



Anti-Bullying Summit Report

Education and Early Childhood Development

Anti-Bullying Summit Report

Minister's Message

On behalf of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, I am pleased to release the report on the province's first Anti-Bullying Summit. This Summit brought people from across the province together to discuss bullying in our schools, to learn from each other and, most importantly, to support each other.

Our government is committed to putting New Brunswick first with better education and the belief that all children deserve the opportunity and supports to achieve their full potential. Premier David Alward and I are committed to continuing the work of establishing greater respect for diversity and inclusion. We will work with teachers, support staff, parents, districts, students and community partners on a multi-phased approach.

Our children and students, as well as the dedicated individuals who work within our school system, deserve safe and healthy learning and working environments. Supports will be strengthened to ensure that destructive behaviour is reduced in our schools. This is our priority.

I would like to thank all participants for their contributions and I would like to acknowledge my predecessor, Hon. Roland Hache for initiating the Summit.

The results of the Summit are clear – that no one person, school, community or government, can solve this issue alone. We must all continue to work together.

The Anti-Bullying Summit report gives us an opportunity to continue the dialogue, the sharing and the journey to eliminate bullying in our schools and our community.

Jody Carr, Minister
Department of Education and Early Childhood Development

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On June 17, 2010, well over 160 stakeholders from various backgrounds (including students, parents, federal and provincial government, District Education Council representatives, district and school personnel, non-profit agencies, community-at-large) across New Brunswick came together in Fredericton to discuss ways to address and prevent bullying and its impact on students in the public school system.

Participants had the opportunity to listen to morning and afternoon presentations on topics ranging from the use of policy and legislation to curb bullying to practical examples of successful anti-bullying programs in place within New Brunswick schools. After each panel presentation, there were group table discussions that allowed participants to network and share their points of views.

These discussions were guided by six key questions:

1. *What are the challenges facing students, teachers, parents, local law enforcement and the local community in addressing bullying?*
2. *Should the Department of Education define bullying or provide guidelines on what is considered bullying?*
3. *How will we know that efforts to address bullying are effective?*
4. *How can students, schools, parents, community organizations and local law enforcement work together to make schools safer?*
5. *How can students, parents, community organizations and local law enforcement help schools address bullying that happens outside the school and school hours, in the community but impacts on the school environment?*
6. *How can the Department of Education, school districts, and schools work collaboratively to better communicate with students, teachers, parents, other school personnel, and the local community about what is being done in our schools and what are our shared roles and responsibilities in addressing and preventing bullying in our schools?*

After examining the feedback, comments, and suggestions provided to the Minister at the Summit, it seems that despite diverse backgrounds and experiences, participants share many common ideas about the current situation in our schools and what should occur in order to address this serious issue.

This report reflects a synopsis of the overall themes and ideas that arose during the Summit, including actual comments, as recorded by the note taker.

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Common Elements

For the most part, participants agreed that:

- Defining bullying is a challenge
- Communication needs to be improved
- Resources are limited
- Solutions are only possible through the contributions of all partners
- A number of positive strategies exist in our schools but more can be done
- More stringent accountability measures are needed

Defining Bullying

“Bullying evolves over the years. If we establish a law, it will be difficult to be flexible over time to respond to new needs.” – Summit participant

Generally, participants were divided on whether or not bullying should be defined. They noted that it is often assumed we all know what bullying is, but in discussions around the table it became clear that we do not necessarily agree on what bullying is. For example, bullying is most commonly defined as an action that needs to be sustained, repeated and intentionally hurtful; however, some argued that any action that is hurtful should be considered as bullying, regardless of whether it was sustained or repeated.

Parents in particular were concerned about what they perceived as discrepancies in definitions between schools and districts. Participants who supported a common definition argued that one standard is necessary to avoid inconsistencies and confusion. For example, a definition would ensure that cyberbullying is consistently treated as bullying. Those who were opposed to defining bullying provincially were concerned that a definition would allow other negative behaviours to slip under the radar because they were not “listed” as bullying. Further, some participants were concerned that there is a danger of all negative behaviours being lumped into one category, that of bullying, when perhaps the incident was an isolated event or motivated by some other cause not related to bullying. This could then result in the situation not being addressed appropriately. Also, some noted that even the clearest of definitions can lead to different interpretations of what is considered to be bullying.

Others still suggested that the Department develop guidelines rather than define bullying, adding that guidelines would:

- Provide the flexibility to address the many forms that negative behaviour can take as well as bullying;
- Allow a principal or teacher to use his or her professional discretion and to consider mitigating factors such as intent and impact; and,
- Reduce inconsistencies between schools.

Communication and Resources

“There has to be a way to work with the school district, the school and the department to gain access in our schools to the services offered by different community organizations.” – Summit participant

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Participants identified communication as one of the major challenges preventing successful implementation of *Policy 703: Positive Learning and Working Environment* which provides a framework for the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, school districts and schools to create positive learning and working environments in the public education system. A number of participants indicated that they only became aware of Policy 703 once they read about it in the discussion paper released in advance of the Summit. Parents and students in particular noted they were pleased to learn that such a policy existed but many found the policy to be in “government” speak and therefore not easy to follow.

There was general consensus that there needs to be better ways of sharing information about policies, programs, and services. A number of participants highlighted that communication between the school and parents needs to be improved, particularly if a child has been involved in an altercation, be it bullying or otherwise. Also, community groups noted they have excellent resources but that it can be difficult to get information about their programs and services into the schools.

In addition to communication, lack of resources was cited as a challenge facing schools. It was noted that awareness of the issue is not enough. People need information and supports to take effective action. Teachers and administrators in particular shared that they are not always able to adequately address issues because they are overworked, have insufficient support networks, and/or a lack of the necessary training to help students.

Despite these challenges, participants repeatedly highlighted the extraordinary social capital available within New Brunswick and that we all need to work together more effectively to leverage this capital. Many highlighted that effective communication is crucial to fostering ways to better work with the resources available to us. By doing this, we promote little known services, avoid duplication and share best practices.

Accountability

“We as adults need to set the example that it is everyone’s responsibility to prevent and educate on bullying – it needs to go beyond the school education.” – Summit participant

Lack of accountability was raised in a number of contexts, including concerns that:

- While bullying is addressed in provincial Policy 703 – *Positive Learning and Working Environment*, it would have more teeth if it were entrenched in legislation.
- While schools are required to follow Policy 703, there is no mechanism in place to ensure they do and there is no penalty for those who do not.
- There is a lack of consistency in anti-bullying initiatives across the province. Some schools have really embraced creating an anti-bullying culture while other schools appear to be doing very little.
- In order to use our resources wisely, appropriate measures need to be developed to evaluate our solutions to ensure they are making a difference.
- A parent has no recourse when he or she disagrees with a school’s handling of a bullying incident.
- Adults need to be more accountable for their actions as they are role models for our children.

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Final Remarks

“We have to ensure that each school has a program in place and they have to share their success. The Minister of Education has a responsibility to ensure that all schools have measures or a program in place.” – Summit participant

One of the overarching themes that came out of the Summit was a positive commitment to work together to support our schools, our teachers and our students. It is not enough to say “bullying is everyone’s business.” We have to take real action that will have a real impact on the lives of individuals affected by bullying. No single group – be it principals, teachers, students, parents, community groups, government – can solve this problem alone. Solutions to bullying require us to work together. What can you do to help?

As a student:

- Stand up for people who are being bullied, sending a message that bullying is unacceptable.
- Report bullying when you witness it.
- Create groups and activities that are inclusive for everyone.

As a parent:

- Become aware of the school rules and policies.
- Ask for and accept the school’s help whether your child is a target, bully or bystander.
- If your child is a teen, inform your child about how teasing or bullying can escalate into behaviours that are illegal and potentially punishable by law.
- Interact with your child’s school in a respectful manner.

As a teacher:

- Provide students with opportunities to talk about bullying.
- Immediately acknowledge and reinforce positive behaviour and compliance with school rules.
- Speak to your administration about different kinds of training you think are necessary for yourself and fellow teachers.

As an administrator:

- Communicate regularly with colleagues to find out about best practices and different programs and services being offered.
- Take cases of bullying seriously, helping to find solutions for all students involved
- Ensure staff and parents are aware of policies and resources.

As a community member:

- Support initiatives of your local school to address bullying.
- Adapt school rules against bullying within your organization.
- Participate in problem solving and help offer counsel when needed.

As a first step, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development will work with districts to:

- Develop a brochure for parents on Policy 703.

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- Establish minimum standards for what must be in place at schools to address and prevent bullying.
- Develop a sample Positive Learning and Working Environment Plan as an appendix to Policy 703.
- Explore ways to enhance communication on key policies with DEC's, districts, schools and the community.
- Expand the provincial student code of conduct to all individuals involved in the publicly funded school system – parents or guardians, volunteers, teachers and other staff members – whether they are on school property, on school buses or at school-authorized events or activities.

This paper is not the final word on what must be done, but the beginning of a conversation that we hope will continue. If our collective commitment to addressing bullying appears to be waning, we encourage you to speak up, be heard, and help keep all of us accountable.

Thank you to all those who attended the summit and made the day an overwhelming success. Together, we can create a positive school environment where students have a sense of belonging, security and well-being.