

I Will Need a Key for the Classroom

By Valence Young

Occasional teachers, like everyone else who works in the school, need to know how to protect themselves and their students during an emergency. In the event of a major incident or threat of school violence, there could be a lockdown. During a lockdown or a lockdown drill, educators must be able to lock the door to their classroom or other secure areas where they are working.

Some school boards are not providing a classroom key to OTs. These school boards appear to be concerned that OTs may forget to return the key at the end of the day. But without this key, the educator cannot protect herself and her students during a lockdown. An OT who has to insist that a classroom key be provided may face a stressful situation with the principal before the school day has even started.

School boards that don't provide OTs with keys to the classroom are falling short of provincial policy and legislation. The Ministry of Education requires that all publicly funded school boards have a lockdown policy to ensure that a lockdown plan is in place at each school site, and that a minimum of two lockdown drills occur each school year. School boards have to measure up to the detailed guidelines for lockdown plans as described in the Ministry's *Provincial Model for a Local Police/School Board Protocol* (2011). The *Occupational Health and Safety Act* (OHSA) requires that school boards and principals take every precaution reasonable for an educator's protection. The OHSA also requires that school boards must provide information, instruction, and supervision to the educator to protect his or her health and safety.

There is more to a lockdown plan than carrying a classroom key. A lockdown plan must

include clearly defined roles, responsibilities, and expectations for dealing with an emergency situation. The plan includes expectations for staff, students, parents, and police. Educators must be able to lock the door to their classroom or other secure areas where they are working. There are lockdown practices for unsecured areas, like the hallways and the gym, where an evacuation may be required. There are additional actions for keeping people safe in portables and washrooms, as well as in outdoor areas.

Here are three steps to getting ready for a lockdown:

- Ask for the classroom key. If a classroom key is not provided, inform the principal that you need a key in case there is a lockdown.
- Ask for emergency plans including the lockdown plan for the school. You need to be informed about dealing with a lockdown drill or an emergency event.
- If the door lock is faulty, report it to the principal as a health and safety hazard. A faulty locking mechanism could cause a lockdown to fail.

If you cannot get your hands on the classroom key, report this to your principal as a health and safety concern. Inform the worker health and safety representative at the school site. Call your Occasional Teacher President for support. Your OT President can get expert advice from ETFO Provincial Office. 



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