

Ontario promises millions to combat teen violence

CANADA AM

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DALTON McGUINTY (Premier of Ontario): I just happened to be flipping through the channels last night, and you're going 15 minutes into a newscast now with stories related to violence. And that's not what this community is all about.

[Taped segment ends]

THOMSON: Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty, referring to the latest ring of stabbings among teenagers in Toronto -- three in the last month alone, including the fatal stabbings of 18-year-old Tanner Hopkins in his driveway and 16-year-old Drew Stewart who was chased, beaten and stabbed to death while trying to stop a group of teens from harassing his friends. The incidents are prompting the Ontario government to spend millions of dollars to help protect students from the risks they face simply by going to class.

Joining us now to talk about the province's action plan is the president of the **Canadian Safe School Network**, Stu Auty.

Thanks for coming in this morning.

AUTY: A pleasure, Beverly.

THOMSON: Tell me a little bit about some of the measures that the Ontario government -- I mean, \$9-million, but some of the specifics as to what they want to do to make schools safer for kids.

AUTY: Well, it's a four-step plan. The first part of it is a school audit set up where basically it's a survey of schools in Ontario to see where they are, what kind of facilities they've got, what type of programs are out there. And then they make an assessment based on that. So, you start with some research and then you come to terms with the amount of money you've got, first of all. We know what it is. And how can we best use it? So, that's the first step.

The second part of it is focused on bullying, anti-bullying programs. We know that we're going to be doing that.

THOMSON: And there are a number of anti-bullying programs already in existence. But I guess you'll have to assess which ones have been more effective and how much money can go into those.

AUTY: Well, exactly. And how are we going to prioritize? Is it going to be centralized? Are we going to be putting money into research for anti-bullying programs? Or just take what's on the shelf and just distribute them in a better fashion. So, that's No. 2.

No. 3 is taking a look at the Roberts report which is about child abuse. And we'll be doing that.

And then the fourth part is a review of the Safe School Act which has been in place for a number of years now. And just make an assessment of it.

THOMSON: But they also are talking about putting in some video surveillance cameras in some schools?

AUTY: There has been some discussion about that, clearly. And, initially, the government brought in surveillance cameras at the entrances and exits, but mainly at the entrances. Much like a concierge in a condo. In other words, the secretary doesn't have to have a volunteer sitting by the door to see who's coming and going from the front door. That's one aspect.

Now, there's some pressure on the other side saying, look, we need cameras throughout the buildings. That's a hugely expensive project. We're talking about, in some cases of a high school, it could cost upwards of \$150,000 per school to retrofit an old building. Now, that's another case in itself. And whether or not we want to put monies in that direction will be under discussion.

THOMSON: Well, when we take a look at some of these incidents, and certainly Dalton McGuinty was talking about it at the top of this segment, about just how many incidents there are involving gangs and bullying and now knives being apparently the weapon of choice for these teenagers. What's going on out there that has changed, that has seemingly made these kids so much more violent?

AUTY: Well, you know, it's all about power. It used to be that the bully was the big guy in the corner who lorded it over everybody because he was big in size. But now we know that the little guy can have just as much power, if not more, with a weapon. And the other part that the little guy can have is a group.

So, we have found that kids today are essentially desensitized in many ways to violence. They are soaked in violence from early on. And so, what we're finding is that kids know ways to get back. If they have been victimized early quite often the victim will become the victimizer. We're seeing that today. We're also seeing kids ready and willing to go all the way if they've got a weapon in hand.

THOMSON: Right, not just a slash but continue to beat.

Do you see our society -- I mean, certainly they have them in the States, but do you ever see a time when we're going have to have metal detectors? Or do you think that would be valuable because of the prevalence or proliferation of knives?

AUTY: That's a good question. That question is coming up more and more, especially where you've got knives in schools. And with kids. So, I don't know the answer to that. I know that the Canadian public don't want metal detectors in schools. I know the Canadian public don't want armed guards in schools, because that's been the US experience. It's been my understanding for years --

THOMSON: Well, it's an escalation, yeah, sure.

AUTY: We want to stay away from that. Now, will we be able to? That's a good question.

THOMSON: Interesting program to talk about. We'll be monitoring it in the future and I'm sure other provinces will be taking a look as well. Nine million dollars going into Ontario to fight this.

Stuart Auty, thank you very much for coming in.

AUTY: A pleasure.