

April 29, 2009

Eastern School District
Att. School Board Trustees
PO Box 8600
Charlottetown PEI C1A 8V7

Dear Trustees,

The PEI Home and School Federation is pleased that the Eastern School District has drafted a policy titled "School Lockdown Response Plan". In mid November the Federation requested information from the school board around the communications plan to parents and their children regarding school lockdowns. We received a sample letter to parents, including a backgrounder page that includes a section on Parent Involvement. In that section, it reads that "Parents should be aware of what their child is expected to do in a lockdown and how they can communicate with the child and the school." The Federation agrees, but we have heard from parents who feel that the communication is not timely or sufficient. For example, the backgrounder details the lockdown procedures if a child is in a classroom, but what if he/she is in the library, cafeteria, gym or outdoors?

In a letter dated December 4, 2008 to Sandy MacDonald, Superintendent of Education, the Federation emphasized the need for a comprehensive board-wide communications plan that clearly identifies the role and responsibilities of parents around lockdowns, and that the plan would be rolled out in a consistent way across the board. Moreover, parents need to know what the schools are telling their children about lockdown procedures. If the District's expectation is that parents should be aware of what they and their children are expected to do in a lockdown, then this information needs to be communicated in an effective way.

I have reviewed the draft lockdown policy and while it does outline individual responsibilities, it falls short of providing details on how and what type of information parents will receive. I highlight a few specific points in Section 3.

School Lockdown Response Plan Awareness and Drills

The School administration is responsible:

(a) to communicate the plan to staff, students and parents.

How will this be accomplished? Does the District plan template include what type of parent information is to be included? Is the communication instrument(s) standardized across the board (i.e. parent meeting, notice, website)? I have children in Sherwood Elementary and Stonepark Intermediate and even though both schools have now completed lockdown drills, I have not received either of the response plans.

Parents/Guardians are responsible:

(a) to be made aware of the plan so they can foster dialogue about the topic with their children.

We offer a suggested revision “to be made aware of the plan so they can discuss lockdowns with their children and provide any support their children may need.”

(b) to be encouraged to discuss with their children their responsibilities as outlined above.

We offer a suggested revision “ to discuss with their children their responsibilities as outlined above, and to reinforce messages that their children will have received from teachers relating to these procedures.”

High Risk Incident (Actual Event)

The Federation believes there should be language in this section on the responsibilities of parents/guardians. We offer the following:

“Parents/Guardians are responsible:

- (a) to understand how they should respond, if a high risk incident were to occur, as outlined in the School Lockdown Response Plan.”
- (b) to assist police by following police direction at the off-site evacuation locations.

This assumes that there is information in the plan on what parents should do and what they should not do in the event of an actual lockdown. For example, who do parents call? What type of response should they expect from police and/or emergency services?

Overall, the Federation would like to see more detailed language in the policy on the information to be communicated to parents. At our AGM on April 18, 2009 a motion was brought forth and passed by parents "that the PEIHSF continue its dialogue with the Eastern School District around school lockdown procedures to ensure that parents concerns are communicated and acted upon." It is important for the school board to take a leadership role to ensure that all schools in the district are providing the same key information on lockdowns to parents in an effective and timely manner. For example, we believe a letter to parents, a lockdown backgrounder document and a school lockdown response plan should go home to parents and that these documents should also be easily visible on the school’s website. The Federation believes that some of the concerns expressed by parents speak to the need for improved communications around lockdowns.

The Federation looks forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Bill Whelan
President