

# Drilling for Preparedness at Schools: Is it Enough?



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# INTRODUCTION



Schools are locations where disasters and emergencies have occurred:

- 1994 Northridge EQ causes damage to a number of schools in Los Angeles
- 1999 Columbine, CO. Two shooters kill 12 students and a teacher
- 2001 The WTC towers in NY become targets of terror attacks. Schools are within blocks of the collapsed towers, and schools throughout the nation gridlocked as parents rushed to get their children.
- 2004 A school was seized by terrorists in Beslan, Russia. About 300 die, most of whom are children.

# Schools conduct drills to prepare for emergencies



Tornado Drill, School in Virginia, 2004  
Above photos by Heather King, VDEM



EQ drill in Japan  
BBC news



Fire evacuation Drill  
High School in Maryland  
*Photo by Ellie d'Eustachio.*  
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# Drills: A way to enhance school preparedness



- “Put into action” plans and protocols
- California Education code requires
  - Fire drills
  - Earthquake “drop and cover drills”
- Different requirements for different grade levels
- Schools also conduct lockdown or “code yellow” drills

# RESEARCH QUESTIONS



- What type of drills are conducted?
- How often are schools district drilling, and how do these figures compare to California State mandates?
- How quickly do students and staff evacuate from school buildings?
- What are some challenges encountered while drilling?

# METHODS

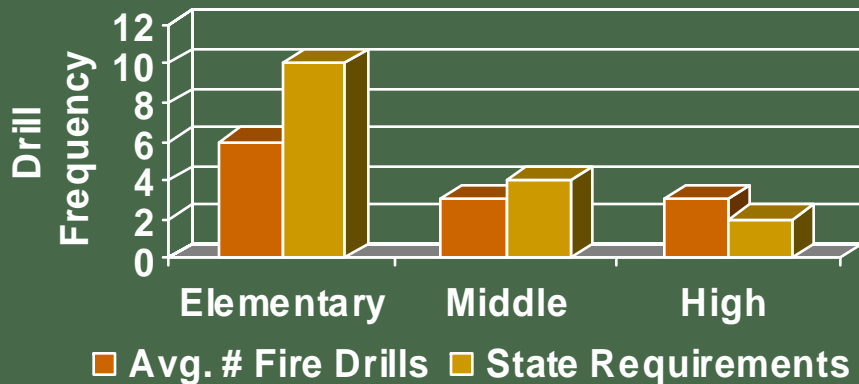


- Two South Los Angeles school districts
- Mixed methods multilevel design, we combined multiple sources and methods:
  - Data abstraction from archival drill records
  - One-on-one interviews with school staff and focus groups with staff and students
  - Real time drill observations

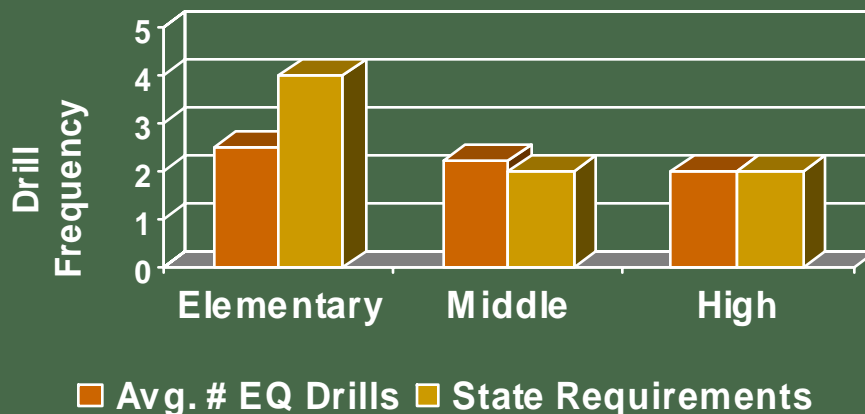
# Drills Conducted and State Requirements



## Fire Drills

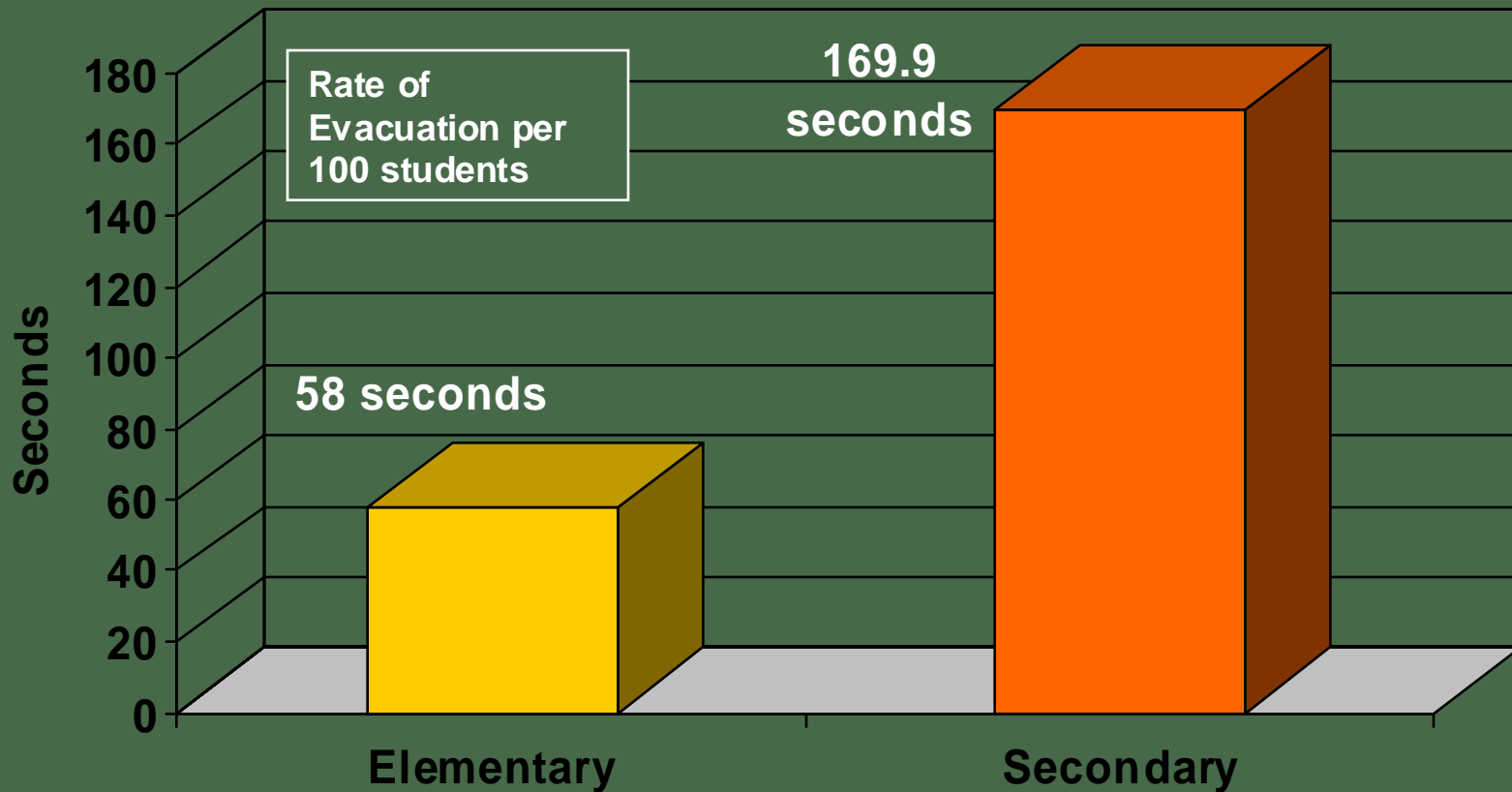


## Earthquake Drills



- Elementary schools are not drilling at levels to meet state requirements.
- Requirements for elementary are much higher than secondary schools.
- Secondary schools drill at levels meeting the bare minimum.

# How Quickly do Schools Evacuate Students and Staff?







# Drills as a Training Vehicle

- Interview  
train
  - How  
opp
  - Beli  
train
- We know where to go if there's an earthquake, we do drills at least once a semester. So we go out to the yard then we come back.... Other than that, I think we're half way there [with preparedness].... Maybe I'm being generous, we've practiced each one of the techniques necessary to keep safe from falling debris or from buildings that are caving in but other than that... They teach us to leave.*

# Challenges to Drills



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*All we know [is to duck and cover] - and to me this is not even good because... [these desks] are not big enough for all of our big boys. ... it just does not work for big kids, for sixteen year-old boys. You ask one of them to get up underneath and see how well they do. They need to get rid of them, that's not right. I have some big boys and if they just move a little bit they take the desk with them when they walk off. - High School Teacher*

de”



# Challenges to Drills

- There is a frequency of ringing the bells at [the high school], sometimes the bells don't work there,
- sometimes they blink all the time, and teachers have become somewhat desensitized to the blinking lights, and the ringing of the bells, it doesn't happen every day but at least happens once a quarter where someone tampers with the bells because it's a high school campus so someone touches or pulls it...it does not add to a sense of emergency because you once said oh, that's just kids playing with the fire, so...it isn't a sense of emergency. – Administrator



# Drills do not include full school community

- *I'm concerned about adults. I always say 'I'd rather deal with ten thousand kids than ten adults.' Because adults, in their mind, they think they know what they are doing. When it comes to tense situations I know what I'm supposed to do and they are just in the way. ...in my experience it has been adults are not very helpful unless they are trained and they can follow instructions.*
- *"no school is in and of itself separated from the community it participates in."*

# Drills do not address full spectrum of issues or reactions during an actual emergency or disaster



- *Drills We know when the bell sounds like we know to*
- *When the LA riots happened, I heard teachers saying 'the heck with my students, I'm getting out of here'... They were afraid...they became frightened and they weren't acting like they would normally act.*
- *It could have been the most caring, sensitive teachers and when there was really an emergency...they really freaked out.*
- *real earthquake.*

# CONCLUSIONS



- Drills have become rote activities that provide a minimum level of safety information
- “minimum level of safety practice”
- Drills are not used as opportunities to improve emergency procedures
- Debriefing allows for schools to self-evaluate their drilling experience to discuss challenges and suggest and implement changes

# What do Schools Need....



- Need to debrief and use information from debriefing to improve infrastructure and policies for drills
- Need realistic simulated exercises that are well-planned and involve parents
- Need systematic accounting of the school drilling process

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