

Submission by the

**Ontario Teachers' Federation/
Fédération des enseignantes et
des enseignants de l'Ontario**

to the

**Standing Committee on General
Government on Bill 212 *Education
Amendment Act* (Progressive Discipline
and School Safety).**

May 14, 2007

OITF/FEO

Submission of the Ontario Teachers' Federation/Fédération des enseignantes et des enseignants de l'Ontario to the Standing Committee on General Government on Bill 212 *Education Amendment Act (Progressive Discipline and School Safety)*

The Ontario Teachers' Federation (OTF) welcomes this opportunity to provide the Standing Committee on General Government with feedback on Bill 212 *Education Amendment Act (Progressive Discipline and School Safety)*.

OTF is the statutory organization representing the professional interests of teachers employed in the publicly funded schools of Ontario. It is composed of four affiliated organizations—l'Association des enseignantes et des enseignants franco-ontariens, the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario, the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association and the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation—and has a membership of 155,000 teachers.

School safety is an issue of concern to each and every one of the teachers who are members of OTF. We want not only students, parents, teachers and other educational workers to be assured of a safe environment in which to teach and learn, but we also want all Ontarians to value our schools as safe and secure places. The Affiliates of OTF have done considerable work on looking at what will make our schools safer places to learn and to work. They have, in the last few years, focused particularly on the impact bullying can have on everyone in our schools.

As with many issues it is important that we strike a balance. In this case we must find that fine balance between protecting the safety of students, teachers and other educational workers and addressing the root cause of student behaviours.

While we recognize that the details of these amendments contained in Bill 212 will be further defined in the Regulation addressing some of our questions, we do want to address the changes contained within the Bill.

Suspension and Expulsion

The teachers of Ontario have never supported teachers having the authority to suspend students nor principals having the authority to expel students. In fact, many of our Affiliates have advised their teachers not to exercise this right. Therefore, we are generally in support of the proposals in Bill 212 to return the authority to suspend to principals and the authority to expel to Boards.

The concept of progressive discipline is one that is understood by Federation. The intention is to balance between changing inappropriate behaviour and applying consequences for that inappropriate behaviour. While we recognize that there needs to be a common sense application of this idea, it is also important that it not become an excuse for school administration and management not to deal with significant safety issues in our schools. It will be important for the successful implementation of this concept to provide appropriate inservice for teachers and principals.

Teachers are pleased that the Bill includes provisions for students to not only continue with their academic programs, but also for students to have access to treatment as needed. We have two issues we would like to raise concerning this part of the Bill. The first is that this commendable initiative needs to be appropriately funded. By that we mean that it should not be funded from existing grants to schools boards. Recognizing that this work is often quite expensive, the cost of providing the right funding is even greater.

The second issue we would raise is that from our point of view it is essential that these students continue to be taught by trained and certified professional teachers. The Bill gives the Minister the authority to establish policies that would "...impose different requirements on the provision of the programs for different circumstances." It is our position that such policies should ensure the qualifications and certification of teachers.

We support the increased emphasis the Bill puts on communication surrounding matters of suspension and expulsion. It is imperative that the student and the student's family understand their rights and responsibilities in such difficult circumstances. We also recognize that some of these changes are in response to certain findings of the Ontario Human Rights Commission.

We would like to emphasize that it is also important to include teachers in the communications. The level of communication is of greater importance to teachers at the point when students are being reintegrated from the special programs. This matter is one that has long been of concern to us, and we hope the development of the Regulation for this Bill provides the Government with an opportunity to address the subject.

Mitigating Factors

Bill 212 requires the Principal to consider certain factors on making recommendations for expulsion. These factors are to be defined in Regulation. We recognize the significance of this provision of the Bill and the rationale for its inclusion. We do, however, expect that Federation will be consulted in the development of this Regulation and consideration of its impact on the safety of our schools.

Bullying

As mentioned earlier, the Ontario Teachers' Federation is very concerned about bullying in our schools. We are pleased to see bullying included as an offence in these changes. The devastation that bullying can have on those who are being bullied is deep and can be far reaching.

We do have some questions that we would like to be addressed concerning bullying.

1. We hope that the changes will include all forms of bullying including cyber bullying which, as we know from news reports, is increasing as technology advances.

2. It is important that the changes also include the bullying of teachers and other educational workers in schools as well as the bullying of students. Once again, committee members will be aware from news reports of the kind of physical and psychological bullying to which teachers have been subjected.
3. In addition to the consequences outlined in the Bill, we need to increase our prevention and intervention regarding bullying.

Summary

In general Federation welcomes the introduction of Bill 212 *Education Amendment Act* (Progressive Discipline and School Safety). It brings clarity, transparency and accountability to an issue of fundamental importance in our schools – confidence in our schools as safe and secure places to teach and learn.

- We support giving principals the authority to suspend and school boards the authority to expel.
- We believe that Progressive Discipline must be appropriately applied and inserviced
- We agree that suspended and expelled students should be in alternative programs provided by certified teachers, and that the programs should be properly funded.
- We look forward to improvements in communication among all stakeholders in the area of school safety.
- We expect to be consulted on the development of the Regulation of mitigating factors.
- We want to see a broad definition of bullying in the Regulation and offer our help in the development of this Regulation.

We welcome the opportunity to address the committee on this important piece of legislation and offer our assistance in the development of the Regulation.