

April 7, 2006

Standing Committee on Social Development
Second Report of the Third Session Sixty-second General Assembly
Cyberbullying and Violence Prevention Initiatives Among Youth

Mr. Speaker and Members of the Legislative Assembly:

Executive Summary

The Standing Committee on Social Development was directed by the Legislative Assembly in November 2005 to solicit public input on the topic of cyberbullying and violence prevention initiatives among youth. The Committee contacted school boards (the Eastern School District, the Western School Board, and the Commission scolaire de la langue française) and independent schools in the province; as well as Eastlink; Aliant; and the Innovation and Technology Association of Prince Edward Island (ITAP) asking them to comment on the issue. In addition, the Committee advertised in newspapers across the province and posted the call for input on the committees' section of the Legislative Assembly website. Finally, the Committee invited representatives of the Department of Education and the RCMP requesting they provide background information regarding their assessment of the current situation in the province.

The Committee held three public meetings to plan its work, and to discuss the issue of cyberbullying and violence prevention initiatives among youth: January 12, February 23, and March 9, 2006. In addition, there was one *in camera* meeting scheduled, on April 6, 2006, to consider the Committee's report to the Members of the Legislative Assembly.

The Standing Committee on Social Development has appreciated the opportunity to hear from the public regarding issues and concerns on the topic of cyberbullying. The Committee has reviewed the presentations and written materials that have been submitted, and is making a number of specific recommendations which, if adopted, will strengthen and support efforts to raise awareness and educate our students, parents and educators about the serious issue of cyberbullying.

The Standing Committee on Social Development recommends:

- 1. that government support the initiatives that are in place regarding peaceful schools;**
- 2. that government review the recommendations contained in the May 2003 report of the Standing Committee on Social Development entitled "Addressing Bullying: It Takes the Community" with a view to addressing recommendations yet to be implemented;**
- 3. that schools incorporate information on cyberbullying in their current internet or computer-use agreements which are signed by students and parents;**

4. **that schools examine their policies with regard to access to cellular telephones by students while on school property, with a view to limiting the use of such technology;**
5. **that schools partner with the Prince Edward Island Home and School Association to deliver programs to parents on how to “cyberproof” their homes and families;**
6. **that the Premier’s Action Committee on Family Violence initiate a campaign to distribute copies of their informational brochure “It’s Up to You - Internet Safety Tips for Parents” to all homes on Prince Edward Island;**
7. **that government, through the Department of Development and Technology continue its funding for the popular Youth of the Digital Age (YODA) program, with a requirement that the program’s teaching materials include an expanded component for students on safe and responsible online behaviour;**
8. **that the Legislative Assembly of Prince Edward Island recognize November 13-18, 2006, as National Bullying Awareness Week in Canada, and participate in various activities and events throughout the province in an effort to raise awareness about violence-prevention initiatives and, specifically, the impacts of cyberbullying.**

Introduction

The Standing Committee on Social Development is charged with matters concerning education, health and social development.

On November 22, 2006, the Committee was directed by the Legislative Assembly of Prince Edward Island, as follows:

WHEREAS bullying is a widespread form of violence that is common on school playgrounds, in neighbourhoods and in homes throughout Canada and the world;

AND WHEREAS bullying encompasses a variety of negative acts that are physical, verbal, psychological or a combination of these, carried out repeatedly over time;

AND WHEREAS bullying involves a real or perceived imbalance of power, with the more powerful child or group attacking those who are less powerful;

AND WHEREAS research has shown that bullying has long-lasting harmful effects for both the victim and the bully;

AND WHEREAS the Internet and cyber-bullying have become a part of today's modern youth culture;

AND WHEREAS this is a new form of bullying which enables students to anonymously post false, negative and/or hurtful information about other students;

AND WHEREAS statistics show that nearly sixty percent of Canadian students use chat rooms and instant messaging programs;

AND WHEREAS a recent survey found that fourteen percent of young Canadian Internet users had been threatened while using instant messaging;

AND WHEREAS sixteen percent of these young Internet users admitted they have posted hateful comments themselves;

AND WHEREAS cyber-bullying remains difficult to investigate;

AND WHEREAS in June, 2005 the Province and the RCMP joined forces to ask Island parents to ensure the contents of their children's personal web sites are appropriate;

AND WHEREAS many Island schools are committed to combating abuse with proactive programs and various anti-bullying initiatives;

AND WHEREAS the RCMP commercial crime section delivers Internet safety talks to students, teachers and parents each school year;

AND WHEREAS students have a duty to demonstrate care for themselves, for each other, and for their school and staff;

AND WHEREAS reducing bullying and youth violence is everyone's responsibility;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the members of this Assembly support parents and care givers in their efforts to review their children's websites and Internet activities;

AND THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the members of this Assembly direct the Standing Committee on Social Development to consult with interested parties including students, parents or guardians, schools, community organizations, agencies and services, business and other groups to examine the issue of cyber-bullying and violence-prevention initiatives among youth.

Committee Membership

Permanent members of the Committee are:

- Wayne Collins, Chairman (District 15, Winsloe-West Royalty)
- Carolyn Bertram (District 17, Crapaud-Hazel Grove)

- Hon. Robert Ghiz, Leader of the Official Opposition (District 13, Charlottetown-Rochford Square)
- Wilbur MacDonald (District 6, Belfast-Pownal Bay)
- Hon. Elmer MacFadyen, Minister of Community and Cultural Affairs (District 10, Sherwood-Hillsborough)
- Beth MacKenzie (District 18, Park Corner-Oyster Bed)
- David McKenna (District 7, Glen Stewart-Bellevue Cove)

Hon. Kevin MacAdam, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Aquaculture (District 2, Morell-Fortune Bay) resigned as a Member of the Legislative Assembly and member of the Committee on February 17, 2006

Substitute members included:

Hon. Jim Bagnall (Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Aquaculture)
Richard Brown (District 12, Charlottetown-Kings Square)
Wes MacAleer (District 14, Charlottetown-Spring Park)

Public Consultation Phase

The Committee met on January 12, 2006, to plan its work schedule for this matter. It was agreed to place an advertisement requesting public input on the topic of cyberbullying and violence prevention initiatives among youth. The Committee also decided to invite a representative from the law enforcement community to provide a briefing; and to contact school principals throughout the province and other interested stakeholders for the purpose of soliciting additional input.

On February 1, 2006, an advertisement inviting organizations and individuals to present their views to the Committee on this topic was published in *The Guardian*, *Journal Pioneer*, the *West Prince Graphic* and the *Eastern Graphic*, and a French language version ran in *La voix acadienne* on the same date. Information concerning the terms of reference of the Committee and background details were posted on-line on the committees' section of the Legislative Assembly website (www.assembly.pe.ca). An on-line comment form was provided for the convenience of the public in submitting their views.

At its meeting of February 23, 2006, the Committee heard from June Sanderson, Counseling Specialist with the provincial Department of Education, along with Julie Matheson, a high-school student. On March 9, 2006, your Committee met again to hear from Constable Don Crozier, of the RCMP "L" Division; Martha Ellis, Francis Hendricken, Wendy MacDonald, and Shirley Jay, representing the Prince Edward Island Home and School Federation; and Lana MacIsaac, Information Technology Facilitator with the Technology in Learning section of the Department of Education.

In addition to the personal representations made to the Committee, there was one written submission, as well as a number of documents relating to the Committee's deliberations on this topic filed with the Clerk of Committees over the course of the public consultation phase. All briefs and associated papers are retained in the permanent files of your Committee in the Office of the Legislative Assembly. A complete list of interveners forms Appendix A; a list of documents received by your Committee is contained in Appendix B of this report.

Following the public consultation phase of its work, your Committee met *in camera* on April 6, 2006, to consider its recommendations to the Legislative Assembly.

Overview of Presentations and Written Submissions

Cyberbullying - Defined

We are all familiar with schoolyard bullies. Cyberbullying is the online equivalent. Renowned Canadian expert in cyberbullying, Bill Belsey, in his definition of cyberbullying, states:

Cyberbullying involves the use of information and communications technologies to support deliberate, repeated, and hostile behaviour by an individual or group, that is intended to harm others. (www.bullying.org)

Cyberbullying can happen through the use of email, cell phone text or photographs, multimedia messages, instant messaging, defamatory web logs, personal web sites, and online personal polling sites.

Like all other forms of bullying, cyberbullying is about human relationships, power and control. But it does differ in several significant ways. Cyberbullying is most often "under the radar" of adults, who use information and communication technologies in quite functional ways. In contrast, young people are a connected generation. They are "always on" and are often communicating in ways that may be unfamiliar to adults and away from their supervision. Cyberbullies can hide behind the anonymity that the Internet can provide, an anonymity that can foster a loss of inhibition and protect the bully from identification and consequences. As well, cyberbullying behaviour is more common outside of school on home computers or cell phones. Schools and school boards may be dealing with the repercussions of cyberbullying, but the behaviour is taking place elsewhere.

The most deeply disturbing aspect of cyberbullying is the assault on the family home. Cyberbullying can happen at any time and in any place, making home no longer a safe refuge from social cruelty. A child may be intimidated, threatened or harassed while just steps away from his or her parents, who are completely unaware of the assault.

Examples of Cyberbullying

The Internet has enabled youth to create their own web sites, chat instantly with their peers and even read each other's diaries. It is a normal and a natural part of the lives of young people. But the technology also offers an opportunity for harm. Here are some examples of cyberbullying:

- Youth may send hateful or threatening messages to their peers using IM or instant messaging.
- Someone may steal another child's password and begin to chat with people, pretending to be the other person.
- Blogs or web logs, are online journals and are a fun way for youth to post messages for all their friends to see. Sometimes blogs are used to damage the reputations of others or to invade their privacy.
- Web sites may be created with stories, cartoons, pictures and jokes ridiculing others.
- There have been cases of teens sending mass emails to other users that include degrading photos of others. As well, the newer cell phones allow people to send and receive digital photos, which may be taken without the subject's permission or knowledge.

Preventing or Minimizing Cyberbullying

The Committee learned that there are some straightforward things that will go a long way to preventing or minimizing cyberbullying. These strategies are for both youth and their parents:

1. Keep computers in open, commonly-used or family spaces.
2. Never give out personal information or passwords. Personal information includes your name, the names of family and friends, address, phone number, school name, sports team name. It also includes your email address and photos of you and friends or family members.
3. Be wary. Don't believe everything you see or read online.
4. Use good manners. Be as polite to others online as you are off-line. If someone treats you rudely, do not respond.
5. Don't send a message to someone else when you are angry. Wait until you have calmed down and have had time to think.
6. Don't open a message from someone you don't know.
7. Trust your instincts. If something doesn't feel right, it probably isn't.
8. Give yourself a break. You don't have to be connected all the time. Spend time with friends and family in actual reality, not virtual reality.

Strategies for Parents

The Committee learned that awareness and education are the keys to promoting the safe and responsible use of the Internet and other information and communication technologies. Parents must be involved and be aware.

The Committee recommends that parents:

1. Learn everything you can about the Internet and what your children are doing online.
2. Encourage your children to come to you if anybody says or does something online that makes them feel uncomfortable or threatened.
3. Talk to your children about responsible Internet use and safety.
4. Create an agreement or contract for computer use with clear rules about online behavior.
5. Review your children's personal web sites on a regular basis to ensure they are safe and appropriate.

A Role for Schools

Schools have a leading role to play. The Committee supports efforts to integrate anti-bullying programs with a specific cyberbullying component into Island classrooms, and encourages school districts and schools to develop a plan of action to address how they will assist students to engage in the safe and responsible use of the Internet. Schools should work with parents, and other stakeholders, to move beyond the simple adoption of an Internet Use Policy to increase awareness about the seriousness of cyberbullying and the various strategies for preventing it. The Committee believes that professional development for teachers and administrators regarding safety and responsible use issues is a key component of a comprehensive response to cyberbullying. As well, the Committee expects that research on how the Internet is affecting the social and moral development of young people will be of assistance in formulating a plan of action for the entire community.

Recommendations

Beyond the general strategies for students, parents and educators listed previously in this report, the Standing Committee on Social Development has some specific recommendations for the consideration of the Members of the Legislative Assembly.

It is recommended:

- 1. that government support the initiatives that are in place regarding peaceful schools.**

Schools, in partnership with parents and communities, play a vital role in promoting acceptance, respect and tolerance. School-based anti-bullying programs are making a difference by addressing the root causes of bullying and cyberbullying.

- 2. that government review the recommendations contained in the May 2003 report of the Standing Committee on Social Development entitled “Addressing Bullying: It Takes the Community” with a view to addressing recommendations yet to be implemented.**

The Standing Committee on Social Development undertook a study of the issue of bullying, in general, in the province in 2003. Its final report was tabled and adopted by the Legislative Assembly in May 2003, and contained a total of ten recommendations. While reviewing the report, the Committee became aware that there are a number of those recommendations still under consideration or in the process of being implemented. The Committee endorses the work done at that time and believes that the conclusions of the report should be revisited by government.

- 3. that schools incorporate information on cyberbullying in their current internet or computer-use agreements which are signed by students and parents.**

Most schools surveyed indicated that they have adopted internet use policies, or acceptable use policies to guide students and staff use of the Internet. The policies essentially establish the rules that govern the use of the Internet at school. Although unacceptable online behaviour generally happens outside of school-sanctioned or educational Internet use, the addition of facts about cyberbullying to the agreements will serve to raise the awareness of both students and parents about the issue and how to combat it.

- 4. that schools examine their policies with regard to access to cellular telephones by students while on school property, with a view to limiting the use of such technology.**

The Committee is concerned about the growing acceptance of the use of cellular telephones by students in our schools, and questions the propriety and wisdom of the practice. There was some evidence presented to the Committee which would indicate that cell phones, even when not misused, are distracting to students and teachers in the classroom.

- 5. that schools partner with the Prince Edward Island Home and School Association to deliver programs to parents on how to “cyberproof” their homes and families.**

The Committee encourages increased involvement of parents in their children’s academic life, and sees this as an opportunity for parents to increase their knowledge about computers and the Internet. Schools, in partnership with the Prince Edward Island Home and School Association, are well-placed and efficient vehicles to provide

education

to parents on these issues, and to foster dialogue between parents and their children about personal and family values and the importance of safe and responsible choices in the use of the Internet.

6. **that the Premier's Action Committee on Family Violence initiate a campaign to distribute copies of the informational brochure "It's Up to You - Internet Safety Tips for Parents" to all homes on Prince Edward Island.**

This brochure, originally a project of the Prince Edward Island Child Sexual Abuse Advisory Committee, in partnership with the RCMP and the government of Prince Edward Island, contains straight-forward advice for parents on keeping their families safe online. It is a brief, practical guide for parents looking for knowledge, skills, and motivation to assist their school-age children. A copy of the brochure forms part of this report as Appendix C.

7. **that government, through the Department of Development and Technology, continue its funding for the popular Youth of the Digital Age (YODA) program, with a requirement that the program's teaching materials include an expanded component for students on safe and responsible online behaviour.**

Young adults are employed, through YODA, as technical coaches and facilitators to work with elementary school students across the province, teaching IT skills. Again, this would appear to be an ideal opportunity to coach students in both technical and life skills.

8. **that the Legislative Assembly of Prince Edward Island recognize November 13-18, 2006, as National Bullying Awareness Week in Canada, and participate in various activities and events throughout the province in an effort to raise awareness about violence-prevention initiatives and, specifically, the impacts of cyberbullying.**

A variety of activities can be organized in Island schools to address bullying. As an example, the Committee is pleased to suggest a cyberbullying poster contest for elementary school children, modeled after the successful project recently undertaken in Newfoundland and Labrador by the Citizens' Crime Prevention Association and co-sponsored by Aliant. In that contest, each student was asked to colour a poster related to the theme of "Stand up and speak out! Help put an end of cyberbullying!" The posters were collected and five winning posters selected which were combined into a poster series and distributed to each school in the province. The contest proved to be very popular, particularly as MP3 players were offered as a prize incentives.

Conclusion

The Standing Committee on Social Development was pleased to hear the concerns and ideas of Prince Edward Islanders on the issue of cyberbullying, which is emerging as one of the more challenging issues facing educators and parents as young people embrace the Internet and other

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mobile communications technologies. It is a concern that must be addressed in the context of preparing our youth for citizenship in the global, wired world.

The Committee thanks the individuals and organizations who participated in this process and provided their expertise on the topic.

Respectfully submitted,

Wayne Collins
Chairman
Standing Committee on Social Development

Appendix A List of Intervenors

Alberton Elementary School
Aliant
Amherst Cove School
Bloomfield Elementary School
Crozier, Constable Don, RCMP “L” Division
Czank, Wade
Donagh Regional School
Dundas Consolidated School
Eastlink
Englewood School
Greenfield Elementary School
ITAP (Innovation and Technology Association of Prince Edward Island)
Kensington Intermediate Senior High School
LM Montgomery School
MacIsaac, Lana
Matheson, Julie
Miscouche Consolidated School
Morell High School
O’Leary Elementary School
Prince Edward Island Home and School Federation
Prince Street Elementary School
Rollo Bay Consolidated School
Sanderson, June
Souris Consolidated School
St. Teresa's Consolidated School
Summerside Intermediate School
Tracadie Cross School

Appendix B Documentation

Belsey, Bill. "What Can Be Done About Cyberbullying," extract from the website www.cyberbullying.ca

Citizens' Crime Prevention Association of Newfoundland and Labrador. "Cyberbullying Workshop Highlights Need for Action," Crime Prevention in Newfoundland and Labrador, Fall 2005.

Gillis, Charlie. "You Have Hate Mail," MacLean's, January 9, 2006, p. 35

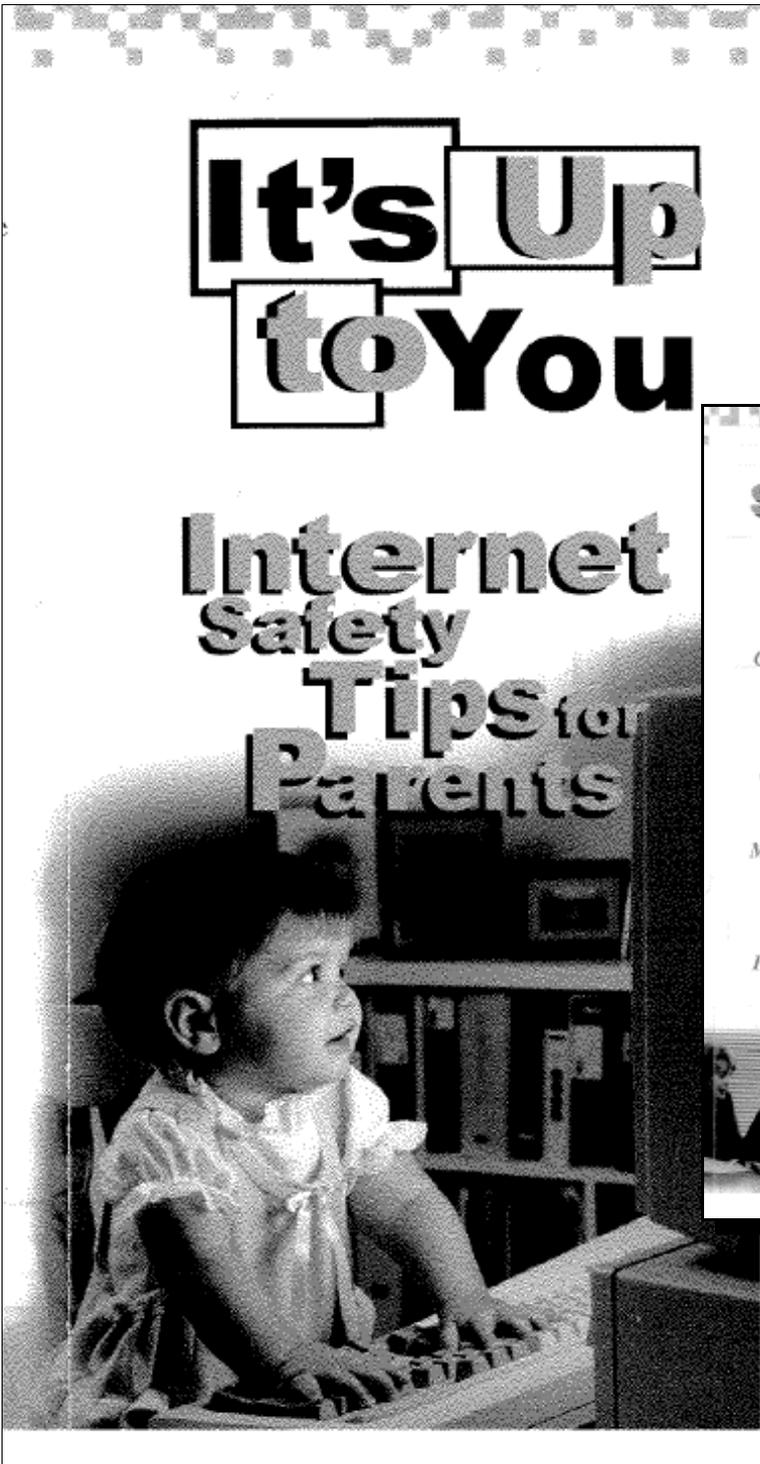
Government of Canada. "Illegal and Offensive Content on the Internet," 2001, ISBN 0-662-65442-0

Media Awareness Network. "Internet 101," extract from the website www.bewebaware.ca, 2004

Prince Edward Island Child Sexual Abuse Advisory Committee. "It's Up to You - Internet Safety Tips for Parents"

Royal Canadian Mounted Police Technological Crime Unit. "Internet Safety"

Appendix C
Extracts from Brochure Entitled "It's Up to You - Internet Safety Tips for Parents"

A collage of small images at the bottom of the page. It includes a person using a laptop, a person at a computer desk, a house, and a portrait of a man.

Safety Tips for Using the Internet

Computers should be located in family areas of your home. Avoid placing them in secluded areas such as a child's bedroom.

Children and teens should always ask permission to go on-line.

Monitor Internet use. Be aware of the sites your children and teens are visiting. Periodically check the screen while your children are on-line. You might wish to purchase software which blocks unwanted sites.

Identify with your children appropriate websites to visit. Bookmark interesting sites.

Discourage the use of chat lines. They are not e-mail but an active discussion with two or more computer users anywhere in the world. Remember, these are people you do not know. Teens are more apt to participate in open discussions regarding relationships. As a result they may be more vulnerable to exploitation. Producers monitor chat lines!

Never permit your child or teen to give out identifying and personal information. This includes name, phone number, credit card number, as well as home or school e-mail addresses.

Never permit your child or teen to arrange a face-to-face meeting with someone they met on-line.

Never allow your child or teen to send pictures. Pictures can be altered for exploitative purposes.

Never allow your child or teen to respond to messages that are suggestive, mean, obscene, threatening or just feel weird, uncomfortable, confusing or scary. Encourage your child or teen to tell you if they receive such a message or if they mistakenly access material of a racist, sexually explicit or violent nature.