

Topic:	Water-based Activities – Swimming, Activities In/On Water, and Considerations for Activities Near/Over Water
Effective:	September 2017
Cross-Reference:	OPASSE Safety Standards; HDSB Localized Minimum Standards; Administrative Procedures: Day Field Trips and In-School Presentations; Student Excursions; Environmental Factors and Physical Activity (Thunder, Lightning, High Winds, Extreme Temperatures and Inclement Weather); Risk Management – Minimum Standard of Care for Interschool Athletics; Identification and Management of Concussions;
Revision Date:	December 2019
Review Date:	December 2021
Responsibility:	Superintendent of Education (School Programs)

INTENDED PURPOSE:

The Halton District School Board (HDSB) is committed to the safety of all students while participating in physical activities, both on and off school campus, as part of HDSB curricular (instructional) and/or co-curricular (Interschool Athletics) programs.

To minimize risk to students and staff participating in all physical activities, we adhere to the minimum provincial standard set forth annually through the Ontario Physical Activity Safety Standards in Education (OPASSE) by Ophea - Curricular and Interschool Modules (Elementary and Secondary), as well as the HDSB Localized Minimum Standards (Elementary and Secondary).

For activities such as swimming or those that take place in/on water, additional considerations are required to minimize risk. There are also considerations that need to be made for activities that occur near/over water. All of these considerations are contained in this Administrative Procedure.

DEFINITIONS:

Halton District School Board Localized Minimum Standards: a localized HDSB support document above and beyond the OPASSE that staff refer to when planning physical activities for students.

In water: activities occurring while enclosed or surrounded by water (e.g., diving, scuba diving, snorkeling, triathlon and water polo, etc.).

Near Water: activities occurring within a close distance to water (e.g., stream or pond study, nature walk, water sampling, overnight stay in a cabin near water, etc.) where there is no intent in the activity to swim/bathe, boat, or wade beyond knee height.

Non Designated Swimming Area: a body of water used for swimming that does not have any set boundaries (e.g., buoys, float lines), nor lifesaving equipment readily available. Swimming in a non-designated area may occur on outdoor education trips (e.g., back-packing, sailing, canoeing, or kayaking).

On water: activities supported by a water surface; boating/watercraft (e.g., base camp lake water canoeing, canoe tripping, flat water kayaking, sailing, etc).

OPASSE: The Ontario Physical Activity Safety Standards in Education (OPASSE), managed by Ophea, represent the minimum provincial standards for risk management practice in school boards. These safety standards are updated on an annual basis. <https://safety.ophea.net/>

Over water: activities occurring directly above water; (e.g., ziplining, aerial park activities like treetop trekking) where there is no plan or intent to enter the water.

PROCEDURES:

When students participate in curricular and/or co-curricular activities: **1) swimming 2) in/on water or 3) near/over water** the following procedures and minimum standards must be adhered to in each of the areas outlined below **PRIOR** to participation in the activities.

Prior to participation in curricular and/or co-curricular activities related to swimming or activities in/on water, students must pass a swim test. Note: the exception to this is as a passenger on a commercial boat which adheres to industry safety standards for the purposes of a tour. Swim tests are specific to the activity and must be completed in the presence of a certified aquatic instructor or a certified Lifesaving Society National Lifeguard. Up to date requirements and components of the swim tests are located in the OPASSE activity specific pages. <http://safety.ophea.net/>

Swim tests must be completed:

- within the school year (i.e., September through August) in which the activity is taking place, and,
- at a local pool prior to engaging in the activity.

In lieu of completing a swim test, students may provide proof of current Bronze Medallion certification or higher.

Any lifeguard or outside service provider associated with the curricular and/or co-curricular activity, as well as the school administration and parent(s)/guardian(s), must be made aware of the swim test results prior to student participation. A copy of this documentation will be on file at the school prior to the commencement of activity.

Ratios for student supervision, instructing, and lifeguarding are reviewed annually by Ophea and can be found in the OPASSE activity specific pages. <http://safety.ophea.net/>.

- 1. Swimming:** occurring in lakes, ponds, and rivers at recreational camps, public swimming areas and non-designated swim areas. Students are required to complete HDSB Swim Test Form A.

Curricular swimming is an approved activity for all HDSB students. Competitive Swimming is an approved interschool sport that exists at HDSB secondary schools only (including Gr.7-12 schools).

Both activities must be done in accordance with [Ontario Public Pools Regulation 565](#) and meet the minimum provincial safety standards set forth by the OPASSE and the HDSB Localized Minimum Standards.

Students are not permitted to swim in residential backyard pools, hotel pools, water parks or use water slides as part of an HDSB curricular and/or co-curricular field trip/excursion.

Participation in instructional swimming requires that identified Non-Swimmers (including those who self-identify and do not take the swim test as well as those who do not successfully pass the initial swim test) must wear a properly fastened Personal Flotation Device (PFD) where not in direct and constant supervision by the aquatics instructor. Staff should refer to the Swimming Safety Guidelines for Students with Special Needs including Appendix: Safety Checklist for Determining Student Readiness to Participate when planning curricular swimming outings for students in Life Skills/Community Pathways Programs.

Swimming activities require on-site supervision by certified lifeguards. Teachers and Educational Assistants, regardless of whether they hold a lifeguard certificate must accompany students to the activity area and be present and actively supervising during all swimming activities.

Regardless of whether the student is swimming independently or wearing a PFD, the supervisor(s), instructor(s), and/or lifeguard(s) must be cognizant of:

- environmental conditions (e.g., air and water temperature, thunder and lightning, currents, tides and wave conditions, water quality, weather, wind, air quality, humidity, UV index, insects, etc.)
- water factors (e.g., avoid swimming in fast moving rivers or streams, or near other hazards such as drains, dams or boating areas, etc.)

2. Activities in Water (e.g., Diving, Scuba Diving, Snorkeling, Triathlon and Water Polo, etc.) and **Activities on Water - Boating/Watercraft** (e.g., Base Camp Lake Water Canoeing, Canoe Tripping, Flat Water Kayaking, Sailing, etc.). Students are required to complete HDSB Swim Test Form B.

Activities in/on water - boating/watercraft are not approved for HDSB students below Grade 7 in either a curricular and/or co-curricular capacity. Moreover, “white water activities” on water (e.g., white water canoeing, white water kayaking, etc.) are not approved for any HDSB students, regardless of age or grade.

Activities in/on water - boating/watercraft are generally associated with Outdoor Education and may or may not involve overnight camping. Regardless, they must be carried out in keeping with water conditions appropriate to the skill level of the group and a swim test must occur in a local pool prior to departure for the event. The basic student qualifications required of all students participating in activities in/on water -boating/watercraft, must meet the minimum standards as set out in OPASSE specific to the Outdoor Education activity being undertaken.

Students who do not pass the swim test for activities in/on the water may **not** participate regardless of their ability to complete the swim test while wearing a PFD. Alternative experiences, such as instructional swimming, should be considered.

Supervisor(s), instructor(s) and/or lifeguard(s) must be cognizant of:

- environmental conditions (e.g., air and water temperature, thunder and lightning, currents, tides and wave conditions, water quality, weather, wind, air quality, humidity, UV index, insects, etc.)
- water factors (e.g., current, depth, etc.) and the ability to have a safety craft/rescue boat accessible to participants.

A safety craft is a designated craft that is rescue-capable, taking into consideration the necessary factors (for example, distance from shore, weather, water and wind conditions), and contains at least one instructor, trip guide, or individual who meets the required first aid certification(s). A safety craft must be in the water and accessible while students are participating in “on water” activities. The safety craft need not be motorized. If the safety craft is a motorized craft then the operator of the motorized safety craft must have a Pleasure Craft Operator Card. The operator of the safety craft, whether craft is motorized or not, must have experience in navigating the craft. To determine the specific safety craft requirements for each on-water activity, refer to OPASSE.

Conditions where Safety Craft are Not Permissible: If the body of water does not allow the use of a safety craft (e.g., too shallow, pool, etc.), then the instructor(s) must always maintain a proximal distance such as to be able to reach students as quickly as in the case of a safety craft being present.

Note: A safety craft is not required if instruction for “on water” activities takes place in a pool.

3. Considerations for activities near/over water:

From a safety perspective, some activities that occur near or over water are not actually defined as water activities. It is the intent that determines the purpose of the activity. Intent to swim, bathe, boat, etc. is not present in activities such as stream or pond studies, nature walks, walking on a bridge, water sampling or an overnight stay in a cabin near water. Physical and Outdoor Education activities such as ziplining, aerial parks/treetop trekking over water are by definition

climbing activities and minimum safety requirements can be found in the OPASSE - Climbing - Zipline/Tyrolean Traverse/Equivalent activity pages. When in doubt, check OPASSE for the specific activity and/or contact the HDSB Instructional Program Lead(s) for Safety for your subject area.

In planning activities near/over water, consider the following:

- How does the proposed activity support the curriculum expectations?
- How are safety considerations differentiated specific to the age and stage of the students involved?
- What pre and post teaching is occurring to support student safety near/over water?
- What are the supervision ratios?
- Is there expertise available from the site of the activity (nature interpreter, guide, program facilitator)?
- What is known about:
 - a. the distance from the water that students will be working
 - b. the depth of water if students are entering it
 - c. the speed of current
 - d. the temperature of water
 - e. students previous experience with water
 - f. seasonal or weather related changes that may impact the water conditions
 - g. appropriate equipment to support safe practices (eg. hip waders, nets, gloves, etc).

Halton Conservation and The Weather Network will provide warnings when conditions become unsafe for activities near or over water.

In conclusion, given the risks associated with swimming, activity in/on water and those activities that are near/over water as well as the high duty of care required of staff and supervisors, it is paramount that staff planning these curricular and/or co-curricular activities, field trips and excursions involving students do so with enough lead time to ensure due diligence, careful planning, and activities appropriate for the age and skill level of the group.