

SEAC Inquiry – September 19, 2018

School Fire Safety and Students with Disabilities

Autism Ontario’s mission is “to ensure that each individual with ASD is provided the means to achieve quality of life as a respected member of society”. “Autism Ontario is dedicated to increasing public awareness about autism and the day-to-day issues faced by individuals with autism, their families, and the professionals with whom they interact. The association and its chapters share common goals of providing information and education, supporting research, and advocating for programs and services for the autism community”¹.

In alignment with Autism Ontario’s provincial mission and priorities, the Toronto chapter strives to bring the local voice and concerns of TCDSB parents to the forefront in the form of formal inquiries (item 13, *Inquiries and Miscellaneous*) at TCDSB Special Education Advisory Committee meetings with the intent of receiving Board staff clarification and information.

It is our understanding that it is a requirement, as per the Ontario Fire Marshall and various Ontario legislation that schools must have a fire safety plan which has been approved by the Chief Fire Official, that supervisory staff be appointed and trained on how to carry out the school fire safety plan and that the drill procedures must be developed and carried out in consultation with the Chief Fire Official. On top of the previously listed requirements and according to Article 2.8.3.2. of Division B of the Fire Code, it is also our understanding that schools must hold three fire drills which includes a total evacuation of the building in each school term, or at least once a month during the summer term in schools attended by children and in day care centres in schools attended by children.

Seeing as the Ontario Fire Code requires a total evacuation of the building during fire drills in schools; when developing the school fire safety plan and before submitting the plan to the Chief Fire Official, it is our understanding that the capabilities and mobility needs of the building occupants which includes students and staff must be taken into consideration and duly noted in the plan.

According to the Toronto Catholic District School Board’s policy register; policy number SM.07 *Fire Emergency Procedures*, regulation 3: “each school’s Fire Safety Plan will also be posted on the school’s portal page”.

Due to the varying capabilities and characteristics of students with special education needs, many challenges in effectively enforcing fire safety procedures may be present during drills and in the case of an actual emergency. The auditory over-stimulation and transition away from the structured schedule of the day during a fire drill or actual emergency may cause a heightened sense of fear and confusion for many students with special education needs, students who are deaf and hard of hearing may require additional support and students with mobility impairments may also require additional support. Ensuring that these students are explicitly taught safety procedures and that the necessary human resource/facilities support is available in the case of an actual emergency is essential.

¹ <http://www.autismontario.com/client/aso/ao.nsf/web/About+Us>

Autism Ontario – Toronto Chapter would like to know:

- 1) What policies and procedures are in place that specifically includes the consideration of the varying capabilities and characteristics of students with special education needs when developing, carrying out and monitoring fire safety plan procedures in TCDSB schools?**
- 2) What process is in place to provide additional preparation and support for those students that struggle with transition, sensory processing or other needs as specified in their IEP.**
- 3) What metrics are in place for monitoring and reporting compliance with the fire safety plan requirements?**

The Toronto chapter of Autism Ontario asks that your written response be included as part of the October 2018 SEAC agenda.

Supplementary information:

<https://www.mcscs.jus.gov.on.ca/sites/default/files/content/ofm/docs/TG-04-2016%20-%20Fire%20Drill%20Guideline.pdf>

<https://www.tcdsb.org/Board/Policies/Documents/SM07.pdf>