

Ministry of Education

Making Ontario's Schools Safer

Safe Schools Amendments Come Into Effect February 1

QUEEN'S PARK, Jan. 30 /CNW/ - New changes that make Ontario's schools safer by more effectively combining discipline with opportunities for students to keep learning take effect February 1, 2008.

School boards are now required to:

- Provide programs to students who have been expelled or are on a long-term suspension to allow them to continue their education and access services such as anger management or career counselling
- Treat bullying as an infraction for which suspension must be considered
- Consider mitigating and other factors before students are suspended or expelled
- Respond to all inappropriate behaviours in the most appropriate way instead of automatic suspensions and expulsions (in most cases). This could include a range of consequences such as meetings with parents, referral to a community agency, suspension or expulsion.

"A safe learning environment is essential for students to succeed," said Education Minister Kathleen Wynne. "I am confident that we will continue to make our schools safer by building on the investments and changes we have already put in place."

To help make these changes more effective, school boards are being encouraged to work more closely with local community agencies. These could include mental health providers and child and family services. The province will provide \$9 million over the next three years to help boards work with community partners to provide at-risk students with access to these additional supports.

"When community agencies and school boards work together, children, youth and their families benefit," said Minister of Children and Youth Services Deb Matthews. "Partnerships like these help young people succeed in school and become healthy productive adults."

The new requirements complement an investment of more than \$43.7 million for training, programs and supports to address inappropriate behaviour, and fund additional personnel to help students and build upon work already done to improve school safety in Ontario. They also address a number of the recommendations made by the School Community Safety Advisory Panel.

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Backgrounder

MAKING ONTARIO'S SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES SAFER

A safe and positive learning environment is essential for student success. The McGuinty government is committed to helping our children reach their full potential and has taken a number of important steps to not only help make schools safer, but also reduce incidents of youth violence.

SAFE SCHOOLS STRATEGY

To help ensure that students feel safe at schools and on school grounds, the Ontario government has a comprehensive Safe Schools Strategy that includes a Bullying Prevention Strategy.

- **Amendments to the Education Act** - In June 2007, the government passed amendments to the safe schools provisions in the Education Act that more effectively combine discipline with opportunities for students to continue their education. In addition, bullying has been added to the list of infractions for which suspension must be considered. Training has been provided to school board teams on changes to the Education Act. Further training initiatives, including anti-racism, anti-discrimination and cultural awareness will also be undertaken.
- **Investing in Safer Schools and Bullying Prevention** - On top of the \$28.7 million already invested, the Ontario government is investing a further \$43.7 million for 2007-08. This includes:
 - \$10.5 million annually for school boards to fund 170 psychologists, social workers, child and youth workers, attendance counsellors and others.
 - \$1.7 million in one-time funding for 18 police officers who will work with school boards in Toronto, London and Hamilton to prevent bullying.
 - \$23 million annually for programs and supports to address inappropriate behaviour and programs for all expelled students and students serving long-term suspensions.
 - \$5 million annually for other safe schools initiatives including providing training to school board teams including principals, vice-principals and teachers on changes to the act and ways to apply discipline in a non-discriminatory manner, along with other supports to school boards.
 - A one-time investment of \$500,000 to the Council of Ontario Directors of Education for the development of an e-learning behaviour management resource for principals and vice-principals that is part of the ministry's Bullying Prevention Strategy.
 - \$3 million per year over the next three years to help school boards enhance partnerships with local community agencies, such as regional child and family services, to help schools offer more services to students such as mental health counselling.

- **Kids Help Phone** - By April 2008, the Ontario government's \$3 million partnership with Kids Help Phone will have helped them provide anonymous support to over 40,000 bullying victims, bystanders and the bullies themselves.
- **Code of conduct for schools** - The Ontario government has revised the Provincial Code of Conduct for schools to make it clear that hate propaganda and other forms of behaviour motivated by hate or bias are unacceptable in Ontario schools.
- **Bullying prevention** - To help reduce bullying, the Ontario government has developed a multi-lingual pamphlet for parents on bullying prevention. The government also provides a registry of bullying prevention programs on the Ministry of Education website and has developed school climate surveys that will help school staff determine their school's needs and make decisions on bullying-prevention programming.
- **Pathways to Education** - The government is investing \$2.3 million in 2007-08 in Pathways to Education Canada, a charitable foundation that helps reduce poverty by lowering the dropout rate and increasing access to postsecondary education among disadvantaged young people.
- **Online respect and responsibility forum** - In May 2007, the Minister of Education hosted a student forum to gather insights on how students are using the Internet, cell phones and other online technologies. A summary of that discussion is published in Get Connected, Get in the Know: Online Respect and Responsibility, which is available on the Ministry of Education website.
- **Gang Awareness Seminars** - The government co-sponsored two Gang Awareness Seminars during the summer of 2007 for over 250 educators and school officers. This initiative was presented in partnership with The Committee of Youth Officers for the Province of Ontario and The Ontario Gang Investigators Association.
- **Developing and enhancing curricula** - Changes are being made in existing curricula for all levels of the elementary and secondary education system in Ontario in order to ensure it is inclusive and addresses anti-discrimination education by giving students and staff opportunities to learn about diverse cultures and perspectives. Knowledge and skills relating to conflict resolution, to bullying prevention, and to discrimination and harassment are also being integrated into the revised curriculum as appropriate.
- **Community Use of Schools** - Since 2004, the province has provided \$20 million annually for the Community Use of Schools Program. The program helps school boards lower or eliminate the fees they charge not-for-profit community groups to use school space after hours to promote participation in a range of community activities.

- **Focus on Youth** - In summer 2007, the government provided \$4 million to school boards to create new, or expand existing summer youth programs in Toronto schools in priority neighbourhoods.
- **Character Development** - The government has introduced a Character Development initiative that supports academic achievement by developing well-rounded citizens who will help build a strong, caring and compassionate society.

REDUCING YOUTH VIOLENCE

The Ontario government is also working with schools and communities to prevent youth violence.

- **Review of the Roots of Youth Violence** - Premier McGuinty has asked former Chief Justice Roy McMurtry and former Speaker of the Legislature Alvin Curling to co-chair a comprehensive review of the roots of violence involving youth. They are to recommend measures, among others, that will make children, schools and communities safer, and help young people make good choices. The review is not only surveying the academic research about causes of and proposed solutions for violence involving youth, but also consulting with leading experts and, most importantly, with the youth most affected by violence in their communities. The Co-Chairs' recommendations are expected to address both short and long term measures that will lead to positive action.
- **Project PEACE** - The government's \$270,700 investment in Project PEACE (Public Education And Crime Eradication), a prevention, education and enforcement initiative of the Toronto Police Service allowed police officers to work closely with communities, schools and young Torontonians to keep guns out of the hands of youth and youth out of the reach of gangs.
- **Youth Justice Committees** - The Youth Justice Committee program, an alternative to the formal court process that holds low-risk young offenders accountable and addresses issues that may lead to re-offending, has been expanded to 54 communities across the province - one for every court jurisdiction. More than 80 per cent of the participants have had no further contact with the justice system within one year of completion.
- **Youth Intervention Centres** - Since April 2006, the government has established 32 youth intervention centres across the province. The centres provide structured and closely supervised programs where youth in conflict with the law accept responsibility for their actions, and develop anger management, learning, employment and life skills to help reintegrate them into their communities.

- **African Canadian Youth Justice Program** - In May 2006, the government, in partnership with the African Canadian Legal Clinic, launched an innovative program to reduce youth offences and help youth in conflict with the law, aged 12 to 17, achieve better outcomes through appropriate community-based, culturally-sensitive services and referrals. Operating out of four Toronto-area youth court locations, the program offers both court workers and reintegration social workers to assist youth in accessing community supports and resources, including counselling and mentorship opportunities.
- **Youth Opportunities Strategy** - The government is investing \$28.5 million over the first three years of the strategy to improve outcomes for youth in under-served communities. The strategy features a range of community services and supports including employment and training initiatives, a prevention and diversion program to support school success, youth outreach workers and a website to better connect youth with appropriate services and supports - www.youthconnect.ca.
- **Down with Guns Program** - The government has directed \$3 million in grants to a community-designed initiative that is being led by the African-Canadian Christian Network in partnership with the Toronto Community Foundation. This youth anti-violence strategy is focused on four key areas: family, education, employment and crime prevention.
- **Apprenticeship Training** - Pre-apprenticeship projects for at-risk youth total approximately \$2.1 million over three years. Approximately 220 at-risk youth have learned practical skills to help them become eligible for apprenticeship programs in the skilled