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Auditor General
of British Columbia

**Fostering a Safe
Learning Environment:
How the British Columbia
Public School System Is Doing**

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The Honourable Bill Hartley
Speaker of the Legislative Assembly
Province of British Columbia
Parliament Buildings
Victoria, British Columbia
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Sir:

I have the honour to transmit herewith to the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia my 2000/01 Report 1 – Fostering a Safe Learning Environment: How the British Columbia Public School System Is Doing.

Wayne K. Strelloff, CA
Auditor General

Victoria, British Columbia
June 2000

copy: Mr. E. George MacMinn, Q.C.
Clerk of the Legislative Assembly

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auditor general's comments



British Columbia's public school system is faced with many challenges when it comes to providing a safe learning environment for its 600,000 students. Schools are deeply connected to the communities in which they are situated, and whatever is acceptable behaviour in those communities influences what happens in the school setting.

The 1988 BC Royal Commission on Education acknowledged that, although the school system cannot be expected to resolve the problems of society, most people look to schools to maintain an environment that enhances opportunities to learn. Increasingly this means having to teach children how to express their views and feelings constructively, and how to interact with each other in ways that create a positive school climate.

This, my first report since taking office, was largely completed under the leadership of my predecessor, George Morfitt. I extend it to Members of the Legislative Assembly, the public and the public school system with the intention of identifying and assessing what has been done so far in this province to foster a safe learning environment. Most students generally feel safe being in school, but some do not. The more we can find ways to remedy physical and psychological safety concerns that students have about school, the more they will benefit from the money being spent to provide them with an opportunity to learn.

The report provides specific recommendations for ways of improving safe learning efforts of the ministry and school districts. In discussing these with representatives of teachers, school administrators, superintendents, trustees, parents and students we found there to be general agreement that our suggestions should be given priority. As well, the Ministry of Education has indicated in its formal response at the end of this report that it intends to do its part to support these efforts.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who cooperated with my Office to gather the information for this report—in the ministries of Education, Attorney General and Children & Families; in the BC Teachers’ Federation, BC Principals’ & Vice-Principals’ Association, BC Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils, BC School Trustees Association and BC School Superintendents’ Association; and in the BC College of Teachers and the province’s universities.

As well, I would like to acknowledge the hard work, professionalism and dedication of my staff in the timely production of this report.

Wayne K. Strelloff, CA
Auditor General

Victoria, British Columbia
June 2000



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fostering a safe
learning environment:
how the british columbia
public school system
is doing

highlights

An audit of how the British Columbia public school system fosters safe learning

Approximately \$4 billion is spent every year on public school education in British Columbia, making it the second biggest budget item after health care. One of the keys to optimizing the value from this spending is the provision of a school setting where students feel safe, both physically and psychologically, so they will take full advantage of opportunities to learn.

The public school system cannot be expected to take full responsibility for the behaviour of students while they are in school. Children and youth spend only five to six hours a day in school for about 180 days a year. The remaining hours and days they spend in their homes or communities. The success of any school-based strategy to reduce student aggression and foster a safe learning environment thus depends on how family members and community contacts support students in developing attitudes and behaviours that encourage cooperation with and acceptance of others.

Even so, we expect the public school system to provide a learning environment that is as safe as possible, given the constraints that exist. Leaving school early, or not being able to focus on learning, contributes to students not developing to their full potential. The related effects can have long-term impacts. Some people are unable to find meaningful employment or to respond appropriately to adult responsibilities, with negative impacts on the way they treat themselves and possibly others. This can result in misery for those involved as well as greater demands on income assistance, health care and the justice system.

Recent media reports of incidents of violence in schools locally and around the world have raised public concerns about the ability of the school system to provide a safe learning environment. In this province, the Ministry of Education has responded with increased funding under the BC Safe Schools Initiative for programs aimed at reducing student aggression. Also, school districts have developed safe learning strategies to complement core curriculum and teacher in-service training intended to promote socially responsible behaviour.

Audit Purpose, Scope and Approach

The purpose of this audit was to assess the extent to which the public school system in British Columbia is fostering a safe learning environment—one in which students behave in a socially responsible manner, are treated with respect, and feel secure to engage in learning, safe from physical threat, bullying, harassment, intimidation and intolerance.

There are many factors outside the control of the school system that affect attitudes and behaviours needed for a safe learning environment: family, community and cultural influences and socioeconomic conditions. Our audit was focused on the actions being undertaken in the public school system (kindergarten to grade 12) to foster safe learning.

The Ministry of Education’s goal of human and social development has aspects that relate to the provision of a safe learning environment—that is “to develop in students a sense of self-worth and personal initiative... (and)... to develop a sense of social responsibility, and a tolerance and respect for the ideas and beliefs of others.” We looked at policy guidelines for dealing with disruptive behaviour, safe learning programs, core curriculum to foster socially responsible behaviour and related resource materials and teacher in-service training that have been developed and introduced over the last three or four years to determine how well they promote this goal.

We did not audit the delivery of student health and development programs in the Ministry for Children & Families or programs in the Ministry of Attorney General designed to reduce violence in the community. Rather, we gathered information from those inside and outside the school system about how efforts are coordinated with these other programs—so that we could assess the efforts of the Ministry of Education and the rest of the school system as part of the bigger picture.

We also did not audit ministry programs for the very small percentage of students enrolled in alternative forms of delivery (such as alternate schools or distance education) or categorized as “moderate” or “severe” behaviour problems.

Our examination was performed in accordance with assurance standards recommended by the Canadian Institute of Chartered Accountants and accordingly included such tests and other procedures we considered necessary in the circumstances.

We visited five school districts: Central Okanagan, Greater Victoria, Prince George, Sooke and Surrey. In each of these districts, we went to elementary, middle and secondary schools where we met with principals and vice-principals, teachers, counsellors, students and parents. In these same districts, we also interviewed superintendents, directors of instruction, members of district parent advisory committees, school safety contacts, district counsellors and school board trustees. We timed our visits to be able to attend meetings and presentations of district committees working to reduce aggression and improve safe learning in schools.

We also talked with people from six other school districts: Abbotsford, Burnaby, Delta, Nanaimo, Vancouver and Vernon.

As well, we surveyed every school district in the province by distributing a random sample of questionnaires to teachers and school-based administrators. The questionnaires asked in detail about policies, programs and curriculum being used to foster safe learning, and about how results of these efforts are tracked. Based on our response rates, we have a 95% level of confidence that survey findings described throughout this report represent the views of teachers and school administrators in British Columbia, generally with a 7% margin of error or better.

To supplement the information we gathered directly from parents and students, we used the findings of student and parent surveys already done by BC Student Voice (a provincial body that speaks for students), the Ministry of Education, the BC Safe Schools Centre and the McCreary Centre Society.

In the course of the audit, we also collected and analyzed more than 400 documents containing research and information about factors related to aggression in schools. A list of those we relied on extensively to give us an understanding of the issues is included in Appendix C.

Overall Conclusion

We conclude that for most students British Columbia schools are, generally, safe places to spend time and learn. However, in every school there are incidents of aggressive behaviour (including verbal, physical and psychological aggression) that negatively impact the learning environment and cause some students to feel unsafe.

The public school system in the province has recognized this problem and has over the last few years developed policies and programs designed to address it. As well, curriculum for

promoting socially responsible behaviour has been made part of the province's core requirements for kindergarten to grade 12. Early indications suggest that these efforts are worthwhile, although more needs to be done to fully implement the initiatives and to properly assess the extent to which various strategies are working.

Key Findings

The ministry and school districts have developed safe learning strategies that look promising, but further enhancements are needed

In the past three or four years, British Columbia's public school system has developed a number of safe learning programs such as the BC Safe Schools Centre and Effective Behaviour Support training, both of which have the potential to make significant contributions to improving school environments. However, most educators in the public school system have yet to benefit from their use. Local safe learning strategies have also been developed by most school districts, and anecdotal evidence suggests that those efforts are worthwhile.

- The BC Safe Schools Centre was established as a central source for advising on strategies and loaning resources to support educators in reducing student aggression. The centre has produced, and distributed to every school in the province, the *Safe Schools Kit* containing various resources to assist schools and teachers in fostering a safe learning environment. We found that, while usage of these resources is increasing, many teachers are not yet aware of what is available to them through the centre. Also, improvements to the centre's existing database and website are needed to better manage access to these resources.
- Effective Behaviour Support courses have been provided to teams of teachers and administrators in about 300 schools. In these courses, participants learn how to assess and monitor behaviour problems, teach social skills, model problem-solving behaviour and encourage positive behaviours. Schools that have taken the training and applied its principles report significant reductions in student aggression. At the moment, however, training is not available for all interested schools.
- Most schools have a variety of safe learning strategies for encouraging students to learn to get along with each other. Anecdotal evidence suggests that those efforts,

especially when applied on a school-wide basis, are worthwhile. However, more needs to be done to address student aggression in high incidence areas such as playgrounds at the elementary level and hallways at the secondary level.

The ministry has developed suitable curriculum to promote socially-responsible behaviour, but teachers need more support to implement it

The ministry has recently introduced suitable core curriculum that is generally accepted by teachers. However, there are still some challenges that need to be addressed.

- Curriculum to focus on social development of students was introduced in 1995/96 as part of core requirements —as *Personal Planning* for kindergarten to grade 7 and as *Career and Personal Planning* for grades 8 to 12. Many of the elements of the curriculum are directly related to matters that influence safe learning, such as “personal development,” “mental well-being” and “substance abuse prevention.”
- Resource materials associated with this curriculum are suitable for fostering positive attitudes and tolerance of others in most areas; however, in spite of ministry efforts to reduce the number of learning requirements, teachers are still indicating that the task is daunting. More in-service training may be needed, along with clarification of what resources are available to assist teachers in discussing sensitive topics such as substance abuse, suicide and depression, and sexual orientation.

Suitable policy guidelines have been developed for dealing with disruptive behaviour, but are not consistently applied

The ministry has assisted school districts and schools by working with stakeholder groups to develop policy guidelines for addressing aggression in its various forms and for responding to behaviour problems when they arise. Districts and schools have adapted these guidelines into strategies aimed at reducing problems identified in the particular district or school. Some districts and schools have made this more of a priority than others, however. The response has varied according to perceived need, community interest and involvement, and staff interest and ability to take on the task.

- Guides for fostering a safe learning environment have recently been developed by the Ministry of Education and its education partners. Issues addressed include how to monitor aggressive behaviour, plan for school safety, respond to critical incidents, reduce the number of out-of-school suspensions and recognize and report sexual exploitation. We found these guidelines to be suitable for the purposes for which they were designed, namely raising awareness of the issues and encouraging those in the school system to take the next step in developing local strategies for applying the guidelines. While some districts have already done so, most are still in the early stages of becoming familiar with what is in the guidelines.
- Student codes of conduct have been developed for all districts and schools; however, student adherence to codes varies significantly. Expectations and consequences regarding aggression and related behaviours need to be made clearer; students need to be encouraged to report concerns about other students; and school staff need to consistently follow up to make it clear that codes will be enforced.
- School districts and schools can do more to encourage students or parents to report concerns about school staff interactions with students; at present such reports are often not readily forthcoming because of the perception shared by students and parents that follow-up is inconsistent or ineffective.
- Case management is generally poor for students who have been assigned resource workers from the Ministry for Children & Families to assist with family problems and interactions with the justice system. Better sharing of information is needed between school staff and resource workers to increase the likelihood of these students being successful in school.

Anecdotal evidence suggests recently introduced safe learning initiatives are worthwhile, but more detailed tracking of actual incidents of aggression is needed

Users of ministry and school district initiatives for safe learning report that efforts are worthwhile. Without data on actual student behaviour changes, however, it is hard to determine which types of behaviour are impacted and to what degree.

The ministry, school districts and schools need to do more to track student attitudes and behaviours as they relate to aggression. Only then will the school system be in a position to know whether money spent to improve the learning environment is properly focused on where it will do the most good.

- Students surveyed on aggression levels in 1992 and in early 1998 report no significant change in behaviours, except for drug use, which is on the rise. Educators we surveyed in late 1999 also report increases in drug use, but say they are seeing more verbal and physical abuse, vandalism and theft, and signs of suicidal gestures and depression. These results should not be interpreted, however, as a failure of initiatives that have only recently been introduced.
- Initial assessments of the Effective Behaviour Support program introduced in 1997 suggest that efforts are contributing to significant decreases in aggression in those schools where staff have applied the approach. However, most of these schools do not yet have suitable means of tracking student behaviours to show which types of aggression are being influenced and to what degree. As yet no evaluation has been done of the impact of providing training and resources through the BC Safe Schools Centre.
- The ministry generally refers to school system results in terms of student academic performance. Using this measure, British Columbia students usually perform at least as well as their Canadian counterparts. The ministry does not, however, focus additional efforts on those districts and schools that perform significantly below the provincial average to determine the extent to which deficiencies in learning environment play a role.
- Generally, schools and districts tend to focus more on recording numbers of student suspensions than on analyzing the reasons for them or how changes in the numbers relate to aggression-reduction. As a result, there is no clear provincial picture of the extent of student behaviour problems or of whether existing strategies are helping to foster a safe learning environment in our schools.



summary of recommendations

The Ministry of Education should:

- **expand efforts to provide Effective Behaviour Support training. (#1, page 38)**
- **along with the Ministry of Attorney General, develop ways of giving priority to improving the database and website of the BC Safe Schools Centre. (#2 page 42)**
- **re-organize the grade collection for Career and Personal Planning curriculum to assist secondary teachers in ranking the usefulness of listed resources, and notify teachers when it is available. (#6, page 53)**
- **call for meetings with the province's universities and the College of Teachers to emphasize the need for mandatory pre-service courses for teachers on classroom strategies for dealing with difficult behaviours and for delivering Personal Planning and Career and Personal Planning curriculum. (#7, page 55)**
- **identify or develop suitable resources for teachers and students to recognize and report student depression and suicidal gestures. (#8, page 60)**
- **provide teachers with suitable guidance for encouraging tolerance and respect for students of same sex orientation. (#9, page 62)**
- **assess the extent to which teachers would benefit from training in identifying students' special needs and in adapting teaching strategies to meet those needs. The initial focus should be on elementary teachers, to increase the chances that students will start off with the help they need to develop a positive relationship with their teachers and peers. (#10, page 63)**
- **resolve with senior representatives of the ministries of Attorney General and Children & Families coordination problems in developing and distributing safe learning policy guidelines. (#11, page 66)**
- **work with school districts to develop specific guidance for school administrators on how to give feedback to teachers in a constructive way, and on how to manage the grievance process. (#15, page 74)**

- **consider examining schools and districts where student academic performance is significantly below provincial averages, so that underlying reasons can be identified and possibly addressed. (#18, page 85)**
- **develop a database for monitoring student aggression and encourage input from, and use by, schools and districts so that province-wide efforts can be properly evaluated and, if need be, modified. (#19, page 90)**

School districts should assist in the above, as well as:

- **expand efforts to provide Effective Behaviour Support training. (#1, page 38)**
- **find ways to improve the involvement of elementary school-ground supervisors in school initiatives to reduce aggression. (#3, page 46)**
- **do more to address student aggression at the secondary level, by increasing efforts to monitor and reduce aggression, and encouraging students to report concerns. (#4, page 47)**
- **follow up on contributions by outside agencies to reduce aggression by making sure lessons presented are properly integrated with subsequent classroom exercises. Also, the extent to which presentations have been effective in influencing student attitudes and behaviours should be determined, possibly with the help of those who originally made the presentations. (#5, page 49)**
- **provide teachers with suitable guidance for encouraging tolerance and respect for students of same sex orientation. (#9, page 62)**
- **have their own critical incident plans tailored to particular district and school circumstances. These plans should include details of who must do what, when and where in a critical situation. As well, districts should periodically provide training and practice sessions to all school administrators. (#12, page 68)**
- **offer more guidance to school administrators on how to improve the learning environment through positive means, and so assist in reducing the use of out-of-school suspensions. (#13, page 69)**

- **encourage school staff to clarify and enforce student behaviour expectations that are included in school codes of conduct. (#14, page 72)**
- **encourage students to come forward with concerns about how school staff are interacting with them. This should include better means for reporting and follow up at the school level as well as the school district level if concerns are not properly addressed. (#16, page 75)**
- **develop ways to improve case management for “at risk” students, involving school staff and staff from the Ministry for Children & Families. (#17, page 78)**



detailed report



a safe learning environment: what it is and why it is important

A safe learning environment is free of aggression

According to Ronald D. Stephens of the US National School Safety Center: “a safe school is a place where students can learn and teachers can teach in a warm and welcoming environment, free of intimidation and fear of violence.” (Appendix C: 17)

The BC Safe Schools Centre describes safe schools in a variety of documents as those that are effective, accepting, free from potential physical and psychological harm and violence, nurturing, caring and protective. Unsafe schools, on the other hand, are described as lacking cohesion and ineffective, chaotic, stressful, disorganized, poorly structured, high risk, with gang activity, violent incidents, and unclear behavioural and academic expectations.

In its Safe Schools Planning Guide, the centre goes on to identify eight key components for a safe school:

- Climate of Respect
- Violence Prevention Policies and Procedures
- Curriculum and School-based Programs
- Training and Professional Development
- Support for Students and Staff
- Safe Physical Environment
- Community Involvement
- Effective Communication

For the purposes of this report, we have categorized aggression as:

- verbal aggression (mocking, name-calling, teasing, intimidating, racist, sexist or homophobic taunting, verbal threats, coercion, extortion, dangerous dares);
- physical aggression (hitting, pushing, shoving, spitting, kicking, threatening with a weapon, vandalism, stealing); and
- social or relational aggression (spreading rumours or gossip, framing, excluding from interactions, or inciting hatred, racist, sexist, or homophobic alienation).

The Ministry of Education portrays aggression and related behaviours as a continuum of actions in terms of severity, from relatively harmless rough-play to put-downs, fighting, gang actions, murder and suicide (Exhibit 1).

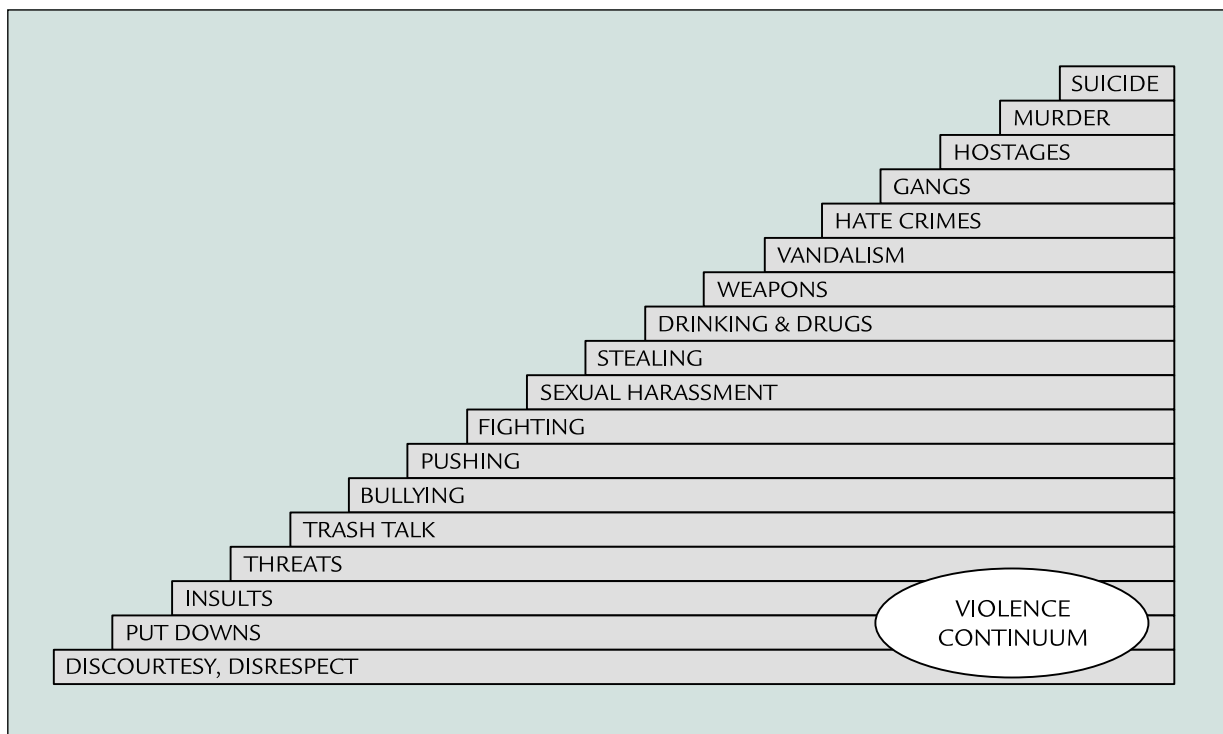
There are many outside factors that influence student behaviour in schools, notably early childhood development, family background and community influence, school connectedness, entertainment and the media, gender, race, culture, religion and developmental challenges (Appendix A). Schools have the challenge of dealing with the negative aspects of these factors when they contribute to aggression in the school setting.

An unsafe learning environment has far-reaching effects

Students who do not feel safe in school are not as likely to do well academically and are more likely to leave school early. Unchecked aggression can also contribute to psychological effects that add to thoughts of suicide, problems with the justice system and employment or family problems.

Exhibit 1

Violence continuum



Source: Ministry of Education, Special Programs Branch



Courtesy: Ministry of Education

Students have trouble academically

Students who do not feel safe or accepted by their teachers or peers may find it difficult to concentrate on their studies. This can lead to absenteeism and other behaviour problems (Appendix C: 18). All of these factors are likely to contribute to students leaving school before graduating from grade 12 or without obtaining marks that could assist them in registering for further education or finding employment.

A 1998 survey of recent school dropouts by BC Student Voice, a provincial body that speaks for students, found that one of the key reasons for students leaving school before graduating is to escape from harassment by their peers. (Appendix C: 5)

Students suffer psychological harm

Health Canada surveys (Appendix C: 7) have found that victims of bullying are more likely than non-bullied students to feel lonely and unhappy, and to have low self-esteem. Other studies (Appendix C: 6, 16) have shown that victims of bullies are at more risk of depression, post-traumatic stress disorder and schizophrenia later in life. While students may arrive in school already exhibiting poor self-esteem, matters are made worse when combined with mistreatment by other students.

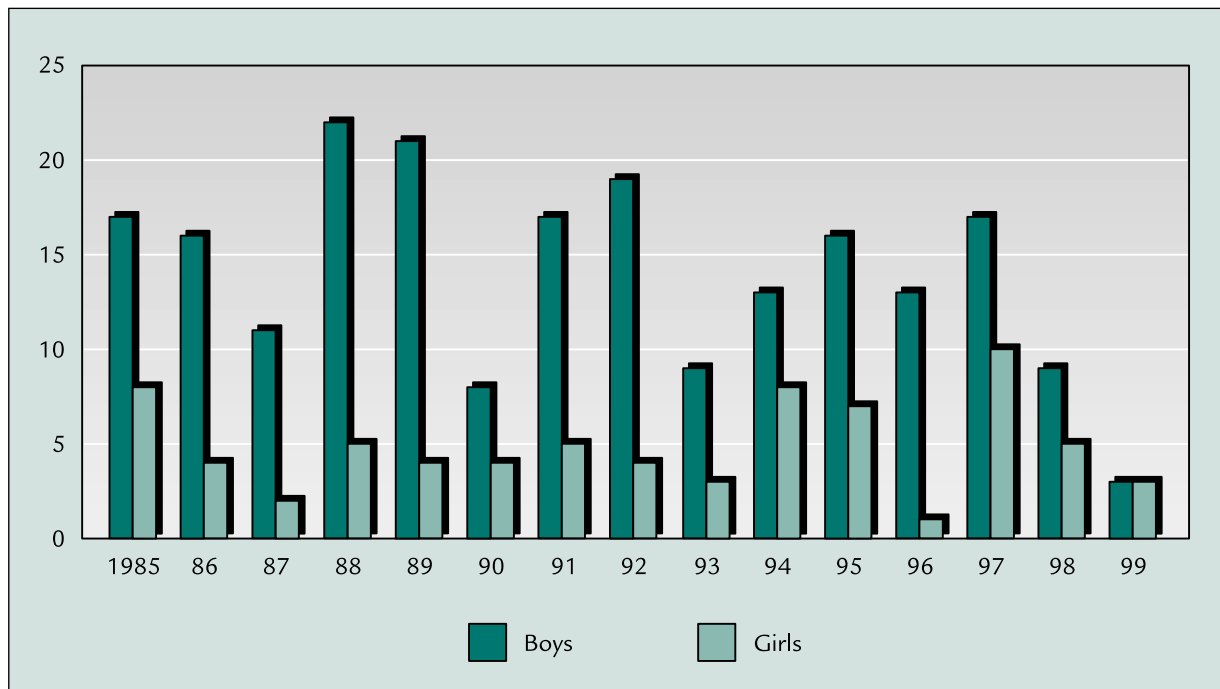
Research (Appendix C: 12, 13, 14) has shown that adolescents who commit suicide often have a history of being harassed at school. A world-renowned expert on the subject, Dan Olweus of Norway, began studying bullying in the early 1980s when

three Norwegian boys committed suicide after being harassed. His studies show that those who look different are not necessarily targets of bullies; he contends that the more significant factor is whether the person behaves in a self-assured way or not. Other research suggests that those who look or act differently are more likely to be singled out by bullies, which can contribute to a lack of self-assurance. If the singling out is accompanied by an intolerance of different races, cultures or basic beliefs, the effects can seriously impede the chances of the targeted student fitting in or feeling accepted by peers—a vital component to being able to learn and develop to his or her full potential in the school setting.

According to BC Vital Statistics (Appendix C: 4), suicide is a leading cause of death among both males and females aged 15 to 24—second only to accidental death. Far more children and youth die by their own hand than by someone else’s. Although girls are said to attempt suicide more often, boys are more likely to die from the attempt (Exhibit 2). Over the past 14 years, the numbers have varied considerably and, while they do not show any particular trend, are a cause for continuing concern.

Exhibit 2

Number of deaths by suicide for British Columbia children aged 0–18 years



Source: Prepared from BC Vital Statistics data in Causes of Death of Children by Gender and Age

The 1998 McCreary Centre survey (Appendix C: 11, 12, 13) found that 14% of British Columbia teens reported having suicidal thoughts, with 11% going so far as to plan suicide, and 7% actually attempting it. Two other McCreary surveys, done in 1999, show that sexually exploited youth and those who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT) are much more likely to contemplate and attempt suicide—almost 50% of LGBT youth and sexually exploited youth surveyed had attempted suicide.

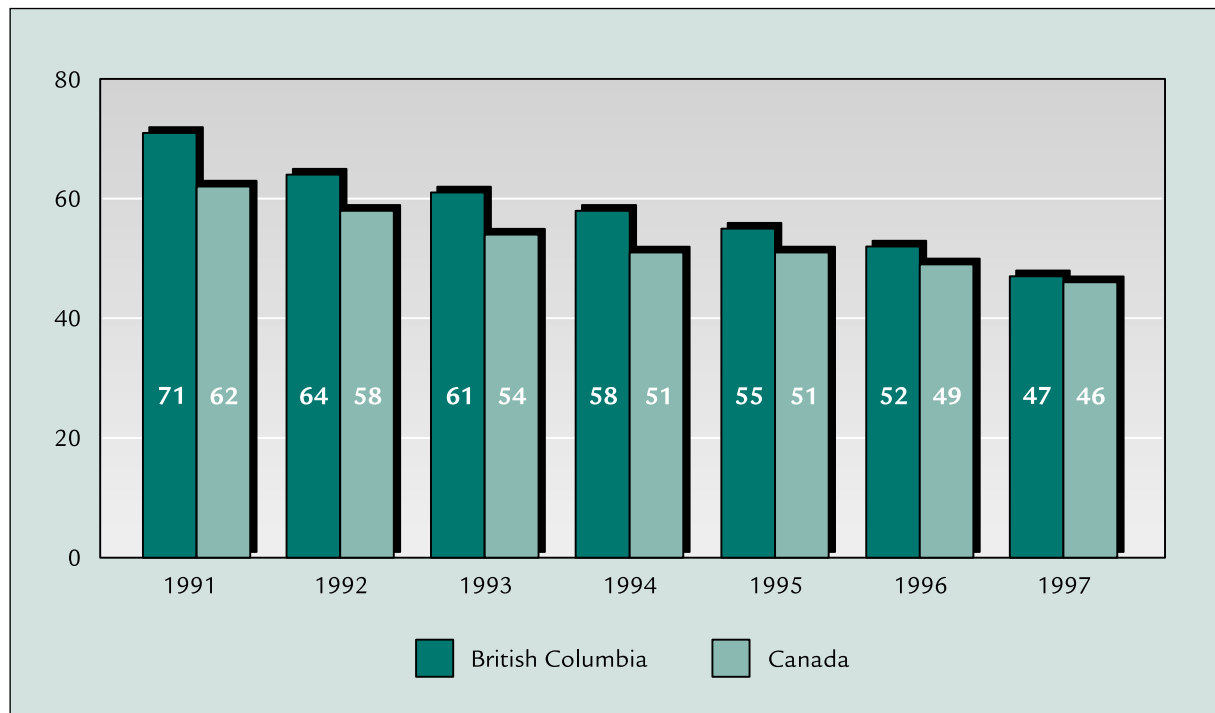
Students become involved with the Justice System

The percentage of youth 12 to 17 years old charged with criminal code offences has declined from 26% of those charged in 1991 to 20% in 1997 (Appendix C: 1). This is well above the proportion of youth compared to the rest of the population, however, which stayed at about 8% throughout the same period. The average number of criminal charges filed against British Columbia youth 12 to 17 years old exceeds the Canadian average, but the gap is narrowing as shown by recent declines (Exhibit 3).

Exhibit 3

Numbers of criminal code offences in British Columbia and Canada

(per 1,000 youth)



Source: Prepared from Ministry of Attorney General data in *Youth Crime* (1998)

When it comes to criminal code charges for violent acts, British Columbia youth rates rose significantly from 1988 to 1997. Some researchers believe the higher rates (Exhibit 4) are because of increased reporting to police and adoption of “zero tolerance” policies by school boards (Appendix C: 8). The Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics reports that 15% of youth crimes are committed on school property. This does not, however, reflect the level of aggression or related harmful behaviours that occur on school grounds but that do not result in criminal charges being laid.

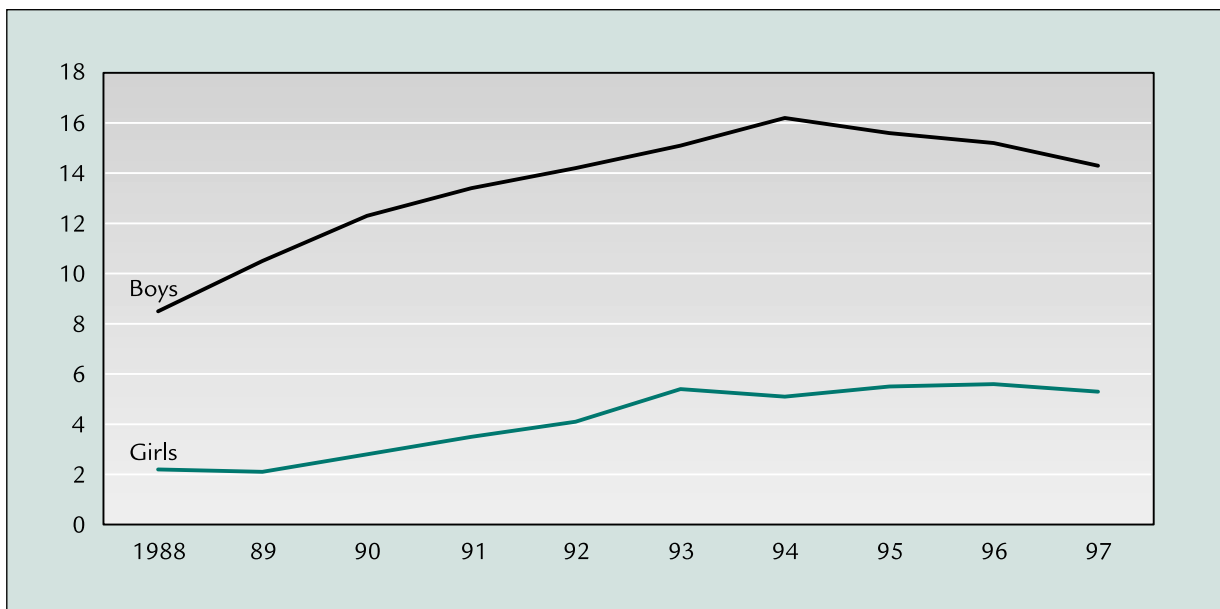
Students have trouble later in life

Bullying has been connected to continuing aggression later in life. Research (Appendix C: 3, 9, 10, 16) shows that children who are bullies grow up to have more arrests for drunk driving, spousal abuse and child abuse than others. Bullies require more support as adults from government agencies and are more likely to have court convictions, alcohol problems, antisocial personality disorders and mental health problems. According to research, 60% of boys identified as bullies in grades 6 to 9 have at least one court conviction by age 24.

Exhibit 4

Youth violent crime charge rates for British Columbia youth

(per 1,000 youth)



Source: Prepared from Ministry of Attorney General data in *Youth Crime*

According to Marshall Rosenberg, founder of the Center for Nonviolent Communication based in Texas (Appendix C: 15): “Every violent act is a tragic expression of unmet need.”

Without proper support early on, bullies are unlikely to learn better ways of interacting with others, which further inhibits their ability to lead fulfilling lives as responsible members of society as well as adversely affecting those with whom they interact. As well, the added costs resulting from the negative impacts of their aggression as adults are a drain on the economy.



agencies involved in safe learning programs

A number of agencies and associations are involved in developing, implementing and assessing school programs for children and youth in British Columbia. We provide here a brief description of their various roles and responsibilities.

Ministry of Education

The Ministry of Education is responsible for setting the overall funding and broad policy directions for education in British Columbia for kindergarten to grade 12. The ministry develops provincial curriculum, teacher in-service training and curriculum guides that define the expected learning outcomes for each subject or course. The ministry is also responsible for keeping parents and the public informed about how resources are being used and what British Columbia's children are learning.

The ministry has three goals for the public school system as a whole:

Intellectual Development—to develop in students a(n):

- ability to analyze critically, reason and think independently, and acquire basic learning skills and bodies of knowledge;
- lifelong appreciation of learning, a curiosity about the world around them and a capacity for creative thought and expression.

Human and Social Development—to develop in students a(n):

- sense of self-worth and personal initiative;
- appreciation of the fine arts and an understanding of cultural heritage;
- understanding of the importance of physical health and well-being;
- sense of social responsibility and a tolerance and respect for the ideas and beliefs of others.

Career Development—to assist students in:

- attaining their career and occupational objectives;
- developing effective work habits and the flexibility to deal with change in the workplace.

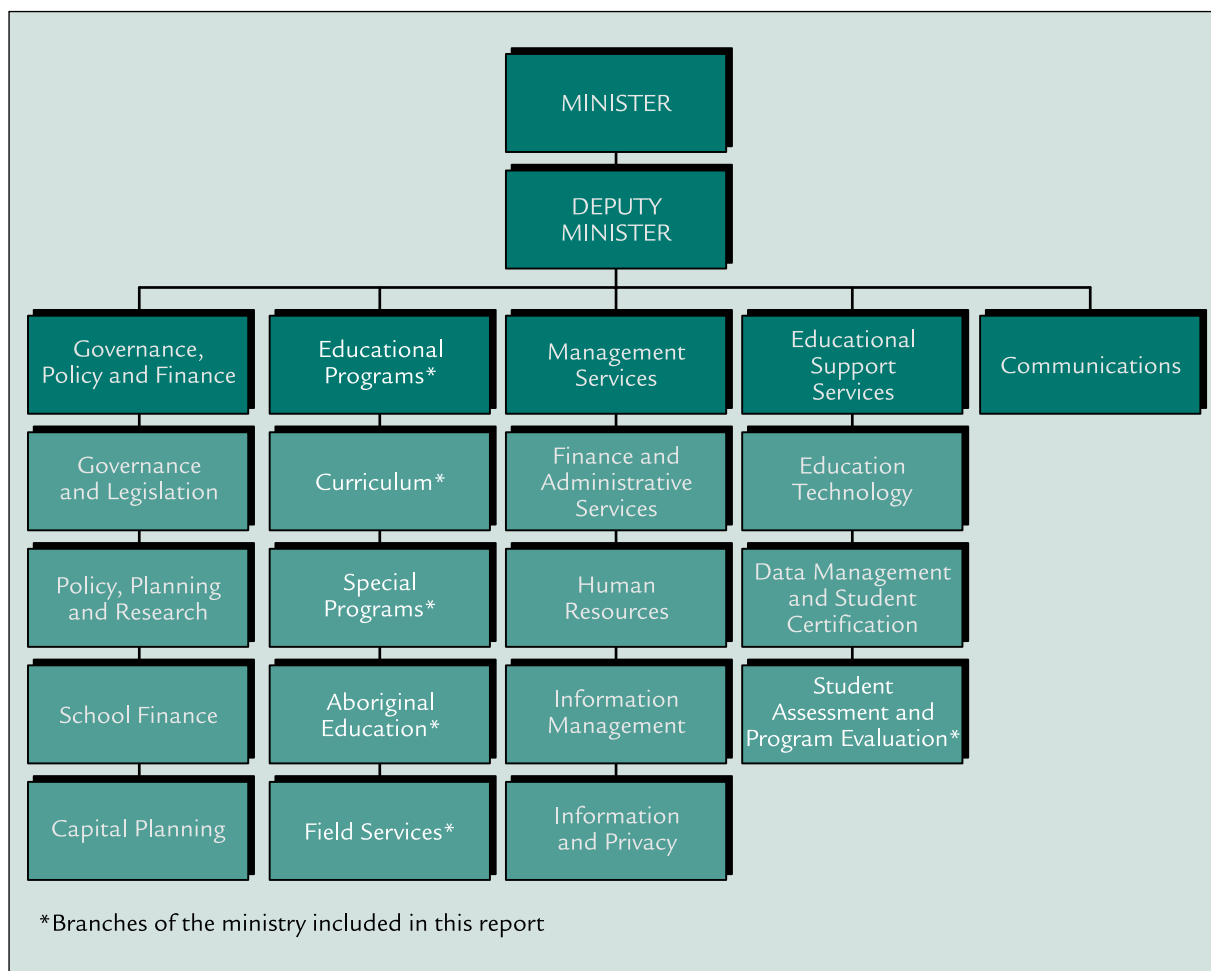
Our audit reviewed the activities of the branches within Educational Programs of the ministry, as well as the Student Assessment and Program Evaluation Branch (Exhibit 5).

School Districts and Schools

There are 60 school districts with about 1,800 schools in the province. Each district is governed by a Board of Trustees, whose members are elected by local constituents. Boards are responsible for managing the schools in their district and for providing students with opportunities for quality education. School boards determine local school policies and approve educational resource materials, rules such as codes of conduct, and student major suspensions or expulsions (Exhibit 6).

Exhibit 5

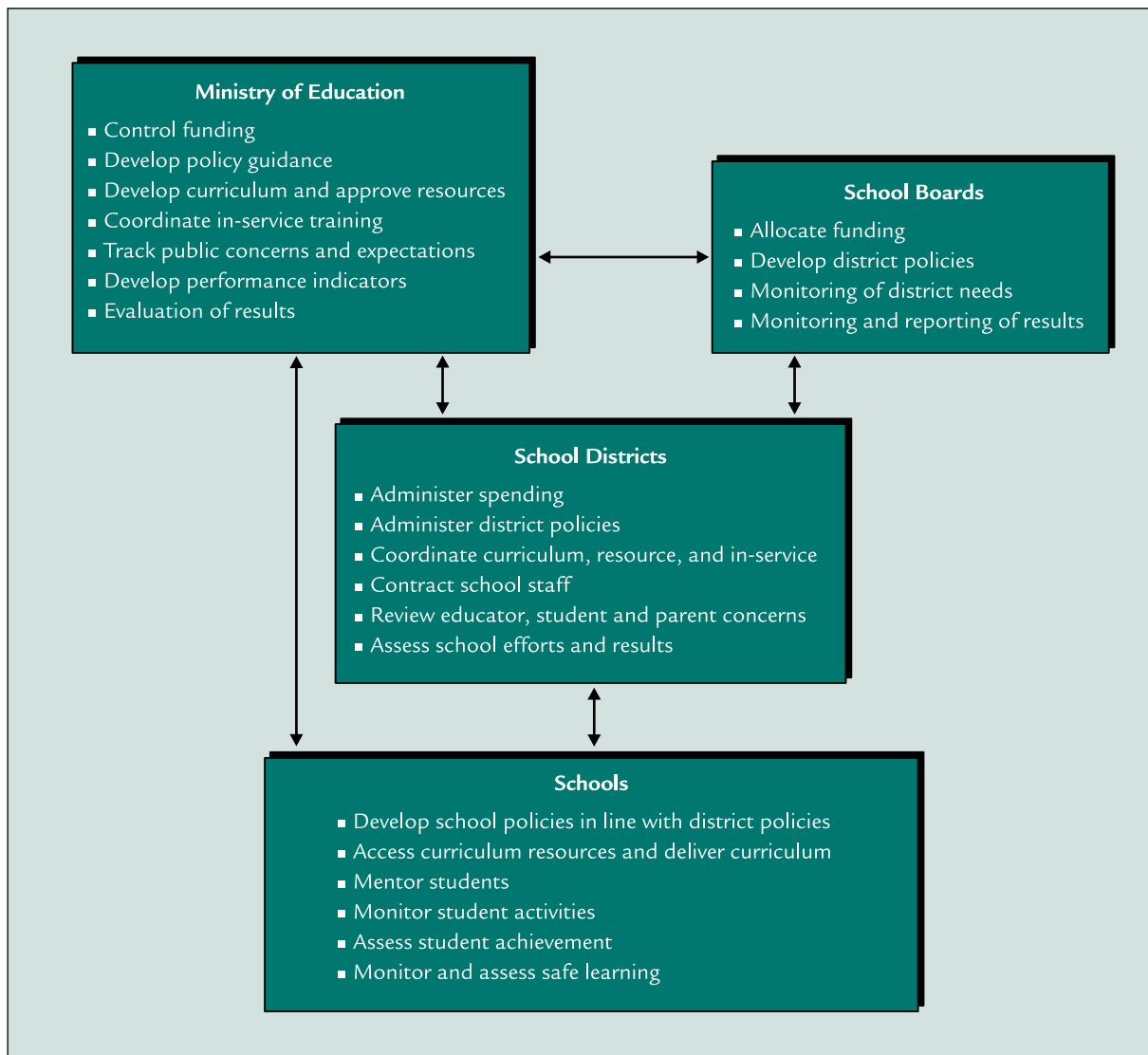
Organizational structure for the Ministry of Education



Source: Ministry of Education

Exhibit 6

British Columbia public school system roles in safe learning



Source: Prepared from the School Act and various policy documents

Boards are accountable to the public for allocating funds according to local conditions and priorities, and for ensuring the quality and cost-effectiveness of the programs they deliver. They are also responsible for ensuring that educators in their school districts follow provincial policy guidelines and legislation.

Each school district office is headed by a superintendent who is responsible for managing the district and reporting to the Board of Trustees. Various managers, including assistant superintendents or directors of instruction, report to the superintendent.

Public schools in British Columbia are funded by provincial grants and, as such, are required to follow the provincially prescribed curriculum and provide instruction in core and elective subjects. Schools are managed by administrative officers (principals and vice-principals) who are accountable to school district boards and management, as well as to parents of the students within the school.

Professional Associations

The British Columbia College of Teachers establishes standards and qualifications for certification of teachers and other professionals in the public school system. It is a self-regulating professional body with power to discipline its members and to suspend, withdraw, or withhold certification.

The British Columbia School Trustees Association supports the efforts of school board trustees around the province by gathering information and coordinating meetings and seminars on key issues such as school policies, student achievement, accountability and governance.

The British Columbia School Superintendents' Association is the professional association for district superintendents. It supports a province-wide network of superintendent contacts to compare and discuss school district issues.

The British Columbia Principals' and Vice-Principals' Association is the professional organization for school administrative officers in the province. The association gathers and reports on information about administrator concerns and represents administrator views by participating in education-related committees.

The British Columbia Teachers' Federation conducts bargaining on behalf of public school teachers and represents their views in a number of different education-related committees. It also conducts research into teacher-related issues and provides various services for teachers, such as training courses and lesson aids on a variety of topics.

Provincial Student Association

The British Columbia Student Voice is a group of students from all over the province who receive funding from the Ministry of Education to periodically survey their peers and speak on their behalf at provincial education conferences and committee meetings. The group is supported in this by administrative assistance and additional funding from the British Columbia Principals' and Vice-Principals' Association.

Parent Associations

There are numerous parent associations in the province advocating for the needs of students and families. We met with representatives from two—one with a focus on parent concerns and one with a focus on parent education.

The British Columbia Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils (BCCPAC) is an association created to provide a collective voice for the expression of parental views about public education in the province. Under the School Act, each district has a district parent advisory council (DPAC) and each school has its own parent advisory council (PAC). Both DPACs and PACs, through their elected officers, advise school boards and schools about their expectations and concerns.

The BCCPAC Advocacy Project operates a toll-free line (1-888-351-9834) to help develop local advocates for parents in their interactions with the school system. The project, which began in December 1994, has assisted more than 30 school districts using funds provided by the Ministry of Education.

When parents call for individual assistance, the advocates are often able to direct them to their local PAC or DPAC for help. The provincial advocates have provided workshops to parents on how to act as advocates and resolve school-related problems. They have also produced the following resource materials to guide parents in their dealings with the school system: *Self-Help Guide*, *Dealing with Retribution and Speaking Up*. Each year the advocates report on their activities and accomplishments and provide recommendations to BCCPAC for changes.

Parent Education BC is a volunteer group of parent educators who provide training for parent education leaders. It also liaises with research institutions that conduct research into the effectiveness of parent education initiatives. The group provides information and resources for parent groups about a variety of parenting programs, including *Systematic Training for Effective Parenting* (STEP), *Positive Parenting* and *Active*

Parenting. Volunteers around the province are providing these parenting programs, but the extent of geographical coverage and levels of parent participation are not readily available.

Ministry for Children & Families

The Ministry for Children & Families provides a number of child and family services, including those that promote the development and maintenance of healthy lifestyles. Several programs previously administered by the Ministry of Education or the Ministry of Health were transferred to the Ministry for Children & Families when it was created in 1996. School-based services provided by the ministry include the following:

- *Community Schools* offers academic, extracurricular, recreational, health, social services and work skills programs for people of all ages.
- *School Meal Program* subsidizes meals for children in schools where socioeconomic conditions contribute to concerns about proper nutrition.
- *Inner City School Program* provides additional funding for schools designated as “inner city” because they have higher numbers of students with difficulties participating at school for socioeconomic reasons.
- *Alcohol and Drug School-Based Prevention* funds in-school services such as prevention programming, teacher training, early intervention counselling and information on substance abuse issues.
- *Early Academic Intervention Program* helps to fund initiatives for providing an early response to children with learning difficulties, primarily in the area of reading.
- *Provincial Resource Program* provides summer educational programs for children in the care of the Ministry for Children & Families to assist with continuity of educational goals.
- *Healthy Schools* initiative involves school-age children and youth in identifying issues, planning and taking action to improve their own health.
- *Public Health* programs provide school services that promote healthy growth and development. Such programs include those that address sexual health and injury prevention and that make referrals to physiotherapy, occupational therapy, nursing support and speech-language services.
- *School-Based Support Services* provides child and youth care workers for students who are experiencing difficulty at school or who have dropped out of school for social or emotional reasons. The care workers advise teachers on behaviour management techniques for individual students

and assist in classrooms when students' behaviour endangers themselves or others. They also discuss students' progress and problems with parents and act as liaisons between the school system and statutory agencies.

- *Youth Justice Services* provides probation officers for students involved with the justice system.

After the Ministry for Children & Families was established, responsibility for mental health policy development and service planning and delivery for children and youth was transferred to it from the Ministry of Health. The two ministries are expected to work collaboratively to support integrated planning and service delivery for young people who require early intervention. With this in mind, the Ministry for Children & Families is in the process of developing a Provincial Child and Youth Mental Health Plan.

Beginning in March 2000, the Ministry for Children & Families began to offer high-risk youth, who are interested and qualify, the opportunity to enter into youth agreements. These legal contracts include a plan for independence, which sets out the goals to be met during the term of the agreement and the services that will be provided to the individual, such as alcohol and drug abuse treatment, counselling, basic life skills training and education, as well as financial assistance. The ministry estimates there are more than 2,000 high-risk youth in British Columbia, about 400 of whom may be eligible for—and motivated to take on—the responsibility of a youth agreement.

Ministry of Attorney General and Law Enforcement Agencies

The Community Program Division in the Ministry of Attorney General provides funding for school-related anti-violence initiatives. It works with the Ministry of Education and the School District of Burnaby in managing the BC Safe School Centre, which develops and delivers programs and resources designed to foster a safe learning environment for children and youth.

Some of the programs sponsored by the Ministry of Attorney General are:

- *TROO* (Total Respect of Others) is designed to promote respect and eliminate racism;
- *TCO2* (Taking Care of Ourselves and Others) is designed to discourage youth from considering a life on the street;

- *841-KOZ (Eight for One Cause)* is designed to teach youth about options for preventing violence and victimization;
- *Youth Against Violence Line* offers toll-free (1-800-680-4264) confidential access to youth for getting help and in preventing potential crimes;
- *BCYPN (BC Police Youth Network)* links more than 140 officers around the province who respond to calls on the *Youth Against Violence Line*, assist with community crime prevention and school safety projects, and provide information to help teachers, youth, school liaison officers, police and parents address school and community safety;
- *YATs (Youth Action Teams)* involves youth and regional youth coordinators from around the province using the *Taking a Stand: Youth Against Violence Action Kit* to develop and coordinate neighbourhood crime and violence prevention projects.
- *All Together Now* is a pilot project providing crime prevention and intervention for “at risk” youth aged 9 to 12; and
- *Nights Alive* offers youth an opportunity to work with police and community partners to develop and implement their own after-hours or late-night recreational activities.

In many school districts, the RCMP and municipal police provide school liaison officers, who play a key role in addressing aggression by their participation in school programs. RCMP staff also deliver programs such as *DARE* (drug abuse resistance education) and *BRAVE* (bully resistance and violence education) to British Columbia students. As well, local police sometimes deliver programs to raise student awareness about aggression and how to deal with it. An example is *Rock Solid*, a Vancouver Island program run jointly by police forces of the Western Communities, Esquimalt, Oak Bay, Saanich, Sooke and Victoria.

Ministry of Multiculturalism and Immigration

The Community Liaison Division of the Ministry of Multiculturalism and Immigration works with non-profit agencies that develop and deliver multiculturalism and anti-racism programs in schools. The aim is to reduce aggression related to racism by helping public school teachers and administrators to educate students about other cultures. Role plays and discussions are used to increase awareness and promote acceptance of individual differences.

British Columbia Children's Commission

The British Columbia Children's Commission was established in 1996 as a result of a recommendation from the 1995 Gove Inquiry into child welfare. The commission:

- reviews all child deaths and critical injuries sustained by children in the care of the Ministry for Children & Families and makes recommendations for changes;
- hears and resolves complaints about children in care;
- sets standards for the internal review of complaints; and
- reviews plans of care.

Each year, the commission produces an annual report that informs the British Columbia public about the state of the province's child and family service system. The report includes summary comments about system-wide issues, problems encountered and suggestions for changes.

The commission published a *Youth Report* in 1997 and 1998, containing information about alcohol and drug programs, suicide, equality and racism, recreation, youth rights, youth in custody, and youth in the care of Ministry for Children & Families. The 1998 report highlighted concerns expressed by a group of 60 youths from around the province—a key one being that they would like to be treated with more respect by the adults in their lives.

Office of the Child, Youth and Family Advocate

The Office of the Child, Youth and Family Advocate is an independent officer of the British Columbia Legislative Assembly who is responsible for protecting the rights of children, youth and their families, and for ensuring that their voices are heard and considered in the provision of government services. Each year, the office produces a report pointing out where improvements are needed in services for children.

The advocate's 1998 and 1999 reports call for more services to identify and remediate problems related to mental health and the abuse of drugs and alcohol.

Office of the Ombudsman

The Office of the Ombudsman deals with procedural complaints about unfair treatment of British Columbia citizens by provincial agencies. It has a Child and Youth Team that is responsible for investigating complaints from individuals about unfair treatment by public schools. These complaints cover a wide range of issues, from the need for improved student bus access to concerns about suspensions, expulsions, and adequacy of services to meet the individual needs of students.

In 1995, the Child and Youth Team produced a report called *Fair Schools* as the result of an investigation of about 500 complaints received by the office. In it, the Ombudsman stated that “a number of students do not feel welcomed or comfortable at school; they do not feel safe; they do not like going to school; and they do not think that their education is useful to them now, nor will be in the future.”

The report contains a number of suggestions for improvement in how schools are run, which we have followed up on as part of our audit.



programs for developing pro-social skills and reducing aggression

Of paramount importance in fostering a safe learning environment is the use of proactive means for reducing the potential for student aggression. The Ministry of Education gives provincial support to a number of programs aimed at improving the way students behave. As well, school districts and schools have developed local strategies for reducing aggression.

We looked to see whether safe learning programs supported by the ministry and local district strategies are well managed and helpful in addressing aggression issues.

Conclusion

Ministry-supported programs show potential for assisting those in the school system to reduce aggression. However, better planning is needed for the future of these initiatives to encourage increased access to resources being provided.

Anecdotal evidence about locally-developed district and school strategies suggests they are worthwhile; however, without better data on resulting changes in student behaviours, it is not possible to conclude on the degree to which they are well managed or useful.

Findings

Ministry safe schools initiatives look promising but future plans are not clear

The Ministry of Education's Special Programs Branch is largely responsible for the ministry's safe schools initiatives, Effective Behaviour Support and the BC Safe Schools Centre. Both of these programs are helping to raise awareness of safe learning issues and providing support in the form of training and resources to reduce aggression. What is not clear is how the ministry plans to resource these initiatives in the future.

Effective Behaviour Support

Beginning in 1997, the ministry invited Dr. George Sugai of the University of Oregon to come to British Columbia to train educators in the Effective Behaviour Support (EBS) system he has developed in Oregon, which is showing significant improvements in student behaviours there.



Courtesy: Ministry of Education

EBS is a school-wide, comprehensive approach to aggression-reduction. School staff strive to reduce aggressive behaviours by making it a priority to teach all students what the expected behaviours look like and by supporting students in building stronger school connections. This program is partially subsidized by the Ministry of Education and is delivered through the BC Council of Administrators on Special Education (CASE), school district directors of special needs programs. Annual program costs of \$150,000 pay for course materials and instructors for training that involves weeklong sessions each summer, with one- and two-day follow-up sessions in subsequent years. So far, about 300 school teams of 2,000 educators have attended EBS workshops.

The EBS approach is used to teach students the social skills needed to enable them to better interact with each other and their teachers in a school setting. School staff show children what is acceptable behaviour and what is not by modelling and giving feedback as part of the normal course of interacting with them. Appropriate behaviour is reinforced through various means, with the theory that extrinsic rewards will eventually be replaced by intrinsic ones. Children are taught how to treat each other respectfully and report instances where they do not feel safe.

Two key components of EBS are the focus on reinforcing positive behaviour and developing systems for supporting sustained staff implementation of aggression-reduction strategies.

Focus on Positive Behaviour

This strategy involves school staff making a concerted effort to reward students for suitable behaviour. “Gotcha” slips of paper, for example, acknowledge students for good behaviour outside the classroom, such as helping another student in some way. The acknowledgements are then used to select students periodically for an extrinsic form of recognition or reward. This system is initially introduced with rewards on a frequent basis, with the frequency gradually declining over time as proper behaviour becomes the norm. In this way, students are helped to understand expectations about proper behaviour and to develop better intrinsic values.

In our visits to schools applying this strategy, we were told of significant reductions in student aggression in less than one school year. The strategy is said to work with the 80% of students who do not have abnormal behaviour patterns. While it may not appeal to other students (or be needed for those who already behave appropriately), it should help to establish a school-wide framework for proper behaviour. We were told by educators that having a generally accepted framework for behaviour like this allows more time for teachers and administrators to focus on the needs of the smaller groups of students who continue to misbehave.

Systems for Implementing Aggression-reduction Strategies

Administrators are encouraged to collect and analyze data on student aggressive behaviours to identify specific types of problems, such as the individuals involved, locations in the school and the underlying factors. In keeping with this approach, we believe that some sort of organized data collection and analysis is vital to develop and assess strategies for reducing aggression. We discuss this in more detail in the final section of this report, “Evaluation of Safe Learning Initiatives.”

We attended a follow-up session and heard presentations from elementary, middle and secondary schools on how useful the EBS approach has been in reducing student aggression problems. This was later confirmed by our survey findings, which showed that 94% of teachers who had taken EBS training found it useful to some extent.

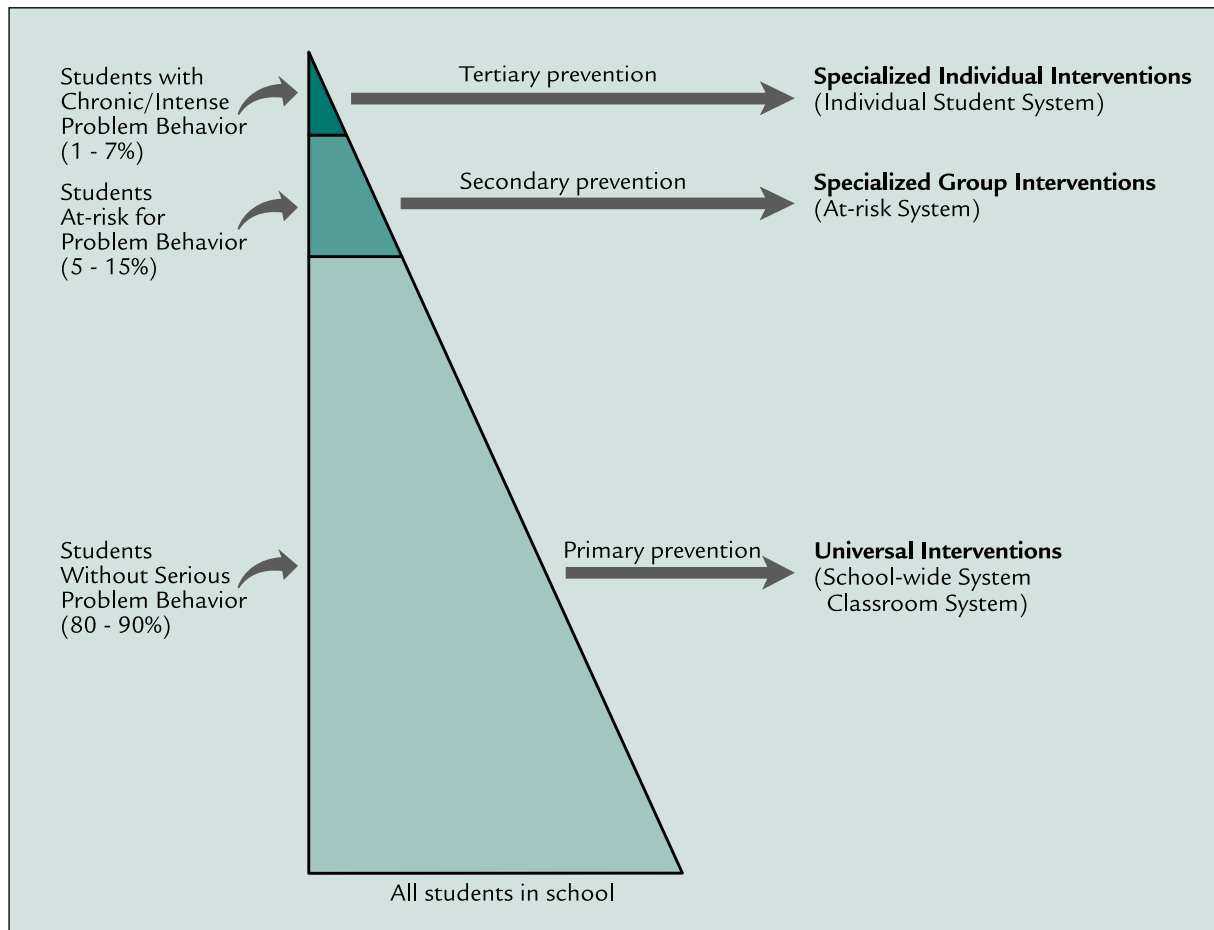
One of the benefits of using an EBS-type approach to student behaviour management is that all staff are encouraged to develop a school-wide support system aimed at getting the majority of students to conform to agreed behaviour guidelines. In the EBS schools we visited, teachers who were initially reluctant to get involved in the program told us how they were so impressed with changes in student behaviour

that they later joined in. In all cases, we were told of how this approach helps to maintain a positive school atmosphere that helps staff find time to focus on handling the behaviours of those students in the smaller percentages who need individual attention (Exhibit 7).

We recognize that many educators already use some of the strategies inherent in the EBS approach. For example, 82% of the school administrators we surveyed reported that their staff focus on encouraging positive student behaviours, and 51% have staff who make a point of mentoring students who have problems. Also, we visited a number of schools where staff members had not heard of EBS, and yet they were working as a team to use school-wide approaches for reducing student aggression. (Our school administrator survey suggests that half of the schools in the province involve most staff members in team approaches to address school problems.)

Exhibit 7

Comprehensive school approach



Source: University of Oregon Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support (<http://pbis.org>)

However, following our discussions with school staff who use the EBS approach and those who do not, we have concluded that existing strategies would be significantly strengthened if an overriding school-wide approach with all of the features of EBS were to be used.

Since its inception in 1997, the EBS program has not been able to meet the demand by educators asking for training. To increase coverage of the EBS program, the ministry has recently begun to encourage the province's educators to learn how to deliver EBS workshops. This should add to the behaviour management expertise already available in the province, as well as allow for more school teams to access training. We would encourage the ministry and school districts to make clear, long-term plans to implement EBS training on a broader basis than is currently available.

Recommendation 1:

The Ministry and school districts should expand efforts to provide EBS training.

The Year of Living EBS

A principal credits Effective Behaviour Support with a dramatic improvement in the school climate

The following excerpts are from an article written by the principal of Harwin Elementary School in Prince George for the BC Principals' and Vice-Principals' Association newsletter in the summer of 1999.

During the first four months of the 1998/99 school year, school staff developed or acquired:

- a system of office referrals to record the major incidents in the school and track the personnel involved, the location, the time and the consequence. A tenet of EBS is that all decisions must be data driven, and it was important to establish a baseline, then continue to collect data to direct instruction and initiatives;
- an EBS team to determine goals and direction. This team consisted of three classroom teachers, two parents, two support teachers, a supervision aide and the principal, and a .1 EBS coordinator, using inner city funding. It was apparent that one person with vision and energy could, and should, become the focal point of the program and the constant during implementation;
- a statement of purpose;
- a set of four school rules and a series of expectations in all settings. To meet another goal of EBS, that of having a common language throughout the school, it was imperative to develop a short, easy to understand and easy to convey set of rules and expectations written in positive terms. Over a period of several weeks, these were developed by staff, students and parents, and then published for general consumption;
- a fall series of in-services for the staff on classroom management, dealing with escalating behaviour and non-compliance; and

- an EBS discussion at every staff meeting to keep the topic on the front burner. Prior to launch, it was important to “keep talking” about the approach, even though we excluded much of the trial work we did from the already burdened classroom teacher.

The following ideas were emphasized:

- this was a three- to five-year project;
- the minority (less than 10%) of children who created most of our anxiety (EBS originator, Dr George Sugai, refers to this group as the Wolf Pack) would not be our first target. Instead, it would be the remaining 90% of children who, with minimal instruction and monitoring, would conform to social expectations. The ultimate goal, of course, was to make the Wolf Pack part of the endangered species list, but there had to be a realization that universal interventions did not work for these children and that individual interventions wouldn't work either, unless the other 90% were under the umbrella;
- social skills instruction is as necessary as instruction in any of the subject areas if you expect the child to “do it right.” An oft quoted example is that of the child who is struggling with division...we will spend time with that child after school, use a variety of strategies and approach the problem with patience and good humour. Too often our approach to a child who exhibits inappropriate behaviour is exclusion, annoyance or both. We don't see it as a problem similar to an academic concern;
- the use of our supervision assistants as guinea pigs; less than a month into the year, our data indicated that more than 60% of the referrals were from the playground and 60% of those referrals were from our supervision assistants. We thought it appropriate that these, our least-trained personnel, could act as a test area for use of particular referral forms, such as the use of our positive reinforcement tool (gotchas) and new methods of active supervision. We tried to keep much of the preparatory work away from the classroom teacher.

The change in the school climate and the behaviour of the children and staff was immediate and significant! ...The results were so dramatic that they could be seen by everybody, even the more cynical of staff. The only concern voiced was that the process of interacting with kids took some time, and of particular concern that it cut into well-earned recess time. There was no argument, except that a decision had to be made whether or not the investment was worth it.

Results from January to March indicated that the answer was definitely yes—office referrals dropped by 30% and 14% of our children accounted for all of the office referrals. (In the previous four months, 32.5% of our children had received referrals.) The feedback was encouraging!..As expected, however, the euphoria of the first weeks wore off, and the question became one of maintenance, and how to sustain the momentum ...After meeting with the staff, it was agreed that beginning in (the next) September, a classroom would be designated as a behaviour resource room to be used for individual and group instruction, times out, etc. In addition, staff asked for repeats of several in-service sessions—the context is now much clearer, and topics such as functional assessment have taken on new meaning.

After the smoke and dust had cleared, it remains that the staff wants to be in for the long haul: the big ideas of EBS, such as discipline as a school-wide issue, positive reinforcement and an instructional base, have been accepted. After our first six months, we were satisfied with the 30% drop in referrals, and with the fact that just over a quarter of our students ever received an office referral.

More than that, we were happy with the tone of the staff and the dedication to move in this new direction. During the last week in June, one of my most experienced and capable teachers said to me, “It is EBS which will allow me to make it through my last five years.” From someone who has seen a quarter century of pendulum shifts and a myriad of approaches, this had to be the most encouraging endorsement of all.

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 Source: BCVPA September 1999 website article by Bruce Ballantyne, Principal in Prince George (www.bc.pvpa.bc.ca/Adminfo)

BC Safe Schools Centre

The BC Safe School Centre, the first of its kind in Canada, opened in December 1997 in Burnaby. At an annual cost of \$300,000, the centre provides advice, information, resource materials, and examples of best practices to address a range of safe school issues including intervention for youth at risk, the encouragement of social responsibility, and the promotion of a positive school climate. Also, a province-wide school district network of “safe schools contacts” has been developed to share information on existing programs.

Users of the centre report being helped by the services available. The existing organization of the centre will have to improve, however, to be able to meet increasing demands as more people in the school system learn of its potential benefits.

The centre is jointly funded by the ministries of Education and Attorney General, with administrative support coming from the Burnaby School District. The concept is based on a similar type of centre in California, which is reported to have been useful there in raising awareness of safe learning issues and in promoting improvements in schools.

The centre’s coordinator, a former inner city principal with suitable experience and credentials in safe learning issues, responds to requests from those in the school system for advice on ways to improve safe learning. This is done informally by phone (toll-free line: 1-888-224-SAFE) as well as through more formal training presentations in school visits.

The BC Safe Schools Centre has also produced a variety of resources on safe school factors, such as characteristics of students in bullying incidents (Exhibit 8). It has issued a *Safe Schools Kit* to every school in the province, containing:

- the manual *Focus on Bullying*, which contains lesson plans and advice for elementary teachers in promoting socially responsible behaviour (one for the secondary level is under development), and
- a set of policy guidelines for school administrator use in planning for safe schools and responding to aggression.

These are discussed in more detail in the sections of this report on “Curriculum Support and In-Service for Teachers in Promoting Socially Responsible Behaviour” and “Policy Guidelines for Dealing with Disruptive Behaviour.”

As well, the centre has a collection of 2,000 videos and books to loan to school staff and parents on safe learning topics such as:

- social and emotional development;
- counselling and support;
- intimidation, harassment and violence;
- youth leadership;
- diversity;
- youth at risk;
- crime and violence prevention; and
- legal system.

Exhibit 8

Characteristics of participants in bullying incidents

Bully	Passive victim	Provocative victim	Bystanders
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ confident ■ has friends ■ is aroused by the drama ■ uses aggression to gain respect ■ engage in crime later in life ■ more frequently boys ■ from all social strata ■ grow up where aggression is accepted ■ lack compassion and empathy ■ calm and lack emotion ■ blame the victims ■ effective at hiding their aggression ■ boys use physical aggression ■ girls use social alienation ■ desire for power and control ■ continually torment victims 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ show a lot of emotion ■ rarely tattle ■ may carry weapons for protection ■ do not ask for the attack ■ sensitive and cries easily ■ shy and lacks social skills ■ insecure and lacking self-esteem ■ chosen last or left out ■ appears to lack humour ■ lacking friends ■ anxious and easily upset ■ bullied repeatedly ■ uses money for protection ■ anxious, depressed ■ difficulty asserting self ■ physically weaker 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ pesky and irritates others ■ quick tempered and fights back ■ gets others charged up ■ clumsy, immature, restless ■ encourages kids who bully ■ may look like bullies but lose ■ try to bully weaker student ■ lacks social awareness ■ irks adults as much as peers ■ irritating habits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ reinforce bullies ■ more friendly to bullies ■ require social status to intervene ■ share in status of bully by being accomplices ■ ambivalent toward victim ■ help aggression to be seen as acceptable ■ maintain the climate for aggression ■ afraid of the bully

Source: BC Safe Schools Centre

Monthly reports show that loans of these resources are steadily increasing, possibly because more people in the school system are becoming aware of what is available. Until recently, tracking of usage has not produced reports suitable for determining which resources are in demand, and data on which districts or schools are accessing the resources is still not readily available.

In our district visits, we met some school staff who did not know about the resources available at the centre. On the other hand, we talked to some who had cancelled plans to develop their own collection of resources after they learned about the centre and found that requested resources were promptly delivered.

Of the teachers we surveyed, 59% indicated that limited funding for curriculum resources is a problem, yet almost none of these had tried to borrow any of the resources available from the centre on loan. It is likely that some of these people could benefit from accessing the centre's resources to expand their own individual or school collections.

As more people in the school system come to realize the benefits of borrowing resources from the centre, demands will increase. This will require a better means of managing information about which resources are in demand and which districts may need more information about what is available.

The Safe Schools Centre also has a website (www.safeschools.gov.bc.ca) but it is not yet functioning in a way that is useful for obtaining detailed information about available resources or for allowing on-line access to those that are in readable form. We believe giving the upgrading of this website priority would undoubtedly assist teachers and administrators in accessing information about available resources.

This program was set up to act as a central resource for those in the school system wanting improved access to advice and resources related to safe learning issues. As such, it vital to have a database and website that can assist in efficiently managing information.

Recommendation 2:

The Ministry of Education, along with the Ministry of Attorney General, should develop ways of giving priority to improving the database and website of the BC Safe Schools Centre.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that district safe learning strategies are working, but more needs to be done

We found that individual districts and schools have adopted a variety of strategies for addressing student aggression, depending on local concerns. Information about those that seem to be working is often shared in a collegial way between schools and districts. However, evaluations are usually done in an informal fashion rather than based on consistent tracking of behaviours the strategies are designed to address.

We observed that those schools where staff worked as a team—with support and leadership from administrators—had more success stories about being able to reduce student aggression. However, the focus on addressing actual incidents of aggression does not allow as much time for team building with staff as most administrators would like. Our survey revealed that two-thirds of administrators would like more time and training to improve their abilities to facilitate interactions between teachers, students and parents.

School administrators report that they spend significant amounts of their time dealing with student behaviour problems. This includes disciplining students who are sent to the office, as well as monitoring various areas of the school, such as hallways and school grounds (Exhibit 9).

We believe that our recommendations to the Ministry of Education and school districts elsewhere in this report should assist in meeting these needs. As teachers are assisted in developing improved classroom behaviour intervention strategies and as school administrators are assisted in

Exhibit 9

Areas where aggressive incidents take place

	Elementary	Secondary
School grounds	84%	22%
Hallways or locker areas	6%	54%
Classrooms	3%	2%
Lunch areas	2%	1%
Washrooms or change rooms	–	1%
Off school property	5%	20%

Source: Auditor General of British Columbia School Administrator Survey, October 1999



Courtesy: Ministry of Education

developing more positive means of dealing with student aggression, student behaviour should improve and discipline referrals should decrease. If administrators are freed up from responding to calls for disciplining students, we expect them to have more time to learn to facilitate better interactions among teachers, parents and students.

Our survey showed that the top two proactive strategies schools use to reduce aggression (with more than 80% of schools doing so) are: organizing noon-hour activities and implementing aggression-reduction initiatives.

Organizing Noon-hour Activities

Because many aggression-related incidents occur on school grounds, especially at the elementary level (Exhibit 9), it makes sense that schools have developed organized noon-hour activities. Information about levels of adult supervision and student participation in these organized activities are not, however, readily available. In some of the schools we visited, we were told of problems with the supervision of elementary students who do not participate in such organized activities.

Research (Appendix C: 19, 20, 21) has shown that good supervision of students, especially in areas where aggression is most likely to occur, is key to dealing with aggressive behaviour. For secondary students, hallways were identified as the number one place where aggression occurs (Exhibit 9). This is understandable since secondary students spend more time in the halls between classes than elementary students do. Our

recommendation in the next section on aggression-reduction strategies at the secondary level is meant to address concerns about aggressive behaviour in the hallways.

Collective agreements between the BC Teachers' Federation and school districts permit teachers to take a break from their students during school noon hours. Even so, some teachers continue to supervise students over lunch. In other schools, administrators hire school-ground supervisors, who are often at a disadvantage because they do not have a sustained relationship with the students. They may not know the students well enough to understand the relationship dynamics, and they are often not given an opportunity to share what they have seen with the teachers so that the latter can understand and deal with the conflicts that may be carried over into their classrooms. As well, we found that some of the supervisors lack the training they need to provide adequate supervision. Without such training, there is a danger that a supervisor will mishandle incidents, possibly increasing the negative impact on students.

In our district visits, we heard a full range of stories about school-ground supervisors—from those who have been well trained and included as a key part of the school team, to those who, though well intentioned, have not been trained to deal with aggressive behaviour or do not get paid to debrief with teachers before or after the lunch hour.

Given the fact that, for elementary students, most incidents of aggression during school hours occur outside the school building, we believe it is imperative that students be properly supervised on school grounds. For many schools, we believe that more can be done to include school-ground supervisors in initiatives to reduce aggression. This should include training through existing safe learning initiatives that could be provided by school counsellors or administrators, as well as through relevant in-service courses provided to other school staff. We have been told that the *Focus on Bullying* initiative coordinated by the BC Safe Schools Centre (described earlier in this section) is encouraging schools to include school-ground supervisors in discussions on school efforts to address aggression.

We also believe that consideration should be given to employing supervisors for longer periods than the lunch hour to provide time for debriefing on incidents that have occurred either before or during lunch. In this way, supervisors would be treated as part of a team that is focusing on reducing aggression and fostering a safe learning environment for students.

Recommendation 3:

School districts should find ways to improve the involvement of elementary school-ground supervisors in school initiatives to reduce aggression.

Implementing Aggression-reduction Strategies

Schools use a combination of strategies that are developed internally and those that are delivered with the help of outside agencies, such as local police and multi-cultural groups. We found that those running all year are better integrated into school curriculum and programs, which adds to the likelihood that they will influence student attitudes and behaviour.

Internally-developed Strategies

A number of schools and districts have developed their own anti-bullying initiatives and, as others hear about their successes, are passing on information to other schools and districts on how to use them. For example, two we heard about on a number of occasions are Coquitlam's *Bully Beware* and Sooke's *Bully Smart*. Most of the initiatives involve teaching students how to identify and avoid high-risk situations to begin with. They also teach students how to express themselves in difficult situations—for example, to help potential aggressors in reducing their own frustrations through positive means and to help potential victims be more assertive. In cases where students are subject to aggression or witness it, they learn how to report it.

Other districts we studied have endorsed commercially produced aggression-reduction programs, such as *Second Step*. The schools we visited spoke highly of their own programs or those they have adopted. We concluded that there are advantages either way: adopting a well-recognized program can save development time, while internally developed programs can address specific school needs more directly and facilitate increased staff understanding and involvement.

Perhaps because the focus on aggression-reduction is relatively new, however, these initiatives are more often available at the elementary level. In those districts we visited, concern was expressed about how students may not continue to be supported by these initiatives when they progress to the secondary level. It is understandable that the early focus has been on the elementary level as a preventative measure.

Now, however, the time has come to make sure efforts at the secondary level are strengthened. Of particular concern is the aspect of aggression-reduction initiatives that emphasizes the need for students to speak up and report incidents of aggression. Secondary students and parents we met with expressed concerns about retribution by the students who were inflicting the aggression on others. They also told us of incidents they thought were not properly followed up by school staff. School administrators, however, described to us actions that were taken and we found them to be according to established policies. In some cases, student aggressors are being referred to programs designed to address aggression without the use of out-of-school suspensions, which makes it seem to other students that consequences have not been applied. This suggests that, in at least some of the cases where students and parents believe nothing was done in response to their reports, it is because privacy issues in releasing information about actions taken with student aggressors keep the facts from being released. This, in turn, adds to the belief that reporting aggression does not always result in remedial action being taken.

Police information about acts of retribution does not support the contention that students who are reported will seek revenge on those who report them—at least at the level of aggression that calls for police action. Students are encouraged in workshops presented by police officers to report concerns to school staff as soon as possible after being accosted, threatened or mistreated by other students, to reduce the likelihood that aggression will continue and even escalate.

Aggression-reduction initiatives that have begun at the elementary level need to be carried forward to the secondary level, to proactively address student aggression. Also, students need to be reminded periodically and in an on-going way who and where to go if they become the subject of aggression by other students. (We address the issue of school staff aggression in a later section on “Policy Guidelines for Dealing with Disruptive Behaviour.”) School staff need to support this by spending more time in hallways, where most of the aggression is reported to be taking place (Exhibit 9), and acting on reports brought to them by students.

Recommendation 4:

School districts should do more to address student aggression at the secondary level, by increasing efforts to monitor and reduce aggression, and encouraging students to report concerns.

Secondary students role play ways of resolving potential conflicts using an NVC (Non-violent Communication) model taught to them as part of their Career and Personal Planning class



Courtesy: Victoria High School

Help from Outside Agencies

Some schools and districts also have access to local groups that have developed aggression-reduction programs. The Community Liaison Division of the Ministry of Multiculturalism and Immigration has developed a network of resource people who present dramas and role plays in schools with the aim of promoting a better understanding of other races and cultures and of the hurtful effects of racism. As well, the RCMP and BC Youth Police Network present workshops for students on the negative effects of drugs, alcohol and violence.

The stories we were told by school staff and members of these outside agencies led us to conclude that their efforts help expand student awareness of problems related to aggression. We were not convinced, however, that student attitudes and behaviours are so easily changed. Unless follow-up is done by classroom teachers to ensure that student attitudes improve and that they are able to apply the skills demonstrated in role plays, the increased awareness is not likely to lead to changes in behaviours. We were told the workshops are often not referred to in subsequent lessons or discussions with teachers or school administrators, and that attempts are usually not made to assess the degree to which student attitudes or behaviours are influenced as a result of the time and efforts spent on the workshops.

Proper follow up should help to reinforce the original material at a later point in time, and evaluations would produce valuable information for improving the design of the materials and presentations themselves. Some of the outside agencies say they have volunteered to do such follow-up and evaluation, but that those in the school system do not welcome their offers.

Teachers, on the other hand, have expressed concerns about the time it would take to ensure that the follow-up and evaluations are done in an appropriate manner. If this is the case, then we think teachers should develop their own means for so doing. If the subject matter is considered to be worth presenting in the first place, then taking the time to reinforce it is equally worthwhile. Also, schools should be routinely providing these agencies with feedback on what worked and what did not, so that presentations are relevant and useful. One of the merits of involving outside agencies in the follow-up and evaluation process could include creating a stronger relationship and better communications with the agencies. The result could be enhanced access to workshops and more effective delivery.

Recommendation 5:

School districts should follow up on contributions by outside agencies to reduce aggression by making sure lessons presented are properly integrated with subsequent classroom exercises. Also, the extent to which presentations have been effective in influencing student attitudes and behaviours should be determined, possibly with the help of those who originally made the presentations.



curriculum support and in-service for teachers in promoting socially responsible student behaviour

Curriculum focused on social development of students can play a key role in fostering a safe learning environment by teaching students about the need to behave responsibly. Curriculum, however, must be accompanied by suitable teacher guidance for its use, such as clearly articulated learning outcomes for teacher delivery of the curriculum and advice on which resources to use and how to use them.

We expected to find up-to-date, relevant, ministry-recommended resource materials to assist teachers with their task of implementing the curriculum, as well as in-service programs to prepare teachers to use the materials and to handle student behaviour issues as they arise.

Conclusion

The curriculum developed by the ministry is suitable for promoting socially responsible behaviour. However, there are some problems in how it is being applied. Although the number of required learning outcomes have been reduced at teacher request, many teachers are still pointing out that it is difficult to meet the expectations laid out in the curriculum. This is said to be due to having too many learning outcomes and too few resources to deliver them.

Clarification is needed on how to use available resources to best advantage and on where to find more resources for some of the more sensitive topics. Also, more teacher in-service is needed for classroom behaviour intervention strategies, ways of managing discussions on sensitive topics and early identification of learning difficulties.

Findings

The ministry has developed suitable curriculum but there are a few problems in implementing it

Suitable curriculum has been laid out, with clearly articulated learning outcomes, for topics designed to promote socially responsible behaviour. At the elementary level, resource lists identify which resources cover multiple

learning outcomes, thereby assisting teachers in efficiently meeting curriculum requirements. This has not, as yet, been done for the secondary level.

The Ministry of Education's Curriculum Branch manages specifications for provincial curriculum and the evaluation of related learning resources. This entails the development of Integrated Resource Packages (IRPs) which lay out expectations for teachers in delivering curriculum in the classroom. The IRPs include descriptions of learning outcomes for each subject so that teachers can assess whether students have acquired the necessary skills and abilities to apply what they have been taught. As well, the IRPs list recommended resources such as lesson plans, books and videotapes that teachers can use to help students achieve the learning outcomes. These packages are made available to teachers in written form as well as by compact disk. Also, the ministry buys licences for videotape purchases to assist school districts with buying resources at lower costs.

Included in the ministry's core curriculum requirements are the subjects Personal Planning (PP) for kindergarten to grade 7 and Career and Personal Planning (CAPP) for grades 8–12. This curriculum is made up of the following topic areas:

- Planning Processes
- Personal Development
- Healthy Living
- Mental Well-being
- Family Life Education
- Child Abuse Prevention
- Substance Abuse Prevention
- Safety and Injury Prevention
- Career Development

The curriculum covering both PP and CAPP was developed by teams of educators and subject experts, and was reviewed by Curriculum Overview Teams, students and parents prior to implementation in the 1995/96 school year. From reviewing surveys of educators, parents and students that were done by the ministry and BC Student Voice, and from speaking with some of the team members, we found that there were a few problems in the development and implementation of the curriculum. These included tight time frames for developing learning outcome descriptions, and concerns about how making this a required curriculum at the secondary level would limit the choice of other academic subjects for post-



Courtesy: Ministry of Education

secondary prerequisites and about how to cover all of the required learning outcomes in the time available.

The ministry responded to these concerns by rewording and reducing the number of learning outcomes for the CAPP curriculum in 1996/97. Our interviews and surveys of teachers, however, revealed that concerns about how to cover the required learning outcomes remain (less than 25% of teachers at all grade levels indicated that “most” of the learning outcomes are achievable with the time available, and the same low number agreed that “most” of the learning outcomes were achievable with the resources available). The ministry has indicated that teachers can readily cover the learning outcomes in the time available if they use resources that address several of the learning outcomes simultaneously. For example, using a video that depicts students involved in a range of aggressive situations can be used to stimulate discussions on a variety of topics.

In an effort to assist elementary teachers in deciding which recommended resources would be most useful to them, the ministry has recently re-organized the “grade collection” for PP to show which learning outcomes are covered by each listed resource. We concluded that the concept is a good one because it assists teachers in selecting resources that can be used to cover multiple learning outcomes. If properly used, the new grade collections should reduce teacher concerns about not being able to properly deliver the curriculum.

When we surveyed teachers on their view about the adequacy of IRP guidance for ranking the usefulness of resources, 36% of elementary teachers answered either “not sure” or “poor.” The ministry has since sent out two notices in *BC Education News* about the new grade collections at the elementary level, so it is possible that more teachers are now aware of them.

We found that, although a “grade collection” exists for CAPP, it is not as well organized as the one for PP. As a result, secondary teachers cannot as easily rank the usefulness of CAPP resources. This is confirmed to some extent by the fact that a higher percentage (49%) of secondary teachers responding to our survey answered either “not sure” or “poor” when rating the IRPs for adequacy in ranking recommended CAPP resources. Given the relatively small amount of time that would be necessary to produce such a tool, we believe the ministry should develop this for secondary teachers.

Recommendation 6:

The Ministry of Education should re-organize the grade collection for Career and Personal Planning curriculum to assist secondary teachers in ranking the usefulness of listed resources, and notify teachers when it is available.

Some school districts and schools have gone so far as to develop lesson plans for this curriculum. While it is normal for teachers to develop their own lesson plans for other subjects, this curriculum was implemented over a short time frame, to be delivered by teachers who often have not received any special professional development in doing so. Thus, some districts decided to assist in the process by supporting interested teachers in developing lesson plans that have since been shared with other teachers. At first glance, we thought this process was not very cost-effective, with each district seemingly “re-inventing the wheel.” However, we have come to see that the process was a valuable one for those involved, because of the greater understanding and buy-in it created. Our survey showed that 44% of teachers are now supported by additional resources developed by the ministry, their school or district.

The ministry originally assisted in this process at the secondary level by developing and issuing detailed lesson plans in what was referred to as “CAPP in a Box.” The drawback was that it was costly to produce and time-consuming to update the copyrights required for the materials. For the elementary level, the ministry’s resource lists include packages that have

detailed lesson plans for teachers to use in delivering the PP curriculum. For example, in our interviews with teachers, we were often told that the *Lion's Quest* and *Second Step* programs for the elementary level are very useful in this regard.

The BC Safe Schools Centre has also recently coordinated the development of a manual with detailed lesson plans for the elementary level based on pilot work undertaken by the Vancouver School Board. Called *Focus on Bullying*, it contains advice and lesson plans for teachers of kindergarten to grade 7 to use in reducing aggression. This manual is part of the centre's *Safe Schools Kit* that 83% of teachers we surveyed said they had not tested. However, of the remaining 17%, almost all reported it was useful. Since we did not list this resource by name (*Focus on Bullying*) in our survey, it is possible that many teachers do not know it came from the *Safe Schools Kit*. For those elementary teachers we interviewed in person, the majority had seen the manual and reported that specific lesson plans such as these are much needed. The BC Safe Schools Centre has now coordinated training sessions on how to apply the principles in *Focus on Bullying* at more than 100 schools, and it is expected that more schools will follow.

During our fieldwork, the centre was also coordinating the development of a similar manual for the secondary level. Due for release in 2000 and aimed at assisting secondary teachers of CAPP, *Safe Secondary Schools* is similar to *Focus on Bullying*, but intended for grade 8–12 students. It is to include “best practice” examples and lesson plans.

Pre-service courses do not require training in classroom behaviour intervention strategies

To properly foster a safe learning environment, all teachers must be exposed to a range of strategies that will enhance their abilities to deal with the variety of students and learning challenges that present themselves in the average classroom. The teachers would also benefit from having a better understanding of the sorts of social and psychological pressures their students are under.

In our review of courses being offered in British Columbia universities for teachers, we found that all offered instruction for classroom behaviour intervention strategies and delivery of PP and CAPP curriculum. However, teachers are not required to take these courses to graduate, which means that some do not receive specific instruction in how to manage difficulties that arise in classrooms or in how to discuss sensitive subjects that are included in PP and CAPP.

Part of the reason the courses are not mandatory is that the BC College of Teachers does not recognize the teaching of PP or CAPP as a specialty area, the way it does other core curricula. Our conversations with people at the universities and the college revealed that the matter is under consideration, but that there is some doubt about whether the universities are waiting for the College of Teachers to make this a specialty area, or whether the college is waiting for the universities to make courses mandatory.

Our survey found that 24% of elementary teachers and 31% of secondary teachers have four or more students in an average class whose behaviour significantly reduces their ability to teach the other students. Having effective strategies for dealing with such behaviour is clearly important for all teachers. As well, given that all elementary teachers and many new secondary teachers are expected to deliver the curriculum, it is important related basic courses be made mandatory. For those planning to specialize in the delivery of CAPP curriculum, further courses would likely be appropriate, but would not need to be mandatory for all teachers.

In our view, conversations on this matter would likely move forward if the ministry were to arrange meetings between the associate deans of education in the province's universities and those administrators in charge of the College of Teachers.

Recommendation 7:

The Ministry of Education should call for meetings with the province's universities and the College of Teachers to emphasize the need for mandatory pre-service courses for teachers on classroom strategies for dealing with difficult behaviours and for delivering Personal Planning and Career and Personal Planning curriculum.

In-service courses do not provide in-depth training needed for some areas

Significantly large numbers of teachers reported to us that they do not feel prepared to address the more sensitive topics included in the curriculum—substance abuse, suicide and sexual orientation. Although some in-service is provided, it is not extensive enough to meet teacher needs in these areas. Also, in-service is not readily available for early identification and remediation of learning difficulties—a factor that can contribute to student aggression if not properly addressed.

Teacher acceptance of increasing responsibilities in the area of teaching social skills, along with adequate support from school districts—in the form of in-service and learning resources—is vital to address problems with aggression and related behaviours.

For those already teaching in the school system, in-service courses are available from time to time. The ministry's Field Services Branch has regional coordinators who help to set up in-service programs according to the needs and priorities identified by school districts.

During the implementation of the PP and CAPP curriculum in 1995/96, teachers requested in-service programs to assist them in becoming familiar with the objectives and related resources. A number of in-service sessions were provided based on available funding. Evaluations of these suggest they were of some value, but that it is difficult to meet teacher needs in a one-day course. Such in-service support is still underway, and there have been recent increases in requests for workshops on safe learning topics such as how to address student aggression.

The BC Teachers' Federation has developed a number of related professional development courses. The following list shows some of those offered in 1999/2000:

- Celebrating Diversity
- Creating an Environment for Learning: Classroom Management
- Dealing with Homophobia/Heterosexism in Schools
- Effective Conflict Management-Awareness and Skills Working Together
- Focus on Bullying-Violence Prevention
- Name Calling, Racial Harassment
- Racism-Free Schools
- STAAR-Students Taking Action Against Racism
- Strategies for Multicultural and Racial Unity in the Secondary School Environment
- Teaching Controversial Issues

Districts were provided with \$27 million in the school year 1999/2000 for teacher in-service for the province's 36,000 teachers. This went to pay for professional development fees, substitute teachers and teacher salaries for five annual days of non-classroom time. There are numerous topics requiring teacher attention, from curriculum areas to school and district

problem solving. The ministry does not try to influence topics selected for this in-service. For the last two years, however, the ministry has funded a sixth non-classroom day for which it has listed topics considered to be priority, so there is a potential to do this for future years and prescribe a safe learning focus.

In the ministry report produced as a result of the recent BC Task Force on Social Studies, recommendations encourage better teacher networks to improve the interchange of ideas between teachers of subjects that do not require specific pre-service courses. The ministry has indicated it plans to build such networks for teachers of Social Studies, PP and CAPP.

As well, we have been told that the ministry plans to further develop its *Parent Handbooks on Curriculum* so they will be useful to beginning teachers, including those responsible for PP and CAPP. This should assist teachers in understanding expectations, and better prepare them for using the curriculum.

Sensitive Topics

Some school districts are gradually shifting to the use of specialist teachers at the secondary level who are developing their skills in discussing a wide range of sensitive topics with students. Others, however, assign CAPP to teachers with lower seniority or distribute classes as an add-on to those who consider themselves specialists in other subjects.

We learned from our survey that roughly half of school administrators believe that teacher discomfort with sensitive topics is a factor in hampering the delivery of PP and CAPP curriculum. This was the highest percentage shown of the factors listed—along with “student interest levels,” which we think is directly related to teachers’ abilities to make the curriculum interesting. Teachers confirmed this in our teacher survey, with 35% acknowledging that their discomfort with sensitive topics is problematic in the delivery of the curriculum.

If teachers are not comfortable with the material they have to cover, their ability to make it interesting and relevant to students will be reduced. Secondary students told us that the level of teacher preparedness makes a considerable difference in the degree to which they value the CAPP curriculum. Those whose teachers engaged in discussions with them, or were willing to listen to their views and concerns, made the learning experience worthwhile; those whose teachers did not do so made the course seem like a waste of time.

In our discussions with teachers, supported by our survey findings, three topic areas were found to be problematic: substance abuse, suicidal gestures and depression, and sexual orientation. These three topics also feature significantly when it comes to student behaviours being reported by teachers (Exhibit 15 in “Evaluation of Safe Learning Initiatives”). A significant percentage of teachers reported not being “well” or even “adequately” prepared to discuss these topics with their students. This has been reported as a lack of suitable resources available to support their efforts; however, it is likely also influenced by a need for teacher in-service training in how to use those that are available.

Substance abuse

Our survey disclosed that 48% of teachers do not feel “well” or even “adequately” prepared to discuss substance abuse with students and, of those who had tried ministry listed resources, though roughly half found them to be of some use, only 27% found them truly useful in delivering related curriculum.

Our review of resources listed for use in delivering the CAPP curriculum found that a number were available, but that better ones are needed to assist discussions at the grade 10 to 12 level. The ministry, in recognition of the need for better resources on this topic, has recently added some for grades 8–12 (and has sent notices to teachers in *BC Education News*) that are soon to be available from the Alcohol and Drug Education Society.

Suicidal gestures and depression

In our survey we found that 72% of teachers do not feel “well” or even “adequately” prepared to discuss suicidal gestures with students and, of those who had tried ministry-listed resources for fostering mental well-being, only 20% found them to be useful in delivering related curriculum.

While relatively few students attempt suicide, studies like those by the McCreary Centre (described elsewhere in this report in the sections “A Safe Learning Environment: What It Is and Why It Is Important” and “Evaluation of Safe Learning Initiatives”) show that many contemplate it. When attempts do occur, teachers need to know how to deal with the aftermath. We believe this aspect is adequately addressed by the development of the school and district Critical Incident Response Plans we described in the previous section.



Courtesy: Ministry of Education

Even more importantly, school staff members need to know how to recognize the signs that a student may be contemplating suicide. We asked school administrators whether their staff have been provided with a list of warning signs of student depression or suicide. Fifty-two percent at secondary schools and 32% at elementary schools said staff do have such a list.

Of the recommendations made as a result of fatality investigations by the Children’s Commission of British Columbia from 1996 to 1998, 101 (18%) pertained to suicides. The commission noted that, in most cases, the first signs of difficulty were apparent in relation to school, although these early warning signs were not usually identified or acted on by the school.

Factors the commission noted in the suicide deaths of children they reviewed in 1998 were poor coordination or lack of services, as well as:

- sense of social isolation;
- lack of meaningful connection in school;
- learning disabilities;
- multiple foster homes;
- history of physical and sexual abuse;
- alcohol and drug use;
- separation or death in the family;
- suicide of a parent, and
- hostile reaction to disclosure of sexual orientation.

The commission also noted that aboriginal children and youth experience a disproportionately high rate of deaths compared to the general population. Of the 288 fatalities investigated by the commission between September 1996 and December 1998, 25% were children known to be of aboriginal heritage.

Our understanding from speaking with subject experts is that depression in children can look very different from depression in adults, with behaviour more likely to be agitated than withdrawn. Also, ways of helping children who are depressed or suicidal can differ. We do not think it is reasonable to expect school staff to become experts in interacting with students who are depressed or suicidal. Instead, it is more appropriate to assist teachers and other staff in identifying the signs that a student may need help, so that he or she can be referred to those with the necessary expertise.

In recognition of the need for such a resource, the Ministry for Children & Families has recently developed and distributed a relevant guide to school districts. However, not all schools have been given copies. The Ministry of Education is now preparing a shorter version for distribution to all teachers.

We believe a similar resource is needed to help teachers educate students about the warning signs of suicide and depression in themselves and their classmates and how to report concerns they may have as a result of identifying these signs.

Recommendation 8:

The Ministry of Education should identify or develop suitable resources for teachers and students to recognize and report student depression and suicidal gestures.

Sexual orientation

Our survey disclosed that 40% of teachers do not feel “well” or even “adequately” prepared to lead discussions that would discourage their students from using negative references to sexual orientation. Secondary teachers we surveyed said that negative references to sexual orientation is one of the more frequent forms of aggression, with 32% of elementary teachers and 77% of secondary teachers reporting it happens “on occasion” or “often” (Exhibit 15 in “Evaluation of Safe Learning Initiatives”). As well, 24% of secondary teachers said that their students have been making more negative references to sexual orientation in the past few years than before.

In reviewing descriptions that accompany the ministry's recommended resources lists for PP and CAPP, we found few specific references to sexual orientation. In the PP list for grades kindergarten to 7 we found only one reference, and that was to a book on the subject of hate crimes. None of the books on the CAPP list are said to refer to the subject, but a number of videotapes were listed as such: three for grade 8, one for grade 10 (which we found was no longer available) and one for grades 11 and 12.

Ministry representatives have explained that the process for approving curriculum resources involves publishers or vendors submitting resources to the Curriculum Branch for evaluation and comparison to ministry criteria. More recently, in response to teacher requests for more focused resource lists, the ministry has concentrated the provincial recommendation of resources on those that assist with multiple learning outcomes. This change leaves the responsibility for the evaluation of most single topic, supplemental, and enrichment resources with school boards. This may also have contributed to the small number of resources listed for this topic. In any case, we believe there is merit to the ministry doing an active search for more resources for discussing this subject.

Teachers we interviewed at all grade levels expressed concerns about controversies surrounding the subject of sexual orientation and the need for more ministry- or district-approved resources to support them in their efforts. All those we asked said they would like to include such discussions in their delivery of the curriculum.

In our discussions with representatives of a group called GALE-BC (Gay and Lesbian Educators of British Columbia) and their allies, we were shown an extensive list of videotapes and books screened by them and found to be suitable for discussing sexual orientation in a neutral way with students of all ages. However, the ministry has taken the stand that, because some parents object to teacher-led discussion on this subject, the issues surrounding sexual orientation can be dealt with by teachers referring to resources that have been designed to teach general tolerance of differences. Teachers, on the other hand, told us they need books and videotapes that will help them explain that there are people with a same-sex orientation, and that these people deserve to be treated with tolerance and respect.

We acknowledge that some parents do not want their children involved in such discussions out of a concern that calls for tolerance and respect of individual differences may

be interpreted as encouragement to explore the lifestyle as an option. Nevertheless, the fact that disparaging remarks about sexual orientation have become commonplace even in the early grades, and that some students are being harassed to the point where they leave school or consider taking their own lives or those of others are reason enough, in our view, that the issue be addressed promptly and effectively.

The process for screening resources submitted for approved use will require time. If suitable teaching tools are not forthcoming, however, we call on the ministry to develop them. This will require the ministry to involve representatives from various points of view to ensure all concerns are addressed. Having met with those in the Central Okanagan School District who were involved in developing resources that have been agreed to by both ends of the spectrum when it comes to viewing issues related to sexual orientation (supporters of gay rights and religious fundamentalists), we believe that such cooperation is possible.

As well, teacher in-service should be provided to assist teachers in learning how to use such resources without making references that will be misinterpreted by students or parents.

Recommendation 9:

The Ministry of Education and school districts should provide teachers with suitable guidance for encouraging tolerance and respect for students of same sex orientation.

Early Identification and Remediation of Literacy Concerns

Problems often become evident in the early stages of learning to read and write, but not every child who is slow to begin reading and writing will have problems later on. However, those who continue to struggle are less likely to do well in academic subjects that require substantial amounts of reading. Research (Appendix C: 22, 23, 24) shows that students whose reading difficulties are remediated early are more likely to be successful in later years. Although we did not ask how many schools and districts have early intervention programs, we were told by those who do that time is well spent early on in helping to improve student success in reading and writing.

The ability to identify students who need help through diagnostic assessment and to expose them to early intervention programs (and to divert them if necessary to learning assistance or special needs services) is not something that is included in teachers' pre-service training. As well, early intervention programs such as Reading Recovery—a program aimed at



Courtesy: Ministry of Education

6 year-olds that helps at risk students make connections in reading and writing to become more independent, self-monitoring readers and writers—require teachers to receive additional training.

If more teachers had the skills to carry out diagnostic assessments—and, wherever possible, also remediate—student learning difficulties, this would improve the likelihood that students could be assisted in feeling successful. We believe that increasing students’ chances of success through early identification and remediation of learning difficulties will assist them to become actively engaged in learning and to fit in with their peers, and will reduce the likelihood they will get involved in aggressive or related risk behaviours.

Recommendation 10:

The Ministry of Education should assess the extent to which teachers would benefit from training in identifying students’ special needs and in adapting teaching strategies to meet those needs. The initial focus should be on elementary teachers, to increase the chances that students will start off with the help they need to develop a positive relationship with their teachers and peers.



policy guidelines for dealing with disruptive behaviour

Regardless of the success of safe learning programs and curriculum, some degree of student aggression is likely to be present in the school setting. Consequently, policy guidelines are needed to clarify what is expected of students and staff in addressing disruptive behaviour.

We expected the Ministry of Education to be acting as the steering body of the school system, facilitating joint efforts among all the players involved in the system to develop policy guidelines on ways of dealing with disruptive behaviours as they arise.

We also expected that school districts would be adapting ministry policy guidelines for use at the school level, making sure expectations of students and school staff are clear.

Conclusion

The Ministry of Education has facilitated joint efforts of education partners to develop suitable policy guidelines for dealing with disruptive behaviour in the public school system. We found that some administrators have not, however, reviewed, discussed and further refined these guidelines for use at the school level. For example, new policy guidelines encourage administrators to use means other than suspensions for disciplining students. However, school administrators are asking for in-service training to help them learn how to implement other strategies.

Expectations of students and school staff need to be made clearer so that codes of conduct are more consistently followed and enforced. As well, students and parents need more encouragement to come forward with concerns about student interactions with school staff.

Finally, exchange of information with Ministry for Children & Families staff about students who have been assigned to them for assistance with family problems or interactions with the justice system is not well coordinated.

Findings

Suitable policy guidelines have been developed with input from education partners

In developing policy guidelines for fostering a safe learning environment, the Ministry of Education involves school districts and various provincial associations for parents, students, teachers and school administrators. It also coordinates these efforts with those of other ministries—in particular, the ministries of Attorney General and Children & Families. Gaining agreement on safe learning priorities and school notification procedures is not a simple task, and there have been occasional coordination problems in issuing policy guidelines to districts and schools.

We found that the Ministry of Education facilitates the development of policy guidelines through regular meetings of its Education Advisory Committee, which is chaired by the Deputy Minister of Education. In attending a number of these meetings, we observed that representatives of each of the above groups were called on to discuss and provide input to ministry policy decisions.

During our audit, more detailed discussions on safe learning policy guidelines were held at regular meetings at the BC Safe Schools Centre of the Safe Schools Working Group, a sub-group of the Inter-ministry Committee on Youth Violence and Crime. This group had representatives from provincial agencies for parents, teachers and school administrators as well as from the ministries of Education, Attorney General and Women's Equality. We observed that the meetings provide the various players with opportunities to brief each other and receive input on the initiatives they are responsible for. They also work together to identify provincial safe learning issues and to produce safe learning policy guidelines for the school system.

We noticed, however, that decisions were being made without input from the Ministry for Children & Families, a key stakeholder when it comes to safe learning concerns. Representatives from Children & Families hold their own separate meetings with education partners to discuss issues in common with the school system. However, we found that the two groups have few members in common and that decisions made in one group were not discussed in the other group.

In speaking with representatives from each of the ministries of Education, Attorney General and Children & Families, we heard differing opinions about what the priorities should be for keeping students safe. The Ministry of Education focuses

on what is happening in schools, while the Attorney General is primarily interested in initiatives aimed at reducing violence in schools as part of a community-wide focus, and the Ministry for Children & Families is more involved with child protection and family support services. These points of view make sense given the mandates of each agency. However, when their representatives attend joint meetings—or in some cases, do not attend—agreeing on what to do next can be difficult. This has led to some policy guidelines being distributed to schools without all parties being consulted. Clearly, proper coordination of efforts is important—in both the development and in the issuing of these documents—even though such work takes time.

We were told in most of our discussions with those in the school system that they are already taxed in terms of where they spend their non-teaching time. Some of these interviewees reported that they sometimes feel overwhelmed by the number of policy guidelines they receive at various times during the year from various parties on closely related topics with similar titles and different packaging. This view is supported somewhat by our survey finding that about a third of school administrators had not yet assessed most of the resources produced.

On the other hand, we were also told that, in most cases, administrators and staff appreciate having these guides as a resource. It is difficult to address the issue of how administrators and other staff could find more time to review resources they receive from various parties. However, we believe it may help to some extent to require that the issuance to schools of policy guidelines be approved by the Ministry of Education as to titles, packaging, release dates and, possibly, content.

In an effort to address such concerns, the ministry issued a directive in September 1999 calling for Ministry of Education prior approval for all materials sent to those in the school system. However, a number of policy guides were subsequently released without such approval. It may be that the directive was not specific enough or was misunderstood. In any case, such a directive will need to be reinforced by holding conversations with the various stakeholders to agree on ways of coordinating the process of developing, approving and releasing such guidance.

Recommendation 11:

The Ministry of Education should resolve with senior representatives of the ministries of Attorney General and Children & Families coordination problems in developing and distributing safe learning policy guidelines.

Districts and schools must now develop policies further

The Ministry of Education, with the help of other organizations meeting through the BC Safe Schools Centre, has developed a number of useful policy guidelines to assist administrators in fostering safe learning environments in schools. However, a number of the guidelines have yet to be implemented at the district and school level.

Guidelines relevant to safe learning include the following:

Keeping Schools Safe: A Practical Guide for Principals/Vice-Principals

This guide, released in mid-1999 by the BC Principals' and Vice-Principals' Association, contains detailed suggestions for monitoring and remediating instances of student aggressive behaviour. Our fall 1999 survey showed that 79% of school administrators had already reviewed this guide, of whom almost all consider it to be useful.

Safe School Planning Guide

Part of the *Safe Schools Kit* produced in 1998 by the BC Safe Schools Centre, this guide identifies key issues that should be considered in planning for safe school initiatives. Our survey found that 70% of administrators had reviewed the kit and that most consider it useful. Our conclusion from discussions with principals and other school staff, and from attending a number of in-service meetings on the topic, is that the guide has yet to be used to develop detailed school plans for improving safe learning, but it will serve as a useful document as more and more schools use it to do so.

Being Aware, Taking Care

This guide from the Ministry of Attorney General was issued to schools in late 1999 to raise awareness about the signs of sexual exploitation and to explain what actions should be taken to help the students concerned.

We did not ask those we surveyed about this resource, as it was only recently issued at the time. However, in our discussions with staff in the ministries of Education and Children & Families who are in touch with law enforcement officials, we were told that such a resource is much needed because British Columbia has become a destination for pedophiles. This makes it critical for everyone in the school system to become aware of the signs that a student is a potential or actual victim of abuse.

Responding to Critical Incidents

This guide is also part of the *Safe Schools Kit*, which has been reviewed by 70% of administrators. It provides guidelines for developing school plans to deal with school crises such as fatal accidents, suicides and other extreme acts of student aggression (such as the 1999 Alberta incident in a Taber secondary school where two students were shot, one of whom died).

During our school district visits we viewed some of the more detailed manuals developed by the districts themselves for responding to critical incidents. We found that in some school districts, such as Central Okanagan, schools have been asked to include in the manual contact names, phone numbers and step-by-step responsibilities in the case of a critical incident. As well, these districts have practiced the steps by holding “dry runs” at the start of the last two school years to make sure staff know what to do.

In other schools and districts, however, we found considerable variation in the level of detail provided for in safety action plans and in the degree to which school personnel are clear about what to do in a critical incident.

We believe that this type of planning is vital to school districts and schools to ensure a reasonable response in a time of crisis. The more specific the directions, the more likely it is that the school will be able to respond quickly and appropriately during a crisis.

Recommendation 12:

All school districts should have their own critical incident plans tailored to particular district and school circumstances. These plans should include details of who must do what, when and where in a critical situation. As well, districts should periodically provide training and practice sessions to all school administrators.

Focus on Suspensions

This ministry guide contains suggestions for school administrators on how they might reduce the numbers of out-of-school suspensions. Other methods of discipline and resolution are proposed, such as rescinding student privileges or using in-school suspensions and enrollment in school-sponsored programs such as aggression-reduction initiatives.

Research (Appendix C: 25, 26, 28) has shown that out-of-school suspensions are not very effective at changing student behaviour. As well, suspensions can have unintended effects on the students involved (such as contributing to low school

connectedness and decreasing academic success) as well as on the outside support workers (for example, by adding to the workloads of the social workers, mental health workers and probation officers).

Students who misbehave are often looking for attention, either because of learning difficulties or because they have unmet psychological needs. Some schools we visited had programs to mentor students with problems and “resource rooms” where students could be referred for learning assistance, counselling and assignments designed to reduce the particular offending behaviour. We were impressed with accounts of how these schools had reduced the number of students being suspended. We were told that the time spent setting up and coordinating such programs is more than compensated for by the reduced time spent disciplining students and trying to reduce the distraction for other students.

While the concepts presented in the guide are sound, school administrators need more guidance in how to adapt school procedures to follow them. Fifty-six percent of administrators we surveyed said they thought this resource was useful to some extent, 20% did not think it was, and the remainder said they had not had a chance to review it. Elsewhere in our survey, 62% of administrators said they would like in-service training on how to find ways of using options other than suspensions.

Recommendation 13:

School districts should offer more guidance to school administrators on how to improve the learning environment through positive means, and so assist in reducing the use of out-of-school suspensions.

New guidelines for child abuse

We found that more joint development of policy guidelines was underway. For example, a much-needed *Internet Safety Kit* has been developed with the help of police and the RCMP to help school staff monitor Internet use and warn children of the dangers of interacting with potential predators.

As well, new sets of guidelines have been developed with the Ministry for Children & Families to be released near the end of the 1999/2000 school year as part of the *Child Abuse Response Kit for Superintendents*. Every school in the province is to receive the kit, which is to include:

- *BC Handbook for Action on Child Abuse and Neglect*, a guide developed a few years ago to clarify the roles and responsibilities of various agencies in reporting and dealing with possible child abuse and neglect;

- *Supporting Our Students*, a brochure and guide for schools on how to identify and respond to possible child abuse; and
- *Responding to Children’s Problem Sexual Behaviour in Elementary Schools*, a guide with action steps for school staff on how to speak to students and report concerns about possible sexual abuse.

Student codes of conduct are not always followed or enforced

We found that codes of conduct are not always understood or followed by students, enforced by staff or supported by parents. Of particular note is the relatively low level of code compliance reported for secondary students and staff (Exhibit 10).

Research (Appendix C: 27) has shown that policies explicitly describing inappropriate behaviour need to be supported by consistent monitoring and enforcement. Having a list of rules on the wall does not, in itself, do much to ensure they are followed. To be effective, codes of conduct must be “living” documents—developed, reviewed and discussed periodically with students, staff and parents. Furthermore, students must see that the code is used to discourage repeat offences by those who do not follow it.

In the school districts we visited, we found that the topics included in codes of conduct were similar, but expectations were not always clearly spelled out. In fact, the specificity of the wording varied greatly from one district to another and from one school to another. Some codes used very general terms to describe expectations; others were specific, describing not only expectations, but also consequences for not following the code.

Common topics covered by codes of conduct include:

- general student behaviour expectations;
- school attendance;
- smoking;
- use of illicit substances;
- behaviour in classrooms, on school grounds, on buses, at school functions, and to and from school;
- carrying of weapons or replicas;
- sexual harassment;
- violence or threats of violence; and
- acts of discrimination.

We also found that most school administrators develop codes with input from their staff as well as from parents and students (Exhibit 11).

Students are more likely to follow codes of conduct if expectations and consequences are clear to them. For students at all levels, this requires more than simply speaking about expectations; it requires that teachers help them by modelling and encouraging appropriate actions in all parts of the school. It is also important that students be involved in the discussions to develop guidelines for acceptable behaviour, so that what is not acceptable and what the consequences are for non-compliance can be clarified. As well, school staff need to apply the rules consistently to motivate students to follow them. This was confirmed in our visits to schools where school-wide

Exhibit 10

Percentage of school administrators who say codes of conduct are:

	% Elementary Schools				% Secondary Schools			
	Mostly	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Mostly	Often	Sometimes	Rarely
Understood by students	67	25	7	1	69	24	7	
Understood by staff	80	16	3	1	77	20	3	
Followed by students	62	33	4	1	55	40	5	
Followed by staff	75	22	2	1	65	30	5	
Enforced by administrators	81	14	4	1	77	22	1	
Enforced by other staff	61	30	8	1	41	41	17	1
Supported by parents	65	27	7	1	62	33	5	

Source: Auditor General of British Columbia School Administrator Survey, October 1999

Exhibit 11

Percentage of school administrators who develop codes of conduct with input from others

Input from:	Elementary	Secondary
Students	78%	87%
Staff	99%	99%
Parents	92%	88%

Source: Auditor General of British Columbia School Administrator Survey, October 1999

initiatives such as the Effective Behaviour Support approach (described earlier under “Programs for Developing Pro-social Skills and Reducing Aggression”) are being used.

We acknowledge that efforts required to enforce proper student behaviour can take time away from the teaching and mentoring of students. However, it is important to ensure that students know what is expected of them and that staff members take action if students go beyond what is acceptable. Only then can all students begin to feel safe to learn and develop. Furthermore, school staff should be able to recover time invested in clarifying behaviour expectations and monitoring and enforcing them by spending less time dealing with behaviour problems that would otherwise result.

Recommendation 14:

School districts should encourage school staff to clarify and enforce student behaviour expectations that are included in school codes of conduct.

Students need more support in reporting concerns about school staff

Although the leading form of aggression in schools is believed to be by students toward other students, there is also the issue of teacher to student aggression. We found that more needs to be done to encourage students to report instances where teachers do not treat them with respect.

Formal means exist for addressing concerns about teacher behaviour in interactions with students. The BC Teachers’ Federation (BCTF) has developed a Teacher Code of Ethics that spells out expectations for appropriate teacher behaviour, including respectful treatment of students, colleagues and parents.

In our school visits, however, administrators told us they sometimes have difficulty in dealing with reports of teacher mistreatment of students. Protocol requires that parents or students who wish to complain about a teacher’s behaviour first be referred to that teacher. If parents or students are not able to resolve the matter in this way, the school administrator can then meet with the teacher to discuss what has been reported. Administrators said they are sometimes reluctant to do this because teachers may file a grievance that they are being harassed. The process for dealing with grievances can be long and time-consuming.

Also, secondary students told us they have no one they can turn to when it comes to discussing or reporting mistreatment at the hands of one of their teachers. Students reported that other

teachers or counsellors usually say that their professional ethics prevent them from listening to complaints about colleagues. In our conversations with officials of the BCTF, we found there is a section of their code of ethics requiring teachers to speak directly to their colleagues about any concerns they have about the person's behaviour. We were assured that this requirement should not keep teachers or counsellors from listening to student reports of teacher mistreatment. If, however, the teacher listening to the complaints thinks the teacher in question should be reported for the incident, he or she must first speak with the other teacher to hear what the latter has to say.

While there may be some discomfort on the part of school administrators or other teachers about listening to student or parent reports of teacher mistreatment, we believe it is imperative that students and their concerns be treated with respect. Otherwise it is very easy for students to become discouraged and lose interest in doing well in school.

At the same time, we recognize how important it is that teachers be given specific details about instances where students or parents think they have been disrespectful. We were told by the BCTF that teachers file grievance claims when administrators make vague references to their behaviour and they cannot get specific details about what is behind the complaints.

The whole process of telling a person that his or her behaviour is causing someone else discomfort can be a difficult one. In the case of administrators, it is understandable that they would be reluctant to spell out details of complaints made against a teacher if a parent or student has requested anonymity, or if they are concerned they will say something to jeopardize their working relationship with the teacher. As for students, it is equally understandable that they would be reluctant to complain directly to the teacher who they believe is not treating them properly—especially given the authority the teacher has to assign discipline and marks to the student.

For these reasons, we would like to see administrators learn to approach teachers with appropriate details to discuss complaints from parents and students. Giving teachers constructive feedback about their perceived behaviour might help not only to reduce the number of grievances filed but also to improve the school environment. At the same time, we would also encourage administrators to accept that managing the grievance process is a necessary part of their jobs, and that they should learn how to make the process go as smoothly as possible.

Recommendation 15:

The Ministry of Education should work with school districts to develop specific guidance for school administrators on how to give feedback to teachers in a constructive way, and on how to manage the grievance process.

As well, we would like to see ways developed for student concerns about teacher mistreatment to be heard. We acknowledge that the majority of teachers are working hard to deliver a good education to their students. As in any profession, however, there is likely to be a small percentage of people who misuse their position of authority—even inadvertently (for example, by using sarcasm as a means of controlling students). As part of a safe learning environment, it is vital that students have a means for reporting inappropriate actions of teachers. Those responsible for listening and following up with teachers who are reported will have to be trained in handling potentially awkward situations, in ensuring that the teachers in question are given an opportunity to be heard, and in maximizing the likelihood that teacher behaviour will be modified if the need is confirmed.

There are existing processes that can be enhanced to serve this purpose. For example, student safety committees could survey students to find out their concerns. Reports could then be given to teachers directly, without revealing the names of students who have expressed concerns. If, after a time, teacher behaviours were to continue to cause student discomfort, the committee could then report to school administrators. As well, there may be merit to conducting student evaluations of teachers similar to those done at institutes of higher learning.

The above discussion is focused mainly on student interactions with teachers because of the higher frequency of interaction compared to that with school administrators. However, suggestions for teacher mistreatment of students also apply in cases where school administrators act inappropriately. Given the imbalance of power between students and school staff it is vital that existing processes for reporting any inappropriate behaviour on the part of school staff be supported by an outside agency. School boards are responsible for oversight of how students as well as school staff are treated in schools. Teachers and administrators have professional associations to support them in situations where behaviour is questioned. Parents have local, district and provincial parent associations to support them in expressing concerns to school or district staff.

However, students say they do not always tell their parents when they believe they have been mistreated by school staff. Students do not have their own agency to advocate for their fair treatment, and student council members are said to face the same difficulties as individual students when it comes to raising concerns on behalf of other students. While we encourage those in the school system to look for ways to enhance means students currently have for reporting concerns (such as improving student council reporting and student safety committee surveys), we recognize that change takes time.

In the meantime, the onus falls on the shoulders of school boards to investigate matters reported by students about possible mistreatment by school staff. School district personnel and school board trustees in the districts we visited explained to us that parent complaints to that level are followed up. However, in our conversations with parents and students, we found there is a widely held perception that reports of mistreatment are not always listened to. Students and parents also expressed reservations about reporting incidents of school staff mistreatment out of a concern for retribution.

For these reasons, we think boards should do more to encourage students and parents to come forward with concerns. We expect that board trustees and district personnel will continue to take responsibility for ensuring that school staff are also fairly treated in the process. This recommendation is not meant to subvert existing steps for dealing with reports of school staff mistreatment of students, rather to complement it by clarifying what parents and students can do if earlier steps for addressing concerns do not produce the desired results.

Recommendation 16:

School districts should encourage students to come forward with concerns about how school staff are interacting with them. This should include better means for reporting and follow up at the school level as well as the school district level if concerns are not properly addressed.

Better coordination is needed with Ministry for Children & Families staff

Students who have been assigned Ministry for Children & Families (MCF) case workers because of problems with the justice system or the need for protection from family violence or neglect may be more likely to become involved in aggression and its related behaviours. Therefore, teachers, school administrators and counsellors need to coordinate their behaviour modification efforts with those of MCF staff. This

usually involves sharing information about what is happening in the students' lives, both in and out of school.

School staff report having difficulty contacting MCF staff and involving them in meetings to discuss concerns about these “at risk” students. Even when contact is made, further difficulties arise when MCF staff either withhold vital information (for example, that the student is under stress because of abuse at home) or do not seem to want the information teachers are trying to give them (for example, that the student has not been attending school regularly). In speaking to representatives from MCF, we concluded that the focus of MCF staff on protecting a child (often from an extreme case of family abuse) sometimes leads them to minimize the relative seriousness of school problems, such as the student missing school.

A number of *Inter-Ministerial Protocols for the Provision of Support Services to Schools* were originally developed in 1989, in response to a call from the Royal Commission on Education for better coordination of school services. These protocols were between the then ministries of Education, Social Services & Housing, Health and Solicitor General, and covered a range of services:

- Generalized School Health Services;
- School Environment and the Inspection of Schools;
- In-School Support for Special Needs Students;
- Services to Children and Young People with Severe Mental, Behavioural and Emotional Disorders;
- Psychological Services to Children and Young Persons of School Age;
- Family and Child Services to Support Children in Schools; and
- Policing in School and on School Property.

Since then, provision of services by the various agencies involved in schools has improved somewhat. However, in some school districts there are still difficulties in coordinating services to troubled students—particularly with respect to the Ministry of Education and the Ministry for Children & Families.

We explored this issue because it was raised in the Ombudsman's 1995 *Fair Schools* report, and because it was identified as a continuing concern during our school district visits.

One underlying reason for the coordination problem between the two ministries is that of differing priorities, although both have a mandate to provide services for children

and youth. The resources of MCF are often focused on child protection from family abuse. This does not leave much time to dedicate to prevention of further problems, such as those that affect the same children in their school life. For example, teachers told us that MCF staff often develop student care plans without teacher input, and do not consistently attend case management meetings to develop strategies for dealing with student school problems.

Our survey found that 79% of teachers who have tried to obtain information about their students from the MCF staff have had some difficulty. In discussions with MCF staff, however, we were told that the problem of sharing information goes both ways.

A recent review of inter-ministry protocols involving school system staff and MCF staff found that:

- There is widespread support for protocols as a means to provide a vision, framework for service delivery and practice and clear delineation of roles and responsibilities.
- There have been philosophical and thus practice shifts in some areas that are not well understood or accepted. Service practice and philosophy has shifted in the past decade, and different players do not understand or appreciate the new roles and responsibilities of other parties.
- Shifts in governance structure, mandates and priorities are not well understood. Staff were not clear about which organization and who was responsible for which service or activity.

The problems identified above have led to a lack of clarity at the working level about responsibilities for sharing information and the level of detail that is appropriate. In our view, for example, MCF staff should inform teachers if a student is likely to be upset or distracted because a family member is about to go to court, even though it would not be possible to discuss the details of the court case.

Good coordination and cooperation has occurred in some school districts. For example, the Central Okanagan School District has developed a protocol agreement with the RCMP and MCF for managing cases of students who have been assigned probation officers or social program officers. We were told that clarifying roles and responsibilities and strengthening commitments to share appropriate information has helped to reduce communication problems considerably between schools and these other agencies.

Prince George School District also has a unique model for coordinating the sharing of information about students who have behaviour or family problems. This district has established an Area Support Team of school-based social workers who: counsel students and parents; consult with classroom teachers about a particular child's needs; provide diagnostic assessments; participate on school-based teams to design programs and services for students with problems; serve as liaisons between the school, families and community agencies; and coordinate services with other community resources. We were told that this approach works well because it is focused on the needs of the individual students.

The Ministry of Education has recognized that better coordination between districts and other agencies is needed, and has recently developed templates for school districts to use in developing or revising protocol agreements. The templates provide examples of four-way protocols to assist districts in negotiating agreements and clarifying roles of staff (from the ministries of Education and Children & Families, school districts and law enforcement agencies) in managing cases for students who have been assigned social program officers or probation officers.

We believe that proper case management for "at risk" students is necessary to enhance their ability to perform in school. Both MCF and school staff must be willing to take the time to discuss issues that concern the students involved, even if it means investing time before, during or after school hours. The time spent will pay off in the production of plans that coordinate teacher and social worker efforts for the good of the students involved.

Recommendation 17:

School districts should develop ways to improve case management for "at risk" students, involving school staff and staff from the Ministry for Children & Families.



evaluation of safe learning initiatives

To know where resources should be best focused to foster a safe learning environment, the Ministry of Education and school districts have to evaluate the results of their efforts and determine what is working and what is not working. As well, results information has to be reported to the Legislative Assembly and the public so that informed decisions can be made about how best to fund school system efforts.

We looked for ministry processes for evaluating the results of its safe learning initiatives and identifying provincial “safe learning” issues. We expected the ministry to have developed ways for schools and districts to monitor levels and types of aggression, so that strategies to address impediments to safe learning can be designed, tested and reported on.

As well, we expected schools to use ministry-accepted indicators and systems to record and track data on factors related to student aggression, and to provide summaries to school districts for monitoring purposes. We expected that districts would then be able to identify whether school efforts to reduce aggression are working and to make modifications where they are needed.

Conclusion

The British Columbia public school system began to introduce a number of safe schools initiatives in late 1997 and early 1998. The ministry evaluated one of the key components, the Effective Behaviour Support program, in the early stages of its implementation and found that, although a few weaknesses were identified, it was considered to be worthwhile. A more current evaluation is underway; however, results were not available at the time of this report. Other components of safe learning initiatives, such as the BC Safe Schools Centre and various school district initiatives, have yet to be evaluated.

The ministry measures and reports on student academic performance as its main means of evaluating the success of the school system on a provincial basis. The ministry and some school districts also survey students to determine attitudes as they relate to student aggression. McCreary Centre Society surveys on reported student behaviours suggest that levels of aggression have not changed in recent years, but that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and sexually-exploited youth are more often impacted than other students. Our teacher and

school administrator surveys suggest that some forms of student aggression have increased and are shifting to earlier grades.

The survey data available is based mostly on people's perceptions of aggressive behaviours, however. While this is likely to be a good indicator of actual behaviour levels generally, more work is needed to collect and analyze data about underlying reasons for aggression, where it is occurring, and which strategies are working to reduce it.

Findings

Students report levels of aggression are unchanged in recent years

The McCreary Centre Society, a non-profit society concerned with the health of young people in British Columbia, conducted surveys of British Columbia students enrolled in grades 7 through 12, in 1992 and 1998 (Appendix C: 29, 30, 31). Almost 26,000 students around the province responded to the survey, which was administered by public health personnel in schools.

When we compared McCreary survey results to those prepared by Health Canada for students nation-wide (Appendix B) on aggressive behaviours, smoking and substance abuse, we found that behaviours of British Columbia students are not significantly different from their counterparts in the rest of Canada.

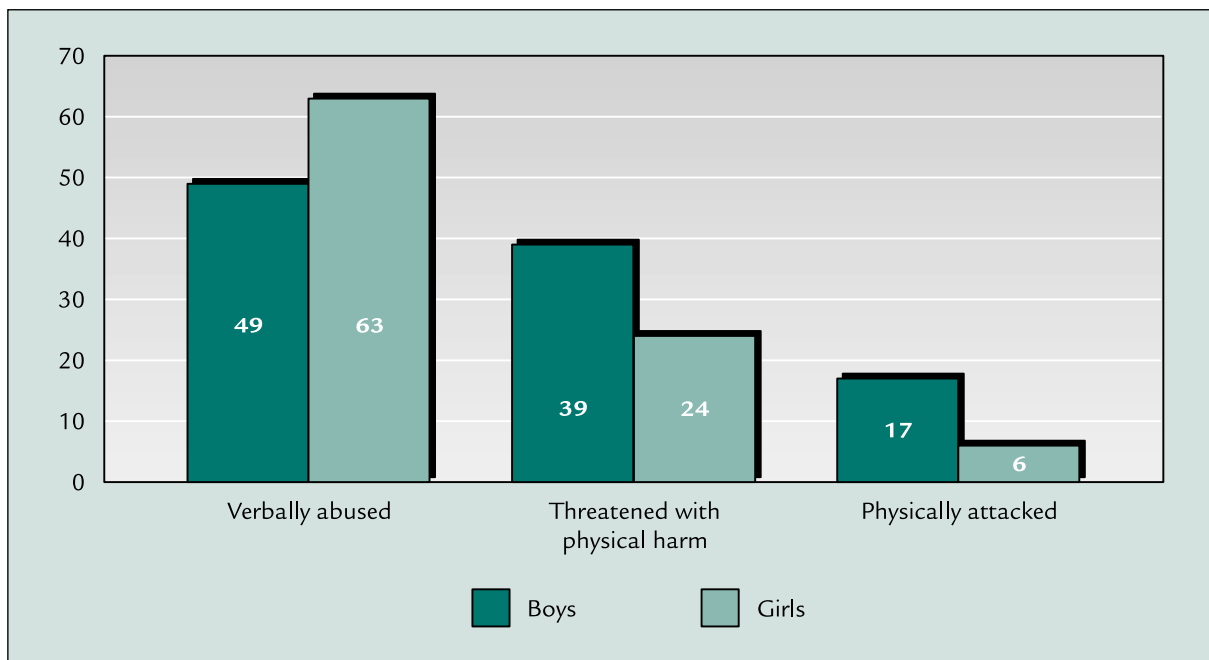
McCreary has also conducted recent studies involving smaller groups of sexually exploited youth and those who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender, the results of which are shown below. (Health Canada has not studied student sexual activity, sexual exploitation or sexual orientation.)

Aggressive Behaviours

The McCreary survey found no significant change in aggressive behaviours between 1992 and 1998. According to student reports of school behaviour, those who had been involved in fights during the year remained stable at 42% of boys and 18% of girls, with fewer of these in grades 11 and 12. More girls than boys reported they had been made to "feel badly or extremely uncomfortable" by verbal comments three or more times in the year, and more of the boys had been threatened with physical harm or actually attacked three or more times (Exhibit 12). As well, only about half of all students said that they always feel safe at school, with far fewer students in grade 8 feeling safe (39%) than in grade 12 (58%).

Exhibit 12

Percentage of British Columbia students subject to verbal abuse, threats or physical attacks in the 1997/98 school year



Source: Prepared from McCreary Centre Society data in *Healthy Connections: Listening to BC Youth-Highlights from the Adolescent Health Survey II (1999)*

Behaviours Related to Aggression

The McCreary survey also asked students about smoking, substance abuse, sexual activity, sexual orientation and sexual exploitation. These factors have been linked to lower levels of student school connectedness that are, in turn, linked to involvement in aggression. We think it is therefore worthwhile noting the information gathered by McCreary.

It appears that students are no more likely to smoke or drink nowadays, and more of them are abstaining from sex until after age 17. Drug use is, however, on the increase. Another cause for concern is that students of same sex orientation or who have been sexually exploited are far more likely to be involved in aggression or related behaviours.

Smoking

The McCreary report suggests that smoking by British Columbia students had not changed significantly from 1992 to 1998. Data shows that 45% had tried smoking, 10% were smoking every day, and girls were more likely to smoke than boys.

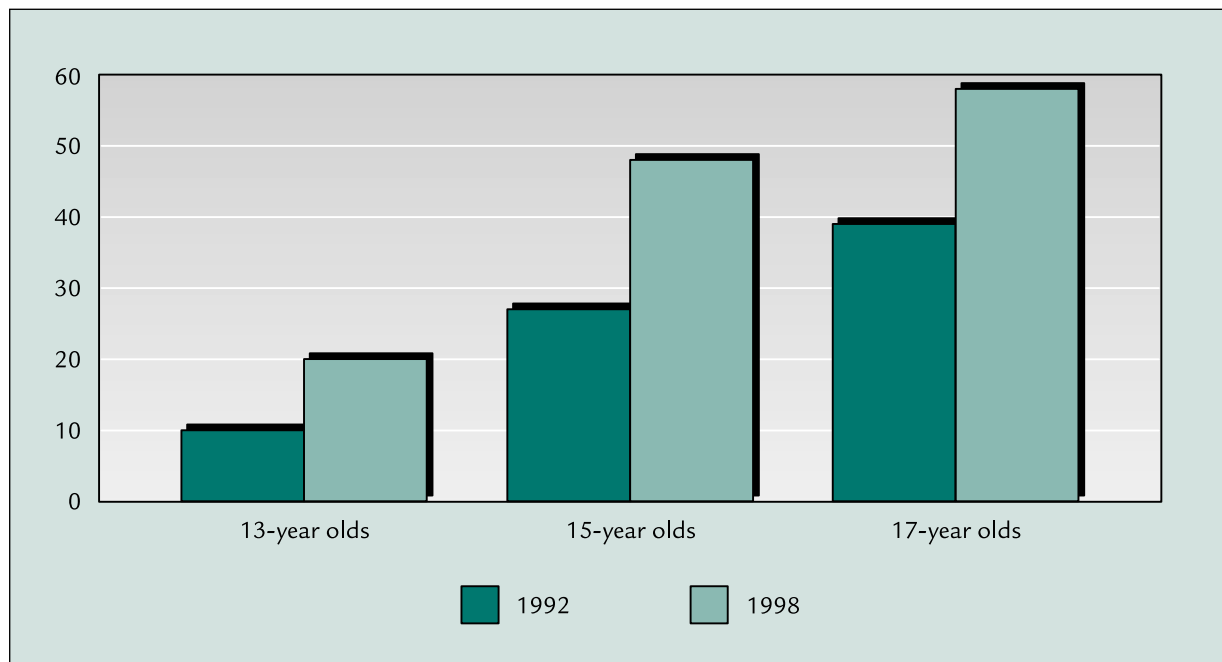
Substance Abuse

McCreary results also suggest that patterns of alcohol use have not changed since 1992, with about 37% of students in total saying they have not tried drinking. Experimentation increases with age, rising from 47% of boys and 41% of girls at age 13 to about 80% for both boys and girls at age 17. Of those who did use alcohol, about 44% said they had engaged in heavy drinking in the past month.

Drug use among teens, on the other hand, was found to be up from 1992. The biggest increase was in marijuana use: 40% of students in 1998, compared to 25% in 1992, had tried it at least once and 13% had used it forty or more times. The use in 13-year olds doubled from 10% to 20% in the six year period (Exhibit 13). McCreary data shows that 76% of students had not used any of the harder drugs such as cocaine, hallucinogens, mushrooms, inhalants, amphetamines or heroin. However, 6% of students reported having used at least one of these 10 or more times.

Exhibit 13

Percentage of British Columbia students experimenting with marijuana



Source: Prepared from McCreary Centre data in *Healthy Connections: Listening to BC Youth-Highlights from the Adolescent Health Survey II* (1999)

Sexual Activity

According to McCreary, a greater number of British Columbia youth are now abstaining from sexual intercourse—from 50% of 17-year-olds in 1992 to 58% in 1998. However, those who are sexually active are not using birth control as often: only 75% of students reported using methods other than withdrawal in 1998 compared to 80% in 1992; and condom use had not increased—in both surveys, 54% reported using a condom the last time they had intercourse.

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Youth

A 1999 McCreary Centre report, *Being Out*, revealed that lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth:

- are at higher risk of suicide compared to their heterosexual peers—25% of LGBT youth attempted suicide in 1998 as compared to 7% of heterosexual (LGBT) youth;
- find the school setting neither safe nor supportive—37% of LGBT youth reported that they “almost always” or “always” feel like an outsider at school, and 82% said that other students at school “sometimes” or “often” make homophobic remarks; and
- are more vulnerable than heterosexual youth to self-destructive behaviours such as substance abuse and risky sexual behaviours (for example, 75% reported having tried marijuana compared to 58% of all grade 12 students; and 62% of sexually active males did not use a condom the last time they had sex as compared to 46% of other sexually active youth).

Sexually Exploited Youth

The McCreary Centre conducted a health survey of young people involved in the sex trade in four areas of the province—Kamloops, Kelowna, Nanaimo and Prince George—and reported the results in *Our Kids Too: Sexually Exploited Youth in BC* (1999). Ninety percent of those surveyed had been physically or sexually abused prior to entering the sex trade (at an average age of 13); almost all smoked; most were frequent users of drugs and alcohol; and nearly half had tried to commit suicide in the past year. Seventy-five percent were still attending school, but 61% were one or more grade levels behind.

School staff report increases in aggressive behaviours

Teachers told us they see increases in certain behaviours (Exhibit 14). Secondary teachers see significant numbers of their students swearing, being verbally abusive, making negative references to sexual orientation, and demonstrating the effects of substance abuse. At the elementary level, trash talk, rough-play and verbal abuse are the most common forms of aggression observed. Teachers also believe some behaviours—such as swearing and trash talk, rough-play, verbal and physical abuse, vandalism and theft, substance abuse, signs of depression and suicidal gestures—have increased in the past few years, while others continue at about the same level. As well, 85% of school administrators also reported a shift to earlier grades in the types and frequency of behaviour problems.

Exhibit 14

Percentage of teachers who observe the following behaviours

	Elementary Schools			Secondary Schools		
	Rarely or never	On occasion	Often	Rare or or never	On occasion	Often
Swearing or trash talk	27	59	14*	9	39	52*
Rough “play”	7	66	27*	24	57	19*
Verbal abuse (rumours, insults or threats intended to hurt or threaten others)	22	59	19*	15	52	33*
Physical abuse (pushing, hitting or fighting fighting intended to hurt or threaten others)	20	67	13*	42	49	9*
Sexual harassment	86	13	1	47	42	11
Negative references to sexual orientation	68	28	4	23	52	25
Negative references to race or culture	56	41	3	31	55	14
Drinking or using illicit drugs	93	6	1	19	40	41*
Brandishing or using weapons	95	5	–	89	11	–
Vandalism or theft	52	45	3	27	58	15*
Gang actions	91	9	–	77	21	2
Signs of depression suicidal gestures	43	54	3	19	68	13
*Teachers report increases in behaviours marked						

Source: Auditor General of British Columbia Teacher Survey, October 1999

The Ministry of Education reports on academic performance but does not use it to identify safe learning concerns

The primary measure used by the Ministry of Education to assess results of the school system is academic performance, most of which is shown on the ministry's website (Exhibit 15). The focus on academic results reflects the fact that the primary goal of the school system is intellectual development of students. This information is not, however, supplemented with sufficient information about student attitudes or behaviours to be able to tell whether a safe learning environment has been established. Nor is academic information used to investigate possible problems in the learning environment.

Given that results in the form of academic performance are readily available, it is possible that they could be used to also determine where potential problems exist when it comes to provision of a safe learning environment.

Recommendation 18:

The Ministry of Education should consider examining schools and districts where student academic performance is significantly below provincial averages, so that underlying reasons can be identified and possibly addressed.

School accreditation assessments could be used to assess safe learning

About 280 schools are under accreditation review each year in British Columbia. The accreditation process requires schools to collect and report data on a range of topics, some of which relate to the provision of a safe learning environment. These include:

- the school's provision of a safe and accessible learning environment for all students;
- students' tolerance and respect for the ideas and beliefs of others;
- students' knowledge, skills and attitudes related to the Personal Planning/Career and Personal Planning curriculum;
- students' sense of self-confidence and personal initiative; and
- students' sense of social responsibility.

Assessments of the above topics can provide information about where problems are and whether existing strategies are working. One flaw we identified with this process, however, is that much of the information reported comes from opinion surveys rather than from reports on actual behaviours. Also, those we interviewed on the subject told us that the usefulness of the process depends on the ability of those involved to identify problems and plan for improvements.

Exhibit 15

Sample of performance information provided by the Ministry of Education

Provincial Learning Assessment and Foundation Skills Assessments programs (PLAP and FSA)

The PLAP periodically measures student performance. As part of this program, the FSAs are used to test all grade 4, 7 and 10 students each year in reading, writing and numeracy. The first FSA report, published in 1999, provided results only for provincial and district levels. In future years, the ministry plans to publish results for each school and to make individual student marks available to students and their parents. (Results are available at <http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/assessment/fsa/welcome.htm>.)

National and International Assessment Results

British Columbia has participated in a number of national and international assessments. The most recent was Canada's School Achievement Indicators Program (SAIP) assessment of mathematics in 1999. Internationally, the province participated in the 1995 *Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS)*. (Results are available at http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/assessment/nat_int_assess.htm.)

Aboriginal Education Results

A May 1999 Ministry of Education publication, *How Are We Doing? An Overview of Aboriginal Education Results for the Province of BC* (<http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/abed/>), reported that aboriginal children in the province are much less likely to complete high school than non-aboriginal children. This report, to be repeated annually from now on, indicated that aboriginal students in British Columbia make up about 7% of school enrollment in most schools, yet 64 % of them did not graduate within six years of entering grade 8 (compared to 26% of non-aboriginal students). The ministry compared aboriginal student performance by school district and found that, although results are much lower than for non-aboriginal students in every district, aboriginal students do significantly better in some districts than others.

The report also noted that aboriginal students are disproportionately represented in most Special Education programs, including those for students with "severe behaviour" problems (less than 1% of non-aboriginals compared to 3.5% of aboriginal students are classified as "severe behaviour").

Other information in Ministry Annual Report (1997/98)

- School completion rates—72% of students entering grade 12 in 1997/98 received a regular high school diploma, while another 11% received other certificates and diplomas, such as General Educational Development and Adult Basic Education certificates.
- Survey results of public satisfaction with the British Columbia public school system—89% want government to take steps to decrease youth violence and 53% perceive a lack of discipline in schools.
- Results of a survey of secondary students—54% did not agree their schools were doing a good job teaching them about the risks of drug and alcohol use; 45% of respondents did not agree students of all cultures, races and religions were treated equally in their school; and 50% of students believed their school was doing a poor or very poor job teaching them how to deal with depression. (Further information is available at <http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/aboutus/annualreport/>)

Source: Ministry of Education website <http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca>

Although school accreditations have been done on a regular basis over the years, the process is currently in question because of British Columbia Teachers' Federation objections about the amount of non-instructional time needed to prepare reports.

The process has been seen as more useful to those in the schools themselves than for the ministry. If concerns are identified during the accreditation process, schools are required to develop plans to address them, using funding provided for this purpose by the ministry. However, if concerns—including those around safe learning—are overlooked by accreditation teams, the ministry has no ready way of finding this out. As well, because each school decides how best to assess its performance, comparing or combining reported results would produce reports of questionable value.

It remains to be seen whether calls for streamlining the process will reduce the time required, yet still result in worthwhile data with which to identify problems and make improvements. In any case, we believe that some sort of system is needed to record data that can be used to identify and monitor student aggression. We give more details on this in the rest of this section of the report.

Effective Behaviour Support training seems worthwhile

As explained in our earlier section “Programs for Developing Pro-social Skills and Reducing Aggression,” Effective Behaviour Support (EBS) training began in 1997 as a key part of the ministry's safe learning initiatives. About one year into the training, the ministry surveyed those who had taken part to see if it was worthwhile. Results showed that those schools where an administrator participated in the training were far more likely to have implemented the principles. Also, although schools were not set up to properly record and track data on aggressive behaviours, anecdotal evidence suggested that EBS was contributing to reductions in aggression.

Based on these findings, the ministry then began to require that educators attend EBS training in school teams that included administrators. Anecdotal reports at annual follow-up sessions since then suggest that this has improved the likelihood that schools taking the EBS training will adopt a school-wide approach that leads to reductions in student aggression.

Although one of the key components of the EBS approach is to record and track incidents of aggression, most of the schools using EBS are not yet set up to do so. The discussion that follows is meant to address this.

School districts are not properly monitoring aggressive behaviour

Although school districts track suspension data, they do not usually record or analyze the underlying factors. Without such data, it is not possible to determine whether safe learning efforts are well placed.

Some districts, such as Sooke School District, have entered into agreements with local colleges and universities to develop and assess aggression-reduction initiatives (Exhibit 16).

Most school districts have not, however, entered into such agreements. The only indicator of aggression levels in most districts is the number of out-of-school suspensions referred to them for approval—namely those that are deemed to be serious enough to warrant more than a specified number of days (either 5 or 10 days, depending on which district it is).

Only one of the districts we visited is monitoring all out-of-school suspensions and the reasons for them. We were told

Exhibit 16

Sooke School District—Community Based Violence Prevention Project

The Sooke School District has been provided with additional resources by the University of Victoria (with the support of the BC Health Research Foundation) to develop and implement various programs for promoting a positive school climate and reducing student aggression. These range from student peer mediation efforts to equipment for noon-hour basketball games. Funding for this initiative has averaged about \$2,000–3,000 per school in 16 schools. The savings from the resulting 40% reduction in district vandalism has been approximately equal to the cost of providing the extra resources.

Students were surveyed on their attitudes toward aggression before the initiative started in 1995 and again in 1998. Data from annual incident reports was also used to track changes in student behaviours. Results of the study show that aggressive behaviours and support for them declined significantly, and students' sense of connectedness with their families and teachers improved.

Findings also suggest that gender differences persist across all programs, with aggression-reduction programs being less successful for boys because the messages are antithetical to their own concept of how the culture expects them to behave as males. Efforts to teach students to be more assertive and to report incidents of aggression were shown to be effective for reducing aggression directed at those students applying the skills learned, but not in changing the behaviour of those who were the aggressors.

Source: Prepared based on *A Community Based Violence Prevention Project: University of Victoria and School District 62 at Sooke*
BC Health Research Foundation Final Report, September 1999

that it is not practical to track all suspensions or to determine underlying reasons for them. We might have agreed with this had we not observed it being done in the Central Okanagan School District. There, district data on all suspensions, including the types of infraction, is routinely collected and analyzed.

As well, we found that a teacher-counsellor in the Prince George School District has developed a database package for school administrators to record details on behavioural incidents when students are referred to their offices for discipline. Names of the students and staff involved, time of day, location in the school, reasons for misbehaviour and the remedies applied can be recorded for entry to the database at the same time as the student interview is taking place or, if need be, at a later point in time. The database can then be used to track incidents of aggression by desired variable (that is, students, staff members, times of day, locations, types of behaviour and remedies applied). This data could be combined with information already produced on student absenteeism, another factor known to be linked with aggression-related behaviours, and on whether students are, or should have been, enrolled in early intervention reading or special needs programs.

We believe school administrators should be routinely recording and monitoring this type of data—along with information from surveys of student attitudes toward aggression and differences due to race or culture, sexual orientation, gender, physical appearance, athletic ability, or intellectual capability—to enable them to identify safe learning concerns and to design and assess strategies for dealing with them. The result would be a more complete picture of individual students, which could help teachers and administrators design strategies for assisting them to do better in school.

The ministry has the capability of providing individual schools and districts with access to its website. We believe that a database could be developed on the website, where data could be recorded using the indicators listed above. Schools and districts could then be encouraged to use the database to monitor school and district safe learning efforts. We met with Dr. George Sugai from the University of Oregon, who has set up such a database there for use by schools as part of the Effective Behaviour Support program (described earlier in this report). It seems that, after security controls over access to data were worked out, schools began using the database and producing reports that show how well they are doing. They have also been able to produce confidential reports on individual students for use in dealing with aggressive behaviours.

Concerns about confidential information can be addressed by avoiding the use of student names on the database. Each student in the province is assigned an education number that can be used to record and track individual information at the school level, but district and provincial summary links need not include the number.

We believe that implementing such a database in British Columbia would improve the ability of the ministry, school districts and schools to assess the results of safe learning efforts and to focus future initiatives where they will do the most good. As well, the ministry would then be able to publish reports of provincial results so the Members of the Legislative Assembly and the public can be better informed.

Recommendation 19:

The Ministry of Education should develop a database for monitoring student aggression and encourage input from, and use by, schools and districts so that province-wide efforts can be properly evaluated and, if need be, modified.



ministry response

Introduction

*The Ministry of Education welcomes the Auditor General’s report *Fostering a Safe Learning Environment: How the British Columbia Public School System Is Doing*. We support the efforts of the Office of the Auditor General in raising the profile of school safety concerns. The Ministry supports the purpose of the audit “to assess the extent to which the public school system in BC is fostering a safe learning environment—one in which students behave in a socially responsible manner, are treated with respect, and feel secure to engage in learning, safe from physical threat bullying, harassment, intimidation, intolerance.”*

We know that school and community safety are key concerns of British Columbians. The Ministry agrees with the Auditor General’s office that ensuring BC schools consistently provide safe learning environment is a complex task.

Government introduced the Safe Schools Initiative in 1997 to support schools and communities in the province. In our important work on the issue of safe schools, we are encouraged by the interest of the public and by the positive response of our education partners and communities across the province who are working with us to achieve positive school safety outcomes for learners in our schools. This support is critical because we know that achieving acceptable levels of school safety across the province takes more coordinated and sustained effort than can be mounted in schools alone. We agree that these efforts are worthwhile and that more needs to be done to implement and assess the outcomes of the Safe Schools Initiative.

When government began the Safe Schools Initiative, it was aware of a wide array of school and community efforts underway, sometimes on an ad hoc basis, to address safety concerns; many communities and schools had made successful starts in ensuring that schools are safe, caring and able to support students’ needs. The goals and objectives of the Safe Schools Initiative have been:

- *to raise awareness of safety concerns;*
- *to better coordinate community efforts through the Safe School Centre;*
- *to systematically address existing policy and resource gaps;*
- *to provide practical support to schools districts and schools as they respond to these concerns; and*
- *to support schools and the broader community in broadening and solidifying practices that promote pro-social skill development and reduce violence.*

We know that, when students' health, safety and well-being are not assured, they cannot learn and achieve to their potential. We know that the positive achievement levels of learners both while they are students and later in life contribute to the health and well being of families and communities.

Our schools reflect their local communities and are influenced by them, sometimes mirroring the violence that is present in society. However, schools are uniquely positioned to lead and model positive, constructive alternatives to violence and victimization. Students can be taught pro-social skills, and schools can lead communities by example.

The Ministry is particularly pleased to see the audit report's endorsement of school-wide approaches to school safety (such as those promoted in the Effective Behavior Support project and the Focus on Bullying program) and recognition that the investment of precious time and resources in preventing safety concerns by establishing positive school climate and culture proves to be cost effective. School that have undertaken these approaches have begun to report tangible results, including evidence that fewer resources are now being required to respond to discipline concerns, vandalism has been reduced, and students are more able to focus on learning.

Appendix A of the report provides a useful synthesis of underlying factors for aggressive behaviour, including circumstances of early childhood development, family background and community influence, school connectedness, entertainment and the media, gender, race, and culture.

The Auditor General's report provides support for what is currently working well and encourages the Ministry to sustain and enhance promising practices. The recommendations provide suggestions for improvement that will contribute to government's Safe Schools Initiative.

Many of the recommendations are congruent with the preliminary findings of three other government activities: the provincial Review of Special Education in British Columbia (Report, June 2000), the background research for the project to revise the Inter-Ministerial Protocols for the Provision of Support Services to Students (Report, June 2000) and work of the 1999/2000 Education Advisory Council in examining citizenship education and schools as sanctuaries in the lives of students.

We will address the key themes that emerge in the Auditor General's report. These include:

- 1. Government coordination of the Safe Schools Initiative*
- 2. Collaboration among government ministries and agencies*
- 3. Development, dissemination, and implementation of policies related to safety*
- 4. Curriculum and learning resources*

5. *Teacher preparation*
6. *Instructional practices and student behaviour*
7. *Accountability*

Ministry of Education Response to Key Themes of the Report

1. *Government coordination of the Safe Schools Initiative*

Although the considerable work that has been done to coordinate the efforts of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of the Attorney General for the Safe Schools Initiative is recognized, the audit report concluded that many educators are not aware of the resources developed by the Ministries and that other extensive resources available in the Safe School Centre are under utilized.

The report suggests that the Ministry review the mandate of the Centre and plan for better coordination of the activities of the Safe Schools Initiative.

Recommendation:

- ***The Ministry should along, with the Ministry of the Attorney General, develop ways of giving priority to improving the database and website of the BC Safe Schools Centre. (#2, page 42)***

The Ministry is committed to improving the coordination of the Safe Schools Centre through on-going planning with the partner Ministry of the Attorney General and host School District No. 41 (Burnaby), encouraging participation of other key Ministries in that dialogue, and revitalizing the Safe Schools Working Group comprised of education partners to serve in an advisory role to guide the long term planning of the Centre's activities.

The Safe Schools Initiative currently includes a variety of means to disseminate information and raise awareness of issues related to school safety. Each school district has been asked to appoint a person as the Safe Schools Contact for the district. Semi-annual meetings sponsored by the Initiative bring these contacts together for training and networking. They are also linked by e-mail and receive regular communications from the Safe School Centre staff. Regional Safe School/Community Meetings (offered in four locations across the province in each of the last two years) have been facilitated by the Ministries to enable key school district staff and community representatives to collaborate on local safety initiatives. New resources are shared at these gatherings with the expectation that they will be taken back to districts for use by educators and community agencies. Articles announcing new resources and activities of the Centre are regularly printed in BC Education News and Better Learning. The Centre website currently lists a data-base of the resources available to educators and community persons.

The Ministry learned from the audit report that the partner ministries should consider ways to enhance the website as a means for better dissemination and communication about available and planned resources to teachers. This work will be undertaken without delay.

2. Collaboration among government ministries and agencies

In general, the audit report is critical of the level of collaboration and information sharing among various ministries involved with children and youth. The report notes that the Ministry for Children and Families is not a partner in the Safe Schools Initiative.

This report confirms the findings of both the Review of Special Education in British Columbia and the preliminary work on the revision of the *Inter-Ministry Protocols for the Provision of Support Services to Schools* which indicate that increased effort needs to be directed to eliminating barriers to effective inter-ministry/inter-agency collaboration regarding issues about safety for children and support for children who need services.

The Auditor General found that school personnel are frustrated by the lack of involvement of MCF case workers in addressing students who are at risk or who display negative or violent behaviour in school. School personnel complain that the lack of information sharing may be putting students or school staff at risk. Schools and agencies have difficulty coordinating services for troubled students without the involvement of both school system and MCF staff. The report indicates that the school system needs support to improve case management for at risk students and develop with MCF staff better ways of working together to support students with behavioural needs.

Recommendation:

- ***School districts should develop ways to improve case management for “at risk” students, involving school staff and staff from the Ministry for Children and Families. (#17, page 78)***

The Ministries of Education and the other Ministries that provide services to children (Children and Families, Health, Attorney General) have committed resources to review the Protocols this year. One of the intended outcomes of the deliberations of the Protocol review is to develop guidelines for ensuring that support services for children are provided in a coordinated, effective, and integrated manner across the social service systems.

Integrated case management is a critical area in which sharing of information is needed to consistently support positive outcomes for students. Ministry guidelines for special education suggest appropriate instances in which to involve staff from agencies outside the school in integrated case management, particularly for students with behaviour

disorders. Part of the work of the Protocol review will address how to make this work more effectively for the benefit of students.

The first phase of Protocol revisions is due to be completed by December 2000.

3. Development, dissemination, and implementation of guidelines related to safety

The audit report is critical of the strategies used by government to release to the school system the resource guidelines to enhance school safety. The audit team found that there are existing problems with the coordination of resource guidelines to schools from various ministries and agencies. The report suggests that proper coordination of efforts is important, both in the development and in the issuing of resource guides. This needs to be done so that it supports rather than overwhelms the education system.

The audit indicates that school boards and schools need to take the lead in further developing local policies and procedures to implement the guidelines provided by the Safe Schools Initiative. For example, schools indicated that the guideline document Safe School Planning Guide is considered to be a useful tool, but few schools have yet used it to develop detailed school plans for improving safe learning environments.

Recommendation:

- ***The Ministry of Education should resolve with senior representatives of the ministries of the Attorney General and the Children and Families coordination problems in developing and distributing safe learning policy guidelines. (#11, page 66)***

The Ministry is committed to improving the means by which resources providing guidelines to schools are developed and distributed. We take seriously the advice of auditors that better coordination of our efforts is required. Staff will table this issue for the consideration of all partners in the Safe Schools Initiative.

The Ministry takes seriously the report's observations that not all educators are aware of resources available to them. We will strengthen the coordination between ministries of development and distribution of safe schools guideline resources.

The report calls on school boards to take action to make their school communities safer.

Recommendations:

- ***School districts should expand efforts to provide Effective Behaviour Support training. (#1, page 38)***
- ***Schools districts should find ways to improve the involvement of elementary school-ground supervisors in school initiatives to reduce aggression. (#3, page 46)***

- ***School district should do more to address student aggression at the secondary level, by increasing efforts to monitor and reduce aggression, and encouraging students to report concerns. (#4 page 49)***
- ***School districts should follow up on contributions by outside agencies to reduce aggression by making sure lessons presented are properly integrated with subsequent classroom exercises. Also, the extent to which presentations have been effective in influencing student attitudes and behaviours should be determined, possibly with the help of those who originally made the presentations. (#5, page 49)***
- ***All school district should have their own critical incident plans tailored to particular district and school circumstances. These plans should include details of who must do what, when, and where in a critical situation. As well, districts should periodically provide training and practice sessions to all school administrators. (#12, page 68)***
- ***Districts should offer more guidance to school administrators on how to improve learning environments through positive means, and so assist in reducing out-of-school suspensions. (#13, page 69)***
- ***School districts should encourage school staff to clarify and enforce student behavior expectations as communicated in school codes of conduct. (#14, page 72)***
- ***School districts should encourage students to come forward with concerns about how staff are interacting with them. This should include better means for reporting and follow up at the school level as well as the school district level if concerns are not properly addressed. (#16, page 75)***

Most of the school district practices recommended in the audit report are encouraged in activities and resources that have been developed through the Safe Schools Initiative.

The audit report identifies the need for schools to address playground safety. The Effective Behaviour Support (EBS) training funded by the Initiative addresses school/community issues of playground safety; the development, teaching and enforcement of Codes of Student Conduct; and the importance of carefully documenting troublesome behaviour in order to plan effectively to reduce it. Addressing playground safety is also part of the Focus on Bullying action planning for schools.

To reduce student-to-student aggressive behaviour in schools, the Initiative provided a comprehensive resource to elementary schools called Focus on Bullying: A Prevention Program for Elementary School Communities. This resource includes suggestions about

how to plan for prevention activities and gives resources to use with students and parents. A complementary resource for secondary school communities will be available in the school year 2000/2001 to assist secondary schools in decreasing aggressive student behaviour.

In 1998, the Ministry of Education provided a guide to school boards for developing local critical incident response plans. This resource called Responding to Critical Incidents: A Resource for Schools was distributed to schools and also included in the Safe Schools Kit. The Initiative supported a highly regarded provincial conference called Safe Schools, Safe Communities in Vancouver in Feb, 2000 to further implement the practice of effective critical incidents planning.

Another resource developed as part of the Initiative is a handbook for schools called Focus on Suspension: A Resource for Schools which encourages schools to consider alternatives to out of school suspension.

The Auditor General's report clearly indicates the need to identify strategies to support school districts in consistently implementing these safety practices in BC schools.

The report suggests that the Ministry work with school districts to develop more effective ways to provide feedback to teachers about their teaching practice and how it affects students. The auditors found that some school administrators find that the existing grievance procedures in some school districts makes it difficult to provide guidance to teachers about how to better handle student behaviour and other aspects of their work with learners.

Recommendation:

- ***The Ministry work with school districts to develop specific guidance for school administrators on how to give feedback to teachers in a constructive way, and on how to manage the grievance process. (#15, page 74)***

The Ministry will explore opportunities to raise the awareness of safe school issues with school system leaders and explore the means to support leadership development in this area. The Ministry will also examine how best to link these recommendations to related recommendations contained in the Review of Special Education in British Columbia (Report, June 2000). A critical part of this work will involve encouraging the BC School Trustees Association, BC School Superintendents' Association, and BC Principals' and Vice Principals' Association to work with their members to address these leadership concerns. The Ministry of Education will pass this recommendation on to the BC Public School Employee's Association, which is responsible for labour relations issues in school districts.

4. Curriculum and learning resources

The Auditor General found that the British Columbia curriculum guides contain outcomes for student learning which promote pro-social behaviour of students. Teachers told the auditors that they need more help deciding which recommended learning resources would best serve them in implementing the Personal Planning and Career and Personal Planning Curriculum.

Recommendation:

- ***The Ministry of Education should re-organize the grade collection for Career and Personal Planning to assist secondary teachers in ranking the usefulness of listed resources, and notify teachers when it is available. (#6, page 53)***

In response to concerns of educators and as part of its larger work plan, the Ministry has re-organized the Personal Planning K–7 grade collections (lists of Ministry recommended resources for each grade) so that recommended resources are more easily referenced to specific outcomes in the Personal Planning curriculum guide. The grade collection for Career and Personal Planning 8–12 was the first such list produced by the Ministry in its project to re-develop curriculum guides as Integrated Resource Packages and thus it differs from the Personal Planning K–7 grade collection format. The Ministry will consider the feasibility of reformatting the CAPP 8–12 grade collections list in the next fiscal year.

The Ministry does not recommend a single resource as the best for a purpose, since local priorities and community needs vary across the province. Teachers need to use their professional judgment to decide which resources best fit the needs of their students and communities.

The audit found that teachers realize the importance of providing instruction on sensitive topics such as substance abuse, suicide and depression, and sexual orientation but that some do not feel prepared or comfortable to provide instruction in these areas to students. Various organizations are providing in-service opportunities, but teachers still feel they need suitable resources to support their efforts and in-service on how to use these resources effectively.

Recommendation:

- ***The Ministry of Education should identify or develop suitable resources for teachers and students to recognize and report student depression and suicidal gestures. (#8, page 60)***

The Ministries of Education and Children and Families have initiated a project to raise the capacity of schools and communities to recognize and help students who are at risk of suicide. The Ministry

of Education has very recently prepared, in collaboration with the BC Council for Families, an informative brochure for school personnel, Suicide—What You Need to Know. A Guide for School Personnel. It has been adapted from the Ask, Assess, Act Suicide Intervention Training Program offered by the BC Council for Families, for the purpose of providing educators with critical information about why students consider suicide, who is at risk, warning signs, and how to seek help. This brochure will be issued to schools in the fall in conjunction with suicide prevention training activities in BC communities.

On another mental health issue, the Ministry of Education is currently working with the Ministry for Children and Families and community agencies to help professionals become more skilled in recognizing students who are in the early stages of serious mental illness and more able to refer them to prevention and intervention services. The Ministry for Children and Families is the lead in this Early Psychosis Identification and Intervention project which is intended to provide information and training to communities across the province. It is expected that training for key contacts in the school system will be initiated in the fall. In addition, the Ministry of Education is scheduled to begin work this fiscal year on a resource guide to assist educators in recognizing and supporting students with mental health disorders (such as depression) so that they might effectively partner with health professionals who provide primary care for these students.

Recommendation:

- ***The Ministry of Education should provide teachers with suitable guidance for encouraging tolerance and respect for students of same sex orientation. (#9, page 62)***

The topic of same sex orientation calls for sensitivity at Ministry, school board, school, classroom, and personal levels. The Ministry has just completed a draft Diversity Policy Framework which will be implemented in the 2000/2001 school year through the Ministry's Field Services Branch to support school boards in promoting and teaching tolerance, celebrating diversity, and addressing issues of racism, homophobia, and sexism.

Some beginning steps in this regard have been taken with the development and implementation of two resources—Focus on Bullying: A Prevention Program for Elementary School Communities and the soon to be completed Focus on Intimidation and Harassment: A Resource for Secondary Schools.

5. Teacher preparation

The audit report points out that pre-service courses for teachers do not require training in classroom behaviour intervention strategies. To foster a safe learning environment, teachers need to enhance their abilities to address the diverse needs of students, including their behavioural needs. Because every class in BC is likely to have one or more students who pose challenging behaviour, it is critical that teachers develop these skills.

Recommendation:

- ***The Ministry of Education should call for meetings with the province's universities and the College of Teachers to emphasize the need for mandatory pre-service courses for teachers on classroom strategies for dealing with difficult behaviours and the delivery of Personal Planning and Career and Personal Planning curriculum. (#7, page 55)***

The Ministry agrees that teachers in training need instruction and practice in using behaviour management strategies, as well as training in how to meet the diverse needs of learner in today's school classrooms. This recommendation is similar to one in the Review of Special Education in British Columbia (Report, June 2000) which suggests that teachers need more course work and practica in teaching students with special needs in regular classroom settings. The Ministry will need to devise a strategy for working with teacher education institutions across the Province in considering this recommendation, which is beyond the mandate of the Ministry.

The wide diversity of topics in the Career and Personal Planning (CAPP) and the requisite teacher skills and knowledge to effectively deliver this instruction have been teacher concerns. In its budget submission to Treasury Board for 2001/2002, the Ministry will propose a comprehensive program for CAPP enhancement, including teacher professional development.

The audit report raises the issue of prevention of behaviour problems in students by early identification and intervention to meet their difficulties in learning. The auditors pose the question whether it would benefit students and make schools safer places to learn if teachers were better able to assess learning difficulties, thus reducing the likelihood that students will develop aggressive or at-risk behaviours.

Recommendation:

- ***The Ministry of Education should assess the extent to which teachers would benefit from training in identifying students' special needs and in adapting teaching strategies to meet those needs. The initial focus should be on elementary teachers, to***

increase the chances that students will start off with the help they need to develop a positive relationship with their teachers and peers. (#10, page 63)

This recommendation is also congruent with recommendations from the Review of Special Education in British Columbia (Report, June 2000) that students will benefit when teachers assess and intervene early to meet their learning difficulties. Many school boards have already recognized the importance of identifying students early for intensive support. The Ministry will consider how best to enhance the capacity of classroom teachers to increase this practice.

The Ministry has recently provided teachers in BC with Performance Standards to help them in assessing student progress. One of the areas for which standards were developed is citizenship/social responsibility. These benchmark standards, developed with educators in the field, provide useful descriptions of student performance to assist teachers in assessing students along a continuum of development. It is hoped that these standards documents will support teachers in making judgments about student learning and behaviour and planning appropriate interventions. The preliminary response to these new tools from school districts has been very positive.

6. Instructional practices and student behaviour

Citing research that shows that out-of-school suspensions are not very effective at changing student behaviour, and that the practice of suspending students can have unintended negative effects, the audit report calls on school districts to find alternatives to suspension. The audit suggests that schools would benefit from inservice to support development of effective alternatives to suspension.

Recommendation:

- **School districts should offer more guidance to school administrators on how to improve the learning environments through positive means, so to assist in reducing the use of out-of-school suspensions. (#13, page 69)**

The Ministry took steps in 1999 to encourage school officials to reduce the use of school suspension by providing all school administrators with a resource as part of the Safe Schools Initiative called Focus on Suspension: A Resource For Schools. This handbook has sparked discussions in some areas of the Province and ways could be explored to further implement the resource as part of the Initiative.

The Review of Special Education in British Columbia (Report, June 2000) also speaks to the issue of school suspension, and strategies will be identified in the months ahead to support boards in ensuring effective practices.

The audit report favours the Effective Behaviour Support training project in British Columbia and recommends that opportunities to receive this training be continued and augmented.

Recommendation:

- **The Ministry expand efforts to provide EBS training. (#1, page 38)**

The Review of Special Education in British Columbia (Report, June 2000) also found that EBS training was highly regarded in the school system and suggests that it be expanded. The Ministry has found that successful implementers believe that EBS strategies have made significant improvements in the behaviour of students, strategies of teachers, and overall school climates.

The Safe School Initiative plans for school year 2000–2001 include continued support for EBS training. In addition, the Ministry is conducting a formal evaluation of the training effectiveness and the extent to which the training has affected positive outcomes in student behaviour. Further activities will depend on the results of this detailed evaluation due to be delivered to the Ministry by the end of June, 2000. Included in this evaluation will be attention to data provided by schools about student behaviour change.

7. Accountability issues

The audit report encourages the Ministry and the school system to raise their levels of accountability by collecting data and analyzing factors that contribute to school safety and improvement efforts in increasing safety.

Recommendations:

- **The Ministry should consider examining schools and districts where student academic performance is significantly below provincial averages, so that underlying reasons can be identified and possibly addressed. (#18, page 85)**
- **The Ministry should develop a database for monitoring student aggression and encourage input from, and use by, schools and districts so that province-wide efforts can be properly evaluated and, if need be, modified. (#19, page 90)**

The Ministry recognizes that school boards require accessible and accurate information to enable them to make decisions that respond to safety concerns in schools under their jurisdiction. The Ministry currently provides school district profiles, on an annual basis, to help boards analyze their circumstances and respond to local needs and conditions. The revised accreditation program also provides basic information for schools to use in developing growth plans that address the issues raised in this report.

The audit report describes several projects underway as part of the Safe Schools Initiative whose implementation is informed by the collection and analysis of school/site-specific data; another example can be found in the elementary school program, Focus on Bullying. A Prevention Program for Elementary School Communities, which describes as “the most basic prerequisite to an effective response to bullying” staff awareness of bullying incidents as they occur over time. The program promotes the use of a simple tracking system to identify the nature and frequency of incidents, those students involved, and the level of interventions required to help change behaviors.

The Ministry will continue to work with Boards to identify key data sources available from the Ministry, in communities, at central Board offices, and in individual schools and will support Boards in consistently using this information to guide successful practice and account for results.

Conclusion

We would like to extend our thanks to staff in the Office of the Auditor General for their diligent and professional work in examining the critical issue of school safety.

The Ministry of Education will consider seriously the Auditor General’s recommendations. We will refer to the report’s discussion of themes and recommendations as we work across government, with school districts and other education partners, and in communities across the province to achieve safe and caring learning environments for all BC students. The Auditor General’s recognition of promising efforts underway and the report’s recommendations that government, school boards, and schools sustain and enhance efforts to promote school safety in the future will support us in this important undertaking.



appendices

appendix a

Underlying Factors for Aggression

Early Childhood Development

Research shows that early childhood development has a significant impact on how prepared students are for school (Appendix C: 58). Children who are neglected or abused are more likely to develop learning, behavioural or emotional problems in later stages of life (for boys, this includes an increased incidence of juvenile delinquency and crime) (Appendix C: 51). High-quality childcare has been linked to higher achievement in cognitive and social skills that prepare students for school (Appendix C: 43).

One long-term study (Appendix C: 54) that followed a group of children from infancy through to age 21 found that those who had been enrolled in high-quality early childhood programs from infancy to age 5 (about half the group) were more likely to:

- score higher on IQ, reading and math tests;
- be enrolled in or graduate from college;
- delay parenthood; and
- be gainfully employed.

For school-age children, research (Appendix C: 49, 57) has shown that the most effective aggression-reduction programs use all the resources in the community, incorporate family services and involve early intervention.

Family Background and Community Influence

Research (Appendix C: 37, 42, 59, 61) has also shown that ineffective parent style, particularly the use of harsh and inconsistent discipline techniques, more often results in aggression and other behavioural problems in children. The effect of a parent who is neglectful, unresponsive, inattentive or overly protective may also cause behavioural problems in children. Other contextual factors include parental involvement in criminal activities, the presence of family discord and violence or child abuse and neglect, and the occurrence of alcoholism and psychiatric problems.

Studies (Appendix C: 37, 39, 42, 59, 63) into whether socio-economic factors affect behaviour have produced inconsistent findings. North American studies have shown a link between poverty and conduct disorders, while Swedish studies suggest that socioeconomic conditions are not a significant factor. In British Columbia, poverty and parent level of education have

been identified as reliable predictors of student academic performance. It has also been shown that students who do not do well in school sometimes act out their frustrations with aggressive behaviour—often in an effort to conceal the fact that they are having trouble.

The 1996 Canadian Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (Appendix C: 36) reported that many problems experienced by aboriginal students can be traced to the imbalance of power they face with non-aboriginals. The result of such a dynamic can be frustration and anger. The commission also found that aboriginal youth are very likely to have experienced racism. These circumstances combined—or individually—can make it difficult for a student to be attentive at school, and lead to feelings of insecurity, low self-esteem, and ultimately aggressive behaviour, including vandalism, self-abuse and bullying.

Geographical location may also make a difference (Appendix C: 38, 42, 52). The prevalence of drugs, alcohol and firearms in some communities can contribute to school-related violence. A 1998 survey of British Columbia youth by the McCreary Centre found significant differences in student behaviour, according to where students lived. In the Vancouver area, students reported lower rates of smoking, sexual activity, drinking and driving, and suicide attempts, but higher rates of racial discrimination. The northwest region of the province had higher rates of smoking, racial discrimination and suicide attempts.

School Connectedness

The 1998 McCreary survey (Appendix C: 52) referred to above also included the following questions about school “connectedness:”

- How much do you feel your teachers care about you?
- How do you feel about going to school?

An individual’s responses to these questions were combined to give the student a relative score of high, medium or low connectedness. The survey found that students who have strong connections to school are not as likely to engage in aggression and related behaviours. Only 14% of those with high levels of school connectedness reported having been in a physical fight in the previous year, compared with 53% of students with low levels of connection. Also, only 14% of students with a strong connection to school had already engaged in sexual intercourse compared with 39% of those reporting low connectedness. Marijuana use was 21% among highly connected students and 60% among those with low school connectedness.

Entertainment and the Media

Many people believe that aggression depicted in television shows, movies and video games has a detrimental affect on children and youth. Research, however, has produced mixed results. What is not in question is that the levels of aggressive behaviours shown through entertainment and the media are now high. One study shows that by the time a typical American child is 16, he or she has witnessed 200,000 acts of violence on television, including 33,000 murders (Appendix C: 38).

According to Margaret Hamburg MD, in *Violence in American Schools* (Appendix C: 46): “violence observed in the media by children does increase aggressive and violent behaviour in children and youth, creates unrealistic attitudes about the efficacy of aggressive behaviour, predicts childhood violence and later crime, and desensitizes children to the horrors of real-life violence.”

Gender

In our society boys and girls tend to express themselves differently from each other. We found that boys and girls generally display aggression in different ways and for different reasons (Exhibit 17).

Exhibit 17

Behaviour tendencies based on gender

Boys	Girls
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Show earlier development of physical/motor abilities, and are more likely to be physically active than girls. ■ More likely to have early reading difficulties and to score lower on academic tests. ■ Express feelings using physical means more easily than verbally. ■ Use physical aggression more often than girls do. ■ Conditioned to avoid feeling empathy or showing emotions. ■ Status determined by athletic ability, toughness, and success in cross-gender relationships. Lose status if they demonstrate effeminate behaviour. ■ Appear to be more carefree and confident. ■ Tend to view physical aggression as being more hurtful than social aggression. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Show earlier development of speaking abilities, and are more likely to sit still when asked to by teachers. ■ Less likely to have trouble learning to read and place more importance on doing well in school. ■ Express feelings verbally more easily than boys. ■ Use social aggression more often than boys do. ■ More likely to feel empathy or show emotions. ■ Status determined by appearance, socioeconomic status, social skills, and academic success. ■ Appear to be less carefree and more self-critical. ■ Tend to view social aggression to be as hurtful as physical aggression, and all aggression to be more hurtful than boys see it.

Source: Prepared based on research references shown in Appendix C: 32, 33, 40, 41, 44, 45, 47, 48, 50, 55, 56, 59

Race, Culture and Religion

Research (Appendix C: 35, 47, 52, 53, 59, 62) indicates that aggressors sometimes target victims who are from different racial or cultural groups. Health Canada's 1999 report on a long-term study of Canadian youth disclosed that the number of children who are bullied because of race or religion is small (ranging from 3% to 6% depending on the grade), but that the number targeted because of the way they look or talk is greater (16–24% depending on the grade). However, the survey has not considered how many of the respondents are visible minorities, so it is not possible to tell how frequently visible minorities are themselves bullied because of their race.

Similarly, the 1998 McCreary survey found that 7% of boys and 8% of girls felt they had been discriminated against because of their race or skin colour, but the proportion of students of different race or colour was not determined. The survey did look more closely at aboriginal students, however, and found that 17% had experienced racial discrimination in the past year. As well, 7% of both genders said that they had been discriminated against because of their religion, and 46% said that they had experienced some kind of discrimination in the past year—discrimination based on physical appearance being the most common form (22% for boys and 28% for girls).

Developmental Challenges

Research (Appendix C: 35, 58, 59, 62) has shown that children with learning disabilities that are inadequately remediated are at higher risk for developing secondary behavioural problems and psychiatric disorders. Early intervention is key to assisting students in fitting in and experiencing success in school. In fact, the likelihood of success drops dramatically when intervention is delayed until grade 3 or later.

Research also indicates that children with significant physical or learning challenges are sometimes targets of aggression. In general, less aggression is directed toward those who are unable to do anything about their situation (for example, those with a physical disability) than to those who are perceived as responsible for their situation (for example, those who are obese, display poor coordination, or have slow problem-solving skills). In fact, one study found that as many as 75% of the boys identified as victims of bullying had coordination problems.

In summary, children with developmental challenges must not only deal with their physical or learning challenges within the school system, but also fend off aggressive students who threaten their physical or psychological safety.



appendix b

Levels of Student Aggression in Canada

Health Canada’s *Trends in the Health of Canadian Youth 1999* (Appendix C: 64) was produced as a result of an international survey called the *Health Behaviours in School-Aged Children*. This survey was administered to 11-, 13- and 15-year-old Canadians in 1989/90, 1993/94 and 1997/98 to assess changes and stability in the health of Canadian youth between 1990 and 1998.

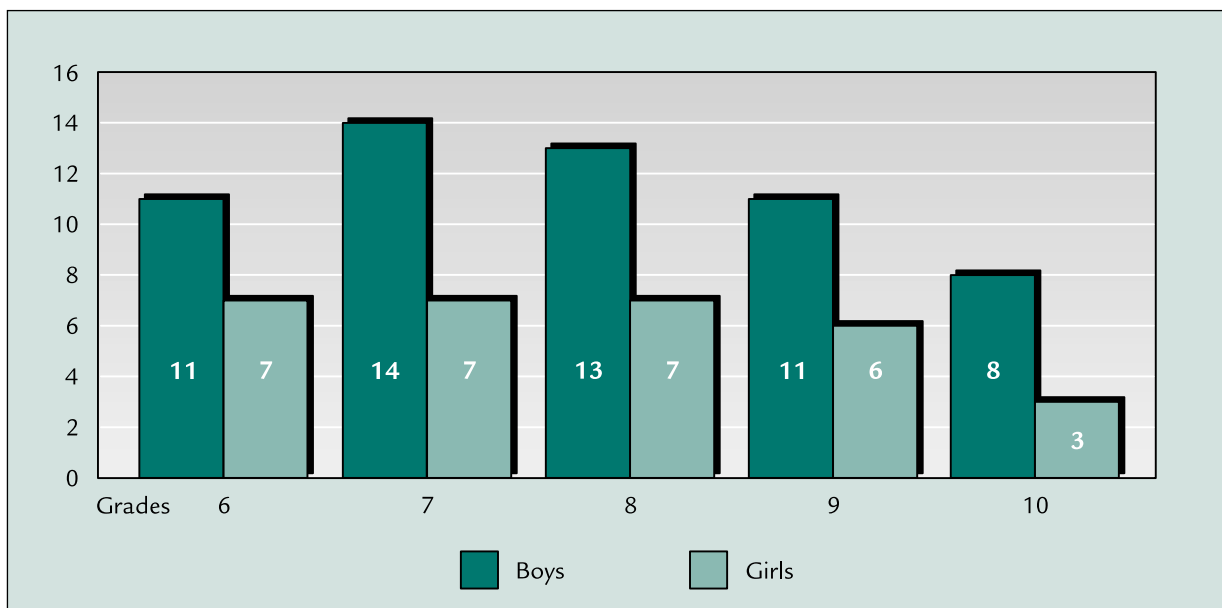
Aggressive Behaviours

Health Canada found that some Canadian students in grades 6 through 10 “rarely” or “never” feel safe at school, with boys and students in grades 7 and 8 most likely to feel this way (Exhibit 18). As well, about 10% of students in grades 8 through 10 said that most or all of their friends carried weapons.

Bullying was found to be most prevalent in grades 6 and 8, with 56% of boys and 40% of girls admitting to having bullied someone during the 1998 school term, and about 43% of boys and 35% of girls describing themselves as victims of bullying during the same term (Exhibits 19 and 20).

Exhibit 18

Percentage of Canadian students who “rarely” or “never” feel safe at school, 1998



Source: Prepared from Health Canada data in *Trends in the Health of Canadian Youth* (1999)

Exhibit 19

Percentage of Canadian students who bullied others in school in 1993/94 and 1997/98

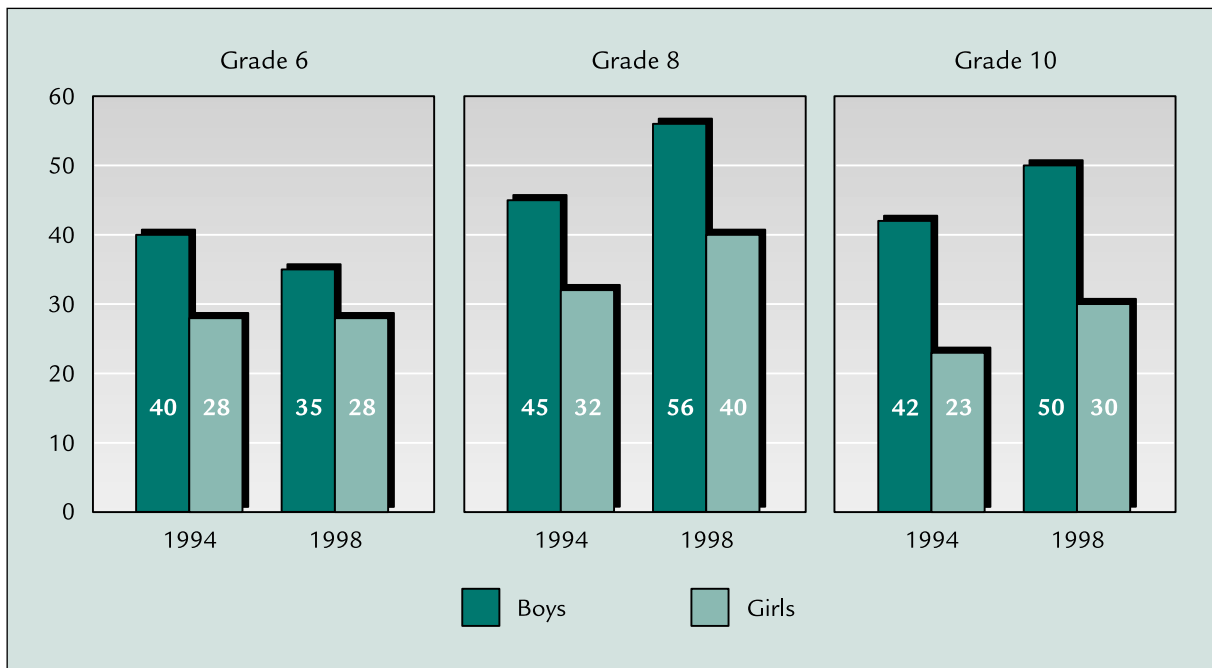
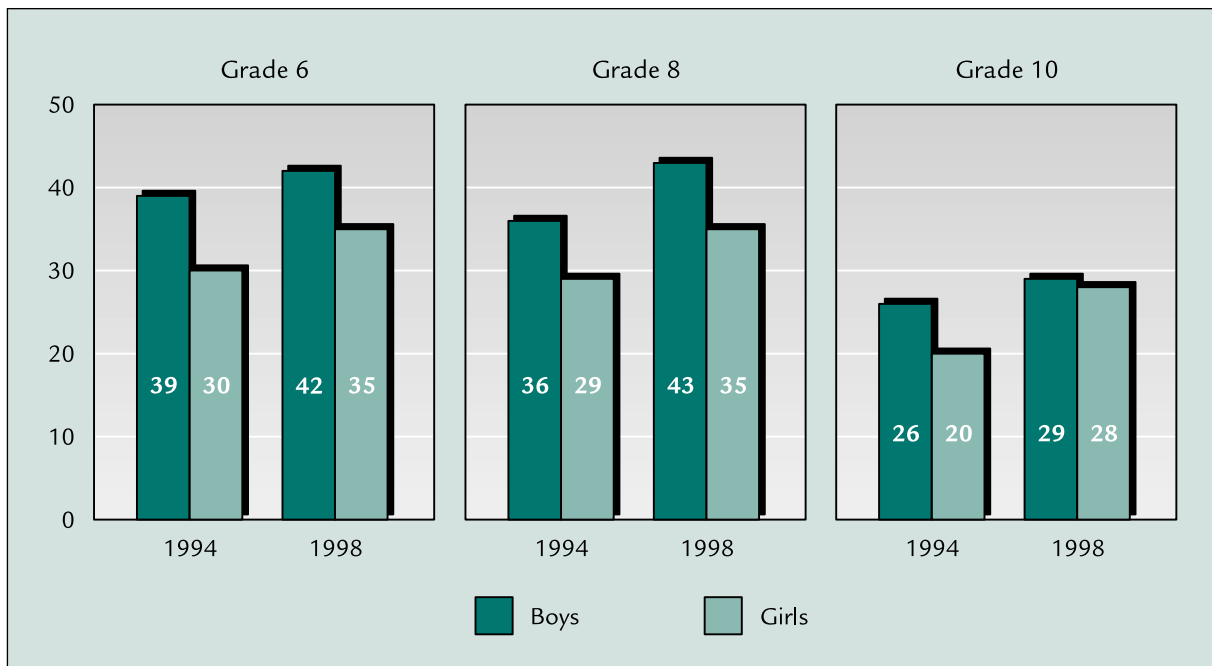


Exhibit 20

Percentage of Canadian students who were bullied in school in 1993/94 and 1997/98



Source (Exhibits 19 and 20): Prepared from Health Canada data in *Trends in the Health of Canadian Youth (1999)*

This is consistent with other research that indicates bullying peaks in middle school and declines in high school (Appendix C: 34, 50, 60). However, these percentages are much higher than those found in other research done in Canada, which identifies 6–15% of children as bullies and twice as many victims as bullies. The differences are likely a result of how the researchers chose to define bullying. The Health Canada study questioned students on whether they had bullied even once, while the other studies usually included only those cases where acts of aggression had been repeated a number of times.

Boys were more likely than girls to be bullies and to have been bullied at all grade levels. They were also more likely than girls to use physical violence. Greater proportions of respondents in the 1997/98 survey than in the 1993/94 survey reported having been bullied, with increases of, on average, 4% for males and 6% for girls. These changes could, however, be due partly to increased awareness in recent years of what bullying is.

Behaviours Related to Aggression

Smoking

Health Canada found no significant increases in smoking for Canadian students generally. However, data shows that significantly more girls than boys are smoking on a daily basis (Exhibit 21).

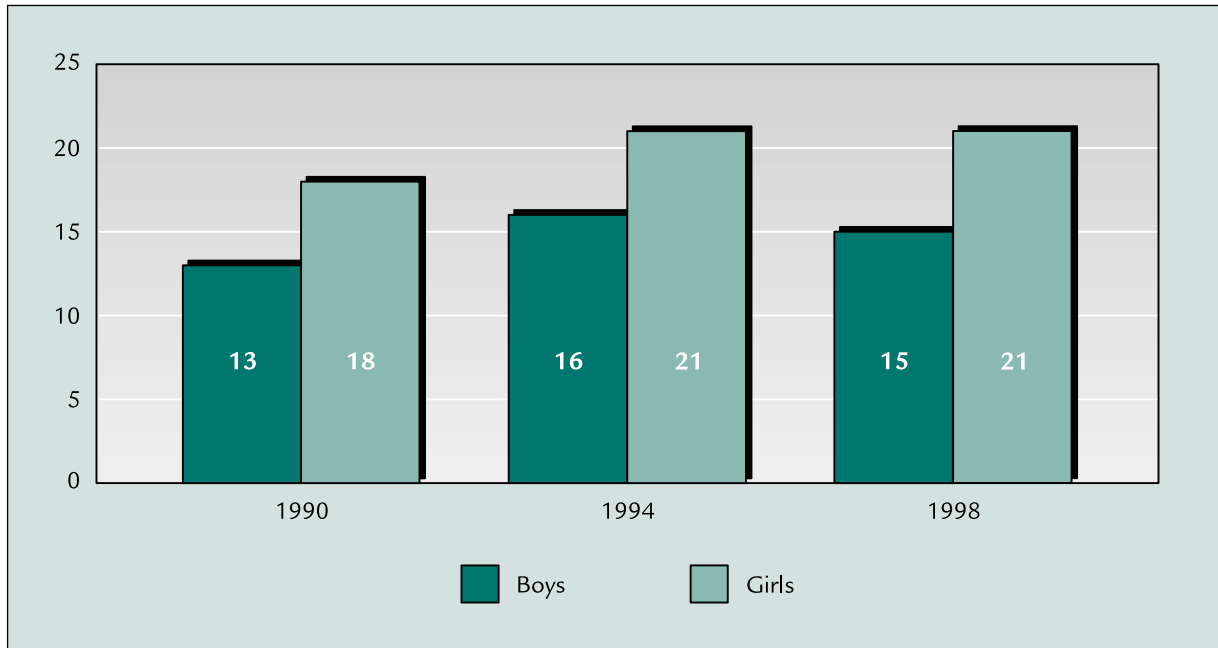
Substance Abuse

Health Canada's study found that the number of Canadian students who had tried alcohol by grade 10 was over 90%. Also, the percentage of students who reported drinking beer at least once a week decreased by about 50% over the three surveys conducted, for all grade groups (to 2%, 5% and 15% in 1998 for grades 6, 8 and 10, respectively). However, the percentage of grade 8 and 10 students who admitted to having already been "really drunk" two or more times (Exhibit 22) went down in 1994 from 1990 and then increased slightly in 1998.

According to Health Canada surveys, the number of Canadian students who have tried hashish or marijuana is on the increase. In 1994, about 30% of grade 10 students had tried one of these substances, but by 1998 this had increased to over 40%. Amphetamine use for grade 10 students also increased slightly from about 7% in 1990 to 9% in 1998. Use of LSD increased from 10% for grade 10 boys and 6% for

Exhibit 21

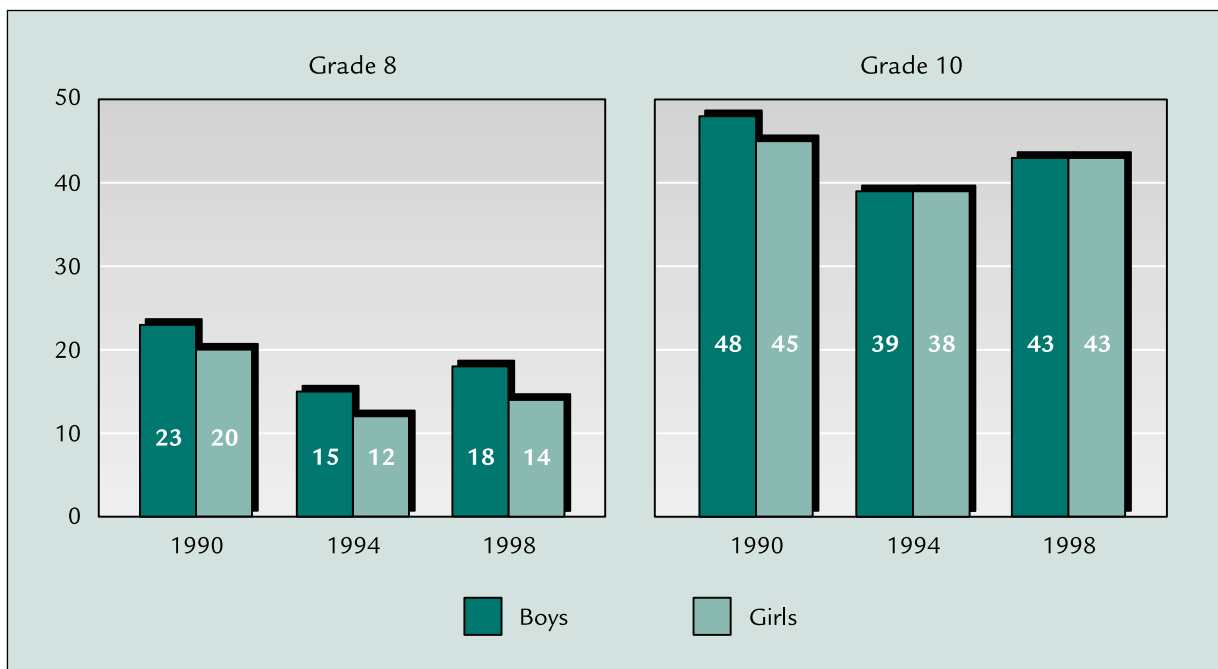
Percentage of Canadian students in grade 10 who smoke every day



Source: Prepared from Health Canada data in *Trends in the Health of Canadian Youth* (1999)

Exhibit 22

Percentage of Canadian students already "really drunk" more than once



Source: Prepared from Health Canada data in *Trends in the Health of Canadian Youth* (1999)

grade 10 girls in 1990 to 13% for both in 1998. The survey also found that marijuana use was linked to other harmful behaviours such as alcohol use and smoking, and that those students who use marijuana are also more likely to skip classes and bully others.



appendix c

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appendix d

Office of the Auditor General: Performance Auditing Objectives and Methodology

Audit work performed by the Office of the Auditor General falls into three broad categories:

- Financial auditing;
- Performance auditing; and
- Conduct of business auditing.

Each of these categories has certain objectives that are expected to be achieved, and each employs a particular methodology to reach those objectives. The following is a brief outline of the objectives and methodology applied by the Office for performance auditing.

Performance Auditing

What are Performance Audits?

Performance audits (also known as value-for-money audits) examine whether money is being spent wisely by government—whether value is received for the money spent. Specifically, they look at the organizational and program elements of government performance, whether government is achieving something that needs doing at a reasonable cost, and consider whether government managers are:

- making the best use of public funds; and
- adequately accounting for the prudent and effective management of the resources entrusted to them.

The aim of these audits is to provide the Legislature with independent assessments about whether government programs are implemented and administered economically, efficiently and effectively, and whether Members of the Legislative Assembly and the public are being provided with fair, reliable accountability information with respect to organizational and program performance.

In completing these audits, we collect and analyze information about how resources are managed; that is, how they are acquired and how they are used. We also assess whether legislators and the public have been given an adequate explanation of what has been accomplished with the resources provided to government managers.

Focus of Our Work

A performance audit has been described as:

...the independent, objective assessment of the fairness of management's representations on organizational and program performance, or the assessment of management performance, against criteria, reported to a governing body or others with similar responsibilities.

This definition recognizes that there are two forms of reporting used in performance auditing. The first—referred to as attestation reporting—is the provision of audit opinions as to the fairness of management’s publicly reported accountability information on matters of economy, efficiency and effectiveness. This approach has been used to a very limited degree in British Columbia because the organizations we audit do not yet provide comprehensive accountability reports on their organizational and program performance.

We believe that government reporting along with independent audit is the best way of meeting accountability responsibilities. Consequently, we have been encouraging the use of this model in the British Columbia public sector, and will apply it where comprehensive accountability information on performance is made available by management.

As the performance audits conducted in British Columbia use the second form of reporting—direct reporting—the description that follows explains that model.

Our “direct reporting” performance audits are not designed to question whether government policies are appropriate and effective (that is achieve their intended outcomes). Rather, as directed by the Auditor General Act, these audits assess whether the programs implemented to achieve government policies are being administered economically and efficiently. They also evaluate whether Members of the Legislative Assembly and the public are being provided with appropriate accountability information about government programs.

When undertaking performance audits, we look for information about results to determine whether government organizations and programs actually provide value for money. If they do not, or if we are unable to assess results directly, we then examine management’s processes to determine what problems exist or whether the processes are capable of ensuring that value is received for money spent.

Selecting Audits

All of government, including Crown corporations and other government organizations, are included in the universe we consider when selecting audits. We also may undertake reviews of provincial participation in organizations outside of government if they carry on significant government programs and receive substantial provincial funding.

When selecting the audit subjects we will examine, we base our decision on the significance and interest of an area or topic to our primary clients, the Members of the Legislative Assembly and the public. We consider both the significance and risk in our evaluation. We aim to provide fair, independent assessments of the quality of government administration and to identify

opportunities to improve the performance of government. Therefore, we do not focus exclusively on areas of high risk or known problems.

We select for audit either programs or functions administered by a specific ministry or government organization, or cross-government programs or functions that apply to many government entities. A large number of such programs and functions exist throughout government. We examine the larger and more significant of these on a cyclical basis.

Our view is that, in the absence of comprehensive accountability information being made available by government, performance audits using the direct reporting approach should be undertaken on a five- to six- year cycle so that Members of the Legislative Assembly and the public receive assessments of all significant government operations over a reasonable time period. We strive to achieve this schedule, but it is affected by the availability of time and resources.

Planning and Conducting Audits

A performance audit comprises four phases of a performance audit—preliminary study, planning, conducting and reporting. The core values of the Office—independence, due care and public trust—are inherent in all aspects of the audit work.

Preliminary Study

Before an audit starts, we undertake a preliminary study to identify issues and gather sufficient information to decide whether an audit is warranted.

At this time, we also determine the audit team. The audit team must be made up of individuals who have the knowledge and competence necessary to carry out the particular audit. In most cases, we use our own professionals, who have training and experience in a variety of fields. As well, we often supplement the knowledge and competence of our staff by engaging one or more consultants to be part of the audit team.

In examining a particular aspect of an organization to audit, auditors can look either at results, to assess whether value for money is actually achieved, or at management's processes, to determine whether those processes should ensure that value is received for money spent. Neither approach alone can answer all the questions of legislators and the public, particularly if problems are found during the audit. We therefore try to combine both approaches wherever we can. However, because acceptable results-oriented information and criteria are often not available, our performance audits frequently concentrate on management's processes for achieving value for money.

If a preliminary study does not lead to an audit, the results of the study may still be reported to the Legislature.

Planning

In the planning phase, the key tasks are to develop audit criteria—“standards of performance”—and an audit plan outlining how the audit team will obtain the information necessary to assess the organization’s performance against the criteria. In establishing the criteria, we do not expect theoretical perfection from public sector managers; rather, we reflect what we believe to be the reasonable expectations of legislators and the public.

Conducting

The conducting phase of the audit involves gathering, analyzing and synthesizing information to assess the organization’s performance against the audit criteria. We use a variety of techniques to obtain such information, including surveys, and questionnaires, interviews and document reviews.

Reporting Audits

We discuss the draft report with the organization’s representatives and consider their comments before the report is formally issued to the Legislative Assembly. In writing the audit report, we ensure that recommendations are significant, practical and specific, but not so specific as to infringe on management’s responsibility for managing. The final report is tabled in the Legislative Assembly and referred to the Public Accounts Committee, where it serves as a basis for the Committee’s deliberations.

Reports on performance audits are published throughout the year as they are completed, and tabled in the Legislature at the earliest opportunity. We report our audit findings in two parts: a highlights section and a more detailed report. The overall conclusion constitutes the Auditor General’s independent assessment of how well the organization has met performance expectations. The more detailed report provides background information and a description of what we found. When appropriate, we also make recommendations as to how the issues identified may be remedied.

It takes time to implement the recommendations that arise from performance audits. Consequently, when management first responds to an audit report, it is often only able to indicate its intention to resolve the matters raised, rather than to describe exactly what it plans to do.

Without further information, however, legislators and the public would not be aware of the nature, extent, and results of management’s remedial actions. Therefore, we publish updates of management’s responses to the performance audits. In addition, when it is useful to do so, we will conduct follow-up audits. The results of these are also reported to the Legislature.



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