

Attention News Editors:

Ontario To Make Schools Even Safer

McGuinty Government To Introduce Mandatory Reporting Legislation In 2009

TORONTO, Dec. 11 /CNW/ -

NEWS

A new report about school safety will help guide and strengthen requirements for staff to report serious incidents.

New legislation to be introduced this spring will, if passed, make reporting serious incidents, including assaults, to the principal mandatory. This follows the release of the new Safe Schools Action Team report, *Shaping a Culture of Respect in Our Schools: Promoting Safe and Healthy Relationships*.

The report also calls for action to address serious issues like gender-based violence, homophobia, sexual harassment and inappropriate sexual behaviour between students in schools. The Ontario government asked the Safe Schools Action Team (<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/nr/08.12/bg1211.html>) in February to examine these issues. Its report summarizes the team's findings and recommends areas for action.

The government will provide a comprehensive response over time that builds on its safe schools strategy. In addition to the proposed legislation, it will be:

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- Providing further support to school staff to respond and take action to stop any further school incidents
- Improving requirements for timely and ongoing communication between schools and parents of both victims and perpetrators
- Working with education partners to revise the curriculum to ensure gender-based violence, homophobia, sexual harassment and inappropriate sexual behaviour are discussed in the classroom
- Developing a manual to help staff respond to incidents of sexual assault
- Expanding the school climate surveys (<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/safeschools/bullying.html>) to help schools assess perceptions of safety.

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QUOTES

"Ensuring the safety of our students is a key priority for our government. This report will guide our further actions to help make our schools even safer," said Education Minister Kathleen Wynne (http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/biography/edu_minister.html).

"I want to thank everyone who contributed during the consultation process, in particular those students who provided the action team with their valuable advice. I am confident that the actions we recommended will help to foster positive and safe learning environments in our schools," said Liz Sandals (http://www.ontla.on.ca/web/members/members_detail.do?locale=en&ID=2115), Chair of the Safe Schools Action Team and Parliamentary Assistant to Minister

Wynne.

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QUICK FACTS

- The Safe Schools Action Team consulted over 200 people in the development of this report.
- Bullying and harassment can affect a student's health, mental well-being and school success, according to a 2008 study by the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (<http://webx.newswire.ca/click/?id=55f22dd581731b6>).
- Sexual harassment and gender-based violence disproportionately affect female students, including those for whom race, class, sexual minority status or disability are a factor (page 6 of the report (<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/safeschools/publications.html>)).
- Every Ontario school board must have a Code of Conduct to foster respect and inclusion in schools.

LEARN MORE

Read the report

(<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/safeschools/publications.html>).

Find out what else Ontario is doing to help make schools safer.

(<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/safeschools.html>)

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BACKGROUNDER

ONTARIO'S SAFE SCHOOLS ACTION TEAM

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The Safe Schools Action Team was re-engaged in February 2008 to review the issues of gender-based violence, homophobia, sexual harassment and inappropriate sexual behaviour in schools. The team also looked at barriers to students reporting these types of behaviours and reporting requirements for school staff, and participated in a review of local police/school board protocols.

TEAM MEMBERS

Liz Sandals, MPP Guelph, Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Education - Sandals was elected to represent the riding of Guelph-Wellington in October 2003 and re-elected to represent the redistributed riding of Guelph in October 2007. Prior to her appointment as Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Education, she served as Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Government Services and the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services. Sandals has taught computer science at the University of Guelph and was elected to her local public school board in 1988. She served as vice-chair and chair of the board and was president of the Ontario Public School Board Association from 1998 to 2002. Sandals holds a Bachelor of Science from the University of Guelph and a Master of Mathematics from the University of Waterloo.

Leeanna Pendergast, MPP, Kitchener-Conestoga, Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister Responsible for Women's Issues - Pendergast was first elected to represent the riding of Kitchener-Conestoga in October 2007. She was appointed Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister Responsible for Women's Issues and is a Member of the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs and of the Cabinet Committee for Emergency Management. Prior to this, Pendergast was the vice-principal of four high schools in the Waterloo region and also served as an education consultant for the Ministry of Children and Youth Services. Pendergast received a Bachelor of Arts degree in English and History at St. Jerome's College at the University of Waterloo continuing her studies at the University of Toronto and at Oxford University in England, receiving a Master of Arts in English Literature, a Bachelor of Education in English and Science, and a Master of Education in Computer Applications.

Stu Auty - Auty is President of the Canadian Safe School Network and the former chair of the Ontario Safe School Task Force. Auty leads a national multi-faceted not-for-profit organization with a mandate to reduce violence in schools and communities in Canada. Over the years Auty has acted as an adviser on safe school issues to municipalities, school boards and provincial and federal governments. He was the founding administrator of the Vanier School for Young Offenders.

Dr. Inez Elliston, Ph.D., O.Ont - Elliston has been engaged for over three decades as an educator and community volunteer. She is a former education officer within the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training and has worked at all levels of the publicly funded education system in Canada, the United Kingdom and Jamaica. In recognition of her contribution, Elliston has been the recipient of numerous awards including the Arbor Award for Volunteerism from the University of Toronto (2003), the Harry Jerome Award for Excellence in Community Service (2003) and the Order of Ontario (2004). She is currently a Patron of P.A.C.E. (Project for the Advancement of Childhood Education) Canada.

Ray Hughes, M.Ed. - Hughes has 30 years of experience in education as a teacher, department head, consultant and university lecturer. He is currently the national education coordinator of the Fourth R Project with the CAMH Centre for Prevention Science and a faculty member at the University of Western Ontario's Faculty of Education. Previously, Hughes was the learning coordinator for safe schools with the Thames Valley District School Board where he coordinated the implementation of violence prevention programs for 190 schools and 80,000 students. He has developed and implemented school-based programs related to substance abuse, domestic violence, gender equity, dating violence, human sexuality, interpersonal violence, conflict resolution and anti-bullying.

Dr. Debra J. Pepler, Ph.D., C.Psych - Pepler is a distinguished research professor of psychology at York University and a senior associate scientist at the Hospital for Sick Children. Her major focus is on aggression and victimization among children and adolescents, particularly in the school context. Her research identifies bullying as a relationship problem that transforms to other problems of power and aggression over the lifespan. Together with Dr. Wendy Craig, Pepler is leading a national network, PREVNet (Promoting Relationships and Eliminating Violence Network), a Networks of Centres of Excellence - New Initiative. With national non-government organizations and Canadian research partners, PREVNet's mission is to promote safe and healthy relationships for all Canadian children and youth.

Lynn Ziraldo - Ziraldo has been involved with the Learning Disabilities Association of York Region for over 27 years and currently serves as its executive director. She has represented learning disabilities and/or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder on numerous committees, task forces and work groups on education, health, social and legal issues in York Region, Ontario

and the United States. She is currently an adviser to the Minister's Advisory Council for Special Education and vice chair of York Region Special Education Advisory Committee. Her involvement in the Learning Disabilities Association has led her to be an effective advocate for her sons, who have learning disabilities and attention deficit disorder, as well as other people with disabilities.

TEAM'S HISTORY

December 2004 - The Safe Schools Action Team was first appointed. The team, made up of recognized safety and education experts, visited communities across Ontario to advise on the development of a comprehensive provincewide approach to bullying prevention in Ontario schools.

Spring 2005 - The team consulted with students, school staff, parents, and community agencies and organizations about issues of bullying prevention.

November 2005 - The team presented its first report: Shaping Safer Schools: A Bullying Prevention Action Plan

(<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/healthsafeschools/actionTeam/shaping.html>).

November 2005 - The team was engaged to review the safe schools provisions of the Education Act.

November 2005 - February 2006 - More than 800 parents, teachers, students and other community members provided input to the team on safe schools issues.

June 2006 - The team delivered its report on school safety: Safe Schools Policy and Practice: An Agenda for Action

(<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/ssareview/report0626.html>) summarizing its findings and recommending areas for taking action.

June 2007 - The Ontario government passed amendments to safe schools legislation (<http://webx.newswire.ca/click/?id=d5713f1de4903b4>) based on the Safe Schools Action Team's recommendations. The changes more effectively combine discipline with opportunities for students to keep learning. The changes also place a greater emphasis on prevention and early intervention.

February 2008 - The team was re-engaged to address the barriers to reporting and review the issues of gender-based violence, homophobia, sexual harassment and inappropriate sexual behaviour in schools.

March - October 2008 - The team consulted with students, school staff, parents, and community agencies and organizations about issues of homophobia, sexual harassment, gender-based violence and inappropriate sexual behaviour.

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BACKGROUNDER

MAKING ONTARIO'S SCHOOLS SAFER

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A safe and positive learning environment is essential for student success. The McGuinty government is committed to helping students reach their full potential and has taken a number of important steps to help make schools safer and reduce incidents of youth violence.

To help ensure students feel safe at schools and on school grounds, the Ontario government has a comprehensive Safe Schools Strategy (<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/teachers/safeschools.html>) that includes:

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- Education Act - Amendments to the safe schools provisions in the Education Act came into effect on February 1, 2008 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 principals, vice-principals and teachers on changes to the Education Act. Further training initiatives, including anti-racism, anti-discrimination and cultural awareness will also be undertaken.
- Safer Schools and Bullying Prevention - the ministry is making our schools safer by:
 - Providing \$10.5 million for additional paraprofessionals, including social workers, child and youth workers, psychologists and attendance counsellors
 - Developing programs and supports for expelled students and students serving long term suspensions
 - Providing \$10 million to 33 select high schools located in urban areas that face challenges such as poverty, criminal and gang activity, and a lack of community resources. The funding will help provide needed supports for students and their families, such as after-school recreational programs and programs to improve student achievement.

These investments build on work undertaken in 2007-08, including:

- \$1.7 million in one-time funding for police officers to work with school boards in Toronto, London and Hamilton to enhance school safety by building positive relationships between police and youth
- \$5 million for other safe schools initiatives including providing training to school board teams of principals, vice-principals and teachers on changes to the act
- Multi-year funding of \$3 million per year for three years beginning in 2007-08 to help school boards enhance partnerships with local agencies, such as children's mental health agencies.
- Kids Help Phone - The ministry's partnership with Kids Help Phone has helped them provide anonymous support to over 40,000 bullying victims, bystanders and the bullies themselves. This partnership is being extended for a further three years.
- Code of conduct for schools - The ministry has revised the Provincial Code of Conduct for schools to make it clear that hate propoganda and other forms of behaviour motivated by hate or bias are unacceptable in Ontario schools.
- Bullying prevention - The ministry has developed a multi-lingual pamphlet for parents on bullying prevention. The government also provides an online registry of resources (<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/safeschools/bullyprevention.html>) and has developed sample 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 has committed \$19 million over the next four years in Pathways to Education to expand its operations to help students in Ottawa, Kitchener and Toronto's Jamestown and Lawrence Heights communities. Pathways to Education is a charitable foundation that helps reduce poverty by lowering the dropout rate and increasing access to postsecondary education among disadvantaged young people.
- 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.

- Community Use of Schools - This program promotes participation in a range of community activities by helping school boards lower or eliminate the fees charged to not-for-profit community groups for the use of school space after hours.
- Focus on Youth - In summer 2008, the ministry provided more than 20,000 young people with free or affordable access to sports and recreation activities, as well as leadership development opportunities at area schools through the Focus on Youth program. It was targeted to families in Toronto, Hamilton and Ottawa that have limited access to learning and recreation opportunities when school ends for the year. School space was offered for no charge to more than 200 community groups that successfully applied to their local school boards.
- Character Development - The ministry has introduced a Character Development initiative that supports academic achievement by developing well-rounded citizens who will help build respectful, safe, caring and inclusive school environments.

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