A Review of School Board Cyberbullying Policies in Alberta

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An online search for school board cyberbullying/bullying policies in Alberta was conducted. The results showed that while only five school boards had a bullying policy, many schools had technology or Internet use guidelines. The online search included an assessment of one extensive school board cyberbullying policy as well as Internet use guidelines in two large school boards in Alberta. While technology and Internet use guidelines support anti-bullying initiatives, it is argued that a clear well defined policy empowers administrators to make informed decisions on how to handle cyberbullying. Finally, policy recommendations are proposed based on the results of the online search.

On a entrepris une recherche en ligne pour trouver les politiques des conseils scolaires albertains en matière d'intimidation/harcèlement en ligne. Les résultats indiquent que si seulement cinq conseils ont mis en place une politique en matière d'intimidation, plusieurs écoles ont des directives quant à l'emploi des technologies et de l'internet. La recherche en ligne a comporté l'évaluation d'une politique scolaire approfondie sur le harcèlement en ligne ainsi que les directives quant à l'emploi de l'internet de deux grands conseils scolaires en Alberta. Bien que les directives en matière de l'emploi des technologies et de l'internet appuient les initiatives contre le harcèlement, nous affirmons que la mise en place d'une politique clairement définie permet aux administrateurs de prendre des décisions éclairées quant à la gestion du harcèlement en ligne. Nous terminons en proposant des recommandations stratégiques reposant sur les résultats de la recherche en ligne.

Bullying is recognized as a societal problem, one that schools have had to acknowledge and deal with more in the past decade than ever before. With the steady increase of the use of technology since the turn of the century (Raskauskas & Stoltz, 2007), there have been increased reports of bullying and media awareness resulting in schools and school boards having to slowly change the nature of school policy on bullying (Samara & Smith, 2008). Early North American studies have found the prevalence of cyberbullying in 1588 youth: reports of cyberbullying at 29% (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2007a), victims of cyberbullying at more than 29%, and individuals who have witnessed cyberbullying at over 47% (Aricak et al., 2008; Patchin & Hinduja, 2006). Samara and Smith (2008) surveyed a random sampling of UK schools to examine the types of school policies they had in place in response to the UK government's anti-bullying campaign. They found that from 1996 to 2002, 217 primary and secondary schools in Central England did change policy implementations from having a bullying policy as part of a broader policy on behaviour and discipline to including a separate anti-bullying policy. Smith and colleagues

(2012) conducted a follow-up content analysis of school anti-bullying policies, and found that while there may be an increase in anti-bullying policies in UK schools, very few policies mentioned or referred to cyberbullying.

Schools are increasingly integrating and using technology as a means of learning for students, parents, and teachers. However, not all boards have specifically or explicitly set parameters around acceptable and unacceptable online behaviour. Consequently, administrators, educators, parents, and students are left deciphering real life cases with little guidance.

In Alberta, there has been a targeted focus on anti-bullying/bullying prevention since 1996; however, an examination of school board policies has yet to be formally conducted. Our purpose in the current review is to examine the presence of Alberta school board policies and procedures pertaining to cyberbullying. First, we will present a review of cyberbullying and its psychological and academic effects of cyberbullying. Second, based on a comprehensive Alberta school board website search, we will report on a sampling of current Alberta cyberbullying policies and technology use regulations. Finally, based on research on school-based bullying policies and other Canadian cyberbullying policies, we will make recommendations to inform future policy development at both the school and provincial level.

Cyberbullying and Schools

Cyberbullying is the latest form of bullying present in Canadian schools (see Tokunaga 2010 for a discussion on traditional bullying and cyberbullying). What distinguishes cyberbullying from traditional bullying is that aggression is being perpetuated through electronic or digital media such as cell phones, blogs, chat rooms, and social networks (i.e., Facebook and Twitter; Hinduja & Patchin, 2009). Cyberbullying is an intentional form of aggression, and similar to the traditional definition of bullying, aggressors can be comprised of an individual or a group (Smith, Mahdavi, Carvahlo, Fisher, Russell, & Tippett, 2008; Werner, Bumpus, & Rock, 2010). Sending harassing or threatening emails or instant texts, posting derogatory comments about someone on a website, spreading rumours, or stalking someone are all examples of bullying through electronic devices (Patchin & Hinduja, 2007).

Like traditional bullying, cyberbullying has three distinguishing features. First, there is intent to harm whereby a bully seeks pleasure or profit through the mistreatment of someone. Second, the cyberbullying must be repetitive in nature (over time); and third, there is a perception of power of the bully over the victim (Patchin & Hinduja, 2007; Vaillancourt et al., 2008). Although there is recent debate surrounding the evolving need to revisit the definition of bullying, the majority of the research literature has embraced this three-criteria-definition of bullying (Smith, Cowie, Olafsson, & Liefooghe, 2002; Ybarra, Boyd, Korchmaros, & Oppenheim, in press). These three features must be present to some degree for acts of aggression to be considered bullying (of which cyberbullying is included). In instances where the three characteristics are not all present, then they may be considered as other forms of aggression (Vaillancourt et al., 2008; Ybarra et al., in press).

Research comparing traditional forms of bullying (e.g., physical, relational) to cyberbullying has shown that cyberbullying often extends from traditional bullying behaviour (Beran & Li, 2007; Cassidy, Jackson, & Brown, 2009; Tokunaga, 2010; Juvonen & Gross, 2008; Ybarra, Diener-West, & Leaf, 2007), and that comparisons are not distinct. Basically, researchers have concluded that cyberbullying *is* bullying, which occurs through a different modality (e.g., cell

phone, computer vs. face-to-face). Further, we would add that cyberbullying may encompass various forms of bullying (i.e., relational, verbal, physical) and because of the nature of the Internet, the impact on the victim has the potential to get amplified. Mailing lists and sites, such as YouTube, allow for cyberbullying to reach wider audiences. Bystanders can repeatedly view or log in to sites where cyberbullying has taken place as well as send links for others to view (Shariff & Churchill, 2010).

Canadian youth, like most adolescents are increasingly exposed to technology (e.g., computers, cell phones) and the Internet, and have incorporated it into their day-to-day lives. The *Young Canadians in a Wired World* (YCWW; Media Awareness Network, 2005) survey found that, of the over 5000 Canadian students between the ages of 4 to 11 years old, 99% had at least one computer in their home. Further, there was a reported increase in Internet use from 79% in 2001 to 94% in 2005. These individuals (now 11-18 years of age) have grown up with technology access across environmental settings (i.e., home, school). According to Statistics Canada (2010), four-fifths of Canadian households reported having Internet access in their homes. The one-fifth that reported having no Internet access in their homes fell in the lowest income quarter (earning $30,000 or less). Cassidy et al. (2009) also found that, out of 363 students in grades 6 to 9, 355 reported having a computer at home and 64% used it once a day, 23% used it five times a week, and 7% used it sporadically or once to twice a week.

As a result of adolescents' ease of access to digital media and technology (e.g., cell phones, computers, etc.), social problems that exist in face-to-face social interactions, such as verbal or physical aggression, as well as indirect forms of aggression (e.g., gossiping) have transferred over to other media. In a cyberbullying survey conducted among 356 participants in British Columbia, Canada, 58% of the 11 to 15 year olds had cell phones, 40% of whom used the cell phone in school (Cassidy, et al., 2009). The authors of this study also found that cell phone usage increased with age. Of the 11 year olds surveyed, 35% had cell phones while among the 13 to 14 year olds, 65% had cell phones. By grade eight, most of the students had cell phones. With the high percentage of students accessing technology to communicate with one another, there is a need for schools and boards to revisit technology policy as it related to bullying.

A current challenge for schools is to figure out what role they play in the broader issue of cyberbullying. In a Greater Toronto Area-based study conducted by Mishna et al. (2008), 21% of students in grades 6, 7, 10, and 11 reported being bullied online in the past three months, and 34% reported being perpetrators of bullying. Cassidy et al. (2009) found that among the 365 students surveyed, cyberbullying did not usually occur through text messages (7%) for participants but rather in chat rooms (53%) and through emails (37%). Furthermore, Cassidy et al. (2009) found that nine percent of adolescents reported receiving threatening messages from others, and of the nine percent, 14 (eight males and six females) said the messages they received were life threatening; 25 (eight males and 17 females) said the language threatened their reputation; 19 (seven males and 12 females) claimed the messages affected their ability to make friends at school; and 14 (six males and eight females) revealed that the messages induced suicidal thoughts. Although relatively few studies exist in this area of research, the ones that do exist allude to a concerning phenomenon. Cyberbullying is related to students' school success and wellness (Schneider, O'Donnell, Stueve, & Coulter, 2012). While school boards have broader policies related to behaviour and discipline, not many of them have formal policies in place for dealing with bullying on a broad level, and even fewer resources and guidance on how to address aggression among members of the school community via nontraditional medium (i.e., technology).

While Canadian cyberbullying statistics vary, self-report studies suggest that it is very real. In an Alberta-based study, 54% of 177 grade seven students reported being bully victims and that one quarter of them had been cyberbullied; 52.4% of the respondents reported that they knew someone being cyberbullied but only 30.1% told an adult about it (Li, 2006). In another Alberta-based study, Rinaldi, Boechler, and Muth (2010) found lower rates: approximately one-quarter to one-third of students reported being called names, having rumours spread about them, and being impersonated by someone else. These authors found that 13% of students reported being threatened while online. Of the 225 students surveyed, 24% reported calling others names, 17% reported impersonating others, and less than 10% reported spreading rumours about others or threatening others.

Cyberbullying and Longterm Outcomes

School achievement. Research has shown a relationship between cyberbullying and academic achievement. For example, a relationship has been found between cybervictimization and a decline in school marks and concentration (Beran & Li, 2007; Schnieder, et al., 2012), an increase in number of school days missed (Beran & Li, 2007; Katzer et al., 2009), and emergent perceptions that school is no longer safe (Varjas et al., 2009). Schnieder, O'Donnell, Stueve, and Coulter (2012) found that students who received mostly Ds and Fs were twice as likely to be cybervictims (11.3% versus 5.2% who were not cybervictims). They were also twice as likely to be victims of both bullying and cyberbullying (16.1% versus 7.4% who were not victims of both). Ybarra, Diener-West, and Leaf (2007) found cybervictimization to be related to cutting class, accumulating detentions and suspensions, and carrying weapons to school. Academic achievement may be affected by psychological outcomes associated with bullying. For example, a decline in academic performance may be attributed to victims' poorer concentration and higher levels of frustration resulting from the bullying (Beran & Li, 2007; Patchin & Hinduja, 2006). According to Juvonen and Gross (2008), incidents of cyberbullying and traditional bullying are correlated, therefore it is difficult to tease apart which contributes more to psychological outcomes. To address this question, Juvonen and Gross conducted a hierarchical regression analysis and found that the number of bullying incidents experienced in school and in cyberspace each independently increased reported levels of anxiety. Basically, bullying is related to poorer school outcomes, whether it occurs face-to-face or via alternative means.

Well-being. The psychological and physical distress associated with cyberbullying has been well established in the literature. Ybarra (2004) found that online harassment (i.e., a one-time harassment situation) led to depressive symptoms in 10 to 17 year olds. Of the 1501 youth surveyed through the phone, 13.4% of those who reported Internet harassment (N=97) also reported symptoms of major depression as compared to 4.6% of young people who indicated major depressive symptoms but were not the victims of Internet harassment.

Online victimization has been found to be related to depression and anxiety over and above related offline victimization and stress measures (Tynes & Giang, 2009). Based on the dichotomous (yes or no) nature of most research on cyberbullying and psychosocial outcomes, Dempsey, Sulkowski, Nichols, and Storch (2009) conducted a confirmatory factor analysis to determine the relationships between cybervictimization and indices of psychosocial maladjustment using measures of symptoms of depression and social anxiety. The authors found that experiences of cybervictimization were weakly associated with symptoms of social anxiety ($r = .20$) and depression ($r = .26$). When controlling for relational and overt bullying,

depression was not significantly correlated with cyberbullying. Juvoven and Gross (2008) further found a link between anxiety and cybervictimization. Additionally, cybervictimization has been linked to low levels of self-esteem (Didden et al., 2009; Katzer, Fetchenhauer, & Belschak, 2009), emotional distress, anger, detachment, and sadness (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006). In sum, aggression experienced by students (on or offline) appears to be negatively related to academic performance and quality of peer relations.

A Cyberbullying Case

In the 2008 appeal of a decision of the Durham Catholic District School Board, R. T. v. Durham Catholic District School Board, Mrs. R. T., the mother of an expelled student who was caught sending threatening messages to another student, appealed to the Child and Family Services Review Board to have the decision on the student's expulsion overturned. The student was expelled for sending messages, such as "…U DON'T WANT ME TO GET MAD BECAUSE THEN ILL KILL YOU RIGHT IN UR SLEEP OR AT SCHOOL ON MONDAY" (p. 2 of Ontario Child and Family Services Review Board documents, 2008), to the victim on Facebook which the victim read at home. It was determined by school officials that the cyberbullying was impacting the victim's learning environment, outlined in the Ontario Education Act, and decided to expel the student. The Board upheld the decision to expel the student because there was evidence that the infraction which did not occur at school had an impact on the school climate. In addition, there was no evidence to suggest that the bully did not understand the foreseeable consequences of her behaviour towards the victim. The Ontario case marked a critical turning point for school boards because it forced the ownership and responsibility back onto schools to act when inappropriate student conduct is taking place, even if it is on cyberspace. Thus, the need for clear school board policies and procedures for dealing with aggression via modern technology was recognized.

Acknowledging Cyberbullying in the Alberta Education Act

Alberta has made many strides in ministerial levels that help guide schools in determining action against bullying. Since the mid 90s, the Province of Alberta has made anti-bullying a priority in schools (Alberta Education, 2012). The *Safe and Caring School Initiative* is a significant result of this endeavor. The *Safe and Caring School Initiative* was launched in 1996 in response to two provincial forums on school violence (Alberta Education, 2012). The first forum took place in 1993, and its purpose was to understand issues related to school violence and to identify the potential strategies that ensure safe schools. The second forum occurred in 1994 as a follow-up to share experiences of successful initiatives in communities. In 1999, the *Alberta Education School Act* was amended to include the *Safe and Caring School Initiative*. The *Safe and Caring School Initiative* of the Alberta School Act, Section 45(8) states, "a board shall ensure that each student enrolled in a school operated by the board is provided with a safe and caring environment that fosters and maintains respectful and responsible behaviours" (Alberta Education, 2012, p. 14). Under this umbrella, we find the inclusion of the anti-bullying initiative.

On April 27th 2011, Bill 18 was introduced to the *Alberta Education Act* (Alberta Education, 2011). Among other education improvements (e.g., giving school boards flexibility to tailor programs to their students and communities' needs), the Bill proposes to discipline students for

cyberbullying and bullying that occurs outside of school premises. In the event that this Bill (or a different version of the Bill) passes legislation, school boards in Alberta will be asked to develop policies that directly address cyberbullying. "Policies embody claims to speak with authority, they legitimate and initiate practices in the world and they privilege certain visions and interests (Taylor, Rizvi, Lingard, & Henry, 1997). In Policy 10 - Policy Making, The Palliser Regional Division No. 26 states "Policy development is a key responsibility of the Board. Policies establish directions for the division, assign authority and establish controls that make Board governance and management possible" (2009, p. 1). How bullying policies will be written at the school district or the school level, and what key aspects must be included are of paramount importance. Although having a bullying policy helps bring awareness to bullying, we argue that unless anti-bullying systems are built within a school to support the policy (e.g., coupled with educational elements, periodically updated), such policy cannot address bullying.

A Review of Alberta School Boards' Bullying Policies and Guidelines Regarding Technology Usage in the Schools

As a framework of a democratic society, many Canadian provinces and territories, including Alberta, operate under legislative mandates to create school safety plans for students and staff's protection from violence (Alberta Education, 2012). In addition, awareness of the harmful effects of cyberbullying on pupils has resulted in the adaptation of policies and programs to address cyberbullying. Boards are mandated to put the policies on their website for access among all pupils. There are sixty-two public, separate, and francophone school boards that are elected by and accountable to their Alberta communities. In their 2007 review using school authority interviews, school board annual education reports, and public policy documents, Shultz, Demeke, and da Costa found that 32% of school jurisdictions had an anti-bullying policy. Since then, there have been several anti-bullying initiatives in school boards and individual schools resulting from the youth's increased awareness of the harmful effects of bullying.

For the present review, we conducted a search of current Alberta policies using the search engine on the Government of Alberta Ministry of Education website which provided links to each school board located within Alberta's jurisdiction. We further searched each school board website for information or documentation regarding bullying or cyberbullying, specifically. If no such policies were found, we then searched for information regarding appropriate technology, Internet, and computer use by students and staff. While not directly addressing bullying, this information on technology, Internet, and computer use was included as it may support cyberbullying policies by identifying and outlining consequences for inappropriate technology use. Inclusion criteria included all boards (Public, Catholic, Francophone, and Charter); information, guidelines, or policy statements regarding Internet, school network, communications, technology, cellular phone, or computer use. From our search, 54 school boards were found to have a policy on acceptable technology use. However, only 10 boards had a policy specifically related to bullying and three included cyberbullying to some extent (Table 1). For a general understanding of current cyberbullying policies and technology use policies/regulations, two of the largest school boards in Alberta (Calgary Board of Education and Edmonton Public School Board) were reviewed. Although neither of these boards have a standalone bullying/cyberbullying policy, we assessed the acceptable technology use guidelines to show how they support anti-bullying initiatives. We also reviewed a Divisionwide bullying prevention policy (Administrative Procedure 316) presented by the Grande Yellowhead Public

Table 1

List of School Districts with a bullying/cyberbullying policy

School district	Bullying Policy Name	Cyberbullying included
Grande Yellowhead Public School Division No. 77	Administrative Procedure 316 - Division-wide Bullying Prevention	Yes
Peace Wapiti Public School Division No. 76	Policy IGH - Anti-bullying	Yes
Westwind School Division No. 74	Policy 326.0 - Harassment/Bullying	Yes
Peace River School Division No. 10	Policy 5.24 - Student Harassment and Bullying	No
Evergreen Catholic Separate Regional Division No. 2	Administrative Procedure 171 - Bullying and Threatening Behaviour	No
Grande Prairie Roman Catholic Separate School District No. 28	Administrative Procedure 336 - Anti-bullying	No
Foothills School Division No. 38	Administrative Procedure 170 - Bullying and Threatening Behaviour	No
Palliser Regional Division No. 26	Administrative Procedure 352 - Bullying Behaviour in Schools	No
Buffalo Trail Public Schools Regional Division No. 28	Policy GBEA Bullying/Personal/ Sexual Harassment	No
Horizon School Division No. 67	Policy IFAA - Student Harassment	No

School division. This policy was chosen for review because it was the most descriptive bullying policy currently available, defining bullying and outlining the procedures for responding to bullying/cyberbullying reports. The policy explains the seriousness of providing a safe and caring environment that is aligned with the objectives of the School Act. It also explains how school pupils of *all ages* are safeguarded. Definitions are provided for the following terms: bullying, cyberbullying, bullying prevention, bullying intervention, and bystander. Procedures for responding to bullying are well outlined and include key points, such as, setting parameters to include school-related bullying that occurs offsite, mandating each school to develop and implement a policy, using a school's pyramid of intervention to respond to bullying, and considering factors when developing and implementing consequences (e.g., cognitive development, previous incidences, talents of the student, school culture).

Edmonton Public School Board is the largest school district in Alberta with 197 schools in its jurisdiction. Our search yielded a Safe, Caring, and Respectable Learning Environments policy and several relevant technology use guidelines. Among the policies and regulations of the Edmonton Public School Board is the *Safe, Caring and Respectable Learning Environments* initiative. This initiative states:

> The Board is committed to acknowledging, addressing, and eradicating discrimination, harassment, intimidation or bullying. The Board believes schools have the responsibility to ensure that students and their families feel safe to share these issues and concerns. Within a safe and caring environment, students and their families have the right and responsibility to bring these concerns to the attention of the school staff. The Board expects that school and District staff will be respectful of the concerns of students and their families and will work with them to provide appropriate supports and resolve their issues in a timely manner. (Edmonton Public School Board, 2010, p. 3)

Safe and caring initiatives set the premise for the development of anti-bullying policies as they help create a culture where bullying is not acceptable. However, this initiative does not give enough detail to understand how to respond to bullying in schools (Shultz et al., 2007).

According to the *Appropriate Use of District Technology* (2000) policy for *Edmonton Public School Boards Policies and Regulations*, staff and students are encouraged to use technology for teaching and learning purposes through tools provided by the District. The policy states, "Students who deliberately use district technology inappropriately will be subject to some or all of the consequences listed in IG.AR - Student Behaviour and Conduct" (Code: KC.AR, 2011). When disciplinary action is required, the student's guardian is informed and involved in resolving the issue. It is the responsibility of the guardian to be aware of the board policy and regulations, review these policies and regulations with their children, work with the school to resolve student's behavioural issues, and cooperate with the school or district in the course of action prior to re-admission of the student following a suspension.

The *Respectful Learning and Working Environments* (2007) document states that the Board is responsible for protecting employees from harassment and discrimination during Edmonton Public School work and school related activities. From these policies, it is unclear if the harassment also extends to instances that occur through the use of school-based technology. However, this policy stipulates that superintendents, principals, and school administrators are responsible for prevention of improper technology use and education of proper technology use.

The Calgary Board of Education is another large school board with 226 schools. This board also did not have any published cyberbullying policies. The *Administrative Regulation, 1062 - Acceptable Use of Electronic Information Resources* (2007) outlines the regulations for proper use of all forms of electronic information (e.g., CD-ROMs, webpages, voicemail, data lines, and excluding telephone conversations) and applies to all members of the Calgary Board of Education (e.g., employees, agents, students, consultants, council members). Prohibited electronic activities include sending or displaying offensive messages or pictures, harassing, insulting, or attacking another person or their reputation, using other people's passwords, intentionally access, post, or send or download inappropriate material, assume identity of another person to obtain information. Breach of regulation includes loss of privileges or suspension under the *6001 - Student Discipline* policy (2002). In section 8 - *Inappropriate material*, it states "Persons must not use Calgary Board of Education electronic information resources to access any material or information that may contain inappropriate material or create, post, send, or download inappropriate material for any use including business, personal or classroom use" (p. 5). This section explains how it is against board regulation for a person to use the board resources or network inappropriately. The policy may include off school property if the person is using the board's electronic resources or network but does not seem to cover inappropriate activities of individuals using personal networks off school property. However, the *6001 - Student Discipline* policy, section 4(f) states, "Students may be held responsible and

accountable to the Calgary Board of Education and its agents for their behaviour and conduct: beyond the hours of school operation if the behaviour or conduct detrimentally affects the personal safety and well-being of individuals or the governance, the climate, or the efficient operation of the school" (p.6). This portion of the policy implies that if cyberbullying occurs off school property but impacts the safety and well-being of students in school, then it becomes an issue in school discipline.

The two largest Alberta school boards included in this review did not have cyberbullying policies; however, we did find several technology/electronic use regulations and policies that could ensure appropriate technology use in schools (i.e., responsibility of authority to act on inappropriate technology use, keeping passwords private, etc.). We argue that technology use policies help define parameters for acceptable behaviour but do not capture all aspects of cyberbullying. A well defined cyberbullying policy can provide a framework for a school to respond to bullying which may lead to environment where bullying is not tolerated (Smith et al, 2012).

School Board Policy Recommendations

School administrators are responsible for setting and upholding a safe and caring environment, one that provides an opportunity for staff and students to attend school free from fear and intimidation (Beale & Hall, 2007). A well defined policy supports school administrators in providing such an environment and taking action against cyberbullying behaviour (Taylor, 2008). All school boards should have a bullying/cyberbullying policy regardless of whether or not bullying is perceived to be a problem in their schools. The following are cyberbullying policy recommendations derived from the broader bullying literature.

Recommendation 1: Use simple and reader friendly language throughout policy. The intent of the policy documentation is to communicate to students, parents, and teachers appropriate school behaviour and consequences for inappropriate conduct. Therefore, language used in these documents should be reader friendly to all groups. Younger children (early grades) and children with special needs may require an oral explanation along with the documentation.

Recommendation 2: Provide an explicit, clear, and consistent definition and explanation of bullying (Smith et al., 2008). In any policy or document referring to bullying, a definition of bullying should be provided that clearly states the three distinguishing features (power imbalance, intent to do harm, and repetitiveness) and include cyberbullying as a type and mode (as mentioned in the discussion above) as well as examples of what behaviour constitutes bullying. The definition of bullying should be tied to the Alberta School Act that ensures a safe and caring environment for all school pupils. A list of cyberbullying examples taken from Kift, Campbell, and Butler (2010) may include:

- Posting cruel messages or threats on an Internet site about the victim;

- Excluding the victim from social network groups intentionally (e.g., Facebook groups);

- Posting inappropriate images of the victim;

- Using a public forum to damage the reputation, humiliate, or cause any other harm to the victim; or

- Posting fabricated information about the victim.

It should also be clear that staff members and students are protected by the policy (Feinberg & Robey, 2008). In addition to the definition of bullying, it should be clear to policy users that any inappropriate behaviour that may not fall under this definition will be dealt with under the appropriate disciplinary actions. For example, if an aggressive behaviour arises between students or staff through Facebook, chat sites etc., the aggressor will be given consequences according to Student Conduct policies. This ensures that the aggressive behaviour does not become repetitive nor does it evolve into bullying.

In addition to providing a definition to policy users, staff members, students, and parents should be educated about cyberbullying (Feinberg & Robey, 2008). There are several ways for this to occur, for example, through school assemblies, newsletters, class instruction, posters, student handbook, or technology use contracts (see recommendation 6).

Recommendation 3: Create a bullying policy committee. A bullying policy committee could involve a full range of stakeholders (e.g., students, parents, teachers, school administration, board members, and Ministry of Education members). The purpose of the committee would be to collect research on bullying to enable it to update or amend policy, determine the extent and perception of cyberbullying in the school population (Beale & Hall, 2007; Feinberg & Robey, 2008; Varjas, et al., 2009), teach students to be Internet savvy (Feinberg & Robey, 2008), and communicate bullying policies and strategies to school pupils. The policy committee would evaluate the current policies and/or bullying interventions on a regular basis, preferably annually.

Recommendation 4: Inform/educate students, parents, and teachers of the legal implications of cyberbullying (Beale & Hall, 2007). In extreme cases, bullying can constitute criminal conduct in Canada on the part of the perpetrator (threats, harassment, or intimidation). However, as alluded to in the cyberbullying case presented earlier in this article, it seems that few students (and possibly adults) are aware of the legal implications of bullying. While there are no specific bullying offences per se, it is important to outline the criminal sanctions associated with bullying to help students realize the criminal potential of their bullying behaviour. The following are Canadian legal sanctions that protect people from cyberbullying behaviour:

- The Criminal Code of Canada, section 300 outlaws publishing 'defamatory libel', or communicating hatred, contempt, or ridicule repeatedly with someone if the communication causes fear to their safety or injures their reputation (Canadian Bar Association, 2011); and

- Human Rights Act, section 3 may be violated if someone spreads hate or discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, age, religion, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, family status, or disability (Department of Justice Canada, 2012).

Recommendation 5: Create policies that deal with technology use and clarify user parameters across contexts (home, school, or other). As presented earlier, academic and social well-being are negatively impacted by bullying (Beran & Li, 2007). This relationship between victimization and school achievement applies even when students are bullied off school property, or during non-instructional hours. When cyberbullying involves students from the same school, the school's involvement and responsibility to protect all students from harm and distraction while learning are essential. For example, the Policy/Program Memorandum No. 144 (PPM 144) was created by the Ontario Ministry of

Education (2009) for schools to follow when taking disciplinary action for Internet cyberbullying occurring offsite (at home or on a mobile device) and affecting the school environment.

In Alberta, school officials are responsible for providing safe school environments for students, staff, and visitors. The Alberta Principal Quality Practice Guidelines: Promoting Successful School Leadership (2009) outlines legislated and school authority mandated leadership responsibility. The Leadership Dimension: Managing School Operations and Responsibilities mandates that a school leader "manages school operation and resources to ensure a safe and caring, and effective learning environment" (p.6). The safety of school members is jeopardized by bullying regardless if it is on school property or not. Roher (2007) adds, "With respect to off school conduct, Canadian courts have held that a school official has the right to impose school discipline for conduct that occurs off school property, where there is a sufficient nexus or connection to the school" (p. 44). As such, cyberbullying policies should expand to offsite behaviours (Juvonen & Gross, 2008). As in the case of R. T. v. Durham Catholic District School Board, Broster and Brien (2010) contend that it is up to the school authority to determine the extent the offsite activity has affected the well-being of the student (refer to York Region District- Board Policy #194.0 Appropriate Use of Technology for an example of a policy that covers offsite school behaviour). A cyberbullying policy then should include:

- A definition of what *off school property* includes (i.e., computer, personal devices, cell phones). If students are from different schools how will the schools communicate to solve the problem?
- A statement emphasizing that these activities can have an impact on safety and the learning environment;
- A clear definition of roles of who is tasked with the authority to make judgment and provide consequences; and
- An explicit listing of possible consequences of cyberbullying (Smith et. al., 2008).

Recommendation 6: Distribute parent and child technology use contracts. It is suggested that schools distribute parent and child technology use contracts with a specific statement prohibiting cyberbullying (i.e., bullying via the use of technology). Some school boards use contracts as a way of educating parents and students of their responsibilities. The benefit of contracts is having students take ownership of their behaviour and conduct. The Fort Vermilion School Division provides an example of Network Use Agreement. The policies and guidelines for student technology and network use are provided in two online documents: Student Network Resources Protocol and Student Internet Use Protocol. The Student Network Resources Protocol (FVSD Guidelines for All Technology Uses for Students) outlines appropriate network ("all technology") use. It states, "Students will not engage in cyber bullying. This includes harassment or bullying of others by use of digital means." Consequences of inappropriate use "could include loss of network privileges, suspension, financial liability for damages, and/or other disciplinary or legal action including suspension or expulsion." All students are expected to read and sign the guidelines, agreeing to comply with the terms of use. The second document, Student Internet Use Protocol, outlines appropriate use of divisional electronic networks, email, and the Internet. Along with the student, a guardian signs the

agreement to confirm that they allow their student access to the Internet and they take responsibility to *guide* and *convey* appropriate Internet use outlined in the agreement.

There are also some disadvantages or cautions when using contracts. Some contracts may use extensive technical and legal language, which may be off-putting and confusing for students and parents. Second, if contracts are imposed without any possibility for parent and student input, there is less likelihood of buy-in and authentic adoption. Future research on the effective implementation of contracts in schools should be conducted.

The use of contracts should be more effective if they also outline which school members they are given to (i.e., students, staff) and should be coupled with an information session to help explain the content and consequences of breaching the contract (Lane, Menzies, Bruhn, & Crnobori, 2011). For example, the Lakehead Information/Communication Technology Use Policy states that teachers and school staff are responsible for implementing the policy in their instruction. Schools are to provide assemblies or in class time for principals and teachers to review what is included in the contract and why. Failure to comply with the policy statement may result in a loss of computer privileges, while *certain breaches* can result in an offense under Canada's Criminal Code and other applicable legislation or suspension according to school Code of Conduct through the principal's discretion. It is, however, unclear in this section of the policy what constitutes *certain breaches*.

The contracts should be given out at the beginning of every school year and to all grades, and staff who use technology and access the Internet or district/division network (education component for parents, students, staff, etc.). The St. Thomas Aquinas Roman Catholic Separate Regional Division (2006) Leduc, Alberta, states that acceptable technology use procedure "applies to all persons using or accessing the Division network or who use Division-owned resources, including but not limited to employees, students, agents, appointees, consultants, contractors, student teachers and volunteers" (pp. 100-31).

To cover cyberbullying behaviour, contracts may include a review of the following good practice behaviours:

- Respecting privacy: maintaining passwords and user ID confidentiality;
- Restricting access to personal passwords and not sharing passwords with others (both for self and others' protection);
- Refraining from sending or sharing abusive or threatening language (swear words, name-calling, harassment, inappropriate information or pictures); and
- Students informing an adult if they access or obtain information that is inappropriate.

Recommendation 7: Create a reliable and fair reporting system. The development of a reliable reporting system is complex. Often students do not feel comfortable reporting bullying to an adult (Juvonen & Gross, 2008; Tokunaga, 2010). Broster and Brien (2010) suggest that students' lack of reporting of cyberbullying to adults is because of fear of parental response that may cause the bullying to escalate or have the electronic device taken away. Anonymity is an important feature of a reporting system. Rinaldi and Muth (2012) found that 25.8% of students surveyed reported that the best solution for dealing with cyberbullying is an anonymous phone-in line where students can report such cases. Students also rated receiving help anonymously (without having to disclose identity) and being able to speak with parents as the top two choices in opening up about online aggression. Important features of a reporting system include:

- Anonymous reporting must be done via a secure and reliable system such as school email, or telephone line;

- Anonymous reporting must have the signature of at least one witness or verifier; and

- Reporting of each incidence of bullying should be addressed to the school principal and investigated by school administration and teachers (Taylor, 2008).

Recommendation 8: Develop appropriate consequences for cyberbullying. Developing comprehensive intervention strategies for cyberbullying is an important piece of bullying policies. However, because of the anonymity that the Internet may provide, it may be difficult to prove that an individual is involved in the cyberbullying. When developing appropriate consequences for cyberbullying, a policy should stipulate how involved parties are to be given consequences. To date, there are reactive consequences, such as expulsion or suspension that are traditionally used in schools for student discipline. They may still be used in extreme situations (e.g., removing a violent child from the school environment). Other strategies are available to restore justice, such as community service-type intervention/consequence, where students work on anti-bullying projects as an educational experience. Major networks in Canada, such as SACSC favour a more educational approach as it expected to have more long lasting and authentic outcomes. Other points the policy should include are:

- Links to appropriate student behaviour document (e.g., student conduct, teacher professional ethics);

- Timely responses to reports of cyberbullying (attached with suggested timelines of responding); and

- Type of consequences (e.g., expulsion, suspension).

Recommendation 9: Train school personnel in effective prevention and intervention strategies. Professional development for school staff is an important part of implementing effective bullying prevention and intervention strategies (Beale & Hall, 2007). The Society for Safe and Caring Schools Communities (Alberta) offers presentations and workshops to teachers and parents on various topics including bullying. Teachers and parents can learn about these and other opportunities through professional associations (e.g., Alberta Teachers Association), professional conventions, and school mailings to name a few.

Conclusion

In this article, we reported results of a provincial scan for bullying/cyberbullying policies in Alberta. We further reviewed the technology use policies and regulations for two of the largest school boards in Alberta. Although most school boards had technology use policies but did not have a bullying/cyberbullying policy, we believe the technology use policies helped support anti-bullying initiatives in educating staff and students on appropriate technology use. We argued in support of having a clear cyberbullying policy to guide school authorities to set boundaries on acceptable behaviour and educate students about inappropriate behaviour and subsequently take action against bullying. The recommendations made in this article are gleaned from

bullying research evidence to help support policy developers in creating effective bullying prevention policies. The development of cyberbullying policies embedded within a broader bullying policy document will position school administrators to take action against bullying in their schools.

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