

SAFE SCHOOLS



Shaping safer schools:

A bullying prevention action plan

November 2005

Safe Schools Action Team



Ontario



SAFE SCHOOLS ACTION TEAM

November 2005

The Honourable Gerard Kennedy, MPP
Minister of Education
Mowat Block, 900 Bay Street, 22nd Floor
Toronto ON M7A 1L2

Dear Minister,

On December 14, 2004, your government announced the appointment of the Safe Schools Action Team to advise on the development of a comprehensive and coordinated approach to address physical and social safety issues in all Ontario schools. Our mandate included addressing the issue of bullying and we were asked to report back to you with our recommendations to make Ontario's schools safer through a province-wide bullying prevention plan.

The Safe Schools Action Team is pleased to submit *Shaping Safer Schools: A Bullying Prevention Action Plan*.

Bullying is a serious matter with wide ranging ramifications not just for schools, but for our entire society. Preventing bullying requires everyone's cooperation.

This report is an action plan for principals, teachers, and other educators, as well as for students, parents, and the broader community. Our recommendations are evidence-based, built on the Action Team's own experience and knowledge around bullying-related issues, and augmented by extensive stakeholder consultations held across the province.

The Safe Schools Action Team is profoundly grateful for the valuable input we received in preparing *Shaping Safer Schools: A Bullying Prevention Action Plan*. Participants in the consultations offered thoughtful insight and perceptive suggestions. We were impressed by their dedication and commitment. Indeed, we are confident that, given the tools outlined in this Action Plan, they will enthusiastically and successfully implement bullying prevention measures across the province, ensuring safer schools and a supportive learning environment for all Ontario students.

Respectfully,

Safe Schools Action Team

Handwritten signature of Liz Sandals in black ink.

Liz Sandals (Chair)

Handwritten signature of Stu Auty in black ink.

Stu Auty

Handwritten signature of Ray Hughes in black ink.

Ray Hughes

Handwritten signature of Debra J. Pepler in black ink.

Debra Pepler

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	5
1.0 THE SAFE SCHOOLS ACTION TEAM	9
2.0 WHAT IS BULLYING?	10
3.0 BULLYING PREVENTION PLANS	12
3.1 What Works	12
3.2 What Doesn't Work	13
4.0 AN ACTION PLAN FOR BULLYING PREVENTION	14
4.1 Bullying Prevention Roles	15
1. The School Community	15
2. The Broader Community	21
3. School Boards	22
4.2 Action Plans	23
1. Action Plan for School Boards	23
2. Action Plan for Schools	24
5.0 RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION	29
APPENDICES	
Appendix A: Recommendations to Other Ministries	31
Appendix B: Sample Bullying Prevention Program Evaluation Tool	32
Appendix C: International Research	36

Une publication équivalente est disponible en français sous le titre *Améliorer la sécurité dans les écoles : un plan d'action pour la prévention de l'intimidation*, 2005.

This publication is available on the Ministry of Education's website, at <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca>.

Shaping safer schools: A bullying prevention action plan

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Overview

Bullying is not only about student behaviour. Bullying is a serious matter with wide-ranging ramifications not just for schools, but for our entire society. The Safe Schools Action Team prepared specific, evidence-based recommendations to develop a comprehensive, province-wide bullying prevention plan.

Everyone involved in Ontario's education community has a key role to play in bullying prevention. The Government of Ontario, along with several of its Ministries, can provide key coordination and support that will ensure the success of a province-wide bullying prevention agenda.

Preventing bullying requires everyone's cooperation. *A Bullying Prevention Action Plan* provides the necessary information and tools to successfully implement bullying prevention strategies in the education community, and defines key areas to engage and involve the broader community. When we create safe, respectful learning environments, we build and nurture safer communities for all our citizens.

Process

The Action Team consulted widely across the province, tapping the experience, expertise, and perspectives of educators, police, parents, students, student advocates, youth and children's services workers, health care professionals, existing bullying prevention groups, and others. As professionals and advocates, participants shared their personal experiences with bullying, and identified positive and negative outcomes of intervention.

Results

The results of those consultations were taken to a Reference Group of provincial experts on bullying prevention. That group undertook a further review of the regional findings with the Action Team.

Conclusions

Principals, teachers, parents, and other adults shape the school climate, and they are responsible to serve as role models in creating a respectful, safe environment for students.

- **Principals/vice principals** provide vital leadership and administer bullying prevention programs.
- **Teachers and School Staff** are responsible for the day-to-day implementation and enforcement of bullying prevention policies.
- **Students** have a significant role in preventing bullying, and need to have the confidence to safely intervene, stop bullying, and report bullying.
- **Parents** are important participants in ensuring that bullying prevention goes beyond the school grounds.
- **The Broader Community**, including police, neighbours, community organizations, and local business, needs to be aware of how bullying takes place away from schools.
- **School Boards** must demonstrate that bullying prevention is a board-wide priority.
- **The Ministry of Education** needs to provide the required support and resources for the bullying prevention programs, including an anti-bullying hotline.

Recommendations

The recommendations in *Shaping Safer Schools: A Bullying Prevention Action Plan* provides the necessary information and tools to successfully implement bullying prevention strategies for the education community.

Overarching Recommendation:

Bullying prevention should be identified as a **priority** for every school board and every school. Each school board in the province should adopt a bullying prevention policy and, flowing from that policy, each school in the province should, as a priority, implement an effective bullying prevention **program**.

Additional recommendations for the Ministry of Education:

- immediate and mandatory training on bullying prevention for current school administrators, with training for new administrators to be provided by school boards, and through the Principal's Qualification Program;
- school board funding for bullying prevention training for teachers and other school staff;

- a bilingual, toll-free, 24-hour province-wide Anti-Bullying Hotline to offer support, advice, and referrals to parents, teachers, and students;
- consider additional professional development days to facilitate training for Safe Schools;
- provide school boards with a bullying prevention policy framework;
- provide funding to support the purchase or development of evidence-based bullying prevention programs for each school;
- require each school board to designate a Safe Schools resource person/coordinator to provide ongoing support, resources, and expertise on bullying prevention and intervention strategies;
- appoint a Safe Schools Implementation Coordinator for a specified term;
- provide schools with centralized data analysis;
- encourage community partners to support bullying prevention initiatives.

Recommendations to Other Ministries:

- **Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities** to encourage faculties of education to provide pre-service training on safe schools;
- **Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services** to encourage police training courses for school liaison officers on bullying prevention, the *Safe Schools Act*, investigations in schools, and school / police protocols; to recognize school liaison officers as eligible community policing officers under the “1,000 officers” initiative;
- **Ministry of Tourism and Recreation** to make bullying prevention programs available to coaches and other community recreation providers;
- **Ministries of Children and Youth Services / Community and Social Services / Health and Long-Term Care** to encourage stakeholders to be active participants with community bullying prevention initiatives.

Recommendation to the Government of Ontario:

- Increase awareness of bullying as an issue with roots and solutions that are much broader than the education system and work to change attitudes related to bullying.

Summary Perspective

Victims of bullying often deal with social anxiety and loneliness, withdrawal, physical ailments, low self esteem, absenteeism, diminished academic performance, phobias, depression, and even aggressive behaviour. In the most extreme cases, the result is suicide.

Bullies who learn to use aggression as a form of power may develop other significant problems including moral disengagement, delinquency, substance abuse, adult criminality, and even suicide.

Successful bullying prevention programs clearly define bullying, and are gender- and age-appropriate, comprehensive to include the whole school community, grounded by strong school leadership, and focus on supporting both the victims of bullying, as well as those who bully.

The Ontario government has committed to making bullying prevention a priority, and *Shaping Safer Schools: A Bullying Prevention Action Plan* reflects that commitment.

1.0 THE SAFE SCHOOLS ACTION TEAM

On December 14, 2004, the Ontario government announced the appointment of the Safe Schools Action Team to advise on the development of a comprehensive and coordinated approach to address physical and social safety issues in all Ontario schools.

Our mandate includes addressing the issue of bullying.

It was our privilege to have access to a wealth of resources and perspectives in the preparation of this report.

The Action Team consulted widely across the province. Our consultations tapped the experience, expertise, and perspectives of educators, police, parents, students, student advocates, youth and children's services workers, health care professionals, existing bullying prevention groups, and others. They brought to the table personal experiences with bullying, and identified positive and negative outcomes of intervention. They shared their views as professionals and advocates.

To ensure our efforts reflected regional differences and local perspectives, we travelled from March 24 to April 18, 2005 to Kingston, Toronto, Ottawa, London, Hamilton, Barrie, Thunder Bay, Timmins, and Sudbury. In each city, we held a hands-on consultation session that had participants at the table working together to develop solutions to bullying.

The results of our consultations were taken to a Reference Group of provincial experts on bullying prevention. That group undertook a further review of the regional findings with the Action Team.

In addition, the Ministry of Education had previously commissioned research on bullying prevention by Wendy Craig, Debra Pepler, and Danielle Shelley of the Canadian Initiative for the Prevention of Bullying.

SAFE SCHOOLS ACTION TEAM

- **Liz Sandals** (Chair) – Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services
- **Stu Auty** – President of the Canadian Safe Schools Network
- **Ray Hughes** – National Education Coordinator, Fourth R Project, Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) Centre for Prevention Science
- **Debra Pepler** – Professor of Psychology at York University and Senior Associate Scientist at the Hospital for Sick Children

2.0 WHAT IS BULLYING?

Of the nearly two million students attending 4,700 schools in Ontario, approximately one in three students in Grades 7 to 12 reports having been bullied at school, and just under one-third report having bullied someone else.¹

What is bullying?

Bullying is a dynamic of unhealthy interaction. It is a form of repeated aggression used from a position of power. It can be physical, verbal, or social.

Bullying may be a relationship problem. Students who bully are learning to use power and aggression to control and distress others. Students who are repeatedly bullied are trapped in an abusive relationship. As a relationship problem, bullying requires relationship solutions.

To exert power, bullies may use an advantage in size, strength, age, or intelligence; an advantage in social status or peer group solidarity; or knowledge of another's vulnerability.

Bullying can be direct or indirect. Physical bullying includes hitting, shoving, stealing, or damaging property. Verbal bullying involves name-calling, mocking, sexual harassment, or racist or homophobic comments. Social bullying can be carried out by excluding others from a group, or spreading gossip or rumours about them. These rumours are often spread quickly through e-mail, cell phones, or text messages to threaten, harass, or exclude.

Victims of bullying often deal with social anxiety and loneliness, withdrawal, physical ailments such as headaches or stomach aches, low self esteem, school absenteeism, diminished academic performance, phobias, depression, aggressive behaviour. In the most extreme cases, the result is suicide. Students who drop out to escape bullying suffer the long-term personal and socio-economic consequences of an interrupted education.

Bullies who learn to use aggression as a form of power may develop other significant problems including moral disengagement, delinquency, substance abuse, adult criminality, and suicide. They may perpetuate bullying behaviour in their relationships by using sexual harassment, dating aggression and other forms of victimization to support unhealthy power structures.

¹ 2003 Ontario Student Drug Use Survey, Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, May, 2004

Bystanders also have a significant impact. Research shows that peers are present in 85% of bullying episodes observed on school playgrounds², and that peers are part of the problem three-quarters of the time. They spend 53% of the time passively watching, and 22% of the time helping the bully. In 57% of instances when peers intervene positively, however, they are effective in stopping the bullying within 10 seconds.³

Too often, bullying has been downplayed as simply “part of growing up”. On the contrary, research and experience have consistently shown that bullying is a serious issue, with far-reaching consequences to individuals, their families, peers, and the community at large.

Creating learning environments that are free of bullying behaviour is much more than simply putting policies into place. It is supporting a community-wide model that celebrates positive behaviours – behaviours carried by our students into their adult lives. When we create safe, respectful learning environments, we build and nurture safer communities for all our citizens.

Fortunately, we are not starting from scratch in determining ways to prevent bullying. There are already bullying prevention programs that work, including some here in Ontario. The Safe Schools Action Team established by the Government of Ontario in 2004, set out to build on this knowledge and expertise, as well as develop a comprehensive bullying prevention framework for Ontario schools.

Our report *Shaping Safer Schools: A Bullying Prevention Action Plan* recognizes that everyone involved in Ontario’s education community has a key role to play. Bullying is not just about student behaviour. Principals, teachers, parents, and other adults shape the school climate, and they are responsible to serve as role models in creating a respectful, safe environment for students.

Beyond offering guidelines for bullying prevention, our recommendations were designed to motivate students, teachers, staff, principals, parents, and the broader community to keep their schools safe – and to give them the tangible tools they need to do so.

² O’Connell, P., Pepler, D., & Craig, W. (1999) *Peer involvement in bullying: Issues and challenges for intervention*. *Journal of Adolescence*, 22, 437-452.

³ Hawkins, D. L., Pepler, D., & Craig, W. (2001). Peer interventions in playground bullying. *Social Development*, 10, 512-527.

3.0 BULLYING PREVENTION PLANS

3.1 What Works

In developing a comprehensive bullying prevention plan for Ontario schools, we reviewed evidence about what has, and has not, worked in various jurisdictions. This research was reinforced throughout our consultations with stakeholders.

Our conclusion is that successful bullying prevention programs have the following components addressing, as appropriate, all members of the school community – students, teachers, administrators, support staff, parents, and other community partners:

- **Education** to develop a deeper awareness and understanding of bullying that helps foster prevention.
- **Assessment** to determine the extent and nature of bullying, perceptions around the issue, and the effectiveness of prevention efforts.
- **Action** to provide identification and prevention strategies for the whole school community and targeted interventions for students that address:
 - school-wide education, embedded in the curriculum, for the entire school population;
 - routine interventions targeted for students involved in the early stages of bullying;
 - intensive intervention strategies for those involved in repeated bullying and victimization, with possible referral to community/social service resources.
- **Policy** to establish the framework within which bullying prevention in the school is defined, prioritized, implemented, and evaluated.

According to recent research on the effectiveness of bullying prevention programs, the most successful programs:

- define bullying;
- support students who are bullied, as well as students who bully;
- are characterized by strong leadership from the principal and teachers;
- take a comprehensive approach by including elements and roles for the whole school community;
- are appropriate for students at different levels (primary, junior, intermediate, and high school);
- address gender-based differences;
- embed bullying prevention within the curriculum;
- focus on developing healthy relationships skills and explain the bullying dynamic;

- recognize bullying as a relationship problem that requires relationship-based solutions;
- involve parents;
- include a broader community involvement component; and
- promote respect, tolerance, and empathy.

3.2 What Doesn't Work

We also took the time to study bullying prevention approaches that have not worked as well. The research indicates that the *least successful* bullying prevention programs:

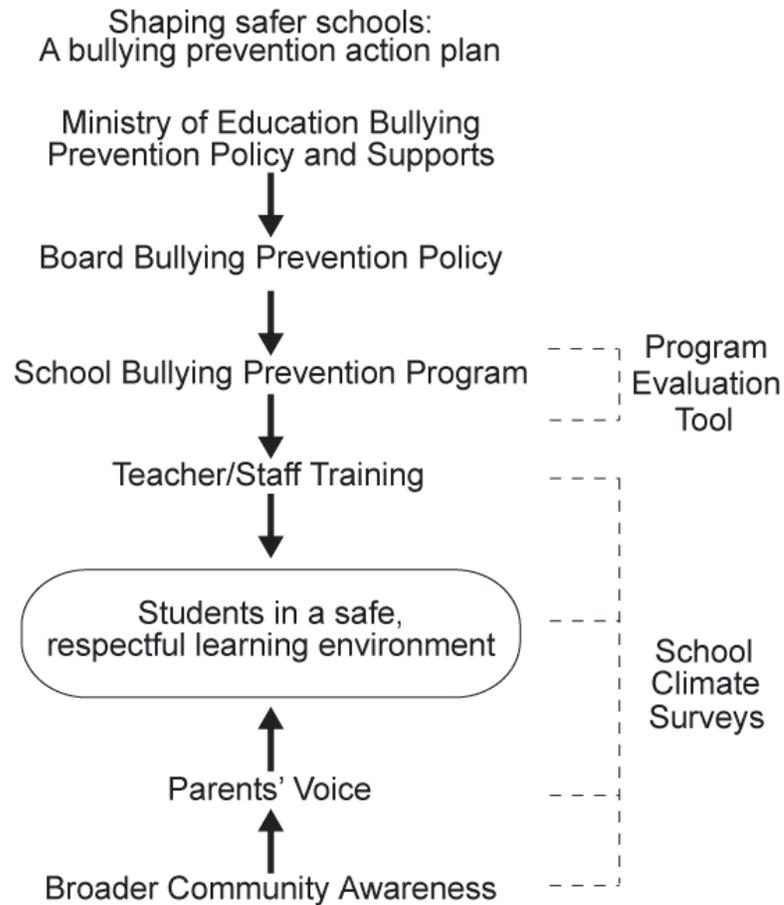
- do not have different intervention strategies for students at different levels of risk (e.g. they may only provide programming targeted at the entire school population);
- are more likely to focus on students who bully, and do not support students who are bullied;
- are not based on improving the social and emotional skills development of students, including those who bully, those who are bullied, and those who are bystanders;
- do not have a parental or community involvement component; and
- are less likely to have been evaluated.

4.0 AN ACTION PLAN FOR BULLYING PREVENTION

We have one over-arching recommendation:

Bullying prevention should be identified as a **priority** for every school board and every school. Each school board in the province should adopt a bullying prevention **policy** and, flowing from that policy, each school in the province should, as a priority, implement an effective bullying prevention **program**.

SAFE SCHOOLS ACTION PLAN



4.1 BULLYING PREVENTION ROLES

Bullying prevention requires input and participation from everyone in the school community. We have identified the key roles for principals, teachers/school staff, students, parents, and the broader community, as well as school boards.

1. The School Community

Principals

By providing leadership and overview, the principal is the most important person in the school for bullying prevention. It is essential that every principal identify bullying prevention as a priority, and put the necessary support in place to make bullying prevention plans successful.

Many principals have already implemented successful bullying prevention programs. Rather than impose additional requirements, our recommendations aim to enhance, reinforce, and build on what they are already doing.

A step-by-step Action Plan for Schools is included in this Report (starting on page 23).

Training

One of the most critical resources for principals is training. We recommend that principals be supported with funding for courses that enhance their training in identifying and responding to different kinds of bullying incidents (e.g. social, verbal, physical, cyber, racial, homophobic, and sexual bullying).

This training helps ensure principals can determine the responses to bullying incidents, both in terms of setting and applying consistent consequences for students who bully (including learning opportunities to improve their behaviour), and can establish effective mechanisms to support vulnerable students.

Training will also help principals with their responsibility to explain bullying prevention strategies to students to ensure a clear understanding of behaviour expectations and consequences.

Enhanced training will help principals create a safe atmosphere for reporting bullying incidents. This includes encouraging students to view their actions as “reporting”-- a positive term, rather than “tattling” or “ratting” with negative implications. Principals have a vital role to break down the “code of silence” around bullying that can often be present in school environments. It is essential to eliminate fear of retaliation for reporting, and address peer pressure issues.

Training also highlights the importance of assessment – an examination of what is currently happening in schools, how students feel, and where and when problems occur. Many schools already undertake this kind of wide-reaching assessment. (For example, The Thames Valley and The Toronto District School Boards have recently undertaken surveys involving their secondary schools).

In addition, training increases awareness of the types of bullying prevention programming available and how principals can further assist their teachers in embedding bullying prevention into the curriculum.

Assessment

Assessment is vital when selecting successful bullying prevention programs. Assessment ensures that the programs effectively address the unique situation in each school.

Students, staff, and parents within the school community all have unique perspectives and information to offer. Focus groups, class discussions, parent and staff meetings, student and school councils, and surveys are effective ways to access this information. Many schools already collect data that helps to identify specific bullying problems. They are encouraged to continue conducting these assessments regularly to stay alert to school needs.

Conversation between schools and their students (and, especially in the case of younger children, with their parents) is important. To ensure that vulnerable students are heard, and that principals have a realistic view of students' perceptions, these discussions need to go beyond the school council or student representatives (who, by definition, are unlikely to be bullied because they are popular and have plenty of support).

A school climate survey is one tool that can help school principals identify the nature and extent of bullying problems. The survey should include not just students and teachers, but also school staff, parents, and others in the community to ensure that the school has the full context in developing its bullying prevention strategies.

Initial assessment provides a baseline. Ongoing assessment helps determine whether programs are effective at reducing bullying and improving the school climate, and whether they continue to be relevant for schools over time. Sample climate surveys will be available shortly on the Ministry of Education web site at www.edu.gov.on.ca.

Although there are many different bullying prevention programs available, it is important that schools choose programs that respond to the issues highlighted in the school climate assessment to ensure that they meet specific school needs. For instance, bullying may be more prevalent in a particular grade, requiring a program that targets the identified grade and age. Racism or homophobia, which are sometimes components of bullying, may be identified as a problem, and programs would need to address issues of racism or homophobia, as appropriate.

Teachers / School Staff

Teachers and school staff are on the front lines of bullying prevention, both in their day-to-day interaction with students, and in enforcing the school's bullying prevention policy and program. They are important as role models for students, and in establishing a positive school climate.

As with the principal, teachers and staff at each school need the skills to identify, respond to, and prevent bullying incidents. They also play a significant role in helping to tailor their school's bullying plan to match their school's needs. It is important, therefore, for teachers to participate in school climate surveys, and to have good lines of communication with the principal.

When teachers and school staff identify bullying issues, it is essential that principals and vice principals provide the appropriate support. Their support reinforces a message to the entire school community that bullying prevention action is being taken.

Teachers also play a central role in bullying prevention through their interaction with parents and others in the community. Teachers and staff need support from administration to be able to reinforce bullying prevention strategies in all of their activities.

Bullying Prevention and the Ontario Curriculum

Wherever possible, we advocate embedding bullying prevention into daily classroom teaching. A reading list, for instance, could include books that deal appropriately with bullying while also covering the subject matter required by the curriculum.

In every grade there are curriculum expectations, many of which already include bullying prevention strategies such as conflict resolution and mediation. Teachers should be aware of these links and use them to promote tolerance, respect, and empathy, all of which are important components of bullying prevention.

Teachers, working with their principals, should be aware of additional programs to assist with the integration of bullying prevention in the school curriculum. For example, a guide to links between curriculum expectations and bullying prevention has been developed by the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. In addition, the Community Alliance for York Region Education (CAYRE), in partnership with local school boards, police, the public health department and York University, has published a series of integrated units for elementary grades. The Region of Waterloo Public Health, working with local school boards, has produced *Imagine...A School Without Bullying: A School Climate Approach to Bullying Prevention*, which includes grade-specific suggestions on ways for teachers to include bullying prevention to meet curriculum objectives.

Students

Ultimately, bullying prevention is about, and for, students.

Bullying prevention strategies should provide students with good role models who demonstrate healthy relationships and appropriate behaviour. Effective plans will also guide students in how to take responsibility for their own behaviour – and to change it if necessary.

Students with a history of bullying need be taught how to use their power in a positive way. They need to have clear expectations: what behaviour is expected, and what they can expect as consequences for unacceptable behaviour. Beyond the consequences they will face, they also need to understand the impact of their actions on others.

Bullying victims need to know that what is happening to them is not acceptable, and that there is help available.

Bystanders must understand that spectators contribute to the bullying problem. They need to know how to intervene in a safe, secure, and positive way. They need to know that reporting bullying incidents to teachers, staff, and principals is the right thing to do. They also need to be confident that they will be heard, and that reporting will lead to resolution.

Above all, students must perceive that action will be taken. Consequences must be demonstrated, both as a deterrent to future bullying and to instil confidence in other students. Recognizing and enforcing bullying prevention policies is crucial in sending a message to the broader school population that bullying concerns will not be ignored.

Student Responsibilities

Ideally, bullying prevention strategies will engage students to the point that they examine their own behaviour, and make changes to ensure they are not contributing to the problem.

Both students who bully, and students who are bullied, must be provided with education opportunities to develop social skills. Education for students who bully includes empathy training and instruction on the positive uses of power. Some students who bully may require additional support in the development of relationship skills. Students who are victimized require skills for developing friendships, not merely interventions to protect them from peer abuse. These students may also require support to promote positive relationships. Referrals to the appropriate social agencies (such as dealing with mental health issues) should also be a consideration in helping students who are bullied.

Students are key in assessing a school's environment. An effective climate survey must identify whether, and how often, students experience bullying, either through direct involvement or as witnesses. All students should expect to be asked about bullying. They should know their responsibility to respond, and feel comfortable about doing so.

Student leaders can play an important role in demonstrating inclusive behaviour and preventing bullying situations. For example, a popular student who recognizes a vulnerable "outsider" in the school cafeteria with a friendly acknowledgement sends a strong message to his or her peers about inclusiveness. These leadership qualities should be encouraged and supported by principals, teachers, and school staff.

Outcomes for Students

An effective bullying prevention strategy will have clear outcomes for students, ensuring that they are able to do the following:

1. **Recognize bullying:** Students should be able to identify the various forms/types of bullying and practise recognizing it; understand the role of unequal power in bullying; understand the role of the bystander in both prevention and in the escalation of bullying; understand the impact of bullying on the bystander, the student who is bullying, and the student being bullied.
2. **Report incidents confidently:** Students should know the difference between reporting and tattling/ratting; know the school procedures related to reporting incidents, and how they will be supported during and after the investigation; understand the role of the bystander in reporting; practise reporting incidents both as a bystander and as someone who has been bullied; and demonstrate reporting skills (i.e., clear communication, naming the type of bullying, etc.)

3. **Respond to incidents safely:** Students should know when it is safe and unsafe to respond to bullying incidents; demonstrate assertive and positive response skills related to bullying, including refusal skills; practise supporting a friend who has been bullied; demonstrate skills related to joining groups and making friends; practise delay and negotiation skills; practise a self-talk; be able to identify an adult in the school who will provide support; and participate in role play activities designed to improve the reporting and intervention skills of bystanders.
4. **Prevent bullying from happening:** Students should demonstrate healthy relationship skills such as negotiation, assertive refusal, delay, problem solving, controlling behaviour and emotions, establishing and maintaining friendships, etc.; have the skills and confidence to resolve conflict in a non-violent way; be able to communicate their role and responsibility in creating and maintaining a respectful, caring school environment; understand the negative impact bullying has on the culture of a school; be motivated to intervene when bullying happens; recognize the early warning signs for bullying, and have the skills to prevent bullying from happening; know how to get adult assistance to prevent bullying; and understand the important role peers have in prevention.

Hotline

A key component of a province-wide bullying prevention strategy is the establishment of an **anti-bullying hotline**. Students will know they have somewhere to turn for help, even if they are reluctant to go to the appropriate authorities at their school. If, for example, a student wants an adult to speak to the teacher, principal, or school board on the student's behalf, a dedicated hotline would provide such an advocate.

Anonymity is an important element of a hotline, especially since a bullied student may feel intimidated about being identified.

In addition to providing direct intervention at the school, a hotline can also be a resource for referring students to social agencies and other relevant services if needed.

Parents

Because bullying takes place both on and off school grounds, it is important for parents to understand how to identify potential bullying situations, and to know what courses of action are available to them in those situations. Internet bullying, for example, is on the increase, and parents need the skills and support to recognize it and deal with it appropriately.

Parents are the best advocates for their children. They need to recognize and address warning signs that could indicate bullying, such as a loss of friends, changes in eating habits, and fear of going to school.

We recommend that schools' bullying prevention programs include a parent/caregiver training component. Education sessions should cover topics such as identifying whether their child is involved in bullying, when and how to intervene safely, and where to get help when they suspect a bullying situation. Training should also address the challenges of breaking down parent stereotypes and misunderstandings about bullying, and reaching parents who have many demands on their time.

The parent training, like the overall bullying prevention program, should be tailored to be responsive to the diversity in the school, and its surrounding community.

As with teachers, staff, and students, parents are a key component in assessing a school's climate. Parents should expect to be surveyed, and have a responsibility to respond.

An anti-bullying hotline would be a valuable tool for parents as well as students. A hotline could provide guidelines for monitoring and reporting bullying, as well as referrals to counselling or social agencies if necessary.

2. The Broader Community

Throughout our province-wide consultations, one point that everyone agreed on was that bullying prevention cannot happen in isolation.

Obviously those directly involved in the school – principals, teachers, staff, and students – play a central role, but the broader community's role is important when bullying takes place outside the school grounds. Police, neighbourhood watch groups, community organizations, and local businesses must all take an active interest in preventing bullying. In fact all adults in the community must act as positive role models for students.

Community involvement is also important in assessing a school's climate. For example, public health nurses and social workers may have different approaches and information to share. Sports organizations, after-school programs, and the clerk at the corner store may have an alternate perspective on student behaviour outside of the school environment. Each has an important role to play in helping to develop a better understanding and a more complete picture of the issues.

Wider support and understanding from community advocates will help ensure consistent messaging, and assist in identifying and responding to bullying. During our consultations, there were many suggestions about involving other government ministries. Their expertise would not only assist in the implementation of bullying prevention programming and initiatives, but would also strengthen ongoing bullying prevention in Ontario schools. In particular, the consultation groups focussed on the Ministries of Training, Colleges and Universities; Community Safety and Correctional Services; Tourism and Recreation; Children and Youth Services; Community and Social Services; and Health and Long-Term Care.

Most of the recommendations for government in this Report focus on the Ministry of Education. Recommendations for other ministries are included in Appendix A.

Our recommendations for groups outside the immediate school community identified as having a direct role in bullying prevention include:

- *Faculties of Education* – Provide pre-service training to future teachers, specifically a course on Safe Schools with a component on bullying prevention.
- *Ontario College of Teachers* – Establish an Additional Qualification (AQ) for bullying prevention.
- *Community partners* – Create active partnerships that incorporate financial contributions and joint training among schools, school boards, and the following:
 - police
 - to provide training on bullying prevention and safe schools;
 - to act as school liaisons;
 - to conduct investigations in schools;
 - public health agencies;
 - children’s mental health agencies;
 - social services;
 - businesses;
 - recreation centres;
 - community colleges and universities;
 - the youth criminal justice system; and
 - other community agencies.
- *All adults in the Community* – Act as positive role models for students.

3. School Boards

We believe the starting point for all bullying prevention programs is with school boards. School boards must identify bullying prevention as a **key priority**.

While many boards have taken action on the prevention of bullying, we believe that bullying prevention policies, programs, and procedures should be consistent across the boards in format and direction. The policy should include clear statements that bullying is never acceptable and respond to the issue of protection from retaliation. Parents should be kept informed on current policies and procedures.

Implementation can only be effective if everyone concerned is aware of and trained on bullying prevention. We also believe that incentives are helpful in encouraging positive and timely action.

A Policy Framework for school boards has been provided to assist school boards with implementing bullying prevention plans.

4.2 ACTION PLANS

1. Action Plan for School Boards

Recommendation:

All school boards should adopt bullying prevention policies and procedures.

Step One:

Each school board's bullying prevention policy should include the following elements:

- a clear definition of bullying;
- a policy statement that prohibits bullying on school property, at school-sponsored events, and on school buses;
- use of the positive term “reporting” to describe the actions of those who come forward with information on bullying, and to dissuade use of negative terms such as “tattling” or “ratting”;
- a means of addressing the issue of protection from retaliation for those who report incidents;
- the formation of a bullying prevention committee made up of teachers, staff, parents, administrators, community and students that meets at least three times a year to review implementation and monitor effectiveness;
- information for concerned parents about who to contact, starting from the classroom through to the board level; and
- a requirement that schools:
 - inform students and other members of the school community of the bullying prevention policy;
 - provide a mechanism that enables students and parents to anonymously report incidents of bullying to teachers and school administrators;
 - notify the parents/guardians of a student who is bullied about what action is being taken to prevent any further acts of bullying;
 - notify the parents/guardians of a student who bullies of the school's response, and the consequences that will result from further acts of bullying;
 - direct teachers and staff to notify school administrators when they witness acts of bullying or receive reports of bullying;
 - direct school administrators to investigate any written reports, and to review anonymous reports;

- include an intervention strategy for school staff to deal with bullying;
- include the prohibition of bullying in student/school handbooks, and inform students of the prohibition against bullying, the consequences for bullying, and the reporting procedures;
- collect data on the number of reported incidents of bullying and the number of incidents that have been verified, and to make the data available to the Ministry of Education;
- outline how bullying-prevention education will be implemented throughout all grades in the school; and
- outline a procedure to evaluate and monitor the effectiveness of policy, prevention programs, and intervention strategies.

Step Two:

Develop increased awareness and education on bullying through summer institutes and professional development seminars for teachers and staff including education assistants, secretaries, and caretakers, and make professional development seminars on bullying prevention available to lunch supervisors, school bus operators, and volunteers.

Step Three:

With community agencies, provide incentives for schools to engage in bullying prevention, and provide awards and recognition for those schools that successfully implement bullying prevention strategies.

2. Action Plan for Schools

Recommendation:

Each school should, as a priority, implement an effective bullying prevention program consistent with the school board's broader bullying prevention policy.

Once the board policy is in place, it falls upon individual schools to implement programs that reflect that policy, and bring bullying prevention to those most affected – students.

Step One:

Conduct a school climate assessment to:

- collect data on student, staff, and parent perspectives on school safety;
- establish a baseline on the current bullying situation;
- identify specific school needs (e.g. is there a problem in specific grades, with one gender or another, in a certain location?);
- enhance understanding of the types of issues to consider when assessing bullying prevention needs (e.g. is racism or homophobia at play?); and
- determine how the school's current bullying prevention activities relate to the best practices identified in research.

Examples of methods to gather information and perceptions about bullying include focus groups, class discussions, meetings with parents and staff, speaking with school and student councils, and conducting climate assessment surveys. Samples of climate assessment surveys will be available shortly on the Ministry of Education web site at www.edu.gov.on.ca.

Step Two:

Use a *Program Evaluation Tool* to determine whether the programs under consideration by the school meet identified needs or to help select appropriate programs. A sample program evaluation tool is attached in Appendix B.

Step Three:

Choose a program. Principals should consult with the school community when determining bullying prevention priorities. Schools should be allowed to choose their own effective bullying prevention programs that include the key elements indicated in the box below.

Key elements of a school bullying prevention program

- Defines bullying
- Identifies different forms of bullying
- Addresses specific issues identified in schools
- Focuses on healthy relationships, and explains the bullying dynamic
- Includes training materials and guides for educators, students, parents, and school staff on the issue of bullying and bullying prevention strategies
- Takes a multi-faceted approach: *school-wide education* (targets the whole school community and is embedded in the curriculum); *routine interventions* (specifies strategies for students involved in bullying and victims of bullying); and *intensive interventions* (identifies supports for students involved in repeated bullying and victimization, with possible recourse to community/social service resources)
- Is *systemic* (with parents, peers, classes, staff, and the wider community) and ongoing (integrated into daily classroom activities in reading, art, and other curriculum elements)
- Includes interventions and supports for students who are bullied and those who bully
- Has safe intervention programs for bystanders
- Helps to develop protocols for safe reporting of bullying incidents
- Has an evaluation component

Step Four:

Provide training and school resources in the following ways:

- identify a lead person to deal with Safe Schools and bullying prevention issues;
- establish and communicate the roles and responsibilities for administrators, teachers, students, and parents in reporting and responding to incidents of bullying;
- involve peer-led initiatives in some components of bullying prevention programming where appropriate, particularly in intermediate and senior grades;
- make available leadership training on bullying prevention for students at the elementary and secondary levels;
- offer awareness programs to parents on a regular basis by schools and community partners.

Step Five:

Incorporate the bullying prevention policy into the School Code of Conduct, and encourage all members of the school community to report incidents of bullying. To ensure consistency and confidence in the program:

- clearly communicate protocols for reporting to everyone concerned (school administrators, teachers, school staff, students, parents etc.);
- create guidelines for procedures to investigate incidents of bullying;
- develop mechanisms for reporting without reprisals;
- create procedures to deal with barriers and roadblocks to reporting of incidents of bullying.

Step Six:

Ensure responses to reporting represent the four **A**s: **A**ffirm, **A**sk, **A**ssess Safety, and **A**ction. This means that responses to reports of bullying incorporate the following key elements:

- investigation of reported bullying incidents, through questioning and the verification of alleged incidents of bullying;
- application of formative consequences for bullying; and
- provision of support and protection for the bullied student.

Step Seven:

Engage the wider community.

Step Eight:

Reassess the school climate with respect to bullying on a regular basis to evaluate whether the bullying prevention initiatives are effective and what additional supports are required.

Bullying Prevention Program Evaluation

Even the best-designed programs will have little effect if they don't match the real needs of your school. Evaluation is a critical component to ensure bullying prevention program options meet identified needs.

An initial school climate assessment provides data on student, staff, and parent perspectives on school safety, establishes a baseline on the current bullying situation and identifies specific school needs. In addition, it enhances understanding of the types of issues to consider when addressing those needs and determines how the school's activities relate to best practices. Ongoing assessment helps to determine whether the programs you have selected are effective and whether they continue to provide support for your school over time.

Once the assessment is complete, you may use an evaluation tool to determine whether an existing program or a program under consideration reflects the needs identified through the assessment.

A sample program evaluation is included in Appendix B of this Report.

5.0 RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

The actions of school boards and individual schools require the support of the Ministry of Education. Interested groups across the province expected that the Ministry would be at the table, providing resources and funding for many aspects of the proposed solutions. We commend the McGuinty government for identifying the need to examine the problem, and develop a plan of action.

Throughout our consultations, we heard about the importance of having school principals on side, working as champions of bullying prevention programs. Research connects improvements in the school climate with a principal's commitment to allocate time and resources to bullying prevention related activities. In turn, research indicates that improvements in the school climate relate to improvements in academic achievement. It is imperative, therefore, that there be mandatory training of school administrators.

We also expect to see support both in the form of assessment and evaluation tools that can be used across the province, and also in providing funding for training and other aspects of new bullying prevention initiatives.

We have ten specific recommendations for the Ministry of Education.

Recommendations:

That the Ministry of Education make available immediate and mandatory training on bullying prevention for current school administrators, with training for new administrators to be provided by school boards, and through the Principal's Qualification Program.

That the Ministry of Education provide school boards with funding for bullying prevention training for teachers and other school staff.

That the Ministry of Education consider additional professional development days to facilitate training for Safe Schools.

That the Ministry of Education provide school boards with a bullying prevention policy framework.

That the Ministry of Education provide funding to support the purchase or development of evidence-based bullying prevention programs for each school.

That the Ministry of Education require each school board to have a Safe Schools resource person/coordinator whose duties include providing ongoing support, resources, and expertise on bullying prevention and intervention strategies.

That the Ministry of Education appoint a Safe Schools Implementation Coordinator for a specified term.

That the government proceed with its plan to establish an Anti-Bullying Hotline. The hotline should offer parents, teachers, and students an outlet to talk about their experiences, as well as offer them advice and referrals. It should offer bilingual services, and be available toll-free, 24 hours a day, province-wide.

That the Ministry of Education provide centralized data analysis. Through it, schools choosing to use the Ministry's school climate survey would report results and, in turn, receive timely reports and analyses of collected results with suggestions of strategies to address critical issues. We recognize that some boards and some schools may already have the capacity to manage an analysis of information and data of this kind. The data collected could also be made available for continuing research on the characteristics of effective bullying prevention programs.

[Note: A further sharing of information could be carried out through data collection and analyses of material provided by schools choosing/using a common climate survey. Some boards and some schools may not have the capacity to manage a timely analysis of data of this nature. A centralized system would enable such schools to obtain reports that would effectively track what does and does not work. It would also provide a continued research capacity. The results would be shared with schools quickly, providing a new and easy-to-use resource in understanding and addressing bullying.]

That the Ministry of Education encourage community partners to support bullying prevention initiatives.

Appendix A: Recommendations to Other Ministries

A suggestion made during the province-wide consultations was that other provincial ministries become involved in the bullying prevention agenda. That involvement acknowledges their respective areas of expertise and research that would allow them to not only assist in the implementation of bullying prevention programming and initiatives, but also to strengthen the development and continuation of bullying prevention in Ontario schools and communities.

One means of realizing this proposed goal was the establishment of an umbrella vehicle for inter-ministerial co-operation for community bullying prevention initiatives. Although the mechanisms and protocols for such a vehicle were not specified, some suggestions about other ministries include:

Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities:

- Encourage Faculties of Education to provide pre-service training to future teachers, specifically a course on Safe Schools with a component on bullying prevention.

Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services:

- Police training courses should be made available for school liaison officers on bullying prevention, the *Safe Schools Act*, investigations in schools, and school / police protocols.
- School Liaison Officers should be recognized as eligible community policing officers under the “1,000 officers” initiative.

Ministry of Tourism and Recreation:

- Make bullying prevention programs available to coaches and other community recreation providers.

Ministry of Children and Youth Services / Ministry of Community and Social Services / Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care:

- Encourage stakeholders to be active participants with community bullying prevention initiatives.

The Government of Ontario:

- Increase awareness of bullying as an issue with roots, and solutions, that are much broader than the education system.

Appendix B: Sample Bullying Prevention Program Evaluation Tool

KEY QUESTIONS	YES	NO	COMMENTS
<i>Education: to develop a deeper awareness and understanding of bullying that helps foster prevention.</i>			
Has the school raised awareness about bullying prevention?			
Is bullying prevention a priority in the school?			
<i>Assessment: to find out the extent and the nature of bullying problems in the school community.</i>			
Has the school conducted a school climate assessment?			
Did the assessment identify the type of bullying (e.g. physical, verbal)?			
Did the assessment identify the content of bullying (e.g. social, racial, religious, homophobic)?			
Did it address the perceptions and responses of students, staff and parents regarding bullying problems in the school?			
Did it identify the severity and frequency of bullying problems over time?			
Did it identify where bullying happens (e.g. halls, lunchroom, playground, school bus, Internet, text messaging)?			
Did it determine the degree of understanding and commitment to bullying prevention of:			
• principal/vice principal?			
• teachers?			
• students?			
• other staff?			
• parents?			
• other adults?			
Were the results of the assessment shared with the school community?			
Were the results used to guide the school's future bullying prevention program selection?			

KEY QUESTIONS	YES	NO	COMMENTS
<i>Action: to create a positive social climate through strategies aimed at students and adults.</i>			
Does your bullying prevention programming raise awareness of:			
• problems of students who bully?			
• problems of students who are bullied?			
• problems of bystanders?			
• healthy relationships while teaching students skills to prevent bullying ?			
• dynamics involved in bullying?			
• the different physical, verbal, and social aspects of bullying?			
• how bullying may differ among boys and girls?			
• how bullying may differ at various ages?			
Do the intervention strategies address:			
• peer processes that can promote prevention and stop bullying?			
• roles and importance of the following in bullying prevention:			
– principal/vice principal?			
– teachers?			
– students?			
– other staff?			
– parents?			
– other adults in the school community?			
Do the intervention strategies support:			
• students who bully?			
• students who are bullied?			
• bystanders?			
Do they enhance the social and emotional skills of:			
• those who bully?			
• those who are bullied?			
• bystanders?			

KEY QUESTIONS		YES	NO	COMMENTS
	Are there specific strategies for students at different levels of risk including:			
	• prevention programs for the whole school population?			
	• targeted interventions for students who bully?			
	• targeted interventions for students who are bullied?			
	• targeted interventions for bystanders?			
	• intensive interventions for students involved in repeated bullying and victimization?			
	Do the intervention strategies encourage ownership of bullying prevention in the school community by:			
	• principal/vice principal?			
	• teachers?			
	• students?			
	• other staff?			
	• parents?			
	• other adults in the school community?			
	Are the intervention strategies grade/age appropriate?			
	Are the intervention strategies gender appropriate?			
	Is there evidence that the situation has improved because of the school's bullying prevention intervention strategies?			
<i>Policy: to set the framework for developing a safe and supportive school climate.</i>				
	Does your school have bullying prevention policies and procedures that:			
	• clearly define bullying?			
	• clearly state a commitment to bullying prevention?			
	• include procedures to investigate, record and report incidents?			
	• detail procedures to communicate with parents regarding incidents?			
	• provide a mechanism that enable students and parents to report incidents of bullying?			

KEY QUESTIONS	YES	NO	COMMENTS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> outline how bullying prevention education will be implemented throughout all grades in the school? 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> include processes to resolve incidents of bullying? 			
Have the policies and procedures been shared with the whole school community?			
If the school board has a bullying prevention policy, are the school's policies and procedures consistent with the board's?			
Does the policy include clear procedures to resolve bullying concerns, including roles and responsibilities of:			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> principal/vice principal? 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> teachers? 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> students? 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> other staff? 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> parents? 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> other adults in the school community? 			
Do the policies and procedures reflect the importance of building capacity for positive social relationships in:			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> students who bully? 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> students who are bullied? 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> bystanders? 			

Appendix C: International Research

Bullying is not an issue just in Ontario or in Canada. It is an international concern, and extensive research about bullying conducted in many jurisdictions produced similar findings, leading to conclusions about what is a “safe school”.

We recognize that all schools in Ontario are different, and that a one-size-fits-all approach will not be effective. However, we do believe that there are some universal characteristics that help to determine whether a school is a safe, respectful learning environment. Below is an example of these guidelines based on research in the United Kingdom. We encourage all Ontario schools to assess whether these characteristics apply to their own environments, and to use the tools in this Action Plan to move forward in areas that need improvement.

In the U.K., the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) has developed guidelines on attributes of a “safe school”. A sampling of the features includes:

- A strong ethos in the school which promotes tolerance and respect, including respect for difference and diversity.
- Positive leadership from senior staff and governors* on how bullying is to be dealt with within the overall policy on attitudes and behaviour.
- A clear policy statement about bullying that has input from staff, senior staff, parents and students and that includes examples of how instances of bullying will be handled.
- A planned approach in curriculum and tutorial programs to the issue of bullying in a context that promotes self-esteem and confident relationships.
- Regular training for all staff to raise and maintain awareness, to alert them to indicators that may suggest bullying, and to equip them with ways of responding to it.
- Frequent consultation with students to find out what bullying occurs, when, where and by whom.
- Confidential and varied means for alerting the school to current instances of bullying.
- Ways of breaking down age-group stratification, for example through ‘buddy’ systems, mixed-age learning groups, and out-of-school clubs run by older students for younger ones.
- Independent listeners, including older students and adults other than school staff, to whom victims of bullying may turn.
- The involvement of students in procedures dealing with instances of bullying through ‘circles of friends’, peer mediation and other schemes.
- Prompt and thorough investigation of reported incidents, including contact with parents of victims and bullies in order to agree, if possible, a course of action.
- Provision for follow-up with victims of bullying and the bullies themselves.
- A system to record incidents of bullying so that analysis of patterns, whether of students involved, type, location or time, can inform policy and practice.

* The equivalent of school board trustees in Ontario.



Printed on recycled paper

05-295

ISBN 0-7794-9320-6 (Print)

ISBN 0-7794-9322-2 (PDF)

© Queen's Printer for Ontario, 2005