



December 11, 2008

The Honourable Kathleen Wynne
Minister of Education
Mowat Block, 900 Bay Street, 22nd Floor
Toronto ON M7A 1L2

Dear Minister,

On February 21, 2008, we accepted your invitation to once again work together to look at how we can better promote healthy relationships and safe environments in our schools.

Our mandate included a review of the issues of gender-based violence, homophobia, sexual harassment, and inappropriate sexual behaviour by students towards other students and a review of the Local Police/School Board Protocols, including but not limited to reporting requirements. We also looked at barriers to student reporting of these types of inappropriate behaviours in schools, and at reporting requirements for school staff.

The Safe Schools Action Team is pleased to submit its report, *Shaping a Culture of Respect in Our Schools: Promoting Safe and Healthy Relationships*.

This report focuses on recommendations to prevent and address gender-based violence, homophobia, sexual harassment, and inappropriate sexual behaviour by students towards other students and to remove barriers to reporting such incidents in order to help students succeed and re-engage in school.

We are aware that over the last four years the Government of Ontario has worked closely with education and community partners to rebuild our publicly funded education system. We are pleased that the Safe Schools Action Team has been a part of these efforts.

During this mandate, in our consultations throughout Ontario, we heard many perspectives and stories about all the initiatives that are happening in schools to help students, school staff, parents, and the school community confront issues of gender-based violence, homophobia, sexual harassment, and inappropriate sexual behaviour. We have also heard about many barriers and challenges faced by students, by schools, and by community agencies, including experiences shared by and about students who feel that school is not a place where they feel welcome.

We believe that every adult in the school has a role to play in addressing issues of gender-based violence, homophobia,

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The Safe Schools Action Team was re-engaged in February 2008 by the Minister of Education in order to review the issues of student-to-student gender-based violence, homophobia, sexual harassment, and inappropriate sexual behaviour, including any barriers to reporting that may exist in Ontario's publicly funded schools, and to provide recommendations for addressing such behaviour and supporting students. The team's new mandate builds on the recommendations from previous mandates, as well as on the effective work the government has done on an ongoing basis to promote healthy relationships and safe environments in our schools.

KEY TERMS

Gender-based violence: A form of behaviour including psychological, physical and sexual behaviour that is based on an individual's gender and is intended to control, humiliate or harm the individual. This form of violence is generally directed at women and girls and is based on an attitude or prejudice which can be conscious or unconscious and which exists on the individual and institutional level that aims to subordinate an individual or group on the basis of sex and/or gender identity.

Homophobia: A disparaging or hostile attitude or negative bias which may be overt or unconscious and which exists on the individual and systemic level towards people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgendered (LGBT).

Sexual harassment: Unwelcome sexual attention directed at an individual by someone whose conduct or comments are or should reasonably be expected to be offensive, inappropriate, intimidating, hostile and unwelcome. Sexual harassment often occurs in an environment in which sexist or homophobic jokes and materials have been allowed.

Inappropriate sexual behaviour: Sexual behaviour on the part of a young person that places the person or another individual at risk physically, psychologically or socially and/or that is inappropriate relative to the person's age or stage of development. Examples include: unprotected sexual activity that might result in sexually transmitted disease, the viewing of pornography at a young age or the posting of sexual information on the internet.

7. Adapted from Peter Jaffe and Ray Hughes, "Preventing Violence against Girls", *Education Forum* 34 (3) (Fall 2008) (Toronto: OSSTF/FEESO). Available online at: <http://www.osstf.on.ca/Default.aspx?DN=7971,7590,493,355,365,Documents>
8. In this document, references to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered (LGBT) persons should be understood to include persons who identify themselves as queer, transsexual, two-spirited, intersexed, or questioning.
9. Toronto District School Board, "Building Healthy Relationships: Interventions for Gender-based Violence," March 2008.

PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF THE REPORT

It is very disheartening when we hear stories of students being bullied or harassed in a school. Research shows that bullying, homophobia, sexual harassment, and inappropriate sexual behaviour have far-reaching consequences to individuals, their families, and the community at large. It is our collective responsibility to put safety in place that our schools are safe places to learn and work. More importantly, we ensure that every student has the opportunity to be successful in school.

This report focuses on making recommendations to the Ministry of Education on ways of preventing and addressing gender-based violence, homophobia, sexual harassment, and inappropriate sexual behaviour by students towards other students. It makes a number of recommendations on ways to make it easier for students to report incidents, to help schools support and respond to students who are victims of these types of behaviour, and to assist school staff in supporting these students. Several recommendations have also been made as a result of a review of all Local Police/School Board Protocols to ensure that they align with the Provincial Model.

In carrying out its most recent mandate, the Safe Schools Action Team drew on results of research by such bodies as the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH). As well, it conducted province-wide consultations with educational stakeholders, including school boards, school principals, teachers, other students, parents, and representatives of a wide range of communities. Public Health personnel, Aboriginal groups, diverse cultural groups, advocacy groups, crisis centres, sexual assault centres, and agencies serving LGBT youth and youth with disabilities.

DESCRIPTION AND SCOPE OF THE PROBLEM

Issues of homophobia and sexual harassment are closely linked to bullying/harassment. According to the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, one-third of students experience bullying/harassment, and one-third of those having bullied someone else.¹⁰ 

Sexual harassment is a type of bullying/harassment that takes the form of unwanted or unwelcome sexual attention, both physical and verbal. A recent report from CAMH states that “the rates of sexual harassment [in schools] are significant”, with 36% of boys and 46% of girls in Grade 9 reporting that “Someone made [unwanted] sexual comments, jokes, gestures or looks at me.” By Grade 11 this rate had declined significantly for boys, but remained consistent at 46% for girls.¹²

The report also found that one in four boys and almost one in three girls in Grade 9 stated that “Someone brushed up against me in a sexual way” or “Someone touched, grabbed, or pinched me in a sexual way.” These figures declined only slightly by Grade 11.¹³

The consequences “among those who report higher rates of sexual harassment victimization” can include psychological problems such as “depression, loss of appetite, nightmares or disturbed sleep, low self-esteem, and feelings of being sad, afraid, scared, or embarrassed”.¹⁴ In terms of student learning, victims of harassment “also reported loss of interest in school activities”, as well as increased absenteeism, decreased quality of school work, poor grades, and increases in skipping or dropping classes, tardiness, and truancy.¹⁵

Research shows that boys more often than girls both receive and make homophobic comments (e.g., “gay”, “fag”, “dyke”, “queer”, “lezzie”, or similar terms): in the CAMH survey 34% of boys reported receiving such comments, compared to 21% of girls. Similarly, 21% of boys reported making such comments, compared to 11% of girls.¹⁶

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Throughout its current consultations, the Safe Schools Action Team has been guided by the vision of a publicly funded education system where all students and members of the school community are welcomed and respected, and where every student is supported and inspired to succeed in a culture of high expectations for learning. The team's review has been shaped by the belief that every student deserves to *be* safe – and *feel* safe – at school, on the school grounds, on school buses, and at school events and activities. This belief informs the guiding principles on which the recommendations in this report are grounded. These principles reflect the shared consensus of government, educators, and community members across Ontario. The principles – six in number – are as follows:

- **Safety is a precondition for learning.**
- **Every student is entitled to learn to the best of his or her ability.**
- **Every student is entitled to a safe and caring learning environment.**
- **Every student is entitled to learn in an environment free from harassment and violence.**
- **A quality education is about more than academic achievement – it is about the development of the whole person.**
- **The commitment to safe schools is a shared responsibility of government, school board trustees and administrators, principals, teachers, support staff, students, parents, police, and other community partners.**

This report f

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i. CURRICULUM

KEY FINDINGS

In our consultations, participants overwhelmingly confirmed that the most effective way to enable all students to learn about healthy and respectful relationships is through the school curriculum. The *Baseline 2007* report from the Canadian Federation for Sexual Health agrees: “Schools represent the only

“Ideas must permeate across all curriculum.”

Educator

23. Canadian Federation for Sexual Health (CFSH), *Sexual Health in Canada, Baseline 2007*, p. 10.
24. From “Sexual Health Education in the Schools: Questions and Answers”. Prepared by Alexander McKay, Ph.D, Research Coordinator, the Sex Information and Education Council of Canada (SIECCAN), 2005.
25. From “Student Health 2005: Gauging the Health of Peel’s Youth”. A Peel Health Status Report Survey designed by the Peel District School Board and the Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board, p. 132.

26. Ibid.
27. The Coalition on Media Violence, Presentation to the Roots of Youth Violence Secretariat, Toronto, February 15, 200

General

- The Ministry of Education must:
 - ensure that references to gender-based violence, homophobia, sexual harassment, and inappropriate sexual behaviour are included in prompts and examples in the revised Health and Physical Education curriculum and in as many other curriculum areas as possible;
 - continue to ensure that revisioni

Health

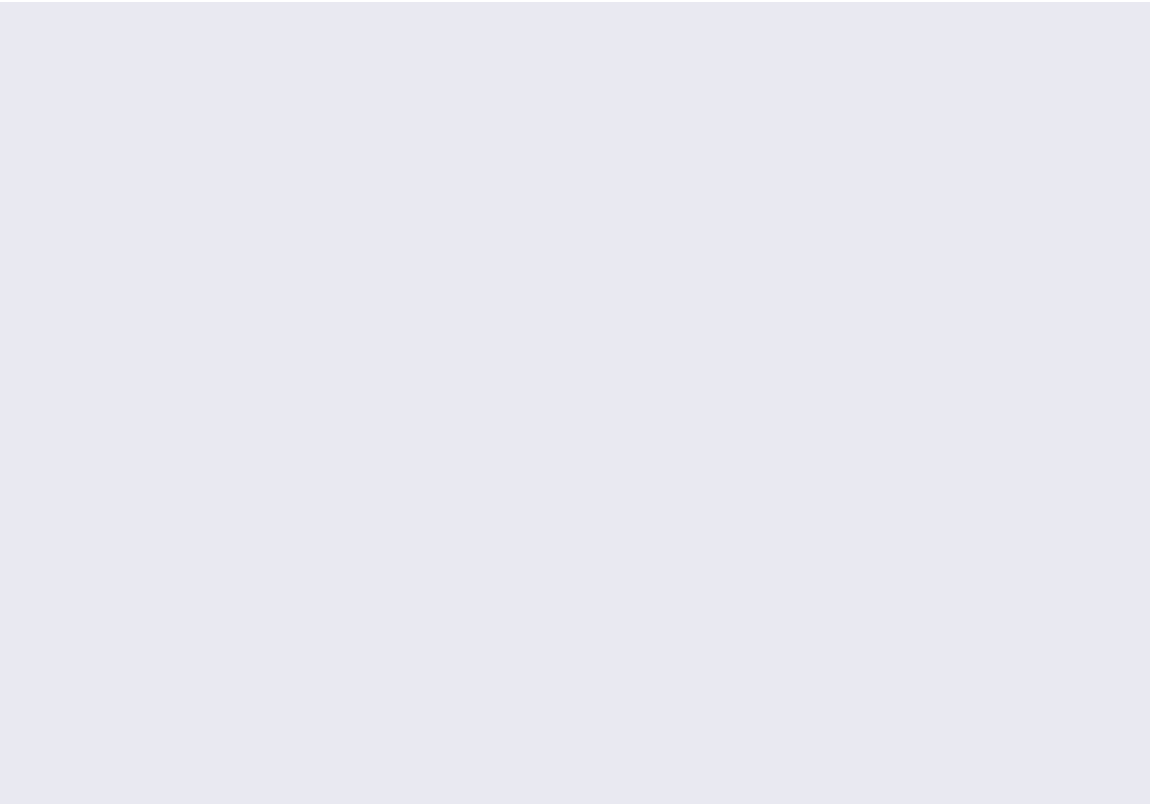
- The Ministry of Education must:
 - consider changing the current report card requirement for Health and Physical Education from one mark (for health and physical education) to two marks (one for health and one for physical education) as part of any review of the Assessment and Evaluation (A & E) process;
 - require teachers to allocate a minimum of 30% of instructional time for health education to address the Healthy Living curriculum expectations as part of an integrated approach to delivering the Health and Physical Education curriculum;
 - ensure that the topics of gender-based violence, homophobia, sexual harassment, and inappropriate sexual behaviour are introduced in an age-appropriate way, beginning in Grade 6, and are developed and studied in greater depth in Grades 7, 8, and 9. In particular:
 - revise the Health and Physical Education (H & PE) curriculum so that:
 - by Grade 6 all students will learn about gender stereotypes and homophobia & Grade 6 all stud

- make student learning from the “healthy living component” of the H & PE curriculum available through partial or alternative options when Health and Physical Education is substituted;
- ensure that when students, including those with special education needs, are exempted from

KEY FINDING

Another gap highlighted during our consultations was that schools and teachers do not always have access to information about which agencies/organizations have the relevant expertise in these areas. Subsequently, this lack of information would have an impact on teachers' ability to support students, including students with special education needs, parents, and other family members.

In dealing with these complex – and often delicate – issues, we heard that, as an effective practice, school boards and schools should, rely on the expertise of the relevant agencies and organizations. This includes the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health, and the Ministry of Children, Youth and Families. It also includes the expertise of the relevant agencies and organizations in the community, such as the police, fire department, and mental health services. This includes the expertise of the relevant agencies and organizations in the community, such as the police, fire department, and mental health services.



KEY FINDINGS

- **EqualityRules.ca – A fully bilingual and accessible website that teaches children about respecting themselves and others, and how to speak up when they or their friends are being treated unfairly. Through interactive scenarios, videos, quizzes, and links, children and teens can learn about healthy, equal relationships for teens and the truth about difficult or abusive relationships.³⁰**
- **White Ribbon Campaign – Promoting Healthy Equal Relationships – A website that outlines fully interactive exercises designed to help teach and promote healthy, equal relationships.³¹**
- **OK2BME is a project operated by K-W Counselling Services in partnership with Family and Children's Services of the Waterloo Region. OK2BME is a set of free, confidential services for kids and teens who are wondering about their sexuality or gender identity. They may identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, or gender-variant, or they may just have questions. Resources for teachers and schools, for students, and for parents are available online.³²**

We also heard that in some cases, students question whether schools are taking these issues seriously when they see that disrespectful comments go unaddressed by school staff or by their own peers. On the extreme end, we heard that in some schools terms such as “bitch”, “fag”, and “dyke” are so common in everyday life that students feel there is little point in reporting such issues and may withdraw from school.

I don't feel like I fit in it is easy to withdraw.
– Student

We heard from participants that school staff do not intervene consistently to deter inappropriate and disrespectful behaviour by students towards other students. It was evident that in many circumstances students did not feel supported or that they had access to an adult with whom they could discuss these issues. Participants reinforced that while some incidents require more in-depth responses, prevention and awareness raising can occur in day-to-day interactions, during classroom discussions, in the lunchroom, at recess, or at school events. In schools where respectful interactions are encouraged and modelled, prevention is a key component.

30. Posted on the Ministry of Education public website: Available at <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/safeschools/bullying.html>

31. Available at www.whiteribbon.ca

32. Available at <http://www.ok2bme.ca/about>

We heard repeatedly that in order to support students, staff must always intervene when they encounter gender-based violence, homophobia, sexual harassment, or inappropriate sexual behaviour. The following resource is included as an appendix to this document to support school staff in doing so.

- **“How to Handle Harassment in the Hallways in Three Minutes,”** developed by the [Ontario Youth Protection Agency, York Region, Peel Region, and the University of Toronto](#)

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS: KEY AREAS FOR PRIORITY ACTION

- To promote a positive school climate, all school staff who work with students, including administrators, teachers, educational assistants, and professional support staff, must intervene to address inappropriate and disrespectful behaviour such as sexual, sexist, or homophobic comments, slurs, and jokes.
- The Ministry of Education must make available resources to school boards on effective intervention strategies for school staff.
- School Boards must address gender-based violence, homophobia, sexual harassment, and inappropriate sexual behaviour in their safe schools policies and protocols.
- In order to promote a positive school climate, where students are not subjected to gender-based violence, homophobia, sexual harassment, or inappropriate sexual behaviour, schools must:
 - provide prevention and awareness-raising strategies for students and staff in the area of

iv. RESPONSE AND SUPPORTS

KEY FINDINGS

There needs to be a s

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS: KEY AREAS FOR PRIORITY ACTION

- To support students who disclose/report incidents of gender-based violence, homophobia, sexual harassment, or inappropriate sexual behaviour, school staff must:
 - respond and take action to stop any further school-based incidents; and
 - offer students access to professionals with expertise in these areas.
- School boards must:
 - provide staff with the necessary skills to respond to and support students who disclose or report incidents of gender-based violence, sexual assault, homophobia, sexual harassment, and inappropriate sexual behaviour;
 - include strategies to re-engage students who are at risk of leaving or who have left school because of sexual harassment or homophobia. These strategies should link up with appropriate student success strategies that boards, schools, and their community partners have in place to engage all students in at-risk situations.

v. REPORTING

KEY FINDINGS

There is a need to assist the students who are unable to support them in reporting sexual assault. Often the consequences of reporting are perceived as being worse than the crime itself.

– *Community Agency Representative*

In Ontario, the *Child and Family Services Act* (CFSA) is the legislation that is focused on promoting the best interests, protection, and well-being of children.

Under section 72 of the CFSA there is a universal duty to report to a Children's Aid Society (CAS) any reasonable suspicion that a child is or may be in need of protection from the person having charge of the child, whether because of harm or neglect inflicted by that person. This

General

- School staff must continue to respond to a child who is or may be in need of protection as required by the *Child and Family Services Act* (CFSA).
- Principals must reportt

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS: KEY AREAS FOR PRIORITY ACTION

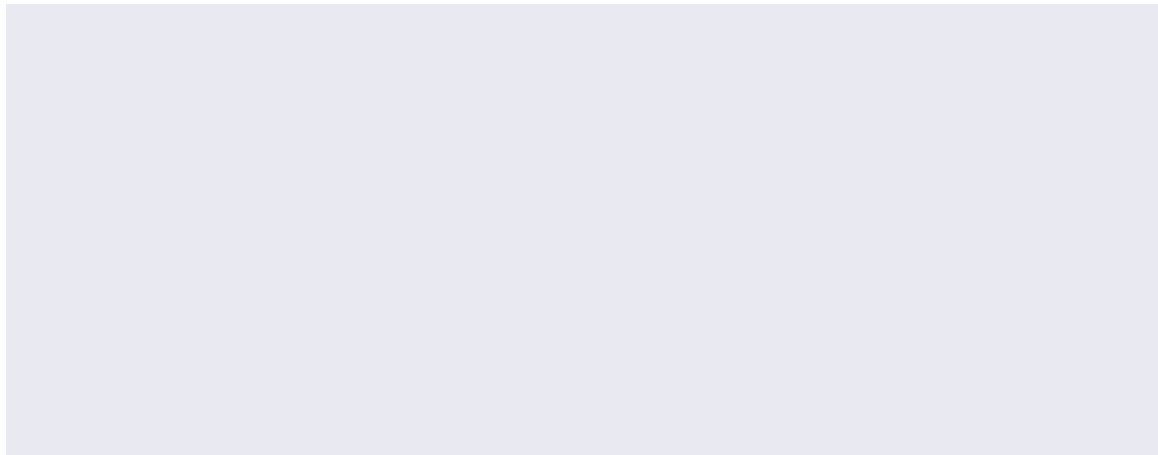
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- School staff must report to the principal any allegations/suspicious of sexual assault of a student by another student *on school premises or during school activities*, and the principal must report this incident to the police.
- In cases where students disclose/report allegations or suspicions of student-to-student sexual assaults *off school premises* to school staff, staff must:
 - for secondary students, ask them whether or not to contact their parents or police, and offer them information about professional supports such as sexual assault services; and
 - for elementary students, call the parents and offer to put the parents in touch with police and professional supports for the student.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS: KEY AREAS FOR PRIORITY ACTION

- To improve collaboration between local police services and schools:
 - school boards must train school administrators annually on their Local Police/School Board Protocols;
 - police services must train police officers annually on their Local Police/School Board Protocols; and
 - where possible this training should occur jointly.
- The Ministries of Education and Community Safety and Correctional Services should conduct a review of the Provincial Model for a Local Police/School Board Protocol to:
 - clarify how principals are to deal with suspension/expulsion investigations, as required under the *Education Act*, while thereen

Students



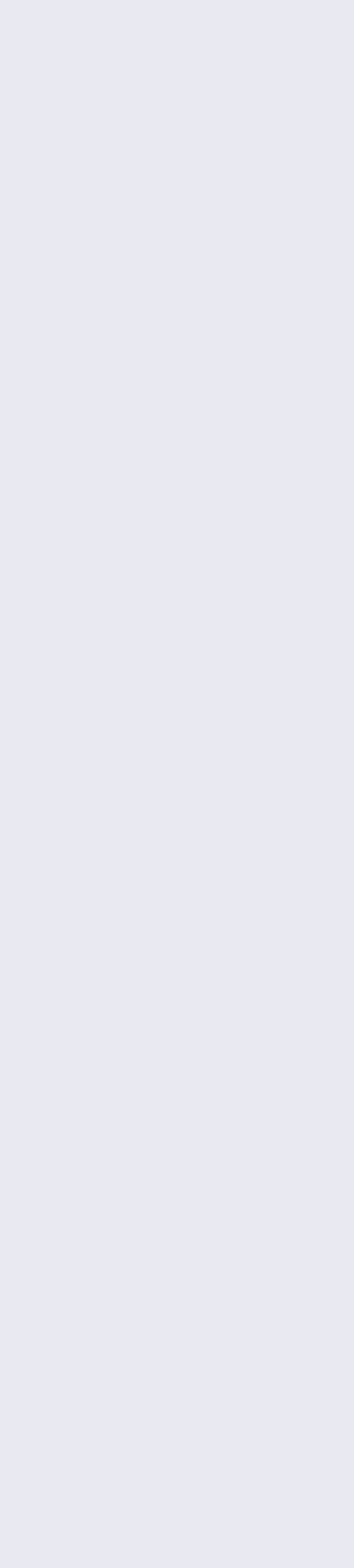
viii. PARENT/FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

KEY FINDINGS

Children flourish when they know that the important adults in their lives care about them, express interest in what they do and appreciate and accept them for who they are.

We know that th

37. Tatyana Barankin and Nazilla Khanlou, *Growing Up Resilient: Ways to Build Resilience in Children and Youth* (Toronto: CAMH, 2007), p. 31.

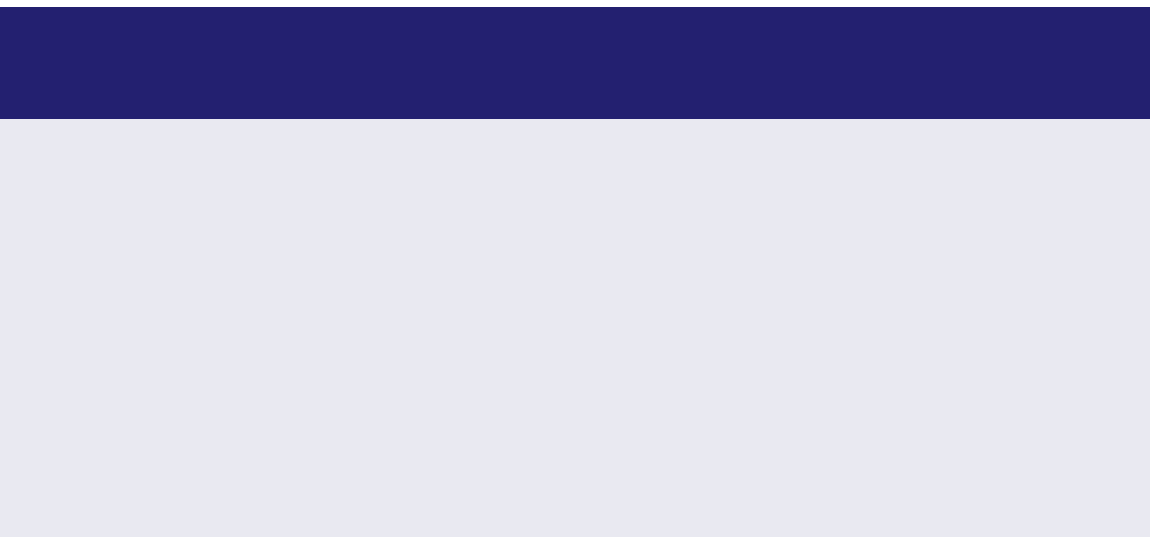


OUR

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS: KEY AREAS FOR PRIORITY ACTION

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS: KEY AREAS FOR PRIORITY ACTION

- The Ministry of Education should request the Ontario College of Teachers to include the prevention and management of gender-based violence, homophobia, sexual harassment, and inappropriate sexual behaviour involving students with special education needs in the additional teachers' qualification courses in Special Education.
- The Ministry of Education must develop support materials for boards to assist principals with





APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: THE SAFE SCHOOLS ACTION TEAM

Ms. Liz Sandals, MPP Guelph, Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister
of Education

Dr. Inez Elliston, Ph.D., O.Ont. – Dr. Elliston has been engaged for over three decades as an educator and community volunteer. She is a former Education Officer within the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training and has worked at all levels of the public education systems in Canada, the United Kingdom, and Jamaica. In recognition of her contribution, Dr. Elliston has been the recipient of numerous awards, including the Arbor Award for Volunteerism from the University of Toronto (2003), the Harry Jerome Award for Excellence in Community Service (2003), and the Order of Ontario (2004). She is currently a Patron of P.A.C.E. (Project for the Advancement of Childhood Education) Canada and the Ontario Council of Education (O.C.E.)

Ms. Lynn Ziraldo – Ms. Ziraldo has been involved with the Learning Disabilities Association of York Region for over twenty-seven years and currently serves as its Executive Director. She has represented learning disabilities and/or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder on numerous committees/task forces and work groups on education, health, social, and legal issues throughout York Region, Ontario, and the United States. She is currently an adviser to the Minister’s Advisory Council for Special Education and vice-chair of York Region SEAC. Her involvement in the LD Association has led her to be an effective advocate for her sons, who have LD and ADD, as well as for other people with disabilities.



APPENDIX B
GLOSSARY O

APPENDIX C

HOW TO HANDLE HARASSMENT IN THE HALLWAYS IN THREE MINUTES

(From the Toronto District School Board)

1. STOP the harassment.

- Interrupt the comment/halt the physical harassment.
- DO NOT pull students aside for confidentiality unless absolutely necessary.
- Make sure all the students in the area hear your comments.
- *It is important that all students, whether onlookers, potential targets, or potential harassers, get the message that students are safe and protected in this school.*

2. IDENTIFY the harassment.

- Label the form of harassment: "You just made a harassing comment/put-down based upon race (religion, ethnicity, abilities, gender, age, sexual orientation, economic status, size, etc.)."
- Do not imply that the victim is a member of that identifiable group.
- A major goal is to take the "spotlight" off the target and turn the focus to the behaviour. Students should realize what was said, regardless of what was meant (e.g., kidd



APPENDIX D

PROVINCIAL MODEL FOR A LOCAL POLICE/SCHOOL BOARD PROTOCOL

(excerpt)

7. Occurrences Requiring Police Involvement or Response

List the types of incidents requiring police involvement or response. The types of incidents listed must include, at a minimum:

- phys



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