
SCHOOL POLICY:	TEMPORARY CLOSURE OF SCHOOLS
PUBLISHED:	November 1997
IDENTIFIER:	TCS199711
CONTACT:	Director, Finance and Corporate Support
RELATED POLICIES:	<i>Critical Incident Planning for Schools</i> <i>First Aid</i> <i>Sun Protection</i> <i>Industrial Action Affecting the Operation of Schools</i> <i>Playground Supervision of Students</i>

This policy should be read in conjunction with the *Critical Incident Planning for Schools* policy.

1 PURPOSE

To set out procedures for the temporary closure of a government school.

2 DEFINITIONS

- 2.1 *Emergency* is any event which arises internally or externally which may adversely affect the safety of persons in a building or its precincts and requires immediate response by the occupants. Emergencies can arise from a number of causes including fire, bomb threat or suspicious item found, structural faults, earthquake, chemical spill, a cut off to the mains water supply, leakage of gas, civil disorder and extreme vandalism.
- 2.2 *A critical incident* can be a physical incident or psychological trauma which has severe immediate impact and likely long-term effects on the individuals involved. These may include:
- incidents which may involve staff/student, staff/staff, or other person/staff/student (such incidents may not necessarily occur in the school)
 - people-made disasters/emergencies
 - natural disasters/emergencies.
- 2.3 *Thermal Comfort*. The thermal environment is a composite of a number of climatic factors, including air temperature, air movement, humidity and radiant heat. Thermal comfort is dependent upon an individual's response to temperature and is affected by such factors as level of activity and metabolism, personal health, medication, suitability of clothing, level of acclimatisation and level and length of exposure to the adverse conditions. It is difficult to determine exact boundaries between acceptable and non-acceptable levels of thermal comfort.
- 2.4 *Parents* is inclusive of guardians and legal guardians.

3 POLICY STATEMENT

The contents of this policy incorporate the ACT Government Service OH&S policies which include *Fire Safety and Emergency Procedures* (OH&S No P-06), *Critical Incident Policy*

(OH&S No P-13), *Thermal Comfort in ACT Government Workplaces* (OH&S No 11), and the *ACT Government Service OH&S Agreement*.

4 POLICY RESPONSIBILITIES

4.1 The Directorate

The Directorate has a duty of care to protect students and staff. The Director-General, executive directors and directors have the authority to close a school on a temporary basis when the safety of staff, students or third persons is at risk. Recommendations for such action should come from the principal or teacher-in-charge at that time and be directed to the relevant School Network Leader.

Temporary closure of a government school may occur where there is an immediate threat to student and staff physical health or safety and/or the existence of distressing environmental factors which results in an inability to continue supervision or a viable program of education.

A temporary school closure may be considered under the following circumstances:

- emergency or critical incident
- risks to health or safety
- instruction from the Medical Officer of Health
- epidemic
- industrial action
- days of extreme weather conditions (thermal comfort).

In the event that a school cannot be used for classes, principals should consult with the relevant School Network Leader to make alternative arrangements for students.

4.2 The Principal

- When possible, the principal should ensure, in consultation with the School Network Leader or senior management that adequate notice is given to the parents of each child through a variety of media including a written note to parents, a radio or television announcement and/or advertisements in newspapers. Schools must not rely solely on written notices. In addition, clearly visible signs must be placed at all entrances to the school.
- When a school is closed on immediate or very short notice ie. within one full working day, the principal and/or deputy principal and staff as determined by the principal, must remain at the school to provide for the care of students both present and arriving at the school. Students of preschool and primary school age must not be sent home without prior notice to parents.
- When the temporary school closure is expected to continue, the relevant School Network Leader should direct staff to report for duty at an alternative workplace.
- In an emergency the principal or teacher-in-charge may evacuate a school without authorisation from the relevant School Network Leader or senior management if real doubt exists about the safety and well-being of the students and staff within the school. In such a case, the School Network Leader should be notified as soon as possible.
- While approval for a temporary school closure may be provided verbally by the School Network Leader, written confirmation of the decision must be provided within two

Temporary Closure of Schools

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working days to the principal. Such advice should be kept on file at both the school and the office of the relevant School Network Leader. School rolls may also need to be adjusted accordingly.

- The schools officer in ACTION (telephone 20 77800 southside and 20 77707 northside, fax 20 78108) and other transport companies must be alerted to the temporary change in school bus transport requirements. Verbal notification must be followed up in writing.

4.3 Conditional Procedures

- **Emergency or critical incident - critical incident management plan.** Schools and workplaces must have a critical incident management plan which is reviewed annually in accordance with the *Critical Incident Planning for Schools* policy and Chapter 6 *Evacuation Planning* in the *Emergency/Disaster Planning for Principals* booklet distributed to schools with *the Critical Incident Planning for Schools* policy.
- **Occupational Health and Safety.** If the nominated health and safety representative at a school workplace perceives an emergency or immediate threat to the health or safety of the school's staff and students, the representative shall notify the principal of the need for immediate action which could include the closure of whole or part of the school.
- **Medical.** The Medical Officer of Health may declare that a school shall be closed for medical reasons. In such an instance, the school shall remain closed until the Medical Officer of Health decides that the school may be opened without prejudice to public health. The School Network Leader must be notified of any such declaration.
- **Epidemic.** If a significant proportion of staff or students is absent due to an epidemic or severe illness and this results in the inability of the school to continue supervision or execution of the normal program of education, the principal should refer to a School Network Leader for necessary action.
- **Industrial action.** All schools are expected to remain open and normal arrangements apply, as far as practicable, when industrial action is taken by employee organisations. Reference should be made to the Directorate's *Industrial Action Affecting the Operation of Schools* policy. If duty of care provisions cannot be met, the principal or teacher-in-charge must notify the School Network Leader.
- **Days of extreme weather conditions - thermal comfort.** Principals should investigate any occurrence of thermal discomfort (hot or cold) within their school and take preventive/corrective action in accordance with the tolerance levels of individual staff members and students, the type of work being performed and the thermal environment at the time. The closure of a school would only be supported in an extreme case. Prior approval must be obtained from the relevant School Network Leader.