

## Transparency questioned

I have been reflecting a great deal of late over all the discussion surrounding accountability, transparency and open government. I question if such a thing will ever exist.

For example, the Ontario Ministry of Education policy program memoranda, school board policy, and what is actually taking place at the ground level are identifiable separate matters. There is a huge difference between law and policy.

As campaigning vigorously continues over the next few weeks, I would ask all potential candidates to consider what accountability, transparency and open government would look like. And I would ask that all non-deciders consider accountability, transparency and open government when weighing the pros, the cons and the platform of their nominated candidates.

Legislation is only as good as those who enforce it. Current safe schools legislation in the Province of Ontario is proof positive of this. There is no real-time enforcement of Keeping our Kids Safe at School Act and The Accepting Schools Act. The very reason parents are turning toward our judicial system for resolve is because of the lack of accountability within our educational system.

?The main difference between a law and a policy are who can create them and who can enforce them. A law is legally enforceable by the judicial system and is created at the provincial and federal levels. A policy provides a set of rules or guidelines that are meant to guide behaviour or practices and are enforceable by the body that created it, rather than the judicial system? ... in this case, our school boards.

Policies are also created in response to legislation. Ontario safe schools legislation requires that each school have a safe and accepting school team in place. This is confirmed by way of Program Policy Memorandum No. 144 as follows:

?Each school must have in place a safe and accepting schools team responsible for fostering a safe, inclusive, and accepting school climate ...?

I have been told that ?it is the expectation that all schools have a safe schools team in place. There was no requirement to report this and therefore there is no record.? The mandate must in PPM 144 now becomes redundant because it omitted to state that the implementation of safe and accepting school teams must be reported. How convenient.

Further, ?the safe and accepting schools team is responsible for creating a climate where bullying has no place, yet they are not responsible for responding to incidents.?

AND the best of all ? ?School boards are not required to track incidents of bullying.?

Are school boards choosing to ignore the serious issue of bullying or choosing to deal with the issue head on? The provincial government that created and promoted our safe schools legislation as the first of its kind in Canada is trying to appear as if they have done their due diligence?

A York Region District School Board trustee once told me to ?trust your school board to do the right thing.? I waited three years for that to happen. This is not an action that represents accountability or transparency.

As mentioned earlier, there is a huge difference between law and policy. Neither should be ignored and both should be dealt with.

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