Bullying: Everyone's Challenge

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Parents and other community members, in part, instigated by world wide media coverage of tragic bullying stories, have increased their expectations of what school staffs and board officials need to do in order to address this insidious problem.

Good educators have always realized the importance of dealing with bullying. These insightful individuals fully appreciated the short term and long term hurt that was the consequence of bullying for both the person bullied and the bully. They knew that past statements such as “kids will be kids”, “Grade 8 girls are often like that”, “be a man” were too facile to produce desirable results.

However, we should recognize that there is plenty of evidence to indicate that in the past educators have been woefully unprepared to both understand and to deal with all types of bullying. Faculty of Education pre-service programs and Board organized in-services have not dealt adequately with this important issue when preparing or upgrading teachers.

School staffs together with all the other partners within a school community must grow in the understanding that bullying in any form is aggression. Whether this aggression is physical, verbal, psychological or relational is irrelevant. The key point is that any form of bullying is unacceptable.

Furthermore, school staffs once having developed a clearer understanding of the issues must dedicate themselves to creating an atmosphere of mutual respect within the school community. To achieve this, they must be very de-

liberate in recognizing that all persons must play a role in confronting bullying issues. The students, the parents and the staff need to come together on a persistent and consistent basis. All involved must believe that the school and the school system play a key role in this harmonizing mission and, therefore, must be deliberate in their actions.

The introduction of programs which provide students with coping strategies for resolving conflicts in non violent ways are an example of what schools and parents can do in a proactive way. It is stated that school-wide anti-bullying initiatives can help reduce the occurrences of bullying up to 50% as they replace aggression with values of respect, inclusion and social responsibility.

School Boards and its senior officials must develop and implement very clear policies and guidelines which will provide the basis for the necessary anti-bullying initiatives and well publicized consequences for bullying behaviours.

Similar to other Boards across Ontario, the Niagara Catholic District School Board has implemented a set of administrative guidelines dealing with bullying.

The chair of the Board’s anti-bullying committee, principal, Marie McKee, reported that “one of the more compelling reasons for introducing a policy on bullying at this time is that recent surveys conducted among students indicated that bullying often goes unreported and that when it is reported, students’ perceptions are that adults don’t (or won’t) act on the information”.

McKee, further states that “the policy is intended to support all students who may become involved in bullying issues - those who are the bullies, those who are the victims and those who are the onlookers”. It is believed that through this approach there is an increased opportunity to fight this hurtful phenomenon.

The Policy adopted by the Niagara Catholic District School Board is as follows:

In keeping with the Safe Schools Policy, the Niagara Catholic District School Board shall endeavour to ensure that the school environment is one of respect, dignity and trust, consistent with the Gospel Values. Bullying fails to respect the dignity and value of all individuals involved. Accordingly, the Board believes that all forms of bullying are unacceptable behaviours.

Consistent with the Safe Schools Act 2000, all members of the school community, including staff, students, parent/guardians and visitors, will be respectful to one another and are responsible in helping to create a safe and caring school environment free from bullying.

It is required that each school include a specified anti-bullying statement in their Code of Conduct.

The Director of Education will issue guidelines in support of this policy.

This policy and the accompanying administrative guidelines empower the entire school community to create schools free from bullying behaviour.