

HB 1753 passed by the 2019 General Assembly amended *Section 22.1-138* of the *Code of Virginia*, regarding the use and operation of electronic room partitions. This section of the *Code of Virginia* now includes the following additional subsections addressing the use and operation of electronic room partitions.

“§ 22.1-138. *Minimum standards for public school buildings.*

...D. No school employee shall open or close an electronic room partition in any school building unless (i) no student is present in such building, (ii)(a) no student is present in the room or area in which such partition is located and (b) such room or area is locked or otherwise inaccessible to students, or (iii) such partition includes a safety sensor that automatically stops the partition when a body passes between the leading edge and a wall, an opposing partition, or the stacking area.

E. Any annual safety review or exercise for school employees in a local school division shall include information and demonstrations, as appropriate, regarding the provisions of subsection D.

F. The Department of Education shall make available to each school board model safety guidance regarding the operation of electronic room partitions.”

In accordance with the *Code of Virginia* § 22.1-138.F, the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) has developed the following guidelines for the operation of electronic room partitions.

The VDOE is recommending the following safety steps be practiced by school division staff when operating electronic partitions installed in a public school:

1. The VDOE recommends that school divisions post near each operable partition instructions on safety. This notice should include the following:
 - a. Only appropriately trained staff may operate this partition.
 - b. Control stations must be attended by staff members while the partition is in motion.
 - c. Staff members must stand on opposite sides of the partition during stacking or extending procedure.
 - d. Students must not be in the room while the partition is in motion.
2. The VDOE also advises school divisions that when new electronic room partitions are installed in a school, the contractor should be required to conduct safety training for staff on the safe operation of the partitions and provide operation manuals of the product. In schools where electronic room partitions have been installed, school divisions should conduct an annual safety review of the partitions, provide their staff with information about the safety requirements to be practiced in the areas surrounding the partitions and the safety measures to be practiced while operating the partitions, as well as provide a demonstration, as appropriate, on the safe and proper operation of the electronic room partitions.

VDOE is also including below model safety guidance on the safe use and operation of movable electronic room partitions based on the master specifications and industry standards for folding partitions.

Model Safety Guidance for Operating Electronic Room Partitions:

A. Location of Remote-Control Stations: Install a two-position, low-voltage key switch to arm the system to control activation of the operator motor that enables movement of the electronic partition. The operator motor control shall consist of two stations with extend and retract constant-pressure push-button switches. Switches shall be of the low voltage type, wired in series, and located on opposite sides and ends of the partition.

B. Obstruction-Detection Devices:

Equip each motorized operable electronic partition with an automatic safety sensor device that causes the operator motor to immediately shut off if the device detects an obstruction.

Types of Obstruction-Detection Devices include:

1. Partition Panel Sensor Edge: Provide a contact-pressure-sensitive safety edge along the leading edge of the partition.

2. Sensor Mat: Place an electrically operated, contact-weight-sensitive safety mat in storage pocket area to detect any obstruction in this area.

3. Infrared Sensor System: Install an Infrared Sensor System designed to detect an obstruction in the partition's path and sound an audible alarm prior to the obstruction causing object coming in contact with the partition.

C. Limit Switches: Provide adjustable limit switches, interlocked with the motor controls and set to automatically stop the operable panel partition at both the fully extended and fully stacked positions.

D. Emergency Release Mechanism: Provide a quick disconnect-release electric-motor drive system permitting manual operation in event of operating failure.

E. Electric Interlock: Equip each motorized operable panel partition with electric interlocks at locations indicated by the manufacturer to prevent operation of the panel partition inside the storage pocket doors.