

Safe Schools Teams: One Year Later: Any Progress?

February 1, 2011 was the first anniversary of the date on which school boards were required to implement new policies on bullying prevention and intervention, with special emphasis on homophobic and gender-based bullying and violence. Education workers are required to respond to such incidents, and to document the behaviour and intervention in a Safe Schools Incident Reporting Form.

Since 2008 every school must have in place a Safe Schools Team responsible for school safety that is composed of one student, one parent, one teacher, one non-teaching staff member, one community partner and the principal.¹

The role of the Safe Schools Team is not clearly defined in statute. This team is separate from the Joint Health and Safety Committee required under the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*. Coordination and communication between these committees is essential.

The goal of the Safe Schools Team is to work together to help achieve a positive school climate which the Ministry's Safe Schools Action Team has 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 modeled by all, a culture of respect becomes the norm."

The Ministry has developed a worksheet for the use of Safe Schools Teams to assist in their discussions and planning to achieve a positive school climate. It is available on the Ministry of Education website.

Advice to Members:

- ✓ ensure that your school's Safe Schools Team is up and running;
- ✓ set up a schedule of frequent meetings;
- ✓ define and clarify the Safe Schools Team's role;
- ✓ define and clarify the role of each member;
- ✓ be creative about planning initiatives to address bullying and gender violence;
- ✓ publicize the Safe Schools Team's role in the school;
- ✓ invite input;
- ✓ create progress reports and share them with the community;
- ✓ coordinate any initiatives with other health and safety committees;
- ✓ be aware of recent incidents of bullying and how they were addressed;
- ✓ compile resources for anti-bullying initiatives, and implement them; and
- ✓ ensure that Safe Schools Incident Reporting Forms are accessible, well understood, and in use at your school.

¹ Policy and Program Memoranda 144, 145 Ministry of Education

Bill 168 – Workplace Violence and Harassment – is now part of the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*. There are specific protections for education workers in schools, especially with respect to harassment and the threat or act of physical violence. School boards must develop workplace violence and harassment policy and procedures. These procedures must include training and a reporting process for workplace violence incidents.

Check to ensure that all board policies conform with Bill 168 and with the safe schools amendments to the *Education Act*.

If they do not, contact your local ETFO office or staff in Professional Relations Services at 416-962-3836 or 1-888-838-3836. See also ETFO's website – Advice for Members.

The Ministry of Education has links to resources and supports related to [safe and welcoming schools](#).

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