

Ministry of Education

Ministère de l'Éducation

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MEMORANDUM TO: Directors of Education
Supervisory Officers and Secretary-Treasurers of School Authorities
Principals of Elementary Schools
Principals of Secondary Schools

FROM: Ben Levin
Deputy Minister

DATE: March 9, 2006

RE: *Provincial Bullying Prevention Strategy Implementation*

I am pleased to provide you with details on the government's commitment to ensure that students feel safe and are safe in school and on school grounds. Providing young people with an opportunity to grow and develop in a safe and respectful society is a shared responsibility in which schools play an important role.

The government has already taken a number of steps to address safety in schools. As you know, the government has appointed a special Safe Schools Action Team to give advice about implementation of new measures to protect students and to ensure that Ontario's publicly funded schools are truly great places in which to learn, grow, and achieve. During the spring of 2005, the Action Team held a series of regional public consultations on preventing bullying in schools.

Based on input heard during the public consultations across Ontario and input from a variety of experts, including community service agencies, police services, child protection agencies, and academics specializing in psychology, education, and child development, the Action Team developed a report, *Shaping Safer Schools: A Bullying Prevention Action Plan* now available on the Ministry of Education web site at < www.edu.gov.on.ca >. The report includes recommendations to make Ontario's schools safer through a comprehensive, province-wide bullying prevention program.

The government is investing \$23 million over the next three years to launch the province wide bullying prevention strategy to help prevent bullying and make it an unacceptable behaviour in Ontario's schools. The province wide bullying prevention strategy is intended to build upon boards' existing capacity in this area and allow you to expand your efforts.

The purpose of this memo is to provide you with details on the elements of the provincial bullying prevention strategy, specifically with information on implementation and the funding being made available to boards immediately for several key elements of the strategy.

Safe Schools Implementation Co-ordinator

I am pleased to advise that Allan Kathnelson from the Ministry of Education's Ottawa Regional Office has been appointed as interim Safe Schools Implementation Co-ordinator to provide one-stop access to the Ministry for school boards and school based safe schools teams by providing ongoing support, resources, and expertise on bullying prevention and intervention strategies. Boards can contact him at safeschools@edu.gov.on.ca with questions related to the bullying prevention strategy.

Supporting Safe School Teams

The bullying prevention strategy is supported by school based safe schools teams who will help schools determine and address their local needs. The safe schools team should be composed of students, teachers, principal and parent representatives. At the elementary level it should be composed of a majority of parents and students, and at the secondary level by a majority of students. It is understood that many schools may already have teams in place that address issues of school and student safety, bullying prevention and promotion of a positive school community environment.

In order to support parental engagement, it is expected that, in addition to the school climate surveys described below, a parent resource pamphlet will be distributed to schools to send home to parents in the Spring 2006.

School Climate Surveys

The *Shaping Safer Schools: A Bullying Prevention Action Plan* recommends that as part of an action plan, schools conduct a school climate assessment to collect student, staff and parent perspectives on school safety and establish a baseline of information to inform their decision making around bullying prevention programming. Sample climate surveys are now available on the Ministry's public web site. The Safe Schools Action Team indicated that the use of school climate surveys is a strongly recommended best practice to assess bullying in your school. Schools may choose to make use of these samples or continue using surveys already in use or currently being developed locally.

Bullying Prevention Programs

To ensure there is an effective bullying prevention program in every publicly funded Ontario school, funding will be provided to boards in the amount of \$1,500 per elementary school, \$2,000 per secondary school and \$1,500 per school authority. These funds are for the purchase or development of bullying prevention programs, training and resources. Your board's or school authority's total allocation for this initiative appears in the attached copies of the transfer payment agreement.

Schools that are considering the best use of their bullying prevention funding should base their decisions on what program best meets the specific needs of the school community. The school climate survey is a very useful tool to use in determining these needs, and safe schools teams are strongly encouraged to use it. The registry described below will also assist schools and their safe schools teams in making programming decisions.

Boards are asked to sign and return two copies of the Transfer Payment Agreement attached by March 31, 2006. Upon receipt of the signed agreements, the funding will be flowed to boards. Funds are to be spent in fiscal year ending March 31, 2006.

Bullying Prevention Registry

To assist schools in identifying which resources might best meet their needs, the Ministry has developed a Bullying Prevention Registry to inform educators and school based teams about which elements of an effective bullying prevention program are present in each program and resource, as well as their cost and

age appropriateness. The classification system is based on the Action Team's recommendations of the key elements of effective bullying prevention programs.

The Bullying Prevention Registry is intended to provide one-stop access to a wide range of products that could be purchased with schools' bullying prevention funding. The registry is now available on the Ministry's public web site with information on a number of programs. It is strongly recommended that schools rely on the registry in the selection of their programs/resources.

The classification template is also now available on the Ministry of Education's web site along with an application form. Companies, vendors and boards who wish to have their programs classified and included on the registry are strongly encouraged to do so. The registry will be updated regularly.

The above items make up the elements part of the provincial bullying prevention strategy that have more immediate timelines for implementation, and in the remainder of this memo I would like to take the opportunity to provide you with information on the additional elements that round out the provincial strategy.

Bullying and Violence Prevention Special Circumstances Fund

Although all schools will be receiving funding for bullying prevention programming, it is anticipated that some schools may have extraordinary needs in addressing school safety and/or bullying. More information on how to access this fund will be available shortly.

Partnership with Kids Help Phone

An ongoing \$1 million partnership was announced with Kids Help Phone expanding the 24-hour hotline's ability to respond to calls and online questions from students about bullying. The funding will also allow Kids Help Phone to hire additional counsellors, provide increased training and improve the response times on the online counselling service. Kids Help Phone is Canada's only toll-free, 24-hour, bilingual and anonymous phone and web counselling, referral and information service for children and youth. Informational materials geared toward students about the Kids Help Phone will be provided to boards to post in schools shortly.

Policy and Program Memorandum

The Ministry of Education will be providing further direction through a Policy/Program Memorandum (P/PM) on Bullying Prevention for boards and schools on how they can put in place a bullying prevention policy. It is expected that this P/PM will be released in the next few weeks.

Training

a) Administrators training on bullying prevention

Planning with the three principals associations (Ontario Principals' Council (OPC), Catholic Principals' Council Ontario (CPCO), Association des directions et directions adjointes des écoles franco-ontariennes (ADFO)) is underway for principals and vice-principals training on bullying prevention.

b) Teacher and School Staff training on bullying prevention

The development of training on bullying prevention is being planned for teachers and school staff. It is expected that the training will be made available starting in the 2006/07 school year.

I would like to thank you for your ongoing efforts to date to support student learning. We want to build upon those and ensure that all students feel safe in their schools and that schools are a safe place to learn. We will continue to update you as information becomes available. If you have any questions, please contact your Ministry Regional Office or Allan Kathnelson, the Safe Schools Implementation Co-ordinator.



Ben Levin
Deputy Minister

- c. Ministry of Education Regional Office Managers