Procedure

Temporary closure and re-opening of state schools procedure

Version: 1.1 | **Version effective**: 03/03/2025

Audience

Department-wide

Purpose

To provide direction to principals about temporarily closing and reopening schools in disaster or emergency situations.

Overview

It may be necessary to temporarily close a school or campus, sometimes unexpectedly, as a result of a disaster or emergency situation. Any decision to close a school is made with the safety of students, staff and community members at the forefront.

This procedure outlines the process to temporarily close and reopen a single school or campus, or multiple schools through a bulk school closure. Closures can be initiated by the Department of Education (department) or by other agencies under the Disaster Management Act 2003 (DMA) or Public Safety Preservation Act 1986 (PSPA).

Responsibilities

Principals – School Controller

- decide to temporarily close the school or a campus of the school in a disaster or emergency situation, unless directed by their Regional Director/Regional Controller (RD/RC), Associate Director-General (Assoc DG), or Deputy Director-General School & Student Support (DDG SSS)
- communicate decisions about temporary school closures and re-openings to the school community
- ensure the safety of students either at the school or campus, or through transportation to an alternative site (if required)
- decide to reopen the school or campus following the disaster or emergency situation
- consider human rights and make decisions that are compatible with the *Human Rights Act 2019* (Qld).

Regional Director – Regional Controller (RD/RC)

- provide advice to school principals on temporary school closures and re-openings
- where the principal(s) has/have not already acted, direct a principal or principals to temporarily close their school or a campus of their school in a disaster or emergency situation
- consider human rights and make decisions that are compatible with the *Human Rights Act 2019* (Qld).

Executive Controller (EC)

- where the principal and/or RD/RC has not already acted, temporarily close a school, campus or schools, in a disaster or emergency situation
- consider human rights and make decisions that are compatible with the *Human Rights Act 2019* (Qld).

Deputy Director-General Schools and Student Support (DDG SSS)

- where the principal, RD/RC and/or Assoc DG have not already acted, temporarily close a school, campus or schools, in a disaster or emergency situation
- consider human rights and make decisions that are compatible with the *Human Rights Act 2019* (Qld).

Director-General

- enact a bulk school closure on advice from the Chair of the Queensland Disaster Management Committee
- consider human rights and make decisions that are compatible with the *Human Rights Act 2019* (Qld).

Process

Step 1: Decision to temporarily close a school or campus

- The principal of the school is responsible for deciding to temporarily close a school or campus. When making this decision, the principal must consider:
  - available disaster or emergency information relevant to their area
  - advice from their RD/RC where available
  - advice from the Regional Response Team (RRT) if the RD/RC is not available
  - if an Emergency Alert (EA) has been issued for the area from the State Disaster Coordination Centre (SDCC)
  - advice from the Local Disaster Management Group (LDMG) and/or District Disaster Management Group (DDMG) where available
  - asbestos as it relates to the incident
  - other local stakeholder input (e.g. Parents & Citizens' Associations, other school principals) where applicable.
- The principal must:
  - consider human rights, and as soon as practicable document their assessment of whether the closure engages or limits any human rights by examining the following questions:
    - Are any human rights engaged or impacted by the temporary closure of the school?

        - If so, will the temporary closure limit those human rights?
        - If so, is the limitation lawful, justified and reasonable in the circumstances?
    - for assistance with the human rights considerations process, refer to the temporary closure of a school/facility checklist in the School Emergency Response Plan (DoE employees only)
    - save the assessment of human rights considerations (DoE employees only) in the school's records management system as soon as practicable.
- Where an RD/RC directs a principal (or principals) to temporarily close a school, campus or schools in a geographical area (i.e. bulk school closure), the RD/RC must consult with the EC and, where practicable, affected state school principals.
- The RD/RC may advise non-state school sector representatives in the region about the closures.
- The RD/RC must also consider:
    - available disaster or emergency information, relevant to the area
    - advice from the LDMG and/or DDMG where available
    - the EA where an alert is issued for the area.
- Where the Assoc DG/EC or DDG SSS direct a principal (or principals) to temporarily close a school, campus or schools in a geographical area (i.e. bulk school closure), the Assoc DG/EC or DDG SSS must:
    - consider available disaster or emergency information, relevant to the area and any EAs issued
    - consult with the RD/RC of the geographical area regarding advice from LDMGs/DDMGs and any other applicable information
    - ensure the RD/RC consults with principals regarding the decision to temporarily close the school, campus or schools.
- In the event of a bulk school closure, the Queensland Disaster Management Committee (QDMC) chaired by the Premier of Queensland, provides strategic oversight in the response to a disaster event. The Chair, under the DMA, may give directions about the circumstances in which a power under another Act may be exercised during the period of the disaster situation.
- The Director-General, based on advice from the Chair of the QDMC may enact a bulk school closure to ensure the safety of students and staff of the schools within the school cluster, local government area or region. The Director-General must consider human rights as outlined in step 1 of this procedure before enacting a bulk school closure.
- In the event of a bulk school closure, principals of the relevant schools must consult with their RD/RC on the closure and its timing and consider advice from the School Supervisor and Regional Response Team (RRT) if RD/RC is not available.
- In the event of a bulk school closure, the RD/RC for the relevant region(s) must:
    - consult with the DoE Executive Controller
    - liaise with the non-state school sector in the region where practicable.

Step 2: Communicating the decision to temporarily close a school or campus

- The principal must make reasonable attempts to communicate the decision to temporarily close a school or campus to:
  - the RD/RC (if the RD/RC or Assoc DG or DDG SSS did not direct the principal to temporarily close the school or campus)
  - the school community, including the Parents and Citizens' Executive
  - all service providers using, or providing services to, the site or campus
  - the RRT, if the RD/RC is temporarily unavailable
  - the Early Childhood Regulatory Authority for State Delivered Kindergartens operating in scope of the National Quality Framework through a notification in the National Quality Agenda IT System.
- Following consultation with the EC, the RD/RC may advise the media of the closure in order to facilitate communication with the community.
- The RRT must arrange for the closure information to be published on the School Closures website.
- Where the temporary closure of a school or campus arises during the school day, the principal must make reasonable attempts to contact parents to make arrangements for the transportation of students to a place of safety.
- Where students are unable to access safe transport, the principal must make arrangements to ensure the safety of students at the school or campus, or an alternative site.
- The principal may release school staff not necessary for the supervision of students. In some cases, staff may be required to attend a different worksite where it is safe to do so.
- Where the decision to temporarily close the school or campus is made outside of normal school hours, the principal must make reasonable attempts to notify students, parents, staff, other service providers and the school community, prior to the start of the next scheduled school day, of the temporary closure.

Step 3: Decision to re-open the school or campus

- Following the end of a disaster or emergency situation, the principal is responsible for deciding to re-open a school or campus. In making this decision, the principal must consider:
  - staff and student safety
  - accessibility to and from the site
  - the condition of the site and infrastructure
  - the availability and impact of essential services
  - available emergency information
  - advice of their RD/RC where practicable or RRT if RD/RC is temporarily unavailable.
- The School Emergency Response Plan (DoE employees only) contains a suitability assessment, including a Rapid Damage Assessment (RDA), to assist principals with determining re-opening of the school/campus.
- There are circumstances where a RDA by QBuild may not be required to re-open the school/campus, including:

- preventative bulk or LGA closure, or
- temporary community-wide essential service outages (e.g. water, electricity) that have since been resolved, or
- physical access issues to the school/campus (e.g. road closures) that have since been resolved.

- In these circumstances, where the event did not impact the school/campus, the principal in consultation with RD/RC, or RRT if the RD/RC is unavailable, can re-open the school/campus after a suitability assessment is completed.
- Where an LGA has not been impacted after a preventative closure, the EC or RD/RC can provide advice to principals regarding re-opening schools/campuses in the LGA without the need for a RDA.

Step 4: Communicating the decision to re-open a school or campus

- Prior to the scheduled re-opening, the principal must make reasonable attempts to communicate the decision to re-open a school or campus to:
  - the RD/RC
  - the school community including the Parents and Citizens' Executive
  - all service providers using the site or campus where applicable
  - the RRT if RD/RC is temporarily unavailable
  - the Early Childhood Regulatory Authority for State Delivered Kindergartens operating in scope of the National Quality Framework through a notification in the National Quality Agenda IT System.
- Following consultation with the EC, the RD/RC may advise the media of the re-opening in order to facilitate communication with the community.
- The RRT must arrange for the re-opening information to be published on the School Closures website.

Definitions

Term	Definition
Bulk school closures	The temporary closure of a schools within a cluster, local government area or region.
DoE Executive Controller (EC)	A person appointed by the Director-General who is responsible for the co-ordination of continuity and disaster management in the Department of Education (DoE). The EC is also the chair of the Department of Education Continuity & Disaster Management Committee (CDMC).
District Disaster Management Group (DDMG)	The DDMG is established under section 22 of the DMA for a disaster district to carry out the functions listed in section 23 including such activities as being responsible for the planning, organisation, coordination and implementation of all measures to mitigate/prevent, prepare for, respond to and recover from disasters.
Disaster or emergency situation	Includes, but is not limited to, flood, fire, bushfire, cyclone, tornado, tsunami, earthquake, chemical, medical, biological, or health related matters, structural

Term	Definition
	damage or other circumstances that render gathering or staying at the premises of the school temporarily unsafe.
Emergency Alert (EA)	An emergency alert is the national telephone-based system that the State Disaster Coordination Centre use to send messages to landlines and mobile phones to warn people of dangerous weather and possible severe impacts. The decision to send an emergency alert is based on certainty, severity, timeframe, frequency and action.
Local Disaster Management Group (LDMG)	The LDMG is established under section 29 of the DMA for a local government area to carry out the functions listed in section 30 including being responsible for the local planning, organisation, coordination and implementation of all measures to mitigate/prevent, prepare for, respond to and recover from disasters.
Principal	The person responsible for the day-to-day management of the state school, or the person who assumes the functions and responsibilities of the principal during the principal's absence from the school (see s.8 of the EGPR).
Regional Director (RD)	The person with responsibility for the management of a DoE region.
Regional Controller	Person appointed to coordinate the regional preparation, response and recovery effort for disaster or emergency situations. This is generally the RD of a geographical area.
Regional Response Team (RRT)	The RRT is the regional level decision making body and is responsible for providing support to the school level. The RRT coordinates the regional response.
School/Campus	For the purpose of this procedure, a school is a state school or state educational institution (including Independent Public Schools), including state outdoor and environmental educational centres and state school operated residential boarding facilities. Schools are inclusive of State Delivered Kindergartens (where applicable). A school may have an additional site or sites referred to as a campus. For example, Tagai State College has multiple sites across the Far North Region, each referred to as a campus of the school.
State Disaster Coordination Centre (SDCC)	The SDCC provides an operational venue for disaster related events while providing state-level support for disaster management responses.

Legislation

- Education (General Provisions) Regulation 2017 (Qld) section 9
- *Queensland Disaster Management Act 2003*
- *Public Safety Preservation Act 1986* (Qld)
- *Human Rights Act 2019* (Qld)

Delegations/Authorisations

- Director-General delegations under *Education (General Provisions) Act 2006* section 46

Policies and procedures in this group

- Disaster and emergency management procedure
- Continuity, disaster and emergency management policy
- Business continuity management procedure
- Managing offers of assistance in disaster events procedure

Supporting information for this procedure

- Nil

Other resources

- Nil

Contact

For further information, please contact:

Disaster and Emergency Management Team
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30/09/2027

Superseded versions

Previous seven years shown. Minor version updates not included.

Nil

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