

Bullying remains constant despite political claims, says coalition founder

(Re: Everyone pays when bullying isn't addressed, August 21, 2014)

I am writing in response to the above opinion piece written by newly elected MPP Chris Ballard and must respond.

I created the YRABC (York Region Anti-Bullying Coalition) in 2009 and while I no longer reside in York Region, I am extremely connected to that community as well as at the provincial and national levels. I was acquainted with Ms. Vlassis and Ms. Anderson - they approached me four years ago asking if they could help with my organization.

In his opinion piece MPP Ballard boasts about all the good work the Liberal government has done on the issue of safe schools. I disagree.

On Monday, July 21, 2014 PC MPP Mr. Jeff Yurek questioned the Minister of Education about what process the Ministry follows to ensure school boards comply with anti-bullying legislation, how the Ministry keeps school administrators accountable, and the process having failed in his riding.

The Hon. Liz Sandals replied with "not every incident turns out to be managed 100% perfectly."

In fact, not every incident is managed at all. This is a response that is not acceptable to me or any other Ontario taxpayer whose child has been let down by their education system. That type of remark is disrespectful to all young people who have suffered as a result of non-proactive administrators and other adults within the educational institution.

The non-compliance that Mr. Yurek speaks of is as a result of Ministry PPM's (Policy Program Memo) that contradict existing legislation. The results from two separate Freedom of Information Requests I received from the Toronto and York Region School Boards clearly indicate the true lack of attention the issue of bullying is being given. PPM's do not equate to statute law. They are guidelines at best with no requirement to report back to the Ministry thereby making PPM's redundant.

The Minister of Education also mentioned that parents should be "contacting their local trustee, because it is, in fact, the local trustees who are accountable for ensuring that safe school legislation is put into place." Parents actually do contact their elected school board trustees and they are repeatedly met with "it's a governance issue and go back to your Principal as they have the ultimate say."

There is a huge disconnect as to what the Liberal government says is happening and what actually takes place. Trustees have no power or authority. Since the Ministry changed their governance model from Site Based Management to the Carver model the school system is in disarray.

At the end of the day the issue of bullying within Ontario schools remains chronic and the manner in which some situations are dealt with is nothing more than shameful with our children paying the physical and emotional price.

The PC party failed to vote in favour of Bill 13, the Accepting Schools Act because it was not a comprehensive anti-bullying piece of legislation. Very little has changed for the York Region Anti-Bullying Coalition, and this is regardless of where I reside. We continue to receive the desperate phone calls and emails describing situations that were not "managed 100%" and the long-term consequences of this.

I have been working with Carol Todd (mother of Amanda Todd). October 10th is World Mental Health Day. I challenge MPP Chris Ballard to get Aurora and Newmarket to light up in purple.

Karen Sebben
Founder, YRABC