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Policy/Program Memorandum No. 144
Date of Issue:

October 4, 2007

Effective:
 Until
 revoked or
 modified

Subject:
**BULLYING PREVENTION
 AND INTERVENTION**
Application:

 Directors of Education
 Superintendents of School
 Authorities
 Principals of Elementary
 Schools
 Principals of Secondary
 Schools
 Principals of Provincial
 Schools
 Special Education Advisory
 Committees

Reference:

 The Education Act, as
 amended by the Education
 Amendment Act (Progressive
 Discipline and School
 Safety), 2007.
 Ontario Regulation 472/07,
 "Suspension and Expulsion of
 Pupils".

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Introduction

School boards¹ in Ontario are required to develop and implement policies on bullying prevention and intervention, and are required to have their policies in place by February 1, 2008. Boards that already have bullying prevention and intervention policies in place must review their existing policies and any other relevant board policies to ensure that they are consistent with the policies in this memorandum.

The purpose of this memorandum is to provide direction to boards on the development and implementation of their policies on bullying prevention



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and intervention.

Providing students² with an opportunity to learn and develop in a safe and respectful society is a shared responsibility in which school boards and schools play an important role. Schools that have bullying prevention and intervention strategies foster a positive learning and teaching environment that supports academic achievement for all students and that helps students reach their full potential.

A positive "school climate is a crucial component of prevention; it may be defined as the sum total of all of the personal relationships within a school. When these relationships are founded in mutual acceptance and inclusion, and modelled by all, a culture of respect becomes the norm."³ A positive school climate exists when all members of the school community feel safe, comfortable, and accepted. To help achieve a positive environment in their schools, boards and schools should actively promote and support positive behaviours that reflect their character development initiatives. They should also endeavour to ensure that parents⁴ and members of the broader community are involved in the school community.

Boards should support and maintain a positive school climate in their schools. The following are some characteristics of a positive school climate:⁵

- Students and staff feel safe and are safe.
- Healthy and inclusive relationships are promoted.
- Students are encouraged to be positive leaders in their school community.
- All partners are actively engaged.
- Bullying prevention messages are reinforced through programs

addressing discrimination based on such factors as age, race, sexual orientation, gender, faith, disability, ethnicity, and socio-economic disadvantage.

- Improvement of learning outcomes for all students is emphasized.

In recognition of the importance of addressing bullying, which can have a significant impact on student safety, learning, and the school climate, bullying has been added to the list of infractions for which suspension must be considered. With the passage of the Education Amendment Act (Progressive Discipline and School Safety), 2007, this change comes into effect February 1, 2008. For the relevant sections of the Education Act and Ontario Regulation 472/07, see the excerpts provided in the Appendix to this memorandum.

Research

Research and experience show that bullying is a serious issue that has far-reaching consequences for individuals, their families and peers, and the community at large. According to the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, one-third of students are being bullied at school and almost a third of students report having bullied someone else.⁶ Research indicates that a clearly articulated school-wide bullying prevention policy is the foundation of effective bullying prevention programming.

If students who are bullied, who bully others, or who witness bullying receive the necessary support, they can learn effective strategies for interacting positively with others and for promoting positive peer dynamics. Research also shows that administrators and teachers need to be provided with opportunities to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to

address bullying through school-level bullying prevention and intervention strategies.

Definition of *Bullying*

For the purposes of developing and implementing policies on bullying prevention and intervention, boards will use the following definition of *bullying*:

Bullying is typically a form of repeated, persistent, and aggressive behaviour directed at an individual or individuals that is intended to cause (or should be known to cause) fear and distress and/or harm to another person's body, feelings, self-esteem, or reputation. Bullying occurs in a context where there is a real or perceived power imbalance.

Students may attain or maintain power over others in the school through real or perceived differences. Some areas of difference may be size, strength, age, intelligence, economic status, social status, solidarity of peer group, religion, ethnicity, disability, need for special education, sexual orientation, family circumstances, gender, and race.

Bullying is a dynamic of unhealthy interaction that can take many forms. It can be physical (e.g., hitting, pushing, tripping), verbal (e.g., name calling, mocking, or making sexist, racist, or homophobic comments), or social (e.g., excluding others from a group, spreading gossip or rumours). It may also occur through the use of technology (e.g., spreading rumours, images, or hurtful comments through the use of e-mail, cellphones, text messaging, Internet websites, or other technology).

Children who suffer prolonged victimization through bullying, as well as children who use power and aggression as bullies, may experience a range of psycho-social problems that

may extend into adolescence and adulthood.

School Board Policies on Bullying Prevention and Intervention

Policy Development

In developing their policies, boards have the flexibility to take into account local needs and circumstances, such as geographical considerations, demographics, cultural needs, and availability of board and community support and resources.

Boards should draw upon evidence-based practices that promote positive student behaviour. In the development of their policies, boards must consult with school councils. They should also consult with parents, principals,⁷ teachers, students, their Parent Involvement Committee, their Special Education Advisory Committee, community partners, social service agencies, members of Aboriginal communities (e.g., Elders), and those groups that are traditionally not consulted.

Boards must take into account the needs of individual students by showing sensitivity to diversity, to cultural needs, and to special education needs in their policies, in keeping with the relevant ministry policies on antiracism and ethnocultural equity and antidiscrimination education and with the principles in the ministry document *Ontario First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework, 2007*. Where possible, the policies should incorporate other relevant board-wide policies, strategies, and initiatives, such as Student Success and character development.

Boards are required to adhere to the Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, the Ontario Human Rights Code, and the Education Act and regulations made under the Act in the development and

implementation of their policies. Board policies must respect all applicable collective agreements. Boards should consult with their legal counsel and freedom of information coordinators to ensure that they are fulfilling their legal responsibilities.

Policy Components and Implementation Strategies

1. Policy Statement

Board policies must include the following statements:

- Bullying adversely affects students' ability to learn.
- Bullying adversely affects healthy relationships and the school climate.
- Bullying adversely affects a school's ability to educate its students.
- Bullying will not be accepted on school property, at school-related activities, on school buses, or in any other circumstances (e.g., online) where engaging in bullying will have a negative impact on the school climate.

2. The Definition of Bullying

Board policies must include the **definition of bullying** that is contained in this memorandum.

3. Prevention Strategies

Board policies must include a comprehensive prevention strategy that includes expectations for appropriate student behaviour.

Board policies should include teaching strategies that support the school-wide bullying prevention policies. These strategies should focus on developing healthy relationships by including bullying prevention in daily classroom teaching (e.g., by including books that deal with bullying on reading lists).

School boards should provide opportunities for all students to

participate in bullying prevention training and leadership initiatives within their own school.

4. Intervention Strategies

Board policies must include a comprehensive intervention strategy to address incidents of bullying, including appropriate and timely responses. Intervention should be done in ways that are consistent with a progressive discipline approach. The strategies could range from early interventions to more intensive interventions in cases of persistent bullying, with possible referral to community or social service agencies. Ongoing interventions may be necessary to sustain and promote positive student behaviour.

Boards must also put in place procedures to allow students to report bullying incidents safely and in a way that will minimize the possibility of reprisal. These procedures should also define the responsibilities and roles of the principal, teachers, parents, and students.

Boards must provide support for students who have been bullied, students who have bullied others, and students who have been affected by observing bullying.

Board policies should include teaching strategies that support a comprehensive intervention strategy. These strategies should focus on developing healthy relationships by including bullying prevention throughout the curriculum in daily classroom teaching.

5. Training Strategies for Members of the School Community

Boards must put in place training strategies for all administrators, teachers, and educational assistants on bullying prevention and intervention, including training on cultural sensitivity and on respect for diversity and special education needs. Boards may also

make training available to other adults who have significant contact with students (e.g., other school staff, school bus operators/drivers, volunteers). Boards should also recognize the ongoing need to support training for new teachers and support staff.

6. Communication and Outreach Strategies

Boards must actively communicate their policies and procedures on bullying prevention and intervention, as well as the definition of *bullying*, to students, parents, teachers and other school staff, school councils, volunteers, and school bus operators/drivers.

It is important that the roles and responsibilities of all members of the school community (e.g., principals, teachers, students, parents) be clearly articulated and understood.

Boards should make every effort to share this information with parents whose first language is a language other than English or French.

7. Monitoring and Review

Boards must establish a monitoring and review process to determine the effectiveness of their bullying prevention and intervention policies and procedures. This process should include the following:

- an analysis of the school climate through anonymous surveys of students, staff members, and parents provided by their schools (these surveys should be done on a regular cycle, as determined by the board)
- performance indicators for monitoring, reviewing, and evaluating the effectiveness of the board's bullying prevention and intervention policies

School-Level Plans

School boards must require that all their schools develop and implement school-wide bullying prevention and intervention plans as part of their School Improvement Plan. Components of these plans must include the following:⁸

- the definition of *bullying*
- prevention strategies
- intervention strategies
- training strategies for members of the school community
- communication and outreach strategies
- monitoring and review processes

The school plans must be consistent with the policies in this memorandum and with the policies and procedures of the board.

Safe Schools Teams

Each school must have in place a safe schools team responsible for school safety that is composed of at least one student (where appropriate), one parent, one teacher, one support staff member, one community partner, and the principal. The team must have a staff chair. An existing school committee (e.g., healthy schools committee) can assume this role.

Appendix: Excerpts From the Legislation

Education Act, as amended by the Education Amendment Act (Progressive Discipline and School Safety), 2007

Relevant excerpts from sections 301, 302, and 306 of the Education Act, as amended by the Education Amendment Act (Progressive Discipline and School Safety), 2007, are provided below for ease of reference. Note that the Act now adds bullying to the list of infractions for which suspension must be considered.

Policies and guidelines promoting safety

301. (7) The Minister may establish policies and guidelines to promote the safety of pupils.

Duty of boards

(9) The Minister may require boards to comply with policies and guidelines established under this section.

Board's policies and guidelines promoting safety

302. (3) If required to do so by the Minister, a board shall establish policies and guidelines to promote the safety of pupils, and the policies and guidelines must be consistent with those established by the Minister under section 301 and must address such matters and include such requirements as the Minister may specify.

Suspension

Activities leading to possible suspension

306. (1) A principal shall consider whether to suspend a pupil if he or she believes that the pupil has engaged in any of the following activities while at school, at a school-related activity or in other circumstances where engaging in the activity will have an impact on the school climate:

1. Uttering a threat to inflict serious bodily harm on another person.
2. Possessing alcohol or illegal drugs.
3. Being under the influence of alcohol.
4. Swearing at a teacher or at another person in a position of authority.
5. Committing an act of vandalism that causes extensive damage to school property at the pupil's school or to property located on the premises of the pupil's

school.

6. Bullying.

7. Any other activity that is an activity for which a principal may suspend a pupil under a policy of the board.

Factors principal must consider

(2) In considering whether to suspend a pupil for engaging in an activity described in subsection (1), a principal shall take into account any mitigating or other factors prescribed by the regulations.

**Ontario Regulation 472/07,
"Suspension and Expulsion of
Pupils"**

Relevant excerpts from Ontario Regulation 472/07, made under the Education Act, are provided below for ease of reference.

Mitigating factors

2. For the purposes of subsections 306 (2), 306 (4), 310 (3), 311.1 (4) and clauses 311.3 (7) (b) and 311.4 (2) (b) of the Act, the following mitigating factors shall be taken into account:

1. The pupil does not have the ability to control his or her behaviour.
2. The pupil does not have the ability to understand the foreseeable consequences of his or her behaviour.
3. The pupil's continuing presence in the school does not create an unacceptable risk to the safety of any person.

Other factors

3. For the purposes of subsections 306 (2), 306 (4), 310 (3), 311.1 (4) and clauses 311.3 (7) (b) and 311.4 (2) (b) of the Act, the following other factors shall be taken into account if they would mitigate the seriousness of the activity for which the pupil may be or is being suspended or expelled:

1. The pupil's history.
2. Whether a progressive discipline approach has been used with the pupil.
3. Whether the activity for which the pupil may be or is being suspended or expelled was related to any harassment of the pupil because of his or her race, ethnic origin, religion, disability, gender or sexual orientation or to any other harassment.
4. How the suspension or expulsion would affect the pupil's ongoing education.
5. The age of the pupil.
6. In the case of a pupil for whom an individual education plan has been developed,
 - i. whether the behaviour was a manifestation of a disability identified in the pupil's individual education plan,
 - ii. whether appropriate individualized accommodation has been provided, and
 - iii. whether the suspension or expulsion is likely to result in an aggravation or worsening of the pupil's behaviour or conduct.

¹ In this memorandum, *school board(s)* and *board(s)* refer to district school boards and school authorities.

² The term *student*, as used in this memorandum, refers to *pupil*, as used in the Education Act.

³ *Safe Schools Policy and Practice: An Agenda for Action*, Report of the Safe Schools Action Team (Toronto: June 2006), p. 8.

⁴ In this memorandum, *parent(s)* refers to parent(s) and guardian(s). Parental involvement applies, except in

cases where the student is eighteen years of age or over or is sixteen or seventeen years of age and has "withdrawn from parental control".

⁵ Based on *Safe Schools Policy and Practice: An Agenda for Action*, Report of the Safe Schools Action Team (Toronto: June 2006), p. 7.

⁶ Edward M. Adlaf, Angela Paglia-Boak, Joseph H. Beitchman, and David Wolfe, *The Mental Health and Well-Being of Ontario Students, 1991-2005*. Ontario Student Drug Use Survey, CAMH Research Document Series, No. 18 (Toronto: Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, 2005), p. 89.

⁷ In this memorandum, *principal* refers to the principal or to a person designated by the principal or by the board.

⁸ *Shaping Safer Schools: A Bullying Prevention Action Plan*, Report of the Safe Schools Action Team (November 2005), pp. 24–27.

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