

Safer schools on curriculum

Provincial report recommends strict reporting policies on violence between students

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Education Minister Kathleen Wynne met with members of the province's Safe Schools Action Team (SSAT) at Queen's Park yesterday to discuss recommendations made in the team's report on school safety. Among the 78 proposals was legislation for consideration early in 2009 that would make it mandatory to report to the school's principal all "serious incidents" -- like assault and sexual abuse.

There are no specific requirements now that says teachers must report to someone on violent incidents between students. The SSAT would like such an operation to work like the Child and Family Services Act, where teachers or counsellors could be found guilty of an offence if they fail to report an incident.

"That was one of the reasons I asked the (SSAT) to do this report," Wynne said, addressing the notion it was surprising teachers did not have to report incidents of violence under the current rule. "We knew there were some gaps with regard to reporting."

The safety report recommends also that schools stress an understanding of themes like gender-based violence, homophobia, sexual harassment and

inappropriate sexual behaviour to students as early as grade six.

The SSAT would also like a separate grade handed out for health and physical education, whereas just one is provided currently.

"We found a lot of topics were missed in the health lessons we have now and we need a reinforced emphasis on those so students feel comfortable discussing them," said Liz Sandals, a member of the SSAT and the Parliamentary assistant to the minister.

"We knew we had the problem in all schools, and the one way to address a problem in all schools is to have a change in curriculum."

Wynne said a lot of the changes recommended were too important to be dismissed because of their simplicity.

"If common sense prevailed, we wouldn't have to deal with a lot of the things we have to," she said.

"But unfortunately we can't make those assumptions. We can't assume someone will report an incident when it happens. We can't assume they will know what to do with these sensitive themes."

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