

# **Guidelines for Developing and Maintaining Lockdown Procedures for Elementary and Secondary Schools in Ontario<sup>1</sup>**

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## **Introduction**

Staff, students and visitors in Ontario's schools, have the right to learn, work and be present in a safe and secure environment. However the possibility of a major incident of violence is a reality which cannot be overlooked. Everyone who spends any amount of time in an Ontario school on a regular basis, needs to know how to protect themselves and how to protect our children, in the event of a major incident or threat of school violence.

Publicly funded schools in Ontario are committed to providing and maintaining a Safe School environment. Much has been accomplished around the issue of Safe Schools since the introduction of the Provincial Model for a Local Police/School Board Protocol in 2000, and more recently with the passage of Bill 212, which amended the Safe Schools provisions of the Education Act, in February 2007.

The Ministry of Education, School Boards and Police from across the province continue to work in partnership to create safe school environments, and to prepare in the event of a major incident of school violence.

Many Boards have actively undertaken the process of establishing lockdown plans with the support of their police service. However this has not previously been a Ministry requirement, nor has there been a consistent approach across the province with respect to lockdown planning. The following guidelines should accompany the Protocols already developed.

## **Purpose**

Based on lockdown procedures that have already been established in many Ontario schools, the following guidelines are being provided to help elementary and secondary schools ensure their lockdown plans meet basic requirements, and to ensure a degree of consistency across the province. While much of what is provided will be termed "Effective Practices", there are two key elements which the OACP are recommending as mandatory requirements by the Ministry of Education.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services acknowledge the work of the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police (OACP) Lockdown Procedure Working Group and thank the members and OACP for their work in preparing these guidelines.*

## **Mandatory Requirements**

***1. All publicly funded school boards in Ontario must establish a lockdown policy to ensure the development and implementation of individual school plans.***

***2. A minimum of two lockdown drills must occur each school year.***

**In developing lockdown plans, each elementary and secondary school should consider the following guidelines:**

### **When to Lockdown / Terminology to be used**

Terminology is very important. Plans should clearly identify when “Lockdown” versus other terminology is to be utilized. Terminology used to order a lockdown, should be plain language, clear and leave no misunderstanding as to what is expected. No secret passwords should be used.

“**Lockdown**” should **only** be used when there is a major incident or threat of school violence within the school, or in relation to the school. The over or misuse of lockdowns, will result in staff/students becoming desensitized and they will not take lockdowns seriously.

“**Hold and Secure**” should be used when it is desirable to secure the school due to an ongoing situation outside and not related to the school (e.g., a bank robbery occurs near a school but not on school property). In this situation, the school continues to function normally, with the exterior doors being locked until such time as the situation near the school is resolved.

“**Shelter in Place**” should be used for an environmental or weather related situation, where it is necessary to keep all occupants within the school, to protect them from an external situation. Examples may include chemical spills, blackouts, explosions or extreme weather conditions.

**Boards must use the above terminology in developing local plans, in an effort to ensure consistency across the province. These guidelines focus primarily on “Lockdowns”.**

### **Rationale**

Common language across the province allows for easy integration when staff, students and other emergency service personal are transferred from one jurisdiction to another.

## **Roles and Responsibilities**

Clearly defined roles, responsibilities and expectations are critical in emergency situations.

At a minimum, plans should include expectations of staff, students, parents and police.

### **Effective Practices**

**Principal** -The principal is responsible for over-all planning, the final content of the plan, scheduling of drills, inviting police, fire and Emergency Medical Services (EMS) to participate in and be aware of planning and drills, training of students and for the overall safety of staff and students. In an actual incident (not a drill), the police are responsible for management of the threat and subsequent criminal investigation, however the principal shall provide full cooperation with police.

**Staff** – School staff, and in particular administrators, have the overall responsibility for the training, safety and well being of students. Administrators during a violent incident have additional responsibilities in terms of working closely with police.

**Students** – Students have a responsibility to be familiar with the plan and to respond quickly to the direction of staff during a crisis situation. Any student with information or prior knowledge of an individual or a potential situation which may result in a violent incident, must come forward with that information as soon as possible. This is also the case during an incident.

**Police** – Police are responsible to respond to and investigate violent incidents. During a violent incident, police will assume command and control of the response and investigation but will liaise and work closely with school administration and other emergency services, throughout the process.

**Parents/Guardians** – Parents and guardians must be informed of the existence of this plan and should reinforce with their children, student responsibilities to follow directions during a crisis and disclose any information they may have prior to or during a crisis situation.

## **Floor Plans**

Accurate floor plans are a key component of lockdown plans and are important both from a planning and response standpoint.

### **Effective Practices**

Consideration should be given to colour coding floor plans using three colours: such as red, green, and blue. Red indicates danger areas of the school which can not be locked down safely, with green identifying areas where staff and students are to proceed to safely lock down. Blue areas identify Command Post locations which will be utilized by police depending on the nature of the incident.

Normally, the main office will be a command post location, with another area within the school identified as an alternate command post location. A third off-site command post location should be identified and formulate part of the individual school plan, in the event neither on-site command post location is available.

Off-site evacuation locations should also be identified and included with copies of the floor plans.

Floor plans should be posted through-out the school, and at least in every classroom and at every entry point to the school. In multi-level buildings, it is suggested that only the floor plans relevant to a specific level, be posted on each level.

Hard copies of floor plans, and electronic copies, if possible, should be provided to police.

### **Rationale**

It is vitally important that police have current, accurate information about the school layout and this information be available in both electronic and hardcopy in the event of computer malfunctions.

## **Identification of Buildings, Exterior Doors, Classrooms**

To assist police in responding to a major incident or threat of violence, buildings, entrances and all rooms within buildings need to be clearly identified.

### **Effective Practices**

In the situations where more than one building exists on school grounds, each building should be clearly identified on all sides of the building with a building identifier, such as a number. All portables shall be clearly identified as well.

All exterior doors shall be clearly identified such as doors A, B, C etc.

All rooms within the building should be clearly marked with room numbers.

### **Rationale**

This information is essential to identify the location of buildings and identify safe access routes for responding emergency personnel.

## **Initiating Lockdown**

Plans should emphasize the importance of locking down as quickly as possible. At the first indication of a major incident of school violence, notification must go to the office and the Lockdown commenced immediately.

### **Effective Practices**

All staff (especially those working in the main office) should be trained that when information is received in the office of a situation requiring a lockdown, whoever receives that information, will immediately activate the school's Public Address (PA) system, inside and outside, announcing the lockdown. There should be no hesitation in announcing the lockdown, and the decision to call the lockdown should be made immediately by whoever receives the call to the office, and should not be delayed for the purpose of checking with Administration before announcing a lockdown. Boards should consider both auditory (PA) and visual notification systems inside and outside the school, to announce a lockdown. For the safety of hearing impaired individuals and in situations where noise levels in open areas such as cafeterias and outside the school, may prevent staff and students from hearing a PA announcement, consideration should be given to the use of strobe lights or other visual indicator, in addition to the PA system.

It is recommended that the actual wording announcing a lockdown, be affixed on or near the microphone, so that it is clearly visible and can be read by the person announcing the lockdown.

### **Rationale**

In emergent stressful circumstances even the most composed individuals may have difficulty remembering exact words. By pre-printing the announcement and practising it, the person delivering the message can ensure that the content is delivered accurately.

## **Classroom/Other Secure area - Procedures During Lockdown**

Plans should provide detailed procedures to be used when locking down a classroom or other secure areas.

### **Effective Practices**

It is recommended that, before locking a door, staff should gather everyone in the immediate vicinity into their classroom or other secure area, but only if it is safe to do so. Once inside a secure area, staff and students should;

- stay away from doors and windows;
- turn off lights;
- close blinds;
- beware of sight lines
- if there is a window in the classroom door, consider covering window;
- take cover if available (get behind something solid);
- remain absolutely quiet;
- teachers to take attendance;
- no cell phone use unless necessary to communicate regarding the incident. Cell phones should be shut off or put on vibrate.

## **Rationale**

The goal is to make the classroom appear vacant.

## **Portables**

Plans must address how to effectively and safely lockdown a school portable.

### **Effective Practices**

Plans must recognize unique issues with portables. Due to thin wall construction, it is recommended that desks be tipped onto their sides with desk-tops facing out, and all desks placed in a circle, with students/staff locating within the circle, down on the floor below the top edge of the desk.

### **Rationale**

The desk-top will act as an additional barrier to a round from a firearm which may have penetrated a portable wall.

## **Washrooms: Procedures During Lockdown**

Plans should address what staff/students should do if they are in a washroom when a lockdown is called.

### **Effective Practices**

As washrooms can not be locked and therefore should be identified during planning as a danger (red) area in the event of a lockdown, students need to evacuate washrooms if at all possible and get to an area which can safely be locked down (green).

For elementary schools, it is recommended that plans identify an adult who normally works in close proximity to student washrooms, to check the washroom(s) prior to locking down themselves, if it safe to do so. After gathering students in the immediate vicinity of their classroom door, into their classroom, they would quickly check both male and female washrooms to which they have been assigned in the planning phase, and take any students found in the washrooms, into their classrooms to lockdown.

For secondary schools, it is recommended that training include an explanation to students that they are responsible to get out of the washrooms immediately upon hearing a lockdown announced, and get to the nearest classroom or other area which is identified as a safe (green) area.

As a last resort, staff or students if trapped in a washroom, should attempt to somehow secure the bathroom door, enter a stall, lock the door and climb on top of the toilet.

### **Rationale**

Plans need to address that staff and students should be moved from washrooms into classrooms but not if it means moving into immediate danger. In those instances, staff and students should remain in the washroom and attempt to make the washroom appear vacant.

### **Open Areas – Procedures During Lockdown**

Plans should recognize that open areas including cafeterias, libraries, hallways and other open areas are the most vulnerable areas of a school, making them the most likely location for a shooting to occur, and the most difficult areas to quickly and effectively secure.

### **Effective Practices**

Considerable time and attention needs to be given to open areas during the planning phase. All possible options should be considered to best address these highly vulnerable areas, including the possibility of evacuating to the exterior of the school. This may be the best option if these areas are adjacent to exterior walls and have doors leading to the outside. It is very important during staff and student training, that everyone understands what to do and where to go in the event a lock down is called and they are in an open area.

### **Rationale**

Consider having various options in the event that the first option is not available.

### **Child Care and Other Facility Occupants**

As many schools have licensed child care centres or other tenants and community groups using school premises, those organizations or individuals must be taken into consideration at all stages.

### **Effective Practices**

It is important that Principals ensure the appropriate staff from organizations sharing facilities, are included in the development and implementation of lockdown procedures and that these organizations participate in aspects of planning, training and drills.

### **Rationale**

Due to proximity issues, the need to be prepared is equally as important for other occupiers as it is for staff and students of schools.

### **Outside of School Buildings when a Lockdown is called**

Procedures must address where staff and students outside the school should go in the event of a lockdown. These procedures should also address how people

who are outside of the school building will know where the evacuation sites are located.

### **Effective Practices**

In order to ensure those who are outside school buildings are aware that the school is locking down, the PA system must be capable of being activated outside the school. Consideration should also be given to including an exterior visual indicator (strobe lights), indicating that a lockdown has been called. Those who are outside the school when a lockdown is called, shall not re-enter the school, but shall proceed immediately to pre-determined off-site evacuation location(s). Once at the location, staff and students shall remain in that location until further advised by administration or police. Plans should include the taking of attendance at the off-site evacuation location(s). Neighbouring schools may not be the best option as off-site evacuation locations, as they too may lock down once they become aware of an incident at a nearby school.

Note: When a “Hold and Secure” situation occurs and staff and students are outside the building, they should re-enter the building prior to the exterior doors being locked.

### **Controlled Evacuation**

In the event of a pro-longed situation, or a situation where the threat has been contained (barricaded individual), plans should include provisions for a controlled evacuation of the areas of the school, not in the vicinity of the contained area.

### **Effective Practices**

Police will make the decision as to whether a controlled evacuation of a school under lockdown, is a viable option, and will direct the evacuation process. This will normally be done on a room by room basis, with evacuees being escorted by police to the evacuation location.

### **Fire Alarms**

Plans should address the issue of how to deal with a fire alarm activation after a school has gone into lockdown.

### **Effective Practices**

In the event that a fire alarm is pulled once a lockdown has been called, staff and students shall not respond as they normally would to a fire alarm, but shall remain locked down, if it is safe to do so. Staff and students must always be aware of other dangers such as fire, and be prepared to respond accordingly in order to ensure their own safety.



### **Rationale**

There is a desire not to create a situation where staff and students run into danger due to responding to a fire alarm. At the same time staff and students do not want to ignore the fact that fire may occur intentionally or otherwise during a lockdown and there is a need to respond to the most immediate threat.

### **Procedures to end a Lockdown**

Plans should include how a lock-down will be terminated.

### **Effective Practices**

Plans to conclude a lockdown will vary by location. It may include a general announcement via the PA system by the principal, or it may be a room to room visit from police/school administration with some sort of an identification process, so that the occupants of a locked room know in fact that who ever is giving them the all-clear, is in fact authentic. Local plans should include procedures for ending lockdowns at off-site evacuation locations. In all cases where police have responded, plans should clearly indicate that the decision to end a lockdown shall only be made after approval of the on-scene police, Incident Commander.

### **Rationale**

There is a need to include the same level of authenticity to ending a lockdown as to initiating one.

### **Training**

Plans should address initial and ongoing training of staff, students and visitors to the school.

### **Effective Practices**

Orientation for new teachers should include mandatory lockdown training. Schools should establish a method to conduct lockdown review training for all staff, during each school year. Schools should consider assemblies to train secondary students on lockdown procedures. Due to the young age of some elementary students, it is suggested that classroom teachers be responsible for training students at the elementary level. Where possible, it is advantageous to have police partners present during training, and to assist with the training of staff and students. Information for parents may include newsletters, school or board websites or an invitation to an evening session on lockdown plans. Fire and EMS should be invited to training sessions.

### **Rationale**

People can be expected to respond properly under stressful and emergent circumstances when properly trained.

## **Drills**

Fire-drills have long been accepted as an important and effective tool in preparing staff and students, in the event a fire breaks out in a school. Equally important, is the practicing of lockdown drills, in preparation for a major incident of school violence.

### **Mandatory Requirements (Ministry of Education)**

**Each school shall conduct a minimum of two lockdown drills during each school year.**

### **Effective Practices**

Work cooperatively with police partners on drills. The Principal is responsible to set the date of drills and over-see the drill, with police support/assistance. Consider including Fire and EMS during drills, so they become familiar with lockdown plans. Staff, students and parents should be given some warning of an impending drill. Procedures should include a plan to alert neighbouring schools of lockdown drills, especially if Fire and EMS have been invited to participate. A short debriefing should be included after all drills, to identify areas of improvement. Many boards have established a tracking system to record drill dates, thereby ensuring accountability and compliance.

### **Rationale**

In order for staff and students to respond properly, plans must be exercised to ensure complacency is avoided.

## **Media**

Plans shall include provisions for dealing with media.

### **Effective Practices**

Police are responsible to address media with respect to the criminal incident involved and police response to an incident. Principal/Board personnel are responsible for dealing with media on issues of staff and student safety. It is strongly advisable that media personnel from police and school boards share press releases prior to release to the media, so that both police and school officials are aware of what the other agency is saying. A spirit of cooperation is highly recommended in terms of police and school officials working closely on media issues.

### **Rationale**

Coordinated and consistent messaging from all partners is essential in maintaining public confidence.

## **Communication with Parents/Guardians/Community**

Communication with parents, guardians and the community in general, is important so as to ensure a good understanding of lockdown procedures, without instilling fear.

### **Effective Practices**

Consideration of sending a newsletter to each home at the beginning of the school year, to inform parents of lockdown procedures and to encourage parents to reinforce with their children, the importance of understanding the procedures and following staff direction.

Parents need to be informed of where they should proceed in the event of an actual incident involving a lockdown. Communication with parents around the importance of lockdowns is vital. Parents should be informed of what is expected should they arrive at school during a drill, or if they are present within the school when a lockdown is called.

In all incidents of a lockdown which was not a drill, it is recommended that a communication to parents be sent home with each student at the conclusion of the school day or as soon as possible.

Parents should be encouraged to ensure contact information is kept up to date so they can easily be reached by staff in the event of an emergency.

### **Rationale**

Parents need to see lockdown drills as essential elements to prevent injury and good communication is required to eliminate fears and concerns. Parents play a key role in ensuring students cooperation and participation in drills.

## **School Recovery following a Lockdown**

Plans should include provisions to address the aftermath of a school lockdown.

### **Effective Practices**

A debriefing should occur in all situations following a lockdown. The nature and severity of the incident, will dictate who should be included in the debriefing.

In serious situations where injuries or loss of life occurs, the Board's trauma response plan will normally be initiated.

In all cases, communication with parents is vital.

### **Plan Review**

Each school plan, as well as the Board plan, shall be thoroughly reviewed annually.

**Effective Practices**

A page should be included within the plan which allows for documentation of when and who reviewed the plan, along with a signature area. Where boards develop a web-based application to record when drills have been completed, a separate page could be created to allow for the recording on the web-site of the date the plan was reviewed annually.

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