall be contacted for immediate evacuation of the elevator occupants. In the event of a malfunction with the elevator and someone is trapped in an elevator, immediately contact the Office of Facilities Services. The Office of Facilities Services shall assist with the evacuation of the occupants, determine the cause of the elevator’s malfunction, and ensure proper repair is completed.

V. Fire Inspections

To comply with the SFPC’s fire inspection standard, the Office of Risk Management and Security Services, in conjunction with the FMO, will conduct annual inspections of all PWCS facilities. Inspections are to ensure the safety of the Division’s occupants and assets by identifying any condition liable to cause a fire, contribute to the spread of a fire, interfere with the system designated to reduce the spread of a fire, endanger life, and/or any violation of the provision or intent of the SFPC.

The facility’s administrator shall receive the inspection report which will identify all violations found, the SFPC’s code section for the violation, and an abatement date for repairs to be made—**100 percent compliance is mandatory**. Adequate progression to violation abatements must occur, per the SFPC standard, the opinion of the Office of Risk Management and Security Services, and the FMO. The completed inspection report must be signed by the administrator of the facility (or designee), dated, and returned to the Office of Risk Management and Security Services within 45 days of receipt.

VI. Fire Lanes

In accordance with Section 503.4, “Obstruction of Fire Apparatus Access Roads,” of the SFPC, a fire lane is an access road designed for fire and emergency apparatuses and shall not be obstructed in any manner, including the parking of vehicles.
VII. Special Events and Activities

A. Permits

1. In accordance with Section 108 of the Operational Permits of the SFPC, and Section 32-210 of the Prince William County Zoning Ordinance, a “Temporary Activity Permit” is required for any special school activity or event that includes:
   a. A large crowd;
   b. The use of decorative materials;
   c. Any egress obstructions;
   d. Any emergency access impediments; and
   e. Any proposed alterations of area use.

2. Requests for a “Temporary Activity Permit” (see Attachment I) or an “Operational Permit—Special Assembly” (see Attachment II) shall be made in writing by the person responsible for the event. The “Prince William County Public Schools—Special Assembly/Temporary Activity Permit” reference page (see Attachment III) was prepared to assist PWCS staff in determining if a permit is required.

B. Amusement Buildings

In accordance with Section 907.2.12 of the SFPC, amusement buildings or special amusement buildings require smoke detection systems, fire alarms, sprinkler systems, illuminated means of egress and exit signs, and a built-in public-address system that shall automatically produce a pre-recorded message that instructs patrons to proceed to the nearest fire exit. A copy of the building’s floor plan, emergency evacuation plan, and fire safety plan must be provided by the person responsible for the event (SFPC 404.3) to the FMO. All decorative materials shall meet the requirements set forth in Section 807.1.2 of the SFPC. The building must have a current fire safety inspection by the FMO, including an up-to-date fire protection system test/inspection record.

VIII. Decorations, Lights, and Special Effects

A. Trees

1. Live or cut trees are not permitted.

2. Artificial trees are permitted provided they are flame or fire retardant and listed by a recognized testing laboratory. (e.g., Underwriters Laboratory (UL), Factory Mutual (FM), etc.)
3. Trees shall not be in an area that obstructs or restricts any exit, stairway, or corridor.

B. Decorative Lighting

1. Only battery-operated lights shall be used on artificial trees.

2. Only battery-operated decorative lighting shall be used in schools.

C. Wreaths, Greenery, and Other Decorations

1. No decorations shall be hung from any fire-rated ceiling including, but not limited to, fire protection devices (e.g., sprinkler heads, emergency lighting, and fire alarm equipment) and ceiling tiles.

2. Natural wreaths are acceptable on the exterior of the building only. Artificial wreaths shall be of an approved flame retardant or fire-resistant material.

3. Artificial greenery shall be of an approved flame or fire-retardant material, pursuant to Section 806.2 of the SFPC.

4. Wreaths, greenery, and other decorations shall not be placed in an exit passageway that interferes with a means of egress.

5. Cornstalks, hay bales, stacks of newspapers, or similar combustible materials are prohibited inside and/or outside the building, pursuant to Section 304.1.2 of the SFPC.

D. Classroom Door Decorations

Decoration of classroom doors are not permitted. In accordance with SFPC, Section 1008, “Doors, Gates, and Turnstiles,” classroom doors are classified as a means of egress and shall be distinguishable from the adjacent construction and finishes—doors shall be recognized as doors. Mirrors or similar reflecting materials shall not be used on means of egress doors. Means of egress doors shall not be concealed by curtains, drapes, decorations, or similar materials.

E. Wall and Room Decorations

In accordance with NFPA’s “101: Life Safety Code” (paragraph 14.7.4.3), artwork and teaching materials shall be permitted to be attached directly to the walls in accordance with the following:
1. The artwork and teaching materials shall not exceed 20 percent of the wall area in a building that is not protected throughout by an approved and automatic sprinkler system.

2. The artwork and teaching materials shall not exceed 50 percent of the wall area in a building that is protected throughout by an approved and supervised automatic sprinkler system.

F. Special Effects

1. Vapor or smoke producing effects, such as fog/smoke machines and dry ice, are only permitted for theater performances, as outlined in the PWCS “Theater Safety Procedural Manual,” otherwise they are not permitted due to the possibility of fire alarm activation and obscuring of exits.

2. In the event of a fire alarm or emergency, an emergency plan shall be in place to safely evacuate all occupants from the building.

3. Fireworks, pyrotechnics, and flame effects are prohibited inside and/or outside all PWCS buildings.

Any questions regarding compliance should be addressed to the Office of Risk Management and Security Services or the FMO.

The Associate Superintendent for Finance and Risk Management (or designee) is responsible for implementing and monitoring this regulation.

This regulation and related policy shall be reviewed at least every five years and revised as needed.