

Creating Safe and Accepting Schools: Information for Parents about the Accepting Schools Act (Bill 13)

We know that a safe, inclusive and accepting school is essential for student achievement and well-being.

That is why the government introduced Bill 13, the *Accepting Schools Act*, which has now been passed into law.

What is Bill 13?

Bill 13 requires school boards to prevent and address inappropriate and disrespectful behaviour among students in our schools. These behaviours include bullying, discrimination and harassment. The new law makes it clear that these behaviours are unacceptable in our schools. It promotes respect and understanding for all students regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, disability or any other factor.

How does Bill 13 help schools and boards prevent and address inappropriate behaviour, including bullying?

It builds on the work already done by school boards and schools. Bill 13 requires boards to:

- Have policies in place on progressive discipline, bullying prevention and intervention, and equity and inclusive education.
- Consider tougher consequences for students who bully others. This can include suspending and considering expulsion if:
 - the student has already been suspended for bullying and the student's presence in the school creates an unacceptable risk to the safety of others, or
 - the bullying was motivated by bias, prejudice or hate.

The Education Act already requires supports for suspended and expelled students:

- If students are expelled or on long-term suspension (more than five school days), they will receive academic/non-academic support through a [suspension/expulsion program](#). Students who are suspended for up to five school days will receive a homework package.

- Provide training and information to teachers and other school staff on an annual basis about bullying prevention and promoting positive school climates.
- Include goals around positive school climate and bullying prevention in their multi-year plans and make these plans available to the public.

Does Bill 13 change the role of principals?

- The bill gives principals new, specific responsibilities. They are now required to:
 - Investigate any incident reported by a board employee which could lead to a student being suspended or expelled, including bullying.
 - Notify the parents/guardians of students who have harmed another student about the incident, when the students' behaviour could lead to them being suspended or expelled. Also invite the parents to discuss the supports that will be provided to their child.
 - Invite the parents/guardians of the student who was harmed in the incident to discuss the supports that will be provided to their child. Principals were already required to notify these parents.
 - Communicate with teachers and where appropriate, other board employees, who reported an incident which could lead to a student getting suspended or expelled. Principals will be required to inform them about the results of their investigation into the incident.

How does Bill 13 support boards and schools to engage parents, students and other staff and stakeholders?

The bill helps parents to learn more about the support available to their children through the school and the efforts the school is making to build a more positive school climate.

Boards are required to:

- Set up a process for parents to follow if they have concerns about the support their child is receiving.
- Develop a procedure that allows students, parents and others to safely report incidents of bullying.

- Conduct school climate surveys of staff, students and parents at least every two years.
- Offer parents more opportunities to learn about student safety and school climate.

How does Bill 13 support students?

Bill 13 requires:

- Schools to provide support to students who have engaged in inappropriate behaviour or been affected by inappropriate behaviour.
- Schools to provide programs, interventions or other supports to both victims and bullies, and to those who witness the incident.
- Schools to provide ways for students to safely report incidents of bullying.
- Boards and schools to allow students to form groups at their school to raise awareness and understanding of all students on topics such as:
 - anti-racism;
 - people with disabilities;
 - gender equity;
 - sexual orientation and gender identity.
 These groups may include Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs).

Boards and principals will not be able to prevent students from using the name GSA or another name the students may choose for these groups.

Students may form other types of groups based on the needs of their school.

- The name of the student-led group must help promote a positive school climate that is inclusive and accepting of all students.

How does Bill 13 affect organizations that rent space in public schools?

Bill 13 requires third parties, such as sports leagues and community groups, to follow standards of behaviour that are consistent with the Provincial Code of Conduct when they use space in public schools. The Code helps ensure that all members of the school community are treated with respect and dignity and has been in place for many years.

How does a “whole school approach” make schools better places to learn?

Building a positive and inclusive school climate requires a “whole school approach” that is based on healthy and respectful relationships throughout the whole school and the community.

Safe, inclusive and accepting schools support students to do their best in the classroom and beyond. Everyone has a role to play in achieving safe, inclusive and accepting schools, including the government, school boards, school staff, parents, students and community members.

Together we can create positive school climates that help all students learn, grow and thrive.

Bill 13 is part of a comprehensive action plan

The legislation builds on our Equity and Inclusive Education and Safe Schools Strategies. The legislation is part of a larger action plan which includes:

- Introducing more mental health workers in schools and expanded video counselling services with a psychiatrist for kids in rural and remote communities.
- Finding ways to include more equity and inclusive education principles and bullying prevention strategies throughout the curriculum, building on recommendations from the Ontario Curriculum Council.
- Conducting a public awareness campaign to highlight that all Ontarians have a role in preventing bullying.
- Creating an Accepting Schools Expert Panel to provide advice on resources and practices that focus on a whole school approach, including bullying prevention and intervention.

More questions?

Parents can learn more online about Ontario’s:

- Action Plan for Accepting Schools at ontario.ca/acceptingschools
- Safe Schools Strategy at www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/safekit.html
- Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy at www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/policyfunding/equity.html
- Provincial Code of Conduct at www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/safeschools/standards.html