



DEALING WITH LOCKDOWN CONCERNS

BY VALENCE YOUNG

Recent events in Ontario and beyond have a lot of people thinking about lockdown procedures in their schools. While our hearts go out to the families of victims, we also need to ensure that our schools are safe places to learn and to work.

Ontario schools must have emergency plans in place, including lockdown plans. The Ministry of Education has a lockdown policy: the Provincial Policy for Developing and Maintaining Lockdown Procedures for Elementary and Secondary Schools in Ontario. This policy requires that the lockdown plan at each publicly funded school includes procedures to protect staff and students in the event of a major incident or threat of violence. Principals are re-

quired to conduct two lockdown drills each school year.

The effectiveness of a school lockdown plan depends on factors such as police involvement in lockdown drills and an annual review of the plan that includes consultation with the educational professionals who work in the building.

It is important that ETFO members report concerns about lockdown safety to the principal. Concerns could include the need for training about lockdown procedures, updating risk assessments for open and securable areas, maintenance of security features such as door locks and the PA system, access to keys for occasional teachers, and planning for isolated areas such as portable classrooms.

FOUR STRATEGIES FOR DEALING WITH LOCKDOWN CONCERNS:

Ask your principal about the lockdown plan at your school

When was the lockdown plan last reviewed? Were educators consulted? Are the floor plans accurate? Does the plan meet the requirement for effective practices set out in the Ministry of Education's lockdown policy? What kind of training will be provided?

Report lockdown concerns to the principal

When you report a concern, do so in writing. Keep a copy of the report for your own records. Describe the actual or potential hazard. For example: "The PA system does not operate in classroom 12. Lack of direct communication with the office interferes with emergency procedures." Tell your steward and your health and safety representative that you have made the report. If the principal fails to deal with a concern, get support from your ETFO local.

Include lockdown concerns in the health and safety inspection report

Ask the worker representative who conducts the monthly health and safety inspection to record your concern on her report. For example: "The door locks in the following classrooms are faulty. Doors must lock effectively during lockdown procedures." The principal must read the inspection report and record actions taken to deal with identified hazards. Copies of the completed report should be posted on the health and safety bulletin board and distributed to the Joint Health and Safety Committee (JHSC).

Request corrective actions through the JHSC

Concerns relating to lockdown safety can be included on the agenda of the JHSC meeting. For example: "The need for principal and staff training on lockdown procedures in the event of a major violent incident." The JHSC can make written recommendations, including corrective actions, about lockdown concerns to the school board. The school board must respond in writing within 21 days.

ETFO members know that lockdown plans are more complex than front door security. Speaking up about lockdown concerns helps to ensure that the school community is healthy and safe for everyone. ■

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