

To: Safety and Facilities Services Committee

From: Adam Grant, Commissioner,
Safety and Facilities Services Department

Report Number: SF-25-53

Date of Report: November 5, 2025

Date of Meeting: November 10, 2025

Subject: Fire Pals Oshawa

Ward: All Wards

File: 03-05

1.0 Purpose

The purpose of this report is to inform City Council of the re-branding and enhancement of the City's annual school fire-safety education program, now to be called "Fire Pals Oshawa" with the tagline "Turning Safety Into Fun".

Led by the Fire Prevention Division of Oshawa Fire Services and supported by our Fire Suppression crews, the enhanced program aims to strengthen fire safety education, deepen school relationships, and increase community engagement. This report provides an overview of the revised program scope, responsibilities, benefits, and implementation plan.

2.0 Recommendation

That the Safety and Facilities Services Committee recommend to City Council:

That Report SF-25-53, dated November 5, 2025, concerning the enhancement of Fire Pals Oshawa be received for information.

3.0 Input From Other Sources

- Fire Services

4.0 Analysis

4.1 Background

Oshawa Fire Services currently delivers a fire-safety education program in the 43 public elementary schools in Oshawa each year. Fire Prevention Division staff visit each school

to present to students Grades 1 through 8, educating them on fire safety, home escape planning, smoke and carbon monoxide alarm installation and maintenance.

In recognition of the value of building sustained relationships with younger students and embedding fire-safety awareness early, the program is being expanded. The new “Fire Pals Oshawa” initiative will now include a kindergarten level component and will involve active participation from both the Fire Prevention and Fire Suppression Divisions, ensuring a more personalized, relationship-based approach to fire safety education.

4.2 Program Enhancement Overview

Under the Fire Pals Oshawa model:

- Each Fire Suppression crew will be assigned one public elementary school (from the 43) wherein they will serve as the “adopting” crew for that school.
- The assigned crew will build and maintain a relationship with the school’s kindergarten teachers, the school administration, and custodial staff.

Planned activities include:

- Kindergarten classroom visits by firefighters introducing fire safety concepts at an early age.
- Participation in scheduled fire drills at that school alongside school staff, offering reinforcement of emergency-response protocols.
- Fire truck and crew appearances at fun fairs, school open houses or special events to promote familiarity and positive engagement.
- Fire station tours arranged for the kindergarten classes with their assigned crew, allowing children to meet their local crew, see equipment and promote hands-on learning.
- A “Fire Chief for the Day” event where a student is designated (via competition or nomination) to role-play as Fire Chief alongside the crew.

The Fire Prevention Division will continue its annual visits to all 43 public elementary schools (Grades 1-8) maintaining consistent program delivery of core fire-safety content (home escape plans, smoke/CO alarms, etc.), while suppression crews add the kindergarten focus and relationship-building component.

4.2.1 Rationale / Benefits

The program delivers the following benefits:

- **Early Engagement:** Engaging children at the kindergarten level helps establish a fire-safety mindset early, improving long-term safety outcomes.
- **Relationship Building:** Assigning crews to a specific school builds stronger, ongoing relationships between firefighters and the school community (teachers, admin, custodians, students), which fosters trust, visibility, and community outreach.

- **Experiential Learning:** The variety of activities (classroom visits, fire truck appearances, and station tours) adds experiential education, increasing retention of safety messages.
- **Enhanced School Drills:** Fire drills led or supported by the local crew increase the real-world connection for students and staff, reinforcing school emergency-response procedures.
- **Crew Ownership:** The “adoption” model provides ownership by the crew and the school, allowing tailored planning and scheduling to maximize participation and impact.
- **Continuity of Service:** The ongoing Fire Prevention Division visits to Grades 1-8 ensure that existing fire-safety education remains intact and consistent across all public schools.

4.2.2 Implementation Plan

Phase 1 – Preparation (Q4 2025/Q1 2026):

- Identify and assign fire-suppression crews to each of the 43 public elementary schools (or a subset if the kindergarten focus is initially piloted).
- Meet with school principals and kindergarten teachers to introduce the “Fire Pals Oshawa” program, confirm roles, schedules and expected activities.
- Develop standard materials and scheduling templates for classroom visits, fire-truck appearances, station tours and the “Fire Chief for the Day” event.
- Communicate the revamped program to all school administrators, custodial leads, and teaching staff to ensure awareness and buy-in.

Phase 2 – Roll-Out (Q2 2026):

- Begin the kindergarten-targeted activities such as classroom visits, local fire-truck visits (or station tours) by the assigned crew.
- Continue the annual Fire Prevention Division visits to Grades 1-8 in all public elementary schools.
- Schedule fire drills at each adopted school in coordination with the crew and school staff, including pre- and post-drill debriefing by the crew to observe and provide learning.
- Schedule fire truck/community-event appearances and a “Fire Chief for the Day” event at each school.
- Record activities and engagement metrics (school name, crew, date, participation numbers, type of activity and feedback).

Phase 3 – Monitoring and Evaluation (Mid-year and Year-end):

Quantitative metrics:

- Number of kindergarten visits.
- Number of fire-truck appearances and station tours.
- Number of fire drills supported.
- Total students engaged (Kindergarten + Grades 1-8).

Qualitative feedback:

- Survey school staff (teachers, administration, custodial) on program value, suggestions for improvement, and any scheduling/logistics challenges.

Outcome measures:

- Improvement in student recall of fire-safety steps such as:
 - Awareness of escape plans
 - Testing of smoke/CO alarms at home (via take-home materials)
 - School fire drill performance

The program will be adjusted as required for Year 2 based on lessons learned, including adjusting crew assignments, scheduling models, resource demands, and communication approaches.

4.2.3 Resource Implications

Staffing: Existing Fire Prevention staff will continue to deliver the annual school visits to Grades 1-8; no additional staff are required. The Fire Suppression Division will absorb the assigned-crew workload for kindergarten visits, fire-truck appearances, station tours and fire-drill support. Some adjustments in scheduling (crew availability, community-engagement time) may be required but are manageable within the current budgeted resources.

Materials: There may be minor increases in printing of take-home materials for kindergarten and event visits, minor refresh of promotional items (e.g., certificates for “Fire Chief for the Day”). These costs are anticipated to be minimal and accommodated within the existing Fire Prevention outreach budget.

Transportation/logistics: Use of fire trucks for station tours and school visits will be coordinated to minimize operational impact.

Capital: No new capital expenditures or new full-time positions are required at this time.

Future evaluation may consider whether dedicated outreach-staff or additional resources are needed if the program expands further.

4.3 Program Significance and Alignment

The “Fire Pals Oshawa: Turning Safety Into Fun” program represents a meaningful enhancement to the City’s fire-safety education efforts, focusing on younger learners (Kindergarten) and deepening engagement between our firefighters and the school community. By leveraging the strengths of both the Fire Prevention and Fire Suppression Divisions, the City of Oshawa will deliver a more comprehensive, relationship-based and experiential fire-safety education program. This initiative aligns with the City’s commitment to community safety, education and outreach, and supports a safer, better-informed young citizenry across Oshawa.

5.0 Financial Implications

There are no financial implications related to this Report.

6.0 Relationship to the Oshawa Strategic Plan

This report responds to the Oshawa Strategic Plan Priority Area “Care: Safe and Sustainable Environment” with the goal to collaborate and advocate for effective services, programs, and community safety and well-being support.

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Stephen Barkwell, Fire Chief,
Fire Services

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Adam Grant".

Adam Grant, Commissioner,
Safety and Facilities Services Department