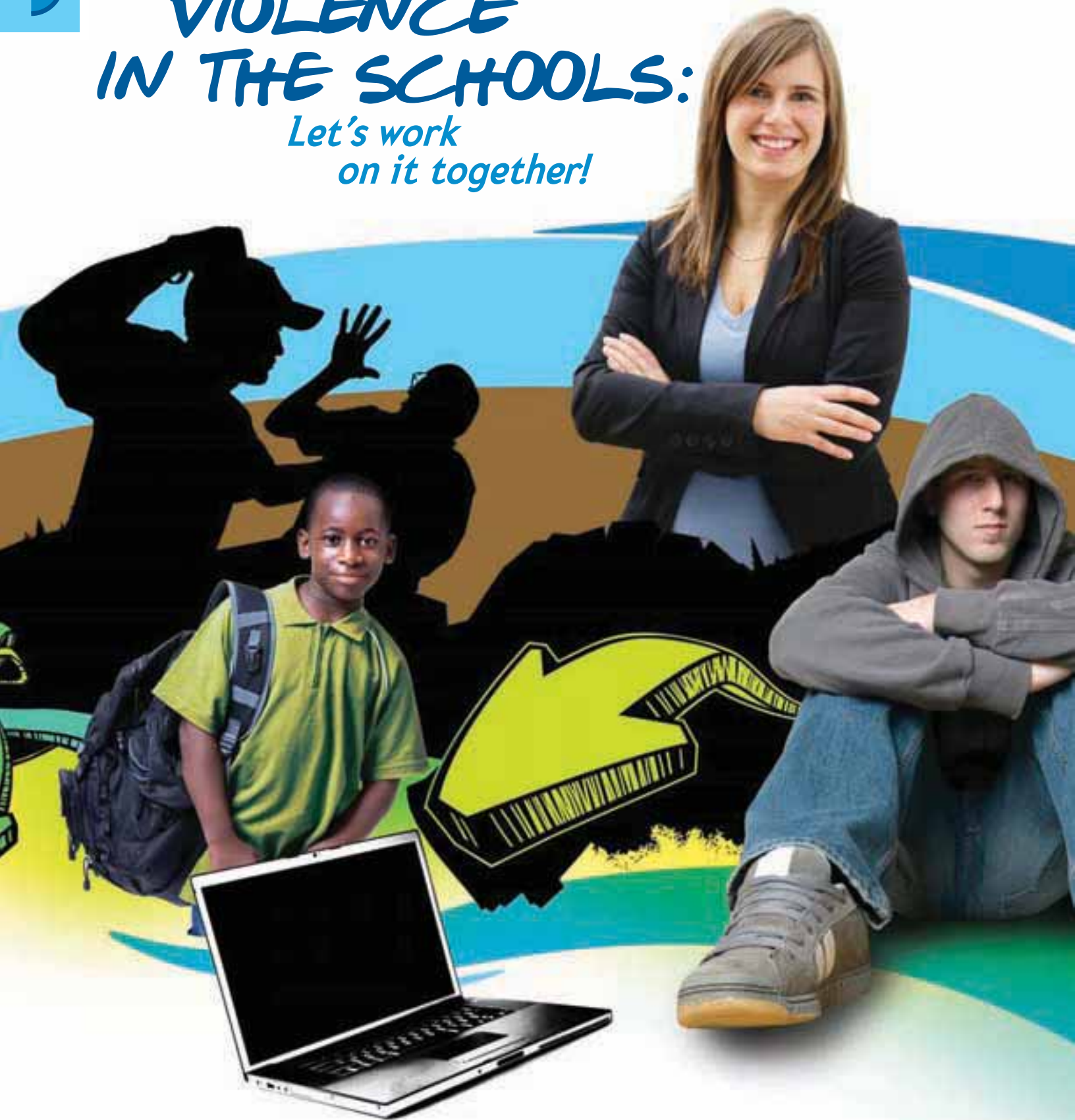




# VIOLENCE IN THE SCHOOLS:

*Let's work  
on it together!*



**Action plan to prevent and deal with violence in the schools 2008-2011**  
For public schools and private schools, from preschool to secondary education



## **Introduction**

For many years, violence in the schools has been a concern for school staff, parents and the different organizations and institutions that work with schools. Violence is a serious and complex problem that transcends borders, commanding the attention of a number of researchers.

Whatever form it takes, violence in the schools has a negative impact on young people, their academic success and their quality of life at school. Indeed, observations from researchers and testimonies from the field tend to confirm that violence in schools creates an unhealthy atmosphere and breeds mistrust, feelings of not belonging, low self-esteem, anxiety and isolation, and increases absenteeism, academic failures, the number of drop-outs, and so on. It is easy to understand why the school community and parents would like to see more action on this issue.

In his 2004-2005 annual report (chap. 3), the Auditor General recognized the efforts of the Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport (MELS) and school boards to support schools dealing with violence. While the Auditor General noted that there have not been many cases of serious violence, he did recommend that data be gathered to help determine the scope of the problem and that action be taken to prevent violence in the schools.

This action plan has been drawn up in light of the school community's expectations and the recommendations of the Auditor General. It demonstrates the Ministère's intention to support and guide the school system in preventing and dealing with violence in the schools, in partnership with the organizations and government agencies concerned. This action plan is spread over a three-year period (2008-2011) and has received financial support in the amount of \$16.8 million. It consists of 20 or so measures designed to foster a healthy and safe environment for all students and members of the school community. These measures will be carried out through 23 different actions.

In Québec, measures to promote student safety and to prevent and deal with violence fall under the responsibility of school boards and schools, which determine the appropriate actions to be taken, given the reality and the needs of their communities. The governing board is responsible for approving the rules of conduct and the safety measures proposed by the principal, as well as any disciplinary sanctions (*Education Act*, s. 76). It is interesting to note that even the law requires teachers to use appropriate means to foster respect for human rights in their students (*Education Act*, s. 22, p. 3).

In drafting this action plan, the Ministère recognizes that it is addressing an audience that is already dealing with the issue of violence in the schools and is fully aware of the negative consequences any form of violence may have on the development of young people and on the school climate. However, these people have asked for further support. This action plan, which builds on the initiatives already taken and recognizes the levels of responsibility in the community, therefore meets a real need.

## **Content of the action plan**

This document consists of two sections and a bibliography.

Section 1 briefly covers current thoughts on the phenomenon of violence in the schools in Québec and abroad, as well as the different steps the Ministère and the school community have already taken to prevent and deal with violence.

Section 2 presents the action plan as such. It describes the goal, the objectives and the measures for the implementation of the plan. The objectives are defined in terms of the following focuses:

- Preventing and dealing with violence
- Joint action and training
- Research and documentation
- Follow-up and evaluation

Each focus is important, but preventing and dealing with violence is the main focus of the action plan. It describes how the Ministère intends to support and guide school boards and schools in their responsibility to prevent and deal with violence in the schools.

### **Highlights of the action plan**

<b>Actions</b>
Hire support officers for the 11 MELS regional offices and set up regional resource groups working in the area of preventing and dealing with violence
Regional training and support sessions
Create a reference tool on different problems involving violence and distribute a list of existing resources
Have an intervention strategy for each school
Have an emergency intervention plan for each school board and school
Produce a semiannual newsletter, an inventory of effective practices and programs and a Web site, and hold a provincial forum
Obtain recurrent financial support for carrying out effective actions in schools
Obtain recurrent financial support for establishing a guidance and support service for students who have been suspended or expelled

### **Section 1**

Why do we need an action plan to prevent and deal with violence in schools?

*For a more objective, pragmatic representation of the phenomenon of violence in Québec schools*

In Québec, the media often report on gang violence, violence in the schools, or street violence perpetrated by youth. In 2002, the World Health Organization stated that violence among young people is one of the most visible forms of violence in society. In addition, several surveys carried out in Canada and in the United States show that people are witnessing an increase in criminal acts, specifically in crimes committed by young

people. However, since the early 1990s, both countries have seen a significant drop in the number of acts of violence recognized and tried in youth court (Ouimet 2004).

No rigorous study has confirmed that students today are more violent than their predecessors (Beaumont, 2007). In fact, indexed studies have shown that student behaviour has not deteriorated (Achenbach and Howell, 1993; Verhulst, Van der Ende and Rietbergen, 1997; Achenbach, Dumenci and Rescoria, 2002; Beaumont, Couture, Fortin and Bourdon, 2009). This reveals a discrepancy between public opinion and the observations of the scientific community.

Does this mean that violence in the schools is a myth? Not at all. The cases reported by the media and by different stakeholders in the school community are quite real. Many authors agree that while there is a problem of violence in the schools, in Québec there is no database to document the scope, diversity, frequency or evolution of the problem. Whatever the number or frequency of violent acts in the schools, it is unacceptable for students to be threatened in the schoolyard or hit on the school bus, for personnel to be insulted, for staff to ridicule certain students or for school property to be vandalized.

Taking a systemic look at these issues is an essential step in defining and describing the current situation of violence on the local, regional and provincial scale. Some of the measures outlined in the action plan, specifically the provincial report, the manifestations and the monitoring system, will provide a more objective, pragmatic picture of the manifestations of violence in the schools and will help to better orient the measures for preventing and dealing with violence.

#### *To integrate the actions into the concerns and activities of the school*

School communities face different manifestations of violence, such as intimidation, teasing, discrimination, homophobia, racism, physical violence and street gang violence, occurring in places such as the classroom, the schoolyard and the school bus, on the Internet (cyber bullying) and in video games. These forms of violence may occur between peers, between young people and adults, and vice versa. School staff may feel helpless and alone facing the task before them. This is why all stakeholders must work together to put a stop to violence.

To this end, schools have been equipped with two tools to ensure comprehensive, integrated and concerted interventions: an educational project and a success plan. These are important tools to be used in mobilizing the school team, structuring priority actions to prevent and deal with violence and determining the objectives to be set, the means to be implemented and the conditions for success, as well as the means to evaluate the impact of these efforts. The chosen means may be based on the Québec Education Program as well as on the complementary educational services programs.

For example, the objectives of the Ethics and Religious Culture program foster a culture of peace and respect for others, while raising student awareness of equal rights, peaceful conflict resolution, the negative consequences of stereotypes and other forms of discrimination and exclusion. This program helps to open students to the world and to give them the ability to work with others while respecting cultural, social and religious differences. Learning about openness to others, tolerance and cooperation is essential to

establishing social peace—as is the development of the cross-curricular competencies (*Constructs his/her identity, Cooperates, Communicates appropriately*) and the broad areas of learning in all educational activities (Health and Well-Being, Citizenship and Community Life).

The complementary educational services outlined in the *Education Act* and the *Basic school regulation* are organized as integrated services programs and give school boards and schools the opportunity to establish different strategies to meet the needs of students in terms of violence prevention. Thus, the means proposed may allow students to make choices about their health and well-being, and encourage them to participate in awareness-raising activities dealing with different issues so that they can explore new avenues and find new ways to protect themselves from danger and abuse. In this type of action, a special role is reserved for psychoeducators, psychologists, special education technicians, and spiritual care and guidance and community involvement animators.

Through this action plan, the Ministère would like the measures to prevent and deal with violence to be more focused, structured and integrated into the current concerns and activities of the education community. This plan should help schools to intervene more effectively when faced with different manifestations of violence, to structure their actions in a process based on careful reflection and rooted in the school's success plan. This is the attitude suggested by MELS and the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux (MSSS) in the Healthy Schools Approach.

*To prevent violence and to work together: violence affects us all*

Over the past several years, the Ministère has applied different measures to prevent violence and has collaborated on different actions, such as the following:

- in each region, setting up support and expertise resources for students with behavioural difficulties
- developing the New Approaches, New Solutions (NANS) strategy in disadvantaged neighbourhoods
- collaborating on the Plan d'intervention québécois sur les gangs de rue 2007-2010 implemented by the Ministère de la Sécurité publique, a plan that shows the government's willingness to coherently coordinate the efforts of several government departments in the fight against organized crime through preventive action
- participating in the interministerial committee to support different funding programs to fight crime
- participating in the Provincial consultation panel on violence, youth and the school environment
- participating in the Table nationale de lutte à l'homophobie (provincial panel against homophobia)
- implementing certain measures in the National Action Plan Against Sexual Assault

In addition, school boards and schools are taking several relevant, beneficial actions at different levels. For example:

- implementing local action plans to prevent violence
- implementing NANS

- hiring professional specialists to support staff and students
- developing tools, programs and intervention protocols dealing with the different manifestations of violence in the schools
- developing emergency plans for different situations that threaten the safety of the students and adults at the school
- working with the police (e.g. Police Presence in Educational Institutions)
- implementing the Healthy Schools approach
- organizing forums

However, in spite of the efforts carried out at different levels, no one strategy seems to foster the development of a healthy and safe environment and the adoption of socially acceptable behaviour. A comprehensive, integrated, joint approach is required, and the means must be adapted to the environment in which they are applied. To this end, several measures of the action plan provide support and guidance to schools and school boards in the implementation of a coherent, structured process to prevent and deal with violence, such as hiring a regional support officer, setting up a regional resource group, and providing training sessions, reference tools and a local intervention strategy.

Through these measures, the action plan highlights the prevention aspect of the actions to be taken to contribute to a healthy, safe environment conducive to student success. Schools and school boards are invited to reflect on this aspect, both in terms of their organization and in terms of more specific interventions such as emergency measures.

However, schools cannot act alone. This is why this plan proposes means to establish and strengthen the connections among families, community organizations and the government agencies concerned with this issue. Measures such as creating an interministerial joint action committee, holding a provincial forum, developing local intervention strategies and providing support and guidance services for suspended or expelled students can help schools and partners work together on actions to be taken or improved upon to better prevent and deal with violence.

## **Section 2**

Action plan to prevent and deal with violence in the schools

This section deals with how the Ministère intends to reach the objectives set out in the action plan. The elements of the definition of violence presented below will be examined.

### **Definition**

There is no consensus for a definition of violence. Indeed, any attempt to define the term runs into the difficulty of setting limits or defining the perception of those who suggest the definition (Jolly, 2002). Cultural factors must be taken into account when determining what constitutes acceptable behaviour, and the definition must be constantly rewritten as values and social norms evolve. There are actually many ways to define violence, depending on who writes the definition and in what context. However, it is important to clarify and refine the concept in order to establish a coherent, shared understanding within the education community.

To this end, the Ministère, working closely with a committee of experts associated with the action plan, proposes a definition that respects the elements considered in different studies of the issue. This mesh of knowledge and practice has led to the following

definition of violence, to be used to guide the actions set out in the action plan:

*Any use of force—verbal, written, physical, psychological or sexual—against any person, by an individual or a group, with intent to directly or indirectly wrong, injure or oppress that person by attacking his or her integrity, psychological or physical well-being, rights or property (MELS, 2009).*

This definition presents the elements used to define violent behaviour :

- The aggressor demonstrates power in terms of strength and expresses or shows this power, with the intention to wrong, hurt or oppress someone (himself/herself or someone else).
- This demonstration of violence may be made by an individual (a student, a staff member, an administrator, a parent, etc.), by a group (a group of students, a class, a team of teachers, a school committee, etc.) or a community (special interest group, etc.).
- Violence can be direct or indirect, may involve an intermediary or use means that are disguised or difficult to perceive.

Agreeing on a definition of violence can bring solid support to the school community, both in establishing objectives to prevent and deal with violence and in determining the actions to take and evaluating their impact.

### **Action plan**

The action plan *Violence in the Schools: Let's work on it together!* aims to align the knowledge available in preventing and dealing with violence, and the different intervention strategies and the practices used in the field. It is structured around four focuses that correspond to the objectives, measures and actions presented in this section. These measures target aggressors and victims as well as witnesses, and some of them will allow parents to get involved and receive the support they need. In addition, they take into account violence among students as well as violence between students and adults.

Other specific issues have been considered, such as violence in young people's romantic relationships, the different dynamics specific to boys and to girls, and the situations in Aboriginal and other cultural communities.

The implementation of the different measures of this plan takes into account several essential components in preventing and dealing with violence in the schools, specifically, the personal characteristics of the young people involved, their development (physical, biological, cognitive and psychological factors) and their environment (family and school-related factors, as well as social, socioeconomic and cultural factors). These elements must be taken into consideration in any attempt to understand the phenomenon and to use intervention strategies.

### **Focus 1: Prevention and treatment**

Focus 1 presents the measures and actions intended to support the school system more directly in its responsibility to prevent violence and to deal with it appropriately. It gives school communities the opportunity to unite and improve on the actions they have



already taken.

Preventing and dealing with violence are considered on three levels of intervention: universal (primary), targeted (secondary) and clinical (tertiary). These levels take into account the risk and protection factors related to the personal, school, family and social characteristics of the situation.

**Objective 1.1: *Consolidate and reinforce actions by schools and school boards to prevent and deal with violence in the schools***

The *Education Act* requires schools to have a three-year educational project and a success plan to be reviewed annually. In order to carry out this responsibility, schools must analyze their situation so as to allow all staff members to share a clear understanding of their teaching practices and the school climate. Schools often intervene creatively and already have measures in place to improve the school climate, but it is recognized there are few means to evaluate the initiatives launched and to assess their impact.

Objective 1.1 consists of six measures involving a variety of actions.

First measure:

**1.1.1 Ensure that each school is aware of the particular challenges it faces with regard to violence, and has devised means of assessing the initiatives in this regard**

Measure 1.1.1 offers the school system tools to help them define their situation regarding violence and to evaluate the actions they take to prevent and deal with it. However, it is up to each school to decide which tool to use to analyze or improve its analysis of the situation.

This measure involves two actions:

**Report on actions carried out and report on manifestations of violence**

Schools are asked to report on the actions they have carried out and the means they have used to prevent and deal with violence. Schools are then asked to complete their report by listing any manifestations of violence observed. This report will allow everyone to share a common vision of the school climate and the practices used in the school community.

Several elementary and secondary schools have used different strategies, either NANS, the Healthy Schools approach or local initiatives, to report on their situation regarding violence in the schools. These steps may replace or complete the report requested by the Minister, which will help schools come up with objectives and determine relevant means to add to their success plan.

In an attempt to explain why some schools and school boards seem to be less affected than others by violence, researchers have suggested that certain factors associated with attitudes, organization, and support and communications systems can affect the general climate of schools. Apart from various intervention programs designed to prevent and deal with violence, a number of elements can contribute to a pleasant, stimulating school environment.

The number of students and staff members, the support and supervision system, reception

and support services for students, their participation in school life, collaboration between adults, the code of conduct and the student supervision plan are all aspects to be explored, as they affect the interventions to prevent violence on a daily basis.

The Ministère has given schools a tool to help them report on their situation with respect to violence, and this tool includes some of these aspects. It will help them report on their situation according to factors such as gender, age and rural or urban setting.

Preventative measures can be included in the educational and extracurricular activities already in place and do not necessarily have to be considered as extra activities or projects. For example, a discussion about differences between cultures, belief systems or respect for other people's choices, either during a History and Citizenship Education class or in Ethics and Religious Culture, could itself constitute a preventive action. Similarly, extracurricular activities allow students to pursue their interests and passions, and contribute to improved self-esteem and a healthy climate within the school.

This is universal prevention, which touches on the growth of personal competencies for all individuals without exception, as well as better organization of the school community's resources.

Second measure:

### **1.1.2 Give schools and school boards, on a regional basis, guidance to support their actions to prevent and deal with violence in the schools and suggest strict, structured, coherent procedures from preschool to the secondary level**

The action plan is not intended to propose a single universal program to prevent and deal with violence across Québec. The reality schools face varies greatly from one area to another. The action plan is meant to support and guide schools and school boards in order to pursue and improve on the procedures already in place, or to foster change in the way violence is dealt with in the schools.

This measure has three actions.

#### **Hire a regional support officer**

The regional support officer's mandate will be to make sure the action plan is implemented properly and to support the sharing of expertise and guidance in the area of preventing and dealing with violence in the schools, while taking into account the reality and the needs of the region. More specifically, this mandate will include:

- Setting up a suitable regional resource group covering the regional office's territory by involving school board representatives and their partners, as well as the services for the English-speaking community and the services for private schools.
- Coordinating, chairing and mobilizing resource groups and guide them as follows:
  - Teaching them to prevent and deal with violence in a structured, coherent manner.
  - Sharing experiences and expertise in the area of violence in the schools.
  - Organizing and following up on training and guidance sessions related to the action plan.
- Doing an inventory of the steps already being taken in the region.
- Acting as a resource person to communicate to the school system any local needs and

priorities regarding violence in the schools.

- Working closely with the various members of the regional office to ensure an integrated set of complementary measures for preventing and dealing with violence in schools.
- Carrying out any information and feedback activities required between the resource groups, the regional office and the MELS Coordination des services complémentaires.
- Helping to develop expertise on the subject according to provincial priorities related to the action plan.
- Working with the provincial training team to organize and, when necessary, to conduct training sessions.
- Making sure that all his/her actions foster the autonomy of schools and school boards in the area of preventing and dealing with violence.
- Working with partners to set up mechanisms for following up on and evaluating the action plan.
- Carrying out any other tasks connected to the objectives of the action plan, particularly those relating to behavioural difficulties and promoting health, well-being and prevention.

### **Create one resource group per region**

These groups offer special opportunities to share information, experience and expertise in order to equip schools and school boards to prevent and deal with violence.

These are opportunities for everyone to work together, making it possible to avoid isolated actions. These groups will focus on victims as well as aggressors and witnesses. They will take into account the specific realities of their region, such as street gangs or Aboriginal communities.

Each regional support group, set up by the support officer with the help of the regional office and the school boards, will have the following mandate:

- Ensuring that the members of the regional support group, school boards and their partners in the region have a shared understanding of the phenomenon of violence, taking into account everyone's conceptions and beliefs as well as current research.
- Making sure schools are better equipped to prevent and deal with violence by enabling members to share information, expertise and experiences in this regard and by taking into account the needs, the diversity of the school population and the particular characteristics of the region.
- Encouraging school boards and their partners to engage in a reflective, structured, coherent process to prevent and deal with violence.

The regional support group can also become a forum for determining shared actions in the face of different manifestations of violence (bullying, teasing, racism, homophobia, etc.) and in the different circumstances in which it occurs (school bus, schoolyard, Internet, etc.). The composition of the group can vary from region to region. It can be formed on the basis of an existing committee and enlarged according to the needs and characteristics of the region. The Ministère recommends the following list of members for the group:

## Representatives employed in education

- Regional representative for complementary educational services
- Regional support persons for students with behavioural difficulties
- Regional support persons for students with psychopathological disorders
- *Healthy Schools* support person
- Development officer working in NANS disadvantaged areas
- Person in charge of the educational project at the school board
- School principal (elementary and secondary)
- Teacher (elementary and secondary)
- Professional (psychologist, psychoeducator, at the elementary and secondary levels)
- Support staff (specialized teacher, student supervisor, etc., at the elementary and secondary levels)
- Child care staff

### Various partners:

- Parent representatives
- Representatives of community organizations
- Representative of the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux (Centre de santé et des services sociaux, Directeur de la protection de la jeunesse, etc.)
- Representative of the police force (Sûreté du Québec, municipal police force)
- Representative of student transportation services

## **Training and guidance sessions**

Training sessions are designed for members of the regional support groups and other stakeholders designated by school boards to help and guide others in dealing with school violence. These sessions equip participants with effective approaches to prevent and deal with violence, and address issues relating to the victims, perpetrators and witnesses of violence, as well as the age-specific needs of students and the problems they face (self-control, self-esteem, violence in romantic relationships, etc.). Among other things, the sessions provide opportunities for the following:

- equipping schools and school boards to take an inventory of their actions to prevent and deal with violence in the schools, given the school population, the school climate, enrolment, the environment, etc., and to evaluate the impact of their actions
- informing participants of educational strategies, promising practices and structured prevention programs that are recognized in Québec and elsewhere by health and education specialists
- helping participants adopt a structured, coherent approach to preventing and dealing with violence, covering the different areas of teaching while taking into account the needs of victims, perpetrators and witnesses, as well as the age of the students, and targeting violence among students and between students and teachers.

On the one hand, the sessions must ensure the development of a comprehensive, systemic and concerted vision by fostering discussion of the values, priorities and needs of a region and, on the other hand, they must ensure that members of the regional support groups understand this vision and are able to explain it to the education community as a

whole.

The goal of the sessions is to integrate expertise in preventing and dealing with violence by taking into account the three forms of intervention (universal, targeted and clinical) and the four systems that make up the school milieu (the school as a whole, its environment, the classroom and the student).

Third measure:

### **1.1.3 Equip schools to intervene in different issues, such as cyberbullying, taxing, racism, homophobia and violence on school buses**

Violence may require specific means of intervention, depending on the problems involved. Measure 1.1.3 proposes a reference tool that will allow stakeholders and parents to better intervene in new situations that may arise, such as bullying and cyberbullying, taxing, homophobia and violence on school buses or elsewhere. This tool outlines the characteristics and explanatory factors, manifestations and consequences, as well as suggested actions that could improve the situation. In addition, it provides schools with a list of resources they may draw on during the process of developing and implementing their own local intervention strategy.

For example, some of these resources include *Police Presence in Educational Institutions: Frame of Reference* (sample agreement between the police and schools), a list of the services offered by the Sûreté du Québec, including a kit, *Objectif: Cyber Branché* (cyberbullying) and the *Programme de réponse pour une école sécuritaire* (emergency plan), the *Resource Kit on Sexual Orientation for Educators and Youth Workers* (homophobia) developed by the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux, as well as documents produced by unions, community groups and research groups, such as the *Trousse de sensibilisation à l'agression indirecte* (indirect aggression).

Fourth measure:

### **1.1.4 Foster the implementation of effective means, especially at the preschool and elementary levels, in order to act early**

The fourth measure of Focus 1 allows schools, especially at the preschool and elementary levels, to develop effective actions or to implement tested programs, including measures for students who are victims or witnesses, as well as for perpetrators. An annual allocation of \$2.3 million will be given to the school boards to enable them to implement this measure. It encourages and supports the school system's initiatives to prevent and deal with violence early in a child's development.

Québec's research community supports the idea of implementing effective actions when students are most vulnerable (Vitaro, 2008; Paquin, 2006), and the transitions from preschool to elementary school and from elementary to secondary school are specifically targeted.

Fifth measure:

### **1.1.5 Make sure every school develops a strategy to prevent and deal with violence as part of its educational project and its success plan**

Measure 1.1.5 is designed to ensure that every school develops a local intervention strategy to prevent and deal with violence in the schools. Using this strategy, the school community must be able to set up the conditions and measures to guide and support the victims and witnesses of violent acts, as well as the perpetrators. Immediate assistance that respects certain basic principals can only reduce the risk of severe, lasting trauma for victims and witnesses.

Each school must adopt such a strategy, based on its success plan, taking into account the characteristics of its population and elements such as the following:

- a profile of the situation including actions carried out to prevent and deal with violence and means to evaluate their impact in the school
- a profile of the manifestations of violence occurring between fellow students, between students and adults, or involving school partners, and a description of the circumstances
- safety and emergency measures
- measures to assist personnel and students who are victims
- the role of school stakeholders (administrators, teachers, complementary services personnel, support service staff and all partners concerned, including parents
- the school code
- information about rights and responsibilities
- legislative frameworks
- occurrence report
- protection of personnel and students who are victims
- dealing with complaints
- a clearly announced school policy on violence that takes into account the characteristics of the school population, etc.

However, given the work that schools have already done to prevent and deal with violence, the measures set out in the action plan may be used to complement what is being done or to review the success plan in light of new information revealed in the profile of their situation.

Sixth measure:

### **1.1.6 Provide pedagogical and psychosocial support for suspended or expelled students in order to help them integrate into the school**

The Ministère will provide recurrent annual funding in the amount of \$1.75 million in order to allow school boards with students in difficulty to organize pedagogical and psychosocial support services to foster the reintegration of suspended or expelled students.

This type of service aims to help students work constructively on the attitudes and behaviours that hinder their social integration and their academic success, and that interrupt the class. It also helps students to keep up with their schoolwork. This service allows effective means to be set up to provide students with every possible alternative

before sending them to special classes for those with behavioural disorders, and it helps to prevent them from developing delinquent behaviour.

The development of a guidance service for suspended or expelled students must be carried out as part of an agreement between school boards and schools, and it must follow the school code and the disciplinary rules established with the school staff and approved by the governing board. This measure will allow schools and school boards to provide a range of services through joint coherent actions that are to be taken throughout the disciplinary process and that are integrated into the student's individualized education plan. However, the school cannot act alone in the face of these issues, and must work closely with parents and partners in order to meet the targeted objectives.

**Objective 1.2: Intervene effectively and ensure safety during exceptional situations in the schools.**

The school community may experience different events that require the development and deployment of an emergency plan. Incidents involving extreme weather conditions, major power failures, exposure to hazardous materials, natural catastrophes, bomb scares, fatal accidents and violence all require a special intervention plan.

In the past few years, schools in different parts of the world have experienced tragic events such as hostage-takings and killings. Until now, Québec elementary and secondary schools have not experienced such events, unlike some of our colleges and universities. However, safety measures must be put in place in order to ensure effective intervention in such exceptional situations. Objective 1.2 of the action plan addresses this concern for school communities and partners. It includes the following measure:

**1.2.1 Make sure that every school board has an emergency intervention plan applicable to itself and its schools, and that it establishes an agreement with police authorities regarding their intervention at the schools**

This measure in the action plan applies especially to schools in the prevention of exceptional situations involving injury or death following, for example, the arrival of a gunman, an armed individual, an imminent direct threat or even an accident due to a false move or lack of supervision, not to mention other types of incidents that could be included in an integrated emergency intervention plan. Emergency situations are often complex; they require a well thought-out emergency plan that includes a range of threats from minor to major. The safety of individuals is at stake.

Every school board must develop or update an emergency plan that can be applied to itself and to its schools. It must include the training of a committee responsible for applying emergency measures in each school, a communication plan for the members of the school team, the school board, partners and parents, as well as a kit with a detailed map of the area and specific information about the staff and the students.

Various partners such as school boards, police and the health network have developed expertise in this field, allowing them to intervene in all aspects of a situation and to take its key elements into account. The school community will greatly benefit from their knowledge and, with their help, can establish procedures to respond to any situation. For example:

- Identifying, preventing and reducing the risk of violent events occurring that could

affect the school community and property (prevention, preparation, intervention and re-establishment).

- Limiting the physical and psychological consequences on individuals and damages to the environment and the property that could result from a violent event in the school community
- Improving the state of preparation and response of all stakeholders concerned when violent events occur (staff training, effective communication, etc.)
- Establishing a structured emergency plan that takes into account all the elements considered, specifically a protocol for crisis situations.
- Working with the police department, determine when and why the police could be called to the school and the protocol that applies in these situations.
  - in the context of prevention and community relations
  - in the context of investigation
  - in an emergency context

This objective is closely related to the emergency context described in the document *Police Presence in Educational Institutions: Frame of Reference*, which stipulates that the school and school board staff must work with the police force, public security, community organizations and the municipality to prepare an emergency procedure to be followed in situations that might involve a hostage-taking, a single gunman or a clash between two gangs.

Schools and school boards are asked to make an agreement with the police to determine, when and how the police will visit the school to discuss violence prevention, intervention and emergency situations. The Provincial Consultation Panel on Violence, Youth and the School Environment has produced a sample agreement that conforms to its responsibilities described in the *Plan d'intervention québécois sur les gangs de rue* (Québec's intervention plan regarding street gangs).

## **Focus 2: Joint action and training**

In preventing and dealing with violence, as in many other areas, joint action and training are essential to the successful, effective application of interventions. This focus includes two objectives with one measure each. The first objective deals with joint action.

### ***Objective 2.1: Increase cooperation and joint action among the various bodies concerned at the provincial level***

This objective includes one measure.

#### **2.1.1 Ensure effective joint action provincewide in preventing and dealing with different types of violence**

Various provincial government agencies are already working to prevent and deal with violence, and will continue to do so. These agencies include the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux, the Ministère de la Sécurité publique, the Ministère de la Justice, the Ministère de l'Immigration et des Communautés culturelles and the Ministère de la Famille et des Aînés.



Measure 2.1.1 seeks to ensure the consistency, integration and complementarity of the processes and actions carried out to prevent and deal with violence in the schools.

More specifically, it includes the following actions:

- sharing information about initiatives regarding violence in the schools that are being implemented by each of the government agencies
- sharing expertise in preventing and dealing with violence in the schools
- working together on current or upcoming interventions in each department and, when applicable, on joint interventions

It is essential to work closely with the government agencies that are concerned with violence in the schools in order to share expertise and to avoid duplicating efforts in a given area.

The second objective of this focus deals with training for the various individuals who work with the students.

**Objective 2.2: *Better prepare school personnel to deal with the problem of violence in the schools***

This objective has one measure.

**2.2.1 With universities, determine ways to include the issue of violence in the schools in initial teacher training**

Preventing and dealing with violence in the schools will be more effective if the people trained to work in a school setting are more aware of this reality and better equipped to act. Many educators feel powerless in situations where they are called upon to prevent and deal with violence. Furthermore, sometimes the violence occurring in the schools has such a negative effect on employees that they quit their jobs. However, the Ministère, in cooperation with universities, intends to solve this problem by making sure that initial training prepares future teachers and professionals to deal with potentially violent situations. Several studies carried out in Québec report on the risk of abandoning the profession and conclude that a focus on teacher training is vital.

Indeed, it seems that teachers who have been trained to recognize violence are less likely to become victims themselves and are more able to effectively manage the tensions in their classroom. In light of this, it is even more important to meet the need for training in this area.

**Focus 3: Research and documentation**

Violence in the schools is not a new phenomenon, although is still largely misunderstood. Researchers and people working in the area, both in Québec and elsewhere, have been striving for years to clarify the issue and to develop promising strategies. Focus 3 of the action plan includes two objectives and several measures intended to make current information available in order to help the school community to understand the phenomenon and to choose the actions it will take. It also aims to define the situation

regarding violence in Québec schools.

**Objective 3.1: *Ensure that schools and school boards and the Ministère have a better understanding of violence in Québec schools***

It is essential to understand the factors that put young people at risk as victims or as perpetrators of violence in order to develop an intervention process to prevent and deal with violence in the schools. Scientific data, both qualitative and quantitative, must be gathered and professionals and decision makers must be provided with current information on the subject.

This objective has three measures.

First measure:

**3.1.1 Document the phenomenon of violence in terms of its causes and determining factors**

This measure, which involves conducting a review of the literature available, aims to inform the school community of the state of theoretical and practical knowledge currently available concerning the phenomenon of violence. The review can provide an expert-approved definition of violence, differentiating between violence, aggression, rudeness, misbehaviour, and anger, and help document the phenomenon of violence in terms of its causes and determining factors.

This documentation is provided during training sessions to the different actors of the school community, so that they are better informed and develop a clearer shared understanding of the phenomenon. Thus the review helps to determine the actions required to prevent and deal with violence in the schools.

Second measure:

**3.1.2 Using existing data, draw up a profile of violence as seen and experienced in Québec schools**

Few studies report on the scope, prevalence, diversity and seriousness of violence in Québec schools, and there is no reliable database to draw up a fair profile of the phenomenon. However, since 2001, when the Groupe de recherche sur les environnements scolaires (GRES) produced a questionnaire about the socio-educational environment, about 440 schools drew up a profile of the situation in their community, specifically in terms of violence. The Ministère gave the GRES the mandate to report on the violence perceived and experienced by the students and staff of Québec's public schools, as per the information in the school profiles.

For the first time in Québec, this provincial report will provide substantial information about the violence perceived and experienced in elementary and secondary schools. These reports will also examine the links between the different manifestations of violence and the other elements of the socio-educational environment, such as the school climate and certain educational and organizational practices.

Third measure:

### **3.1.3 Create an ongoing profile of the situation regarding violence in Québec's schools**

In Québec, the lack of a longitudinal database for a representative sample of Québec schools makes it difficult to properly document the scope of violence in the schools and how it has evolved. To this end, a monitoring system must be set up to create an ongoing profile of violence in the schools, including the location, number and nature of its manifestations, as well as a description of its victims, witnesses, and perpetrators, including their gender, age, etc.

In addition, this monitoring system will be useful in guiding the adoption of effective policies to prevent violence, as well as in evaluating incidents with a certain degree of accuracy.

#### **Objective 3.2: *Ensure that the schools and school boards are familiar with programs and activities for preventing and dealing with violence in the schools***

A number of quality studies, programs and tools that have been developed in Québec or elsewhere remain unknown to those responsible for preventing and dealing with violence in the schools. Making this expertise accessible would help to support and strengthen the means available in the schools system.

The following four measures present the different means available to stakeholders and partners to meet this objective.

First measure:

#### **3.2.1 Establish a means to share information about the phenomenon of violence in the schools**

A semiannual newsletter will be published on the MELS Web site, including relevant information for stakeholders and current knowledge about preventing and dealing with violence in the schools. It will foster the development of a culture of violence prevention in the schools while encouraging the school community to reflect on support and guidance. In addition, the newsletter will be a medium to share information between the research and school communities, by publishing news of discoveries, new projects and best practices by stakeholders and researchers in Québec and elsewhere.

Second measure:

#### **3.2.2 On the MELS Web site, create a section on violence in the schools**

Another measure to support the school system is the addition of a special section to the MELS Web site on preventing and dealing with violence.

School stakeholders, parents and partners will find up-to-date information on the issue of violence in the schools and will have access to different tools to support them in their interventions. Specifically, this section of the Web site will highlight best practices and programs recommended by school and health professionals, as well as initiatives by other government agencies and organizations concerned with violence and young people. It will also provide information about existing documents and initiatives.

Third measure:

### **3.2.3 Encourage the sharing of experiences and the publication of studies on violence in the schools for the various partners and stakeholders in the school system**

A provincial forum will be organized one year after the action plan has been implemented, to allow resource groups and the various stakeholders to share their experiences and expertise.

This event will provide regional support officers, regional resource groups and specialists with an opportunity to meet and report on their work at the local and regional levels. It will also allow the school system to stay abreast of current knowledge on the phenomenon of violence, its manifestations and any recognized, effective interventions.

Fourth measure:

### **3.2.4 Create a directory of procedures and programs developed in Québec or elsewhere to prevent and deal with violence in the schools**

Many reputable studies, programs and tools have already been developed by the various organizations, school boards and other government agencies concerned with violence and young people, but they remain unknown to those responsible for preventing and dealing with violence in the school community. Whether these resources originate in Québec, Canada or abroad, many of them exist and would be useful to support and enrich the means set up in schools. Measure 3.2.4 aims to give the school system a directory of strict programs and procedures designed to prevent and deal with violence in the schools.

Making this expertise accessible will help to support and strengthen the means in place. Participants could also add to and share this directory during their training sessions.

## **Focus 4: Follow-up and evaluation**

The Québec Auditor General's 2005 report mentioned that the follow-up and evaluation described in focus 4 will ensure that the action plan delivers the expected results. This focus has but one objective.

### **Objective 4.1: *To ensure that the action plan is properly implemented, and to assess its impact on young people and the school community***

The follow-up on the action plan must report on the relevance of maintaining, increasing or modifying the actions taken in order to attain the objectives set out in the action plan, specifically by validating the measures implemented as part of the action plan.

This objective has three measures.

First measure:

#### **4.1.1 Obtain the necessary expertise to validate the different tools and interventions used in the implementation of the action plan**

Measure 4.1.1 involves calling upon the collaboration of experts to provide enhanced knowledge of the conditions required to produce the targeted results.

A committee of experts including university researchers, regional offices, school boards and schools will be involved for the duration of the implementation of the action plan, with the mandate to guide and ratify, as consultants, the work and tools described in the action plan to prevent and deal with violence in the schools.

Second measure:

#### **4.1.2 Follow the implementation of the action plan alongside partners**

The Ministère has asked the Provincial consultation panel on violence, youth and the school environment to follow up on the implementation of the 2008-2011 Action plan to prevent and deal with violence in its capacity as the follow-up committee for the duration of the implementation of the Action plan to prevent and deal with violence in the schools 2008-2011.

As the follow-up committee, the Provincial consultation panel on violence, youth and the school environment must pursue its own objectives in addition to its mandate to follow the implementation of the action plan to prevent and deal with violence in the schools. In particular:

- to provide the Ministère with feedback about the implementation of the action plan
- to advise the Ministère on the application of the actions and measures already planned or to be planned, in order to ensure the quality and success of the implementation of the action plan
- to work closely with the Ministère, in accordance with the organization's means, in applying the actions and measures as planned or to be planned
- /to advise on the relevance of the means to be used to evaluate the action plan and to facilitate their implementation.

Finally, the evaluation must report on the processes and results obtained with the adopted measures. It will be carried out in two phases: halfway through the three-year implementation period, and again at the end.

Third measure:

#### **4.1.3 Evaluate the implementation of the action plan and its impact**

The MELS Coordination des services complémentaires, in conjunction with the Direction de la recherche, des statistiques et de l'information, will set up a committee to evaluate the implementation of the action plan in the school community. A first evaluation will be conducted halfway through the three-year implementation period, and another will be carried out at the end.

School boards and school administrators will receive a MELS questionnaire designed to collect information about the actions to be carried out in the school community that correspond to the measures of the action plan that directly concern them.

### **Conclusion**

Violence in the schools affects young people as well as their families and the school staff. Québec schools are not exempt from this phenomenon, although they have long

intervened on a daily basis to correct the situation. While some schools may see less violence than others, the effects of violence, whether perceived or part of a real situation, still affect the entire school community (adults, students, partners, etc.).

Fighting violence in the schools requires periodic intervention as well as an overall joint, structured approach that is part of a series of actions and interventions to prevent and deal with violence. In addition, the school, acting alone, cannot respond to the different manifestations of violence in the community, nor can it be expected to. Indeed, the school must establish or strengthen collaborative ties with families, various partners and community organizations so that they can work together. Parents have the primary responsibility for their child's development, and, as such, can make a significant contribution towards defining effective goals and initiatives. The same holds true for the many organizations in the community whose mission is to provide support in the face of violence in the schools.

The various measures and actions set out in this three-year action plan should better equip the school community to understand the different forms of violence, to detect its manifestations and to intervene effectively. The Ministère hopes that all young Quebeckers and their educators may benefit from an environment that fosters the values of respect, inclusion, sharing and openness to others. MELS would also like this plan to allow students to continue their studies with increased motivation in a safe environment, to reach their full potential and to succeed in their chosen path.

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