

Making Ontario's Schools Safe and Accepting

A safe and accepting learning environment is essential for student achievement and well-being.

Positive School Climate

A positive school climate means everyone – students, parents,¹ staff and community members – feels safe, welcome and respected. Everyone has a role to play in promoting healthy relationships and a school climate which helps to encourage appropriate student behaviour.

Ontario's approach to making schools safe and accepting focuses on:

- promoting positive student behaviour
- providing early and ongoing intervention
- preventing inappropriate behaviour
- addressing inappropriate behaviour with appropriate consequences.

What is the code of conduct?

Every school board has a code of conduct that is based on the provincial code of conduct. It promotes respect and sets clear standards of behaviour for the school community.

The code of conduct applies to:

- school community – students, school staff, parents and community partners
- school or school-related events, and to activities that happen outside of school that could have an impact on the school climate. This includes cyber-bullying.

What happens when a student behaves inappropriately?

Principals determine appropriate consequences and/or supports to help students improve their behaviour, while taking into account their individual circumstances. This approach is called 'progressive discipline'. The goal of progressive discipline is to help prevent inappropriate student behaviour from happening again.

¹ In this document, parent(s) refers to parent(s) and guardian(s) as used in the *Education Act*. It may also be taken to include caregivers or close family members who are responsible for raising the child.

With progressive discipline, the principal will consider a range of options to address the behaviour and help students learn from their choices. This could include a meeting with parents, a detention, withdrawal of privileges, counselling, suspension or expulsion. The principal will take into consideration factors like the student's age, Individual Education Plan, and academic, personal circumstances and discipline history. Parents will be engaged in finding solutions to deal with the behaviour.

Social workers, guidance counsellors, child and youth workers, psychologists and community agencies will work with school boards to offer support and counselling to students.

What are schools doing to prevent bullying?

Bullying is a serious issue and is not acceptable at school, at a school-related activity, online (cyber-bullying) or in other circumstances that will have an impact on the school climate. Every school board has a policy and a plan to help prevent and address bullying in schools, such as:

- Every school has a safe and accepting schools team. The team includes the principal and at least one student, parent, teacher, support staff member and community partner.
- Students can be suspended from school and considered for expulsion (under certain circumstances) for bullying, including cyber-bullying. For example, if a student has previously been suspended for engaging in bullying.

Parents can find out what to watch for, what to do, and where to get help for bullying by reading "**Bullying: We Can All Help Stop It**". This guide is available on the Ministry of Education website in multiple languages.

What happens if a student is suspended or expelled?

Suspensions and expulsions combine discipline with opportunities for students to keep learning.

- Only the principal can suspend a student. Students who are suspended are removed from school temporarily for a specific period of time, between one and 20 school days. Suspended students cannot attend school or take part in school activities.
- The principal will notify parents of the incident, make every effort to let parents know within 24 hours that their child is suspended and will invite them to discuss what supports will be provided to their child. This will be followed by a letter notifying them about the suspension. Students who are suspended for more than five school days are offered an academic program that will help them keep learning. This program could be run in the school or at another location.
- Students who are suspended for more than 10 school days are offered academic programs, as well as non-academic services like anger management or individual/family counselling that are intended to help engage and motivate students and encourage positive behaviour.

- The principal can recommend expulsion but only the school board can expel a student.
- Students can be expelled from their school or from all schools within the board.
- Students who are expelled only from their school must be assigned to another school within the board.
- Students who are expelled from all schools within the school board are allowed to re-enter when they have successfully completed a program for expelled students.
- Expulsion occurs only in the most serious situations. For example, if a student possesses a weapon.
- Students who are expelled will be offered both academic and non-academic programs, including services like anger management or individual/family counselling that are intended to help engage and motivate students and encourage positive behaviour.

What else is happening in Ontario to help make schools safe and accepting?

The government has a partnership with Kids Help Phone – a community agency that offers students counselling and support. Students can visit kidshelpphone.ca or call **1-800-668-6868**. This confidential service is available 24/7/365.

LEARN MORE

For information on making Ontario's schools safe and accepting, and bullying prevention, visit ontario.ca/safeschools.