



Comments on:
The Safe Schools Act, 2000
Submitted to
The Safe Schools Action Team
Policy and Programs Branch
Ministry of Education

By the
Canadian Federation of University Women

Ontario Council

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Submitted by:

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January 31, 2006

Re: Comments of the Ontario Council of Canadian Federation of University Women on the Review of the Safe School Act, 2000.

Dear Ms. Sandals,

The Canadian Federation of University Women/Ontario Council CFUW/Ontario Council) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Safe Schools Act, 2000.

Public education, as well as the prevention of violence in society in general and in schools in particular, is a core concern of the Ontario Council of the Canadian Federation of University Women.

Our members have agreed on policy to urge the government

- “to take effective action to counter all forms of violence at school and ensure the security of all those at risk...”and
- “to develop awareness of the need to counter all forms of violence, ranging from bullying to sexual aggression and drug addiction ...in the program of all concerned Ministries;” also
- “to urge governments to continue to exercise their leadership roles to ensure the security of the person and to promote zero tolerance to violence.”

We commend the Ontario Government for reviewing the Safe Schools Act and hold public consultations. Our members took part at the Round Table discussions at several locations in the province.

We agree with the broad goals of the Act. In particular,

- § since there are vast differences from school board to school board, we appreciate the many provisions which create the flexibility to adapt the Act to local conditions;
- § the opportunity for appeal at all levels builds in additional safeguards; and
- § we commend the emphasis of the Safe School Action Team on prevention as outlined in their report of November 2005 *Shaping Safer Schools: A bullying prevention action plan report*.

We applaud the government for allotting funds in order to make sure that bullying prevention programs become mandatory in schools.

However when we look at the picture on the ground, and examine how the Act has worked out in practice, we have concerns:

Lack of Supports:

- **Schools are generally handicapped by a lack of guidance counsellors and other teachers with specialist training to design and implement meaningful effective programs. This difficulty is true for schools in large centres and is even more pronounced for schools in smaller towns and rural and Northern communities**
- **Expulsions without alternate programs is detrimental to all students, but hits minority students and students from lower socio –economic and backgrounds, and special education students particularly hard.**

In his analysis of Ethno-Racial Inequality in Toronto, Michael Ornstein finds that according to the 1996 census, about 60% of black children live below the poverty line. (Toronto Star, December 31, 2005, pA23)

A factor for the high expulsion rate of these students can be found in the withdrawal in 1997 and 2000 of supports in schools which help students to achieve. Students act out when they are not achieving.

At the Safe Schools Action Team's hearing November 29th, 2005 at the Holiday Inn Airport, the anger of Afro-Canadian parents was palpable.

The black school council president and black elementary school teacher present at the Round Table with our CFUW member emphasized the importance of these supports. In one case a contrast was drawn between two siblings, the older of the two was fine having received support and guidance from the school and the younger not receiving similar support was not.

Recommendation: That the Government of Ontario ensures that its "Every Child Program" also catches such students now and in future.

English as a Second Language and English Skills Development Support:

"Next to food and shelter, there is nothing more important to a child's success in school and life than strong English literacy skills. Not providing high quality English language teaching amounts to stealing their future," said Martin Long president of the Elementary Teachers of Toronto

The Elementary Teachers of Toronto, in a recent survey of 400 classroom teachers in Toronto found that thirty percent of teachers had “students in special education classes whose primary needs were actually language supports.” (Toronto Star, January 18, 2006, B5) For many minority students to succeed ESL support is essential.

The high ratio of ESL students means that classroom teachers have to commit a great portion of their teaching time to the ESL students in their class. This is not working for the ESL students or for the other students in the class as the teacher is hard pressed to give the necessary attention to all.

Cultural differences play a role as well in the attitude to display violence. Students coming from cultures and war torn areas where discipline is physical and angry do not take seriously verbal reprimands delivered in dulcet tones. This is why ESL teachers spend a good deal of time explaining Canadian culture

The Toronto School Board received about \$80 million this school year from the province for ESL supports but about half that money has been allotted to other areas of the board’s \$2 billion budget, such as the \$100 million shortfall on teachers salaries and the utilities bill said Board Chair Sheila Ward since these items are still funded at 1997 levels.

According to a Position Paper on Second Language Training in Ontario released in December 2005 by the Ontario Public School Boards' Association, the lack of sufficient ESL support is reflected in the Grade 3 reading test results for 2003 in which 34% of the ESL students were at the provincial standard (Level 3) as opposed to 54% overall. Similarly in high school, 50% of ESL students passed the Grade 10 literacy test as opposed to 82% overall (p.12).

Recommendation: Make funding for ESL/ESD dedicated funding and make it available for the 5-7 years it takes to achieve mastery of Canadian English.

Timely Identification:

When teachers refer students for identification and special education needs, the waiting times are too long and even when identified the student waits several years for help because the special education funding is insufficient.

In its 2005 Secondary School tracking report, People for Education states that 64% of schools reported having students waiting for special education services (p.34)..

Recommendation: Provide the necessary diagnostic and support teams to eliminate wait times.

Mitigating Factors:

The Act displays a weakness when it speaks of “mitigating factors” (section 309). This allows for reversal of decisions to suspend or expel an offending student where it would not be in the best interest of the other children in the classroom. A student considered a danger to others by the classroom teacher whether there are mitigating factors for his behaviour or not, remains a danger to the rest of the class and should be removed.

Recommendation: Instead of having “mitigating factors” in an offence lead to non suspension and a return to the classroom, channel these students to obligatory remedial programs where they can learn to deal with their inappropriate behaviour before returning to their original classroom.

Life Skills and Preparation for Apprenticeship and Skilled Trades:

When students are not helped in a timely fashion and end up in Grade 7 or 8 with reading levels and numeracy skills far below their peer group, the courses hold no interest for them, they are bored and they act out. Previously, when there were courses offered at this level that called for different skill sets, namely obligatory shop and home economics, such students could shine and find course content relevant.

Moreover, these courses laid a foundation for high school where students could further develop these skills leading to meaningful careers as apprentices in skilled trades. Without this foundation, when students select courses for high school, these options are not selected and consequently these courses in high school are no longer as available. Dropping enrolment, aging and outdated equipment with the lack of money for infrastructure renewal all contribute to the meaninglessness of school for students at risk.

We commend the Premier’s “Learning to 18 Strategy”.

Recommendation: Restore the teaching of technology studies and home economics in Grades 7 and 8 and include them under the funding formula.

Recommendation: Increase the number of Essentials or Locally Developed Courses and offer them not only in large schools.

Alternative Programs for all Expulsions:

We deplore that the Safe Schools Act does not make it mandatory for Boards to provide alternative programs in all cases. The length of the suspension or expulsion should not be a factor.

At risk students at home alone during the day seek the company of their peers and gangs provide it for them at great cost to society as we have witnessed in Toronto and other large Canadian cities. At the November 29th Round Table, black parents mentioned that to avoid having their child's record affected, parents make deals with principals that they will keep their children home as long as nothing is put on their official school record, thus eliminating the problem on the surface. In fact, it only compounds the problem for the school absence would reinforce the inability to pass the courses.

Recommendation: An alternate and equivalent academic program must be provided for all suspended and expelled students within a school setting. Such programs should include healthy doses of physical education, arts education and have better access to guidance counsellors, psychologists, social workers and community support workers.

Resources and Support for the Class Room Teachers:

Another problem highlighted by teachers was the lack of support for the classroom teacher from the principal. Teachers feel overwhelmed and unsupported since problems referred to the office are often turned back to the teacher.

Recommendation: Introduce measures that restore adequate team support and team spirit in schools between principals and teachers.

Important Wider Community Support:

An additional very important support would be after school activities, such as sports and homework clubs, preferably offered at the home school by members of the local community. This would keep at risk students off the street, give them additional academic help and provide them with positive role models.

Recommendation: Encourage community use of schools by eliminating fees for sports programs, home work clubs after school, run by community members.

There is no place for violence in the home, in school and in society. It takes the dedicated support of parents and the whole family, of school and the whole community to provide children with emotional and physical safety and a healthy violence free environment for school and play.

Unfortunately, for better or for worse, societal conditions are such that sometimes one or the other support children need for their physical and emotional safety has broken down. Schools are often tasked with making up for this deficit.

CFUW/ ONTARIO COUNCIL

CFUW/ Ontario Council is made up of approximately 6000 women university graduates from all the regions of Ontario. We are totally member - funded. Our members live in 58 Ontario communities, in big urban areas as well as in rural and northern towns (see Appendix B). We are non - partisan and non- sectarian. When voting on policy each of our clubs has one vote so that the voice of members from Thunder Bay and Renfrew and St. Thomas have the same weight as those from the Toronto and Ottawa areas. This results in well-balanced policies that may be embraced by most Ontarians.

We are business women, scientists, teachers, university professors, nurses and physicians, seed specialists and engineers, farm women and artists and accountants, wives, daughters, mothers and grandmothers. All put their skills and education at the service of their community, and work

- in all public affairs
- for a high standard in public education,
- for the improvement of the Status of Women in Ontario, and
- to ensure Human Rights in the Province.

CFUW/Ontario Council is part of the Canadian Federation of University Women (CFUW) and has links with the International Federation of University Women (IFUW).

CFUW/ Ontario Council recognizes that schools and teachers possess the skills to function as an equalizer and are able to provide a safe environment for learning and development. But schools and teachers in turn need sufficient financial and specialist resources to succeed in beating back violence..

So, our final and all encompassing recommendation is that in addition to the Safe Schools Act, the government fund the public education system in all regions of Ontario at a consistent and predictable rate that reflects the real cost of teachers' salaries, infrastructure and necessary programs and specialist teachers so that every pupil in Ontario has an equal chance to develop according to his or her potential and is as such less likely to become a mere statistic.

Sincerely,

Edeltraud Neal, President,
Ontario Council Canadian Federation of University Women

Appendix A



Some Canadian Federation of University Women Policy on Safe Schools

**Note: CFUW /Ontario Council policy integrates
CFUW/ Ontario Council policy, as well as CFUW and IFUW policy**

ONTARIO:

Education: Public Funding of Public Education

October, 2002

RESOLVED: that the Canadian Federation of University Women Ontario Council re-affirm its stated purpose to assist:

- In achieving and maintaining high standards of public education;
- Supporting publicly funded public education with equal access for all; AND

RESOLVED: that the Canadian Federation of University Women Ontario Council encourage local CFUW Clubs to continue their efforts to monitor policy and funding of public education

RESOLVED: that the Canadian Federation of University Women Ontario Council urge the provincial government

- To provide high quality public education in Ontario, with funding to meet the individual intellectual, emotional, psychological and physical learning needs of each student in Ontario; and
- Affirm Public Education as a key priority

Education - Capping Class Size in the Primary Grades

October, 2000

RESOLVED: That the Canadian Federation of University Women/Ontario Council urge the Ontario government to establish a policy of capping the number of students in the

primary grades at 22 students, and the school boards be given adequate funding to staff the primary grades at this class size

NATIONAL and INTERNATIONAL:

Violence at School

IFUW, 1998

RESOLVED, That national federations and associations urge their respective Ministries of National Education and other concerned Ministries to:

1. take effective action to counter all forms of violence at school and ensure the security of all those at risk, with particular concern for the safety of young girls and teenagers; and
2. develop awareness of the need to counter all forms of violence, ranging from bullying to sexual aggression and drug addiction, and to include education for peace in the programs of all concerned Ministries.

Violence Prevention Education

CFUW, 1992

RESOLVED, That the CFUW urge the Government of Canada and the provincial, territorial, and municipal governments to continue to exercise their leadership roles to ensure security of the person and to promote zero tolerance to violence for Canadian women in the following ways:

1. by expanding the multi-media education campaign on violence against women;
2. by working with relevant professions and community groups to promote strong and consistent violence-prevention education; and
3. by working together to ensure that the community has adequate resources to accommodate the demand for services for abused women and children resulting from the increased education on violence.

Literacy

CFUW, 1991

The Canadian Federation of University Women calls upon the International Federation of

University Women to encourage the national federations and associations to work towards the implementation of and to urge their respective governments to affirm and implement:

1. the right of all people to education as asserted in the "Universal Declaration of Human Rights" (United Nations - 1948); and
2. the "World Declaration on Education for All", and to work to achieve the goals set down in the "Framework for Action to Meet Basic Learning Needs" as adopted at Jomtien, Thailand, by the "World Conference for Education for All - Meeting Basic Learning Needs", 1990.

Apprenticeship and the Skilled Trades

CFUW, 1989

RESOLVED, That the Canadian Federation of University Women urge federal, provincial and territorial authorities concerned with education and skills development and local boards of education:

1. to work with business and labour to create an apprenticeship strategy national in scope, including portable certification and increased opportunities for apprenticeship; and
2. to strengthen technological studies and guidance counselling for both men and particularly women within the schools as well as their links with business, industry, community colleges and trade schools; and
3. to promote public understanding and recognition of skilled trades, and to foster pride in those occupations.

Appendix B



Ontario Council of The Canadian Federation of University Women Club Location

Ajax – Pickering	Kingston	Oshawa & District
Aurora - Newmarket	Kitchener - Waterloo	Ottawa
Barrie & District	Leaside - East York	Owen Sound & Area
Belleville & District	London	Perth
Brampton	Markham- Unionville	Peterborough
Brantford	Milton & District	Renfrew & District
Brockville & District	Mississauga	Sarnia Lambton
Burlington	Muskoka	Saugeen
Cambridge	Nepean	Scarborough
Chatham -Kent	Niagara Falls	Southport
Cornwall & District	Norfolk	St. Catharines
Etobicoke	North Bay	St. Thomas
Georgetown	North Toronto	Stratford
Grimsby	North York	Sudbury
Guelph	Northumberland	Thunder Bay
Haliburton Highlands	Oakville	Toronto
Hamilton	Orangeville & District	Vaughan
Kanata	Orillia	Welland & District
Kincardine	Orleans	Weston & District Windsor

