

## **Exclusions – Principal Responsibilities**

### **January 30, 2019**

On January 30, a call was made to have the Minister of Education restrict when and how a principal may exclude a student from school.

The Ontario Principals' Council, representing 5,300 principals and vice-principals in Ontario's public elementary and secondary schools, would like to share our school-based knowledge about the rare instances when exclusions are necessary and why principals need to retain this ability to provide a safe school environment for all students, including the student who is subject to the temporary exclusion.

First, exclusions are never used to discipline a student. Rather, they are used when there are serious safety concerns. When a student's actions or presence is detrimental to the physical or mental well-being of other students, the student may be excluded from the classroom or school – usually for a short period of time – until adequate resources are put in place to address the safety concerns that have arisen.

While we would always prefer to have a student attending school, there are, unfortunately, some instances in which the needs of a student cannot be met due to a lack of human or financial resources. We have lobbied the government to provide these resources. Until that happens, exclusions will continue to be one instrument used to ensure the safety of all students. They are generally of limited duration and only initiated after other strategies and options have proved unsuccessful.

Second, these decisions are never made exclusively by a principal, but only after consulting with board officials and Supervisory Officers. When used, an exclusion would include a support plan so that the family, school and board have specific resources in place to ensure that the student can safely be reintegrated into the school setting. It is also important to note that the decision to exclude a student may be appealed to the board.

Third, there has been an unfortunate increase in the number of incidents in schools over the past several years involving aggressive or violent behaviour by students. This data has been collected by our organization and by the public teacher federations. It is critical that we find out why these incidents appear to be increasing and how we can respond. In the meantime, until we can proactively manage this reality, exclusions remain one possible response until resources and/or a safety plan can be put in place for the student whose behavior is of concern.

We have shared our concerns with the government about these increased incidents and have proposed a number of recommendations including the establishment of a Think Tank to research, study and develop recommendations; additional resources for students with complex behavioural needs; additional training for staff so they can refer

students to appropriate medical practitioners; mental health leads in schools; and more in-school supervision.

Finally, we understand why parents have concerns about exclusions. They are advocating for their children, which is their right and responsibility. Similarly, principals and vice-principals must advocate for every student and staff member in our schools. If the actions of a student put themselves or other students at risk, we must respond immediately, and sometimes – albeit rarely – that may mean temporarily excluding that student from a class, classes or the school until their needs and behaviour can be managed in an appropriate way.

Principals and vice-principals do not exclude students frequently or lightly. They do so only with the benefit of consultation and in an effort to ensure that all students in the school are kept safe.