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Attention News/Education Editors:

Preventing Violence And Harassment In Schools

McGuinty Government Making Ontario Schools Safer

TORONTO, Feb. 21 /CNW/ - Ontario is working to combat harassment and violence in schools by reengaging a team of safety and education experts.

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The team will focus on improving school safety by making recommendations aimed at preventing behaviour such as:

- sexual harassment
- homophobia
- gender-based violence.

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"One incident of gender-based violence or homophobia in our schools is too many. We have a collective responsibility to take action," said Education Minister Kathleen Wynne.

Research shows that gender-based violence is a serious issue, with far-reaching consequences to individuals, their families, peers, and the community at large. The team will examine the causes of these behaviours, provide recommendations on how to prevent this type of inappropriate behaviour among students and make it easier to report.

The team - called the Safe Schools Action Team - was created in 2004 to examine school safety and review the former safe schools legislation. Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Education Liz Sandals will lead the team and will be joined by the Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister Responsible for Women's Issues Leeanna Pendergast.

"This is a strong team, and I'm confident we will once again deliver recommendations that lead to positive change," said Liz Sandals, Parliamentary Assistant to the Education Minister and chair of the Safe Schools Action Team.

Research indicates that improvements in the school climate relate to improvements in academic achievement.

This is part of the Ontario government's safe schools strategy and also addresses a number of issues raised by Centre for Addiction and Mental Health's report on sexual harassment and by the Toronto District School Board's School Community Safety Advisory Panel.

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MAKING ONTARIO'S SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES SAFER

A safe and positive learning environment is essential for student success. The McGuinty government is committed to helping our children reach their full potential and has taken a number of important steps to not only help make schools safer, but also reduce incidents of youth violence.

SAFE SCHOOLS STRATEGY

To help ensure that students feel safe at schools and on school grounds, the Ontario government has a comprehensive Safe Schools Strategy that includes a Bullying Prevention Strategy.

- Amendments to the Education Act - In June 2007, the government passed amendments to the safe schools provisions in the Education Act 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 school board teams on changes to the Education Act. Further training initiatives, including anti-racism, anti-discrimination and cultural awareness will also be undertaken. Amendments came into force on February 1, 2008.
- Investing in Safer Schools and Bullying Prevention - On top of the \$28.7 million already invested, the Ontario government is investing a further \$43.7 million for 2007-08. This includes:
 - \$10.5 million annually for school boards to fund 170 psychologists, social workers, child and youth workers, attendance counsellors and others.
 - \$1.7 million in one-time funding for 18 police officers who will work with school boards in Toronto, London and Hamilton to enhance school safety through the building of positive relationships between police and youth.
 - \$23 million annually for programs and supports to address inappropriate behaviour and programs for all expelled students and students serving long-term suspensions.
 - \$5 million annually for other safe schools initiatives including providing training to school board teams including principals, vice-principals and teachers on changes to the act and ways to apply discipline in a non-discriminatory manner, along with other supports to school boards.
 - A one-time investment of \$500,000 to the Council of Ontario Directors of Education for the development of an e-learning behaviour management resource for principals and vice-principals that is part of the ministry's Bullying Prevention Strategy.
 - \$3 million per year over the next three years to help school boards enhance partnerships with local community agencies, such as regional child and family services, to help schools offer more services to students such as mental health counselling.
- Kids Help Phone - By April 2008, the Ontario government's \$3 million partnership with Kids Help Phone will have helped them provide anonymous support to over 40,000 bullying victims, bystanders and the bullies themselves.
- Code of conduct for schools - The Ontario government has revised the Provincial Code of Conduct for schools to make it clear that hate propaganda and other forms of behaviour motivated by hate or bias are unacceptable in Ontario schools.
- Bullying prevention - To help reduce bullying, the Ontario government has developed a multi-lingual pamphlet for parents on bullying prevention. The government also provides a registry of bullying

prevention programs on the Ministry of Education website and has developed 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 is investing \$2.3 million in 2007-08 in Pathways to Education Canada, a charitable foundation that helps reduce poverty by lowering the dropout rate and increasing access to postsecondary education among disadvantaged young people.
- Online respect and responsibility forum - In May 2007, the Minister of Education hosted a student forum to gather insights on how students are using the Internet, cell phones and other online technologies. A summary of that discussion is published in Get Connected, Get in the Know: Online Respect and Responsibility, which is available on the Ministry of Education website.
- 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.
- Developing and enhancing curricula - Changes are being made in existing curricula for all levels of the elementary and secondary education system in Ontario in order to ensure it is inclusive and addresses antidiscrimination education by giving students and staff opportunities to learn about diverse cultures and perspectives. Knowledge and skills relating to conflict resolution to, bullying prevention, and to discrimination and harassment are also being integrated into the revised curriculum as appropriate.
- Community Use of Schools - Since 2004, the province has provided \$20 million annually for the Community Use of Schools Program. The program helps school boards lower or eliminate the fees they charge not-for-profit community groups to use school space after hours to promote participation in a range of community activities.
- Focus on Youth - In summer 2007, the government provided \$4 million to school boards to create new, or expand existing summer youth programs in Toronto schools in priority neighbourhoods.
- Character Development - The government has introduced a Character Development initiative that supports academic achievement by developing well-rounded citizens who will help build a strong, caring and compassionate society.

REDUCING YOUTH VIOLENCE

The Ontario government is also working with schools and communities to prevent youth violence.

- Review of the Roots of Youth Violence - Premier McGuinty has asked former Chief Justice Roy McMurtry and former Speaker of the Legislature Alvin Curling to co-chair a comprehensive review of the roots of violence involving youth. They are to recommend measures, among others, that will make children, schools and communities safer, and help young people make good choices. The review is not only surveying the academic research about causes of and proposed solutions for violence involving youth, but also consulting with leading experts and, most importantly, with the youth most affected by violence in their communities. The Co-Chairs' recommendations are expected to address both short and long term measures that will lead to positive action.

- Project PEACE - The government's \$270,700 investment in Project PEACE (Public Education And Crime Eradication), a prevention, education and enforcement initiative of the Toronto Police Service allowed police officers to work closely with communities, schools and young Torontonians to keep guns out of the hands of youth and youth out of the reach of gangs.
- Youth Justice Committees - The Youth Justice Committee program, an alternative to the formal court process that holds low-risk young offenders accountable and addresses issues that may lead to re-offending, has been expanded to 54 communities across the province - one for every court jurisdiction. More than 80 per cent of the participants have had no further contact with the justice system within one year of completion.
- Youth Intervention Centres - Since April 2006, the government has established 32 youth intervention centres across the province. The centres provide structured and closely supervised programs where youth in conflict with the law accept responsibility for their actions, and develop anger management, learning, employment and life skills to help reintegrate them into their communities.
- African Canadian Youth Justice Program - In May 2006, the government, in partnership with the African Canadian Legal Clinic, launched an innovative program to reduce youth offences and help youth in conflict with the law, aged 12 to 17, achieve better outcomes through appropriate community-based, culturally-sensitive services and referrals. Operating out of four Toronto-area youth court locations, the program offers both court workers and reintegration social workers to assist youth in accessing community supports and resources, including counselling and mentorship opportunities.
- Youth Opportunities Strategy - The government is investing \$28.5 million over the first three years of the strategy to improve outcomes for youth in underserved communities. The strategy features a range of community services and supports including employment and training initiatives, a prevention and diversion program to support school success, youth outreach workers and a website to better connect youth with appropriate services and supports - www.youthconnect.ca.
- Down with Guns Program - The government has directed \$3 million in grants to a community-designed initiative that is being led by the African-Canadian Christian Network in partnership with the Toronto Community Foundation. This youth anti-violence strategy is focused on four key areas: family, education, employment and crime prevention.
- Apprenticeship Training - Pre-apprenticeship projects for at-risk youth total approximately \$2.1 million over three years. Approximately 220 at-risk youth have learned practical skills to help them become eligible for apprenticeship programs in the skilled trades.

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ONTARIO'S SAFE SCHOOLS ACTION TEAM

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The Safe Schools Action Team promotes a safe learning and teaching environment in schools, and healthy relationships among students. The government is reengaging the team to identify ways to improve student safety and address concerns including those raised in Toronto District School Board's School Community Safety Advisory Panel's report.

The team's new mandate is finding ways to prevent inappropriate behaviour in school such as:

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- sexual harassment
- homophobia
- gender-based violence.
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It will also look at making it easier for students to report these types of inappropriate behaviours in schools.

Leeanna Pendergast, Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister Responsible for Women's Issues will join the Safe Schools Action Team for this review. This will enable better collaboration between the Ministry of Education and the Ontario Women's Directorate.

TEAM MEMBERS

Liz Sandals - The Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Education and chair of the Safe Schools Action Team. Sandals was elected to the Ontario legislature in 2003 to represent the riding of Guelph. Prior to that, she taught computer science at the University of Guelph and was elected to her local public school board. 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 also represented Ontario on the board of directors of the Canadian School Boards' Association.

Leeanna Pendergast - The Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister Responsible for Women's Issues. Pendergast was elected to the Ontario legislature in 2007. Born and raised in Kitchener, Pendergast has taught at various high schools in the region, serving as vice principal of four schools and as an education consultant for the Ministry of Children and Youth Services. She has worked collaboratively to develop various programs to support youth in Waterloo region, including the Safe Schools Initiative, education representative on the Community Safety and Crime Prevention Council, and the Community Partnership Initiative for youth at risk. She has chaired the school/police protocol for safe schools and the education foundation golf classic to raise money for numeracy and literacy initiatives. Pendergast obtained a BA from the University of Waterloo. She has also studied at the University of Toronto and at Oxford University in England, receiving numerous degrees including an MA, B.Ed., and M.Ed. She and her husband Richard Upenieks live in Conestogo with their three sons Adam, Alexander and Benjamin.

Stu Auty - The President of the Canadian Safe School Network and 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 advisor 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 - Former Director of the Canadian Race Relations Foundation (CRRF). Dr. Elliston spent over three decades as an educator and a community volunteer. She retired from the position of education officer at the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training after working at all levels of the public education system in Canada, the United Kingdom, Jamaica and West Indies. Inez has served as a consultant on several provincial and national projects including: Citizenship Education, The Needs of Immigrant Women, Youth

Leadership Training Programs and University Transition Programs (Admission for Special Groups). Her work includes teacher professional development in multiculturalism and intercultural education and citizenship preparation and training in anti-racist education. She received recognition for her contribution from governments, institutions, and organizations, including the Arbor Award for Volunteerism from the University of Toronto in 2003 and the Order of Ontario in 2004.

Ray Hughes - The National Education Coordinator for the Centre For Prevention Science with the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. He is the past Learning Coordinator for Violence Prevention with the Thames Valley District School Board where he coordinated the implementation of violence prevention programs for 190 schools and 80,000 students. Hughes conducts presentations on violence prevention and safe school initiatives and has developed and implemented school-based programs on a wide variety of related topics. He has successfully implemented a proactive response to violence in schools called the Interpersonal Development Program.

Dr. Debra Pepler - Distinguished Research Professor of Psychology at York University and a Senior Associate Scientist at the Hospital for Sick Children. She leads the PREVNet -- a Networks of Centres of Excellence New Initiative to Promote Relationships and Eliminate Violence. This national network brings together 42 national organizations and 45 researchers to promote healthy relationships for all Canadian children and youth. Dr. Pepler edited a recent book on international bullying prevention programs and has consulted with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development on school violence and bullying. She heads two research networks and holds seven research grants related to understanding and addressing children and adolescents' aggressive behaviour problems.

Lynn Ziraldo - The Executive Director of the Learning Disabilities Association of York Region and advisor and past chair of the Minister's Advisory Council on Special Education (MACSE). As a parent of two sons with disabilities, Ziraldo has been involved provincially and nationally as a parent advocate in the field of special education for the past 25 years. She has also given numerous workshops and training on learning disabilities to parents, professional groups and community agencies. She has represented learning disabilities and/or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder on numerous committees/task forces on education, health, social and legal issues throughout York Region, Ontario, Canada, and the United States. Her work also has been acknowledged through several awards.

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 examine school safety and the impact of the former safe schools legislation.

November 2005 - The team presented its first report: a bullying prevention action plan for schools and communities.

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 summarizing its findings and recommending areas for taking action.

June 2007 - the Ontario government passed amendments to safe schools legislation 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.

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