

SAFE SCHOOLS:

**Bullying Prevention
& Intervention**
REVIEW PANEL

**Building Healthy Relationships and an
Inclusive, Caring Learning Environment**
Community Summary Report

The tragic death of Devan Bracci-Selvey prompted this review of bullying in the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board (HWDSB). We dedicate this report and its recommendations to the memory of Devan, to his family and to everyone who suffers as a result of bullying.

About this summary

This community report is a summary of a much longer report, “Building Healthy Relationships and an Inclusive, Caring Learning Environment: Final Report of the HWDSB Safe Schools Bullying Prevention and Intervention Review Panel.” This summary will give you the highlights from the full report. If you’re interested in learning more, check out the full report ([hwdsb.on.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Safe-Schools-Report-2021-Full-Report.pdf](https://www.hwdsb.on.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Safe-Schools-Report-2021-Full-Report.pdf)).

In this community summary you’ll find information on:

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Helpful resources

If you or a loved one is experiencing bullying or if reading this report brings up difficult past experiences, get help now. We’ve listed resources at the end of this report.

The review panel

On October 7, 2019, Devan Bracci-Selvey was killed behind Sir Winston Churchill Secondary School in Hamilton. Many details about his death remain unclear, but friends and family said that Devan had been a victim of persistent bullying.

Following Devan's death, HWDSB trustees created the Safe Schools: Bullying Prevention and Intervention Review Panel. They asked three well respected community members — Dr. Jean Clinton, Brenda Flaherty and Dr. Gary Warner — to help the board address bullying.

The goals of the review were to:

Provide independent recommendations for bullying prevention and intervention in schools; and

Consider the root causes of bullying.

From December 2019 to November 2020 the review panel consulted with leading bullying researchers and heard from more than 10,000 people, including students, parents, guardians, caregivers, community groups, service providers, school staff, board representatives and concerned Hamiltonians.

This resulted in 11 recommendations and a series of actions for HWDSB, the Hamilton community and Province of Ontario to take to address bullying.

Community feedback

Between February 12 and November 1, 2020, the review panel conducted:

- 17 public consultations
- 9 consultations with groups connected with the school board; and
- an online survey of students in Grades 4 to 12, parents, guardians and caregivers, and staff members.

The panel heard from more than 10,000 people.

Our approach

- **Focus on students and families:** The recommendations and actions in this report put the experiences and needs of students and families above all else.
- **Use the best research and evidence available:** The review panel used the best available research evidence from a variety of disciplines to help make the recommendations.
- **Use an anti-oppressive/anti-racist framework:** This report was built on the understanding that race, gender, disability, income level, gender identity, ethnicity, religion, etc. play a role in bullying and being bullied. The review panel made a significant effort to seek out diverse perspectives and listen to voices that may not often be heard to learn about anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racism, Islamophobia, Two-Spirit and LGBTQIA+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual, plus) issues and more.
- **Change is needed beyond Hamilton:** The report includes recommendations that can be applied locally and are relevant beyond Hamilton.

What we learned

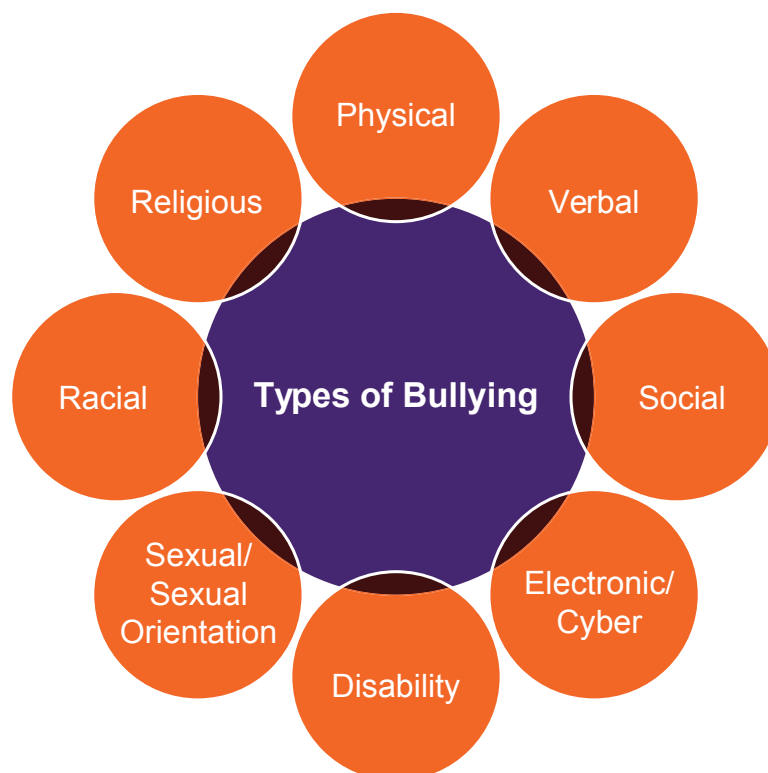
What is bullying?

Bullying is aggression, but not all aggression is bullying. Bullying is intentional, repeated and marked by a power imbalance. Because children and youth who are bullied have less power than those who bully them, they have difficulties defending themselves. They need help from adults in their school community.

- Bullying is a serious issue that causes significant immediate and long-term harm for children and youth as well as adults.
- Bullying is prevalent within HWDSB schools but is not unique to Hamilton. It happens in schools across the country.
- Certain groups experience bullying at much higher rates. Students who identify as Two-Spirit and LGBTQIA+ and/or gender diverse report the highest rates in HWDSB.
- Bullying is connected to racism and other forms of individual and systemic oppression.
- Bullying is a societal issue. Schools are in a unique position to address and respond, but they can't do it alone. They need to work in partnership with students, families, communities and government.

Over 30% of Canadian students are bullied by their peers on an occasional basis and from 7 to 10% are bullied daily. According to UNICEF, Canada ranks in the top five of 31 economically advanced countries for highest bullying victimization rates.

The prevalence of bullying victimization among HWDSB students is very high, with 60% of surveyed students reporting being bullied by others at any rate (pre-COVID) and 20% reporting being bullied frequently (pre-COVID).



What works to prevent and address bullying?

Bullying prevention programs should be based on up-to-date evidence, focused on the whole school and offered in a variety of ways. The best outcomes are obtained from intervention programs that:

KiVa is a bullying prevention program for students in Grades 1 to 9 developed in Finland. It has strong evidence for its effectiveness. Almost all schools in Finland participate in the KiVa program, which is a permanent feature of a school's bullying prevention work. KiVa is both a universal program for all students and a program for students who are involved in bullying. KiVa is being used around the world. It is the world's most studied anti-bullying program.

- Have different approaches for low-, moderate- and high-risk situations (for example, KiVa).
- Are school-wide and address the social environment, culture, and climate with clear anti-bullying policies.
- Collect data to monitor progress.
- Engage families.
- Are based in evidence (for example, WITS, Fourth R and Roots of Empathy).

Interested in learning more?

witsprogram.ca

youthrelationships.org

rootsofempathy.org

kivaprogram.net

What does not work to prevent and address bullying?

Research shows that some approaches that schools have used do not work to reduce bullying. These include:

- Programs that include zero tolerance and conflict resolution.
- Programs that encourage youth to fight back.
- Programs that are led exclusively by youth without supporting adults.
- One-day awareness-raising events.

What we heard from the community

Thousands of people shared their ideas, experiences and solutions with the review panel through the survey and community consultation. The high-level themes coming out of this feedback included:

Bullying is a problem in Hamilton. Students, parents, guardians, caregivers and staff all experience bullying. Bullying affects everyone's mental health and well-being.

60% of HWDSB students reported being bullied at least a few times in the previous year; 20% reported being bullied frequently.

Many children and youth experience bullying because of their race, ethnicity, newcomer status, disability, religion or Indigenous identity.

Bullying is most likely to take place in areas of low or no supervision.

Students who identify as gender diverse and/or Two-Spirit and LGBTQIA+ were two- to three-times more likely to report frequent bullying.

Bullied students reported that when they told someone about being bullied, things only got better one-third of the time.

The majority of parents, guardians and caregivers were satisfied with steps to prevent bullying within HWDSB schools. One-third were not satisfied.

People want to create a culture of caring at school, but there are many times when a culture of fear prevents people from reporting or taking action.

Everyone wants HWDSB bullying policies and procedures that are clear, easy to access, well understood, consistently followed and monitored for effectiveness.

Students and their parents, guardians and caregivers want clear communication and want to know that their voices are heard and valued.

Parents, guardians and caregivers want more bullying reporting and want bullying data to be publicly released at regular intervals.

People and groups in the Hamilton community have lots of experience and skills to share, but they find it difficult to work together with schools and HWDSB staff.

Schools, community groups and programs that address bullying need more resources. These resources need to be culturally appropriate, of high quality and distributed equitably.



Our recommendations

The student who experiences bullying, the student who bullies and the student who witnesses bullying all exist together in a school community. Within this school community, bullying is influenced by a range of relationships, settings and social forces, some of which are outside the school. These include parents, educators, peers, school boards, communities and governments.

When we came up with our recommendations, the circle diagram on this page reminded us that the student is at the centre of learning. It also helped us remember the different environments — each one shown as its own circle on the diagram — that influence both bullying and healthy growth and development. We made sure we had recommendations for every circle — for parents, guardians and caregivers, for schools and the school board, and for the community and government — as well as for the students at the centre of it all.

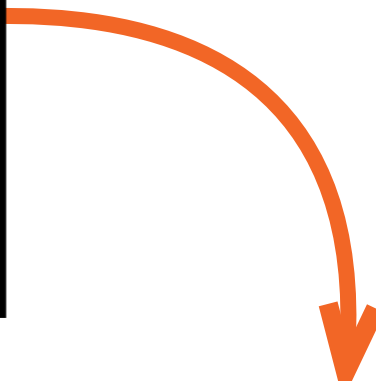
The primary purpose of the review was to improve the experience of students, but some of our recommendations are also meant to reduce the negative impact of school-based bullying on parents, guardians, caregivers and HWDSB staff.

Recommendations

1

Increase student ownership and seek out and listen to student voices

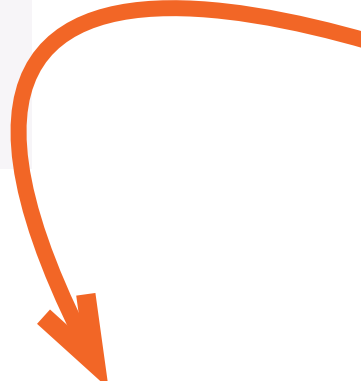
Students have the knowledge, expertise and energy to make classrooms and schools better places. They are also the most directly impacted by bullying. The review panel recommends that students are asked about their experiences of bullying and their feelings about school often and in different ways, not just surveys. Students should also have a say in decisions about school activities and programming that's designed to stop bullying and create a caring school.



2

Involve parents, guardians and caregivers in bullying prevention and response in meaningful ways


Parents, guardians and caregivers play a critical role in a student's life and are deeply impacted by bullying. The review panel recommends regularly asking them for advice and ideas, whether their child was involved in a bullying incident, their school is putting together a program or the school board is looking for input on policy or plans. When a bullying incident is reported, parents, guardians and caregivers need to be informed, updated and given as much information as possible about the outcome.



3

Develop multi-tiered supports and programming

Bullying must be tackled at different levels (or "tiers") to meet the needs of different students. Children who are directly involved in bullying need special supports for mental health and healing. Students who are at risk need coaching and help with peer relationships. All students need caring, inclusive classrooms and schools and to learn skills like empathy. The review panel recommends that the school board create a lead staff position to work with bullying experts, students, parents, guardians, caregivers and educators to create this programming. We would like to see some programs in place for 2021–2022.





4

Support schools so they can establish their own bullying prevention and intervention plans

The review panel recommends that each school is given the time, staff resources, information and tools to coordinate their safe school team and make their own unique plan to prevent and address bullying. Students, parents, guardians, caregivers, school staff, community groups and service providers should be involved in creating the plan. School staff also need specific training to prevent and respond to bullying.

5

Examine special education practices from a student-centred learning perspective

Students with special education needs have the same right to feel like they belong as other students. The review panel recommends that HWDSB look at the best ways to support students with special education needs, including reviewing the use of self-contained classes.

A self-contained classroom is a classroom where a special education teacher is responsible for the instruction of all academic subjects. The classroom is typically separated from general education classrooms but within a neighborhood school. Children who are placed in self-contained classrooms often have multiple, intensive specialized education needs.

6

Review policies and procedures from equity, anti-racism and anti-oppression perspectives

All students should feel accepted and included at school, regardless of their faith, race, gender, ability, sexual orientation, ethnic background and more. The review panel recommends HWDSB examine its current bullying and safe schools policies and procedures to make sure they don't treat certain groups differently, paying close attention to policies and procedures on reporting and responding to bullying. The board should work with equity experts to do this review.

7**Ensure policies and procedures are followed consistently**

When it comes to bullying, rules need to be followed. The review panel recommends that HWDSB makes sure bullying policies, protocols and guidelines, including codes of conduct, are understood and followed by school staff and other members of the school community.

8**Set the foundation for a culture of caring**

Bullying is less likely to happen in caring schools where everyone feels like they belong. The review panel recommends that the board make bullying awareness and prevention a priority and commit to making changes that will support caring, inclusive schools. First, the board should come up with a commitment statement specific to bullying as well as a set of core values to guide these changes. Second, the board should collect data on bullying more often and make it public. And third, the board must ensure there are people or groups at the school, school board and community levels who are watching to make sure change happens.

9**Strengthen the leadership skills needed for culture change**

School leaders – such as principals and superintendents – need special skills to be the champions of change. The review panel recommends that school leaders receive training and coaching so they can continue to improve their leadership skills. School leaders need the skills to continuously ask “How are we doing?” and “Can we do it better?” They need the skills to support and care for school staff. And they need the skills to inspire the creation of caring, inclusive schools.

10**Work with a wide range of community partners**

Bullying is a problem that affects schools and the community. The review panel recommends that HWDSB develop a plan for more and stronger community partnerships to address bullying and create caring, inclusive schools. The plan needs to be clear, have goals and be available to the public.

Ask the Ministry of Education for support

Addressing bullying takes time, people and money. The review panel recommends that HWDSB ask the Ministry of Education to provide resources that will support this work.

Taking action

The full report lists between five and 11 specific actions under each recommendation. Rather than select a few individual actions to highlight, we've chosen to share what most of the actions have in common. For a complete list of actions, see the full report (hwdsb.on.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Safe-Schools-Report-2021-Full-Report.pdf).

What the actions have in common

- **Communicating and collaborating.** Make students, parents, guardians, caregivers and educators part of decision-making processes. Invite a wide range of individuals and groups to provide feedback and participate in creating school and board programming.
- **Providing specialized support.** Students involved in high-risk bullying incidents need specialized support that is geared to their age and developmental stage.
- **Coaching and training.** Give staff the knowledge, skills and tools to handle bullying properly as well as to create caring, inclusive schools.
- **Focusing on relationships.** Healthy schools start with healthy relationships. Everyone from students to trustees will need to learn how to build and strengthen them.
- **Working to end oppression and discrimination.** Bullying is about power. Build equitable, accepting and inclusive schools and school boards and HWDSB will have less bullying.
- **Evaluating progress.** Set goals, collect data and evaluate progress in order to learn and make improvements.
- **Sharing with the public.** Share results with the public so everyone has the same information and institutions are held accountable for results.
- **Looking beyond bullying.** Bullying isn't about one person or a single event. We need to consider the broader environment in which bullying takes place and put the overall well-being of students first.
- **Finding the resources.** Dedicate resources where the needs are greatest and make a long-term commitment to bullying prevention and intervention.

Immediate actions

Members of the review panel have identified 10 actions that should happen immediately.

2. Create a lead staff position within HWDSB to address bullying.

4. Develop a commitment statement specific to bullying prevention and intervention and the right of every child to have an education that is free from violence and discrimination. Establish core organizational values that ensure a culture of caring and respect. Establish timelines and clear outcomes for bullying prevention and intervention work.

6. Increase supervision outside of the classroom during recess, lunchtime and breaks. One option is to bring staff from local recreation programs and youth serving agencies into schools.

8. Design age-appropriate illustrations, with the help of students, that explain bullying and how to respond to it as a bystander, friend, ally and educator. Distribute the educational resources throughout HWDSB community.

10. Develop a community level committee to oversee the implementation of review panel recommendations at the highest level. The committee will operate independently from the board. A wide range of individuals and groups, including HWDSB, should have a seat at the table.

1. Reflect upon the report findings and recommendations and share them widely.

3. Coordinate bullying intervention and prevention efforts with HWDSB's Equity Action Plan, Mental Health Strategy, Indigenous Education and Indigenous Cultural Safety work, and special education programs.

5. Ensure specialized supports for students affected by bullying.

7. Collect data on school-level incidents of bullying on a regular basis and report to the Board of Trustees. Encourage full participation in School Climate Surveys and share results with students, parents, guardians, caregivers and the general public.

9. Form a board steering committee to give regular support and direction to HWDSB as it takes action on the review panel's recommendations. Make sure students, parents, guardians, caregivers, educators, unions and community partners are all represented on the committee and include at least one community advocacy group focused on bullying. Consider sharing leadership of the committee with a student or advocacy group.

Call to action

It is time to take real action, together, to develop inclusive, caring schools and thriving, compassionate citizens using a whole-child approach to education. This means changing the way we learn, teach, lead, set priorities, collaborate, communicate, fund and measure. We must pay attention to child and youth well-being. Question our assumptions. Invite all perspectives. Support each other's efforts. Bring in outside resources. And never look away. We call upon all Hamiltonians — students, parents, guardians, caregivers, school staff, unions, board employees, trustees, community members, community groups and researchers — as well as all levels of government to contribute to these changes as part of the village it takes to raise a child.

What comes next?

Members of the review panel offer to continue to support the work as volunteers. We propose returning to trustees and senior leadership every six months for the first year to 18 months to share knowledge and discuss progress.

The review panel has a website (hwdsb.on.ca/about/safe-schools-review-panel) and an email address (safeschoolsreview@outlook.com) that will be checked regularly.

Who was involved?

The review panel was made up of three community members:

Dr. Jean Clinton, a Clinical Professor in the department of Psychiatry and Behavioural Neurosciences in the division of Child Psychiatry at McMaster University.

Brenda Flaherty, former Executive Vice-President and Chief Operating Officer at Hamilton Health Sciences.

Dr. Gary Warner, an emeritus professor and former administrator at McMaster University, with more than 45 years of experience with issues related to international development, peace, poverty, human rights, anti-racism, immigration, and social justice.

None of the panelists are or have been employees of HWDSB. They acted independently of the school board.

KOJO Institute conducted public consultations, wrote the final report and provided expertise on equity, diversity and inclusion.

Four expert advisors ensured up-to-date research was used in the project: Barry Finlay, Dr. Debra J. Pepler, Dr. Kathy Short and Dr. Tracy Vaillancourt.

More information on who was involved can be found in the full version of the final report, available ([to be added once report is approved](#)).

Helpful resources

Need help now?

If you or a loved one is experiencing bullying now or reading this report brings up difficult past experiences for you, we encourage you to reach out to the following resources right away:

- COAST Hamilton: Mental health crisis line (905) 972-8338 or www.coasthamilton.ca
- Kids Help Phone: 24/7 counselling and information service for young people. Crisis line 1-800-668-6868 or text 686868; visit www.kidshelpphone.ca

Want to report bullying?

Please tell your child's teacher, vice-principal or principal immediately.

If you aren't comfortable reporting bullying to staff, students can use the free and anonymous HWDSB Helps service to share a tip about bullying, mental health issues, substance use and more. Tips are sent to school staff. This is not a crisis line or counselling service.

Text 905-963-0066. Standard rates apply.

Download the HWDSB Helps app for iOS and Android.

Web chat at bit.ly/HWDSBhelpswebchat

If you have questions, please contact your school's principal.

Interested in learning more?

- See the full report "Building Healthy Relationships and an Inclusive, Caring Learning Environment: Final Report of the HWDSB Safe Schools Bullying Prevention and Intervention Review Panel" at: hwdsb.on.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Safe-Schools-Report-2021-Full-Report.pdf
- HWDSB Bullying Prevention and Intervention Information for Parents and Students: <https://www.hwdsb.on.ca/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/Bullying-Prevention-Handbook-2017-final.pdf>
- HWDSB's We Help <https://www.hwdsb.on.ca/secondary/supports/mental-health-and-well-being/> offers tip sheets on mental health and well-being.
- PREVNet www.prevnet.ca has resources, fact sheets and tips on bullying for different audiences (for example, children, teens, parents, educators etc.)
- WITS <https://witsprogram.ca/wits-home/> offers resources for families, children and youth, and schools.
- Fourth R <https://youthrelationships.org/> is focused on youth. Resources help understand and address various behaviours, including aggression.
- School Mental Health Ontario: <https://smho-smso.ca/>

Want to learn more about HWDSB's work?

HWDSB Bullying Intervention and Prevention

hwdsb.on.ca/elementary/supports/safe-schools/

HWDSB Equity Action Plan:

hwdsb.on.ca/about/equity/

HWDSB Mental Health & Wellbeing:

hwdsb.on.ca/about/equity/hwdsb.on.ca/elementary/supports/mental-health-and-well-being/

HWDSB Indigenous Education:

hwdsb.on.ca/elementary/supports/indigenous-education/

HWDSB Special Education:

hwdsb.on.ca/elementary/supports/special-ed/

hwdsb.on.ca/safeschoolsreview

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