

Threats to School Safety Procedures Frequently Asked Questions by Parents

Although we hope that an incident that requires response from emergency personnel never occurs in our schools, we must be prepared to respond quickly and effectively in case it does. The goal of emergency preparedness is to ensure a rapid, coordinated and effective response is possible when an emergency occurs.

The four school boards in Halton and the E.C. Drury School for the Deaf, in partnership with the Halton Region Police Service, have established emergency response plans, which include the steps school and Board staff will take in the event of an emergency at a school, a parent communication plan and an evacuation plan.

Below are responses to the most frequently asked questions by parents with regard to emergency preparedness in schools. For the purposes of this document, the “Board” refers to any one or all of the following: Le conseil scolaire de district Catholique Centre-Sud, Le conseil scolaire du district du Centre Sud-Ouest, the E.C. Drury School for the Deaf, the Halton Catholic District School Board and the Halton District School Board. “Police” refers to the Halton Region Police Service.

1. In the event of an emergency impacting my child’s school, how would I stay informed?

Messages about emergencies impacting your child’s school will be communicated by the Board using a number of communications vehicles, including, but not limited to:

- the Board and/or school websites;
- the Halton Region Police Services website;
- the home/parent notification system;
- the media.

General emergency messages, including early and late school openings and closings, can be found on the Board's website. Emergency messages of this nature are also transmitted to local media, including television and radio stations. Parents are encouraged to use these media sources for updates on emergency situations. During an emergency, parents should refrain from calling the school as it overloads phone lines, which limits communication and may impede the ability of staff to respond to the situation at hand.

2. How will my child's school handle an emergency situation?

All of the Board’s schools and facilities have an emergency response plan. A school’s emergency response plan is based on established Board procedures. The specifics of each plan differ according to the unique circumstances for each location, and are outlined on the Emergency Response Plan poster displayed throughout the school.

A response to a situation will differ, based on the specifics of that situation. The flexibility of the plan is key to the success of the response. In general though, each school’s emergency response plan includes:

- Threats to School Safety and Evacuation procedures, including the designation of one or more appropriate evacuation sites
- the maintenance of a portable critical response kit that contains key information and supplies
- training to personnel, updating of the plan and a practice drill for students and staff twice a year
- the maintenance of checklists for dealing with specific types of incidents
- resources for help before, during and after an emergency/crisis
- an established Safe Schools team

All school plans have been reviewed and school crisis teams have received training.

3. How can I see the Emergency Response Plan for my child's school?

Emergency Response Plan posters are displayed throughout the Board's schools and facilities. Should you have any specific questions regarding the Emergency Response Plan for your child's school, please speak to the School Principal.

4. What is "Hold and Secure?"

Hold and Secure is a response to an emergency situation in the general vicinity of a school, but not on or very near to school property. This could be a police pursuit, a crime in progress or an active search by local police for a suspect. During a Hold and Secure situation, students, staff and visitors are considered to be safe inside the school building. Any students, staff and visitors participating in activities outside the school building when a Hold and Secure is announced, would be instructed to enter the school building immediately. No one is permitted to enter or exit the school building, while the Hold and Secure is in effect. In a Hold and Secure situation, regular school activities proceed within the school building, as long as it is safe to do so.

5. What is a "Lockdown"?

A Lockdown is a response to an emergency situation inside a school or an emergency situation on or very near to school property, wherein the evacuation of the school building is not safe. During a Lockdown, steps are taken to isolate students, staff and visitors from the emergency situation by having everyone remain in designated locations inside the school building. In all Lockdown situations, school staff establish communication with the police by calling 9-1-1.

Much the same way as schools practise fire drills, Lockdown or Hold and Secure drills are also practised in an age appropriate manner. As part of the Board's School/Police Protocol and in accordance with the Education Act, Lockdown or Hold and Secure drills are practised twice throughout the school year to ensure that students and staff know what steps to take in case of an emergency.

During a Lockdown or Hold and Secure, students are not permitted to use electronic devices, such as cellular phones, as their use may impede the ability of the police and school staff to respond to the situation at hand. It may also result in the dissemination of inaccurate information. In the event of an emergency at your child's school, the Board will inform parents by using a number of communications vehicles, including, but not limited to:

- the Board and/or school websites;
- the Halton Region Police Services website;
- the home/parent notification system;

- the media.

6. What will the Board do if an emergency situation occurs while students are in school?

The specific actions taken by school personnel in any emergency situation, both Board-wide and at individual schools, will depend on the specifics of the situation. Any action taken would depend on several factors, including the level of threat and the advice or directive of local, provincial, and federal agencies. The safety of students and staff members will be the primary concern in any decision.

7. Will I be allowed to pick up my child?

In the event of an emergency, it is the Board's intent to ensure that students are safe inside their schools until there is no longer a threat to their safety. Parents will be informed and reunited with their children as soon as it is safe to do so.

8. Does the school have a plan to reunite parents and children?

Yes. Each school has developed a plan for reuniting parents with their children after an emergency has occurred. Additionally, if public safety officials require a school building be evacuated, students and staff members will be safely directed to the designated evacuation site. Parents will be informed by the Board of this evacuation/reunification location using a number of communications vehicles, including, but not limited to:

- the Board and/or school websites;
- the Halton Region Police Services website;
- the home/parent notification system;
- the media.

9. Will I be given the evacuation or parent reunification locations ahead of time?

Emergency Response Plan posters are displayed throughout the Board's schools and facilities, and include the designated evacuation sites for each school and facility. In the event that students are evacuated to a designated site, parents will be informed by the Board of the reunification location, by using a number of communications vehicles, including, but not limited to:

- the Board and/or school websites;
- the Halton Region Police Services website;
- the home/parent notification system;
- the media.

10. What if my child is riding a school bus at the time of a crisis?

Halton Student Transportation Services will be in contact with the Board for instructions in the event a crisis occurs while students are in transport. Bus drivers will be given an alternate safe drop off location if necessary. The Board will inform parents of this location by using a number of communications vehicles, including, but not limited to:

- the Board and/or school websites;
- the Halton Region Police Services website;

- the home/parent notification system;
- the media.

11. Can I pick up my child?

Parents will be able to pick up their children unless public safety officials have declared there is a reason why access to the school is restricted. During any emergency, school personnel will endeavour to maintain a safe and calm environment for students within the school. Classes/instruction will not automatically be cancelled in emergency situations, because the school may be the safest place for children to be. Although some parents may wish to pick their children up from school at that time, please be assured that all will be done to protect our students. Allowing anyone to enter or exit the building during an emergency situation could expose the students and staff inside the school to further danger.

12. Who can pick up my children?

Children will not be released to individuals who are not authorized to do so on the student's emergency contact information or who do not have written parent authorization. Parents and guardians will complete the emergency contact information at the start of each school year. Parents and guardians are asked to ensure that all contact information, including emergency contact information, on file at the school is accurate and up to date at all times.

13. What about my child's medication?

If your child takes medication regularly, you should make sure the school has an appropriate amount of additional medication on hand. Talk with your child's school principal for more information. In the event of a Threat to School Safety, Emergency Medical Services personnel will be notified of any specific medicinal needs.