

## Calgary Board of Education Review

### Practices and Policies Addressing Bullying in the Calgary Board of Education

October 3, 2019

#### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

##### Introduction

After three months of hearing from 150 CBE employees—teachers, school principals, area and learning directors,<sup>1</sup> learning specialists, and representatives in communications, policy, psychology, and law—and after 200 hours of analysis of the information by the primary reviewer and three additional reviewers, it has been found that the CBE administrative regulations dealing with bullying address the phenomenon in a comprehensive, effective, and respectful manner. Nevertheless, a few amendments to those regulations along with training and support are suggested.

It is important to note that the reviewer finds that the CBE teachers, school administrators, area directors and learning directors, and central office staff who participated in this review are a committed, professional, and caring group of individuals who collectively and efficaciously act for the welfare of students, who may be victims or perpetrators of bullying. No CBE employee in this review ever “gives up” on a student.

Statements on the purpose of this review, gathering of information, findings, and recommendations follow.

##### Purpose of the Review

The purpose of this confidential CBE internal review of student-on-student bullying was to examine relevant practices and policies; identify any gaps in policies, training, or supporting processes; and, if appropriate, make recommendations in those areas.

##### Participants and Information Gathering

Participants consisted of teachers from elementary, middle, and high schools; school principals from all three levels of schools; area and learning directors; learning specialists; and individuals working in the areas of communications, policy, psychology, and law. Information was gathered from focus group sessions and individual interviews.

##### The Findings

###### Policy (Administrative Regulations)

The review did not find any gaps in CBE policies<sup>2</sup> but did find that (a) the language used in those documents is difficult for employees to understand, (b) there are barriers to using restorative practices, (c) some teachers who report bullying are not informed of administrative actions taken in response to their reports, and (d) the number of independent administrative regulations dealing with bullying leads to confusion about how to deal with it.

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<sup>1</sup> Effective July 15, 2019 Area Directors and Learning Directors were renamed Education Directors.

<sup>2</sup> The term *policies* here refer to administrative regulations.

### **Training**

The review found that (a) there is insufficient time allocated for teachers to learn how to deal with bullying and its associated behaviours; (b) there is insufficient time allocated for school administrators to learn and practice restorative strategies and practices; (c) nonteachers who supervise students lack training on how to deal with bullying and its associated behaviours; (d) immigrant families with English as a second language face language and cultural barriers to understanding the CBE definition of and the significance of bullying; (e) many students have a lack of resiliency, possess few if any anger management skills, and are unable to regulate themselves in potentially volatile situations; (f) teachers are not conversant on the law of search and seizure of students' cellular phones; and (g) teachers are not conversant on the civil and criminal law regarding distribution of intimate images.

### **Support**

The review found that (a) there is no strategy in place to convey the CBE definition of bullying to parents and students, (b) the CBE does not keep bullying statistics, (c) schools with wealthy parents pay for third-party anti-bullying programs, whereas schools with less affluent parents cannot afford similar programs,<sup>3</sup> and (d) the media does not appear to understand the CBE definition of bullying.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Administrative Regulation Recommendations**

1. The language in the regulations should be left as is and clarified using examples to help teachers, administrators, parents, and students understand the regulations in practice.
2. The regulations should state that the preferred course of action in cases of bullying is restorative practice. This preference would involve ongoing training for teachers and school personnel in restorative practice.
3. School administrators should inform teachers who report a bullying incident what follow-up has been taken, or explain, if relevant, that for reasons of confidentiality they cannot provide further information. A regulation related to practice that reflects the importance of school administration following up with teachers who report incidents would be helpful in instilling trust in the process.
4. In order to reduce the number regulations dealing with bullying, AR 6007 (*Suspension and Expulsion*) could be contained within AR 6006 (*Progressive Student Discipline*), as they are not conceptually distinct areas. Further, in AR 6031 (*Welcoming, Caring, Respectful and Safe Learning and Work Environments*), readers could be directed to AR 6005 (*Student Code of Conduct*), which deals with

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<sup>3</sup> This disparity was raised by many teachers as being fundamentally unfair – but no example was given where such a service was requested by parents but turned down due to a lack of school funding. Moreover, it is important to note that school principals have some discretion regarding the spending of school funds in their schools and must prioritize the same. Further, it is important to note that the reviewer is neither recommending or discouraging the use of any particular program as there may be many third-party programs or internal CBE programs which could offer, in essence, the same service.

behaviour. Regarding students breaches of AR 6005, readers could be directed to the newly expanded AR 6006. This would simplify and clarify the issue for teachers and others.

### **Training Recommendations**

1. Time from teaching should be made available to train both teachers and school administrators on how to deal with bullying and its associated behaviours, in particular student mental health.
2. Time should be made available to ensure that all school administrators have training in restorative strategies and practices.
3. Adults who supervise in schools at lunchtime should receive training in conflict management and remediation for bullying.
4. Time should be given to families who face linguistic or cultural barriers in relation to understanding and thus abiding by the regulations.
5. The CBE should work with the Alberta Government to have student resiliency, anger management, and de-escalation of volatile situations taught as specific items in the school curriculum beginning at the earliest grades. This education is significant, as the question of students' mental health was a concern raised by most teachers and administrators.
6. Teachers should be advised on the law regarding when student cellular phone searches are permitted, including the extent of the search and the use of the data collected.
7. Bullying may involve intimate images being shared among students. Therefore, teachers should be very familiar with the *Education Act*, which deals with intimate images,<sup>4</sup> as well as Alberta's *Protecting Victims of Non-Consensual Distribution of Intimate Images Act*, and Section 162.1 of the *Criminal Code*. It is also suggested that these statutes be reviewed, at the middle school and high school levels, with all students.

### **Support Recommendations**

1. A communication strategy should be in place to convey what the CBE defines as bullying, how it is addressed, and who should be involved in a proactive manner before incidents arise. This strategy should include a strong statement about parental and student involvement in the educative process.
2. As bullying is seen as a serious institutional problem, it warrants statistics being kept on its nature, scope, and prevalence in schools. Data are required to deal with the issue from an evidence-based perspective.
3. The CBE should strive to make available to all schools' programs which address bullying.
4. Whenever the media contacts a CBE administrator with regard to bullying it should be made clear to the media what the CBE definition of bullying is and why it is so.

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<sup>4</sup> In the *Education Act*, "intimate image" means an intimate image as defined in the *Protecting Victims of Non-Consensual Distribution of Intimate Images Act*.

This document is respectfully submitted October 3, 2019.

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