

# SAFER SCHOOLS FOR ALL

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ADDRESSING VIOLENCE AND  
HARASSMENT AGAINST TEACHERS

Ontario's publicly funded Catholic schools are excellent places for children to learn and grow. On the whole, our students perform incredibly well in their studies, while gaining values and social skills that will enable them to make positive contributions to their communities throughout their lives.

But to make our schools the best that they can be, we must acknowledge when there are shortcomings. It is becoming increasingly evident that some students are not getting the support they need, which can result in negative behaviours.

For several years, our Association has been raising the particular issue of violent incidents experienced by teachers – including everything from verbal harassment and threats, to physical assault, to incidents involving weapons. Our teachers have noticed these incidents increasing in frequency and severity, and they do not feel that policymakers and school administrators are taking the matter seriously.

The Association recently partnered with Pollara Strategic Insights, one of the country's leading polling firms, to carry out a comprehensive survey of our teachers. The goal was to seek information that would illustrate the scope and scale of the problem, and make it clear to all Ontarians that violence in the classroom should be at the top of the education agenda. The data we have collected, some of which were released in June, confirms what we have been hearing from teachers across the province, in all of the publicly funded school systems: deficiencies in resources, training, and reporting procedures are failing some students, which is putting teachers, school staff, and classmates at risk.

The good news is that our survey data also point toward solutions. By fundamentally shifting how we think about and address incidents of violence, we can better serve the unique needs of each student, while keeping others in the school community safe from harm.

The recommendations outlined in the following pages represent a whole-community approach to dealing with this issue. Our goal is to create an environment in which incidents of violence are openly acknowledged and discussed, teachers are given the tools and assistance they require, and all students are provided with the professional supports and academic programs that will meet their needs. If the policies and practices that we recommend are implemented, everyone will be thoroughly apprised of their rights and responsibilities, every incident of violence will be recognized with an official report and response, and the entire community will work together to ensure that every student is able to thrive in a positive learning environment.

Our proposals go well beyond anything that has been discussed by the government thus far. We urge political leaders from all parties to adopt these recommendations in their entirety, and to implement them as soon as possible. Teachers cannot accept any more delays or half-measures. For the good of everyone in our school communities, the time to act is now.

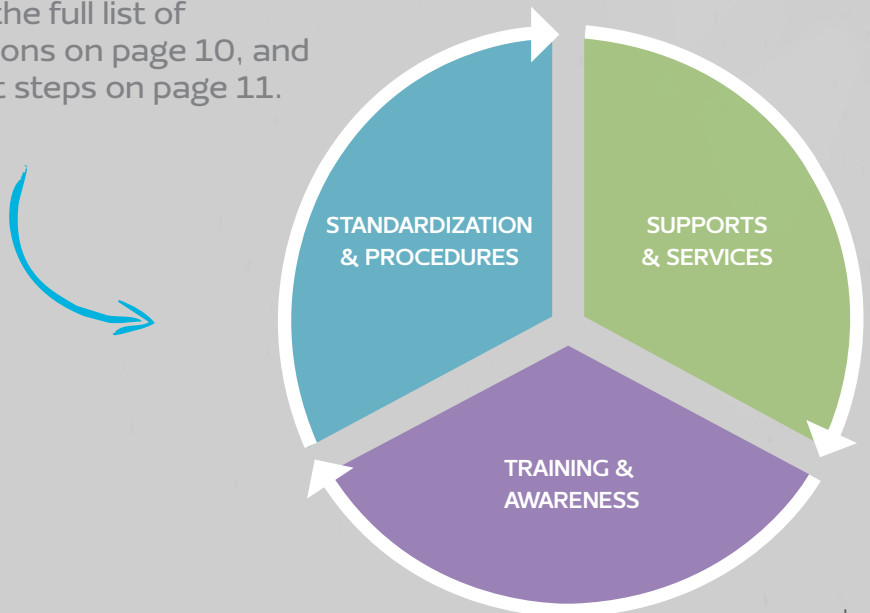
85% of respondents say that the number of incidents of violence against teachers is increasing.

85% of respondents believe that the severity of incidents of violence against teachers is growing.

Over the course of their careers, 89% of respondents have either witnessed or experienced violence or harassment in their schools.

More than **three-quarters** of respondents agree that violence in their schools makes teaching more difficult.

We have organized the data and recommendations into three themes. Read the full list of recommendations on page 10, and suggested next steps on page 11.



# STANDARDIZATION & PROCEDURES

*“Transition meeting(s) with parent(s) and community support agencies need to happen with the school team... [There must also be] a plan that has been communicated to all parties.”*



By and large, teachers do not fill out the Safe Schools Reporting Form after being subjected to violence or harassment in schools.

- **31%** have never filled out the form after experiencing physical assault.
- **53%** have never filled out the form after experiencing an attempted physical assault.
- **75%** have never filled out the form after experiencing harassment.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1) That the education sector employ the definitions of “workplace violence” and “workplace harassment” as set out in the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*.
- 2) Direction, monitoring, and enforcement from the Ministry of Education to school boards, through Policy and Program Memoranda (PPM) or SB memos, regarding reporting of all incidents of violence in the workplace. There should be no local variance in this area.
- 3) Amendments to the principal evaluation process, to ensure there are no negative consequences for reporting or managing violent incidents in schools.
- 4) A single, standard form for reporting incidents of violence in the workplace.

Even among those who properly report an incident, there is general dissatisfaction with outcomes:

- a. Only **39%** of respondents who filled out a Safe Schools Reporting Form met with their principal afterward.
- b. Only **57%** of respondents who met with their principal did so in a timely manner.
- c. Only **7%** of respondents always receive a written response from their principal after a meeting.
- d. Only **26%** of respondents were satisfied with the outcome of their meeting.



Our data indicate that there is no objective process to follow when a teacher has experienced a violent incident at school. In some cases, teachers are uncertain as to whether the incident they have experienced should be reported; other times, teachers are pressured not to report, perhaps because the principal fears that the school's reputation will suffer if incidents of violence come to light. Even when reports are filed, this does not always lead to a satisfactory outcome – follow-up meetings with administrators often do not occur, and no measures are taken to help the student who is acting out.

Our data also point to the need for clear definitions, as well as a standardized and automatic process that is triggered once an incident of violence or harassment is reported. A common understanding of when and how an incident should be reported will enable everyone to address the problem openly and honestly, while standard follow-up procedures will ensure that all teachers and students get the assistance they need. The data also highlight the need for proper monitoring and enforcement by government, to ensure adherence and consistency, regardless of school location or level.

- The form must be sent to the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Labour, school board, union, and local Joint Health and Safety Committee.
- The incident report triggers an immediate meeting of stakeholders, with appropriate attendees to be determined by the principal based on objective criteria provided by the Ministry of Education (must include teacher and principal, may also include parents/guardians, professionals, police, community agencies, etc.).
- After the incident report meeting, a mandatory response from the school principal must be added to the form, including a plan of action where necessary.
- The student(s) involved in the violent incident must be removed from the regular classroom until the meeting has occurred and a plan of action is in place.
- The principal's response, and any action plans, must be sent to the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Labour, school board, union, and local Joint Health and Safety Committee.

# SUPPORTS & SERVICES

ONLY  
**12%**

of respondents indicate that their schools are effective in providing teachers the necessary tools to deal with incidents of violence or harassment.

ONLY  
**13%**

of respondents indicate that educational assistants are always available when needed.

CHILD AND YOUTH WORKERS



**48%**

SOCIAL WORKERS



**42%**

PSYCHOLOGISTS



**26%**

PSYCHOMETRISTS



**9%**

Fewer than half of respondents feel that these professional resources are available to them when dealing with incidents of violence in schools.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- 5) All school staff to have access to information about a student's history of violent behaviours.
- 6) Significant, ongoing investments in professional staff, to support all students.
  - To be delivered through the Pupil Foundation Grant and Special Education Grants.

Respondents to our survey were vocal and definitive in describing the lack of resources, supports, and services currently available to them when dealing with incidents of violence. Many cited the lack of information provided to them regarding students' background and behaviours, which leaves teachers unable to identify triggers and ensure a safe learning environment. Respondents were nearly unanimous in calling for more access to professional workers – such as educational assistants, child and youth workers, and psychologists – in order to proactively support students at an early stage. A number of respondents also lamented the lack of alternative environments or programs that could assist students who act out with violence.

*“Students need to receive appropriate supports and environments. Most students would not be violent if their needs were met. For example, some need a room to withdraw to when it is observed that they are ‘escalating’... readily available psychiatric and/or behaviour therapy... a school program to fit violent students’ emotional and academic needs.”*

*“We need [plans] to be clear, concise, readily accessible, well and frequently communicated and updated. We need increased and sufficient staffing with appropriately/specially trained people to deal with violent students (for example, many more educational assistants, child and youth workers, social workers, mental health professionals). We need facilities designed and equipped to deal with violent students within our schools, and alternative learning environments for the violent students to go to, within and outside of the school, to protect all students and staff.”*

• All money to be “dedicated.”

- 7) Appropriate settings outside the regular classroom for the delivery of supports/behaviour modifications, for all students, beginning in Kindergarten.

# TRAINING & AWARENESS

Percentage of teachers who are **very familiar** with the following policies, plans, and forms regarding school violence.

**22%** Incident Reporting Forms

**19%** Harassment Policy

**17%** Safe Schools Plan

**6%** Risk Assessment Process



**ONLY 36%**

of respondents feel it would be very easy to access the Safe Schools Reporting Form Part 1.

- Only **29%** of respondents indicate that they have received training on non-physical intervention.
- Of those who have received training, only **8%** of respondents feel that non-physical intervention training is effective.
- Less than **6%** of respondents feel that early intervention policies are very effective in modifying the behaviour of violent students.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- 8) Proper training for all school staff on reporting procedures.
  - This is the responsibility of government and school boards.



*[Teachers need] training about when to use forms, and confidence that using the Safe Schools Reporting Form will not be used against them.*

*We need more help/training in the classroom so that we are more equipped to properly deal with potentially violent students.*

Our evidence shows there is a clear lack of awareness regarding the steps teachers should take if they experience an incident of violence or harassment at school. In addition to being unfamiliar with the procedures and processes, a number of respondents feel that they have received inadequate training about how to manage aggressive students, or de-escalate violent situations. Providing teachers with the necessary awareness and training will contribute to ensuring that students receive the support they need, while also ensuring the safety of all students and staff.

*This is a big problem that needs to be addressed. Training ... should be mandatory and it should be board- and school-wide so everyone is on the same page with progressive discipline.*

*Teachers need more training on how to de-escalate situations so as to prevent them from becoming violent. This is especially true for working with students with special needs. If students feel heard they are less likely to become agitated and violent.*

- 9) Intervention training that requires non-physical contact with a student.
- For teachers, this should begin in the faculties of education.

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# NEXT STEPS

To proactively encourage change, it is important that Ontarians speak up about this issue. Whether you're a classroom teacher, a parent, or an MPP, you can help promote safer schools for all.

## TEACHERS

- Report incidents of violence and/or harassment that occur in your school.
- Familiarize yourself with all safe schools protocols and reporting forms.
- Reach out to your local MPP, the Minister of Education, or the Premier to stress the importance of this issue, and encourage government to take action to ensure safer schools for all.



## GOVERNMENT

- We encourage MPPs to adopt all of the recommendations proposed in this document.
- Using the information in this document, speak with other MPPs, the Minister of Education, and the Premier about the importance of this issue.
- Speak to teachers from your riding about their experiences with violence and harassment in schools to better understand how this issue affects your constituents.



## PARENTS

- Contact your local MPP and urge them to make this important issue a priority.
- Use social media to raise awareness about this issue, using the hashtag #saferschools4all





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