



**PAUL DENOMME**  
Superintendent of Student Achievement  
Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board  
20 Education Court, P.O. Box 2558  
Hamilton, ON L8N 3L1  
905-527-5092x2304

March 6, 2020

Dear Parents, Guardians and Caregivers

**Re: Norwood Park Evacuation – February 27, 2020**

I am sharing this letter with the school community as a follow-up to the evacuation incident that occurred during the afternoon of February 27 at Norwood Park Elementary School.

I am deeply sorry that our students and staff remained outdoors in the significant cold for an extended period of time as a result of the evacuation. While the appropriate steps were taken by school staff to ensure that everyone was safely out of the school once the smell of gas was detected the duration of time spent outdoors is regrettable. You entrust us with the care of your children during the school day and we take this responsibility very seriously.

Once the smell of gas was detected the school fire alarm was pulled, the building was evacuated in a swift and calm manner and 911 was called. The Hamilton Fire Department, Hamilton Police Services, and Enbridge Gas Service responded and began their investigation. It was determined that the cause of the smell was a gas leak from one of the school's boilers.

As the outdoor conditions during the evacuation were concerning Principal Moules directed students and staff to the school's emergency shelter site, Living Word Ministries at the corner of South Bend Avenue and Warren Avenue. Unfortunately, the site was locked and access was unavailable. The Hamilton-Wentworth Student Transportation Services was then contacted and busses were dispatched immediately to provide shelter. The first bus arrived at the school within a short time frame followed by other busses shortly after. The alternative to waiting for the busses would have been to walk to the secondary emergency shelter, Ridgemount Elementary School, a fairly lengthy walk from Norwood Park. High school vice-principals and staff from HWDSB's Facilities Management department were also sent to the site to assist.

While I appreciate the desire of some families to be contacted immediately when an incident such as this occurs, the HWDSB practice of refraining from such action is based on learning from past experiences and ongoing discussions with the city's emergency services. When a school is evacuated and a call is made to 911, emergency responders are dispatched to the site. It is critical that during this time access to the school, including walkways, driveways and municipal streets remain unobstructed. Ensuring the safe dismissal of students to the appropriate parent or contact person would also be very challenging during the process of evacuation. Once the evacuation is complete and there is an indication that re-entry within a reasonable period of time is uncertain or if the school would need to be closed, families would be called. As with all major incidents that occur at the school an information letter is posted to the school website along with an automated phone call home once the matter has been resolved.

# HWDSB

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I can reassure you that immediate steps have been taken following this incident and as result the new emergency shelter site will be the Canadian Tire at 777 Upper James South. I am also able to report that repairs to the boiler have been completed.

Once again, I wish to extend my apology for the extended amount of time that our students and staff remained outdoors as a result of the evacuation. Please know that the safety and well-being of your child is our top priority.

Please contact Principal Moules or myself if you have further questions or concerns.

Sincerely,



Paul Denomme  
Superintendent of Student Achievement

Copy:

Rhonda Moules  
Principal, Norwood Park Elementary School

Shannon Leigh Chandler and Angela Larson  
School Council Co Chairs, Norwood Park Elementary School