

"I don't care anymore whether I quit gracefully."



Safety hotline 'meeting need'

More than 316 calls reporting bullying, harassment since Jan. 21; school board mulls online version

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The Toronto school board's student safety hotline has logged more than 316 calls since it was launched on Jan. 21, with reports ranging from bullying to harassment – the most common – to drugs or just general inquiries.

Of those anonymous calls, 160 required some sort of follow-up with the school principal, social workers, police, children's aid or parents.

"Calls have come from parents and guardians, teachers, students and community members," said Gerry Connelly, the Toronto District School Board's director of education, in a speech at a recent safe schools conference.

"The majority of calls are from students, particularly elementary students, as young as Grade 1."

The Student Safety Line was one response to a highly critical report on safety in the city's schools, submitted by a three-member panel headed by lawyer Julian Falconer. The panel was struck after the shooting death of 15-year-old Jordan Manners at C.W. Jefferys high school last May.

The safety line – 416-395-SAFE – has taken reports of sexual harassment, extortions, injuries and homophobia, Connelly said.

And given the volume of calls and the number of follow-ups, "this evidence tells us we are meeting a need," she said.

Critics had said the line was unnecessary, given that CrimeStoppers or Kids Help Phone are already available.

Student trustee Gerald Mak said he was sure the hotline wouldn't work well for secondary students – and indeed, he added, many of the calls have come from elementary students.

"I am trying to work (with the board) to try to create a tip website for students," he said.

"I find in the 21st century, students are online more than they even use the phone, and we should

target our older youth by going online as well."