



## Caring and Safe Schools

One of the very top priorities for the TDSB and each of its schools is to create and maintain caring and safe learning spaces in which students can thrive. There are a variety of ways this is accomplished, from creating positive climates where all members of a school community can feel safe, included, and accepted, to actively promoting positive behaviours and interactions with each other, to numerous policies, practices and programs that support safety and well-being.

The TDSB operates more than 550 schools all across the city and sometimes there are events and incidents that will occur and impact one or more schools. Our staff are always prepared to deal with a variety of emergency situations. Sometimes this involves serious incidents involving police and threats to safety, or they could involve facilities-related issues.

The **Threats to School Safety Procedure** outlines specific ways to keep students, staff and others safe in situations where there is a serious accident, or violent incident in or around schools. We work closely with police partners in situations where there is such a threat.

The Board has an **Emergency Evacuation Plan** designed for 5 levels of threat. The levels of threat range from an imminent building threat to a National Emergency. All schools have detailed evacuation plans to remove students and staff in the event of a serious incident where everyone must leave the building.

A **Lockdown** is used in serious emergency situations where the threat is inside a school or on the grounds. A Lockdown requires that all students be kept inside classrooms or other designated locations that are away from the threat. A lockdown minimizes access and visibility in an effort to shelter students, teachers, staff and visitors in secure locations.

A **Hold and Secure** is a response to a threat in the neighbourhood around a school, but not on school property. This could be a police pursuit or a serious crime in progress in the community. Staff, students and visitors are considered to be safe inside the school. During a Hold and Secure all exterior doors to the building are locked and students and staff are kept indoors. However, unlike a Lockdown, regular activities proceed as usual inside the school.

A **Shelter-In-Place** is used during hazardous environmental situations, such as a gas leak in the neighbourhood, when it is safer to remain inside. It is similar to a Hold and Secure in practice, although air intakes are closed.

In each of these situations, information is shared with parents in a variety of ways, either during or following an event. For very serious situations where the school may not be able to communicate because staff is focused on the immediate safety of students, media outlets and TDSB tools such as its web site and social media applications, are utilized to share information as soon as possible.

As noted, every school also has detailed evacuation plans to remove students and staff in the event of a serious incident where everyone must leave the building, such as a gas leak or fire inside the school. This includes a designated evacuation site, usually a neighbouring school. All TDSB sites also have **Fire Safety Plans**. These plans are reviewed and approved by Toronto Fire Services.

Although we hope never to have a serious situation occur at a school, it is important that all staff and students are prepared and know how to respond in cases of emergencies, so schools are required to conduct a minimum of two lockdown drills and six fire drills each school year. These drills are an essential part of student and staff safety.

There are also a myriad of practices that involve keeping school buildings in good operating condition. For example, drinking water sources are tested for lead on a regular basis and plumbing is also regularly flushed, in accordance with provincial regulations.

As part of a process to measure the condition of its facilities and identify renewal needs, the TDSB regularly inspects its sites. However, like any building, a school will experience facility-related issues from time to time that require attention, so repairs and renovations are a necessary part of the operation of any school. That is especially so in older schools, where roofs or windows may need repair or replacement, or older heating systems require upgrading. Where this kind of work may need to take place during the school day, safety of students and staff is always the primary consideration.

Sometimes, external events such as power outages or water main breaks may impact TDSB buildings as well. This occurred last week near Eglinton PS when a water main was damaged during construction of the Crosstown LRT project. Sometimes a power or water outage may lead to an evacuation. Other times, students and staff can remain, as long as it is safe to do so. Every situation is different but appropriate staff are consulted and safety practices are always followed. For example if a power or water outage renders a fire alarm system or sprinkler system inoperative, a Fire Watch is established as a substitute for early warning detection. This involves staff assigned to actively check the building regularly for any fire hazards or smoke and signaling the need for evacuation if required.

TDSB is charged with the care of your children during the school day. We take this responsibility very seriously each and every day. These are just some of the ways we demonstrate this commitment. We also always strive to review, refine, and revise our practices. Of course, safety is a shared responsibility. Parents play an important role too by keeping contact information up to date, reporting absences, and dropping off and picking up children according to your school's policies. You can also enquire about joining your school's **Caring and Safe Schools Committee** by contacting your school office.

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With information from <http://ppf.tdsb.on.ca/uploads/files/live/98/1155.pdf>

And <http://www.tdsb.on.ca/Elementary-School/Caring-Safe-Schools>