

Recent survey says bullying an issue in schools

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By Deb Bartlett

Public school board officials are happy with the results of a school climate survey, although there does seem to be some difference of opinion between parents and students when it comes to bullying and feeling safe at school.

Shelley Mierle, superintendent of special education and safe schools, said the survey was designed to measure perspectives and perceptions of the organization.

The survey was done at all 41 of the board's elementary schools, and is in the process of being done at the high schools. Surveys were sent home with students for parent input, were handed out to teachers and were completed by students in Grades 4 through 8.

Ms Mierle said there was good response to the survey, which tracked opinion in four areas: school communication and operation; teaching and learning; student safety and behaviour; and school building and grounds.

One of the biggest strengths, said Ms Mierle, was in the area of school operation and communication, where at least 80 per cent of respondents in all three groups (parents, teachers and students) answered positively to the question.

Bullying, said Ms Mierle, did show up as an issue, and all schools must have a plan to deal with it.

The recently approved Code of Conduct outlines how schools will make plans and intervene in the case of bullying.

Ms Mierle said principals were now working on those plans.

This is the first such survey to be done district-wide, she said, and results for each school are being calculated.

Those results will help the school's Safe and Caring School Team, and will be shared with school council.

Director of education Kathy Verduyn said she was proud that "we've gone out there and asked the questions."

The board now has data that is a starting point, she said, and schools can focus on their individual school culture rather than having generalized information.

Trustee Grace Irvine said there appears to be a "communication gap" between parents and their children on the questions about bullying and feeling safe. She said it appears parents and grown-ups don't see what children see.

Trustee Anne Cool asked how schools and the board will be held accountable and make the move to the next level of action.

Ms Mierle answered the next level will include positive behaviour supports (teaching students to develop the behaviours of good citizenship).

In the area of Student Safety and Behaviour, 69 per cent of students disagreed that "Students do not bully each other at this school," while 74 per cent of parents answered that "My child is not bullied or harassed at school."

The difference, said board chair Rick Johnson shows that "there is a disconnect there."

According to preliminary figures released by the board, the survey was completed by about 35 per cent of parents, 70 per cent of teachers and 80 per cent of students. The board website says there are 12,600 elementary school students in the system.

Ms Mierle said the same survey was to be done in high schools, the the large number of snow days has hampered completion of the survey.



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