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\$5.5M to be spent on improving safety

New measures include hiring of more staff, beefing up police link

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On the eve of the first anniversary of student Jordan Manners' shooting death at his North York high school, Toronto trustees have pledged \$5.5 million for new steps to make schools safer this fall.

And they will push Queen's Park for up to \$11 million more from a special grant for urban schools to hire more support staff for students at risk.

In a bid to address charges it has done too little to keep students safe, the Toronto District School Board voted last night on a sweeping array of measures, from hiring more teachers of colour and 21 more hall monitors, to providing safe spaces for female students, tightening up the handling of sexual harassment among peers, beefing up partnerships with police and updating security cameras.

"Jordan Manners tragically lost his life in one of our schools, and his death serves as a strong call to action to create safer schools," said director of education Gerry Connelly.

The plan also calls for the addition of up to 94 more support staff for troubled students down the road, which would require more money from the province.

But some trustees expressed concern that the Toronto Police Service has said it will assign 30 more officers to work with the city's public and Catholic schools.

"I'm appalled that the board would consider a police presence in our schools," said Trustee Stephnie Payne.

"If we turn schools into a police state, kids will be scared to come to school."

However, Connelly assured trustees there is no plan to have police patrol the halls – rather they



FRANK GUNN/CP FILE PHOTO

A year after 15-year-old Jordan Manners was shot and killed at C.W. Jefferys Secondary School, Toronto school trustees are pledging \$5.5 million to make schools safer.

will likely beef up their work with student recreation and anti-bullying programs.

The proposals are the first of three phases spelled out in a board report detailing how it will improve safety and create a "culture of respect" in its schools.

The "leadership action team" report is the board's response to a scathing tally of school safety flaws compiled last year by Toronto lawyer Julian Falconer at the board's request after Manners' death last May 23 at C.W. Jefferys Secondary School.

It was the first time a student in Canada's largest school board had been killed at school during the school day.

Falconer slammed a lack of support staff to help students struggling with problems including guns and knives, and violence against females.

While staff has said the board has money to pay for the first phase – much of it from new provincial grants for safe schools – Queen's Park will need to provide more funding for extra staff to help students at risk.

The board will hold a special memorial ceremony tomorrow at C.W. Jefferys to commemorate Manners and unveil a plaque in his memory.

With files from Kristin Rushowy