



ACCESS:

One School District's Response to **Expelled** Students

by Avis E. Glaze

In recent years, there has been increased emphasis on the need for policies and programs to address the issue of discipline in schools. There has been legislation at all levels of government, and districts have taken action to ensure that schools remain safe places for students to learn. In 1993, the York Region District School Board was one of the first Boards in Ontario to develop a Safe Schools Policy with clear consequences for behaviour. Since then, Ministers of Education have established policies and guidelines for school districts to deal with the issue of school safety.

One result of the measures taken to ensure that our schools remain safe places for learning is an increase in the number of expulsions and long term suspensions. When school districts have no choice but to expel students - particularly those of compulsory school age - because of the gravity of an infraction, the long-term implications for the individual and for society as a whole become a matter of serious concern.

The continuing education of these students requires a coordinated

response from a cross-section of community partners. With this belief as a primary motivator, staff of the York Region District School Board have established a program to enable students to leave school with a diploma and the skills necessary for success in the workplace and in life. The program - Alternative Classroom and Counselling for Expelled and Suspended Students (ACCESS) - was developed in close consultation with those who are often involved in the lives of expelled students, including the Children's Aid Society, Probation, Parole and Corrections Services, and the Police.

In establishing the ACCESS Program, we were mindful of the fact that our general wellbeing and the quality of life we enjoy as a society is threatened when students leave school with poor levels of education. In his article entitled "The Cost to a Nation of Inadequate Education", Henry Levin (1992), identified the following societal consequences:

- ✗ foregone national income
- ✗ foregone tax revenues for the support of governmental services
- ✗ increased demand for social services
- ✗ increased crime
- ✗ reduced political participation
- ✗ poorer levels of health.

In addition to the broader societal implications, there are profound moral and economic reasons for the quest to educate all children to the extent of their potential:

- ✗ Education is the lifeblood of a democracy; it is essential for the development of a civil society.
- ✗ Schools play a major socializing role in society.
- ✗ The United Nations Declaration, of which Canada is a signatory, identifies education as a basic human right.
- ✗ Education is a means of developing self-sustaining and participating members of society.
- ✗ Education is a primary means of social mobility - it enables many individuals to escape a cycle of poverty.
- ✗ The skills of its citizens constitute a nation's primary asset; by investing in the minds of future citizens, society makes use of its rich resources in human capital.
- ✗ At the level of enlightened self-interest, we need to have all our citizens gainfully employed so that they are able to contribute to the retirement pensions of our large cohort of baby boomers.
- ✗ The great anthropologist, Margaret Mead once said that when we save our children, we ultimately save ourselves.

When school districts have no choice but to **expel students**, the **long-term implications** for the individual and for society as a whole become a matter of **serious concern**.

Peter Drucker in *Post Capital Society* (1994), emphasizes the need to focus on educating all children for a post-capitalist society. He states that, while we know so little about what the world that our students will inherit - the world of the twenty-first century - will look like, the primary resource in society will be knowledge.

Program Content

The York Region program for expelled students has the following key components:

- ✗ credit accumulation;
- ✗ anger management counselling;
- ✗ diagnostic/academic assessment;
- ✗ psychological assessment;
- ✗ special education modifications, if necessary;
- ✗ transition to work-related programs such as Cooperative Education Programs, as appropriate.

The location for the program was carefully selected for accessibility without a close association to the regular day school. We chose a facility near our Continuing Education facilities in order to provide some students with access to additional programs, if necessary. The program is supervised by the principal of the Adult Day School, supported by the appropriate Superintendent of Schools.

Our plan clearly articulated:

- ✗ operating norms for the program
- ✗ admission criteria
- ✗ the responsibilities of the ACCESS Teachers
- ✗ the responsibilities of the Child and Youth Worker.
- ✗ expectations of the expelled student and his or her parents or guardians
- ✗ criteria for re-entry into York Region schools

Recognizing that the actions of expelled students often have a profound effect on other students, our ACCESS Plan includes interventions and supports for students who have been victimized. Principals and Guidance Counsellors are responsible for ensuring that these services are offered.

Expectations of the Board

During the proposal stage, we identified several indicators of success for the program. These included:

- ✗ Improved academic credit accumulation;
- ✗ Reentry into the school system with greater self-confidence, positive behaviours and the motivation to learn;
- ✗ A successful transition into the work force.
- ✗ Evaluation of the Program

An external researcher was engaged to evaluate the effectiveness of this program. He collected baseline data on variables such as student demographics, and at the end of the school year gathered data on:

- ✗ Changes in attitude and behaviour;
- ✗ Reasons for improved academic achievement;
- ✗ Whether or not expectations were met;
- ✗ Lessons learned;
- ✗ Most important aspects of the ACCESS program;
- ✗ Issues related to the return to regular school;
- ✗ Post secondary education and career plans; and
- ✗ Levels of home-based support.

Many themes emerged which have implications for future action both in the schools from which students came and in the ACCESS program itself. Students preferred the ACCESS approach of education to other forms of education they had experienced. They identified reasons such as the one-on-one teaching, smaller class size, flexible work schedules, and the commitment and attention provided by the teachers. They insisted that these factors were responsible for their improved academic performance. In spite of the fact that our sample is very small at this stage, the researcher concluded that the success of the program has been unequivocal. The credit accumulation of students is beyond our expectations. Some students have applied for readmission to school within the District and others are making a successful transition to post-secondary institutions and the workforce. A follow-up study will be conducted to ascertain if students who return to

EN BREF

L'une des conséquences des mesures prises pour s'assurer que nos écoles demeurent des lieux d'apprentissage sûrs et sans danger a été une hausse du nombre d'expulsions et de suspensions de longue durée. C'est pourquoi, le Conseil scolaire de district de la région de York a élaboré un programme qui permet aux élèves suspendus ou expulsés de quitter l'école munis d'un diplôme et des compétences nécessaires pour réussir dans le monde du travail et dans la vie.



school demonstrate long-term behavioural and academic improvements.

In sum, we are convinced that York Region schools will continue to be safe places to learn as a result of our consistent and determined application of our Safe Schools Policy. At the same time, we recognize the necessity to provide the opportunity for expelled students to continue their education. Such programs are best delivered through a comprehensive educational program. This includes academic learning, social and psychological counselling, life-skills development and anger management workshops. Ultimately, we all benefit when we create the opportunity for expelled students to continue their education. 🎯

Dr. Avis Glaze is Associate Director of Education in the York Region District School Board with a special interest in academic achievement, citizenship and character development of students. She served as Commissioner on Ontario's Royal Commission on Learning.