

School Safety Update

By David Yeo and School Resource Officer Frank Plourd

The Scarborough School Department works year-round to keep our schools safe. One of the ways we do that is by participating in two active safety committees, the HSSAT (Health Safety Security Advisory Team) and the DEMA (District Emergency Management Team). These teams meet regularly throughout the year to plan and organize improvement strategies. Membership includes: Police, Fire, and EMS, district school administration, district building administration, school nurses and school transportation. These teams develop training and procedures for the district, including scenario based training, such as tabletop exercises.

Table top exercises include building administration, members of the crisis and leadership teams, school resource officers, building safety team members, and representatives from Police, Fire and EMS. Different scenarios are read to the group and the group “talks” through how the incident would be managed while following the schools well-developed emergency plans and procedures. This provides everyone an opportunity to review specific areas of the plan which may need to be furthered refined or developed to provide the most effective response.

We also work with Scarborough Public Safety on active threat exercises, such as the one that took place this past July at the Middle School. This opportunity was supported by a federal grant. The team executed a full-scale simulated threat drill to practice communication, timing and process steps. This exercise provided an opportunity for all departments to thoroughly review how effective the response was and which areas they felt necessary to target for continued improvement.

We continually research and keep current with the latest trends in safety and security which are data driven in an effort to provide an optimal learning environment for our students and ensure the safety of all building occupants. On October 31, members took part in a webinar that demonstrated some of the most current software available for use in public buildings to employ during an active threat incident. Scarborough Public Schools appreciate the teamwork between various municipal departments as we work together to improve safety for all.

The Scarborough School Department has developed three specific protocols to deal with safety and security that we want to share with the public. They include: Lock Down, Hold in Place and Evacuation drills. These drills are practiced throughout the school year so we are prepared for various types of events that may occur.

Lockdowns are used when an emergency occurs outside of the school and an evacuation would be dangerous or when there is an emergency inside and movement within the school will put occupants in jeopardy. Procedures are in place to lock and secure the building immediately, and law enforcement personnel will be alerted. During a lockdown, only public safety officials will be allowed to enter the building.

Some events may call for the school to enter a less serious Hold in Place mode. These events might include a dog search, an injured person in the hall or any temporary event that requires the halls to be cleared. This will require staff to clear the corridors near their rooms and contain all students and staff behind closed doors. Hold in Place also helps with privacy should someone require emergency medical care.

An Evacuation is used when conditions outside are safer than inside. Once the Building Administrator directs an evacuation, all students and staff move from the school to their predetermined outdoor area. After students and staff are accounted for and the threat has cleared, students and staff return to their classrooms. In the event it is determined that we cannot re-enter the building, off site evacuation plans are in place and notifications and further instructions would be made. The safety and security of our campus, buildings, and occupants, are of utmost importance to all of us.

We hope this information provides parents and members of the public some comfort to know that your schools and public safety departments are well prepared and collaborate often to be ready for any and all threats. If an emergency occurs it is important that parents know plans are in place and that their children will be safe. It is also important that parents listen to and follow official communications and directions from the School District and Public Safety Officials rather than responding to the schools and possibly making it more difficult for public safety to do their jobs.