

The Positive Learning Environment Policy

Policy 703

What is it for?

The Positive Learning Environment Policy is a tool designed to help school staff, students and parents build safe and peaceful environments where people feel accepted and respected and where learning is the main focus.

New Brunswick

E D U C A T I O N

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The policy helps to do this by:

- defining principles essential to a positive learning and working environment;
- establishing a process to ensure ongoing efforts at building such an environment;
- identifying best practices for responding to inappropriate behaviour when a positive environment is not enough;
- setting limits for behaviour;
- identifying the responsibilities of all partners in the school system.

What are the components of a positive learning environment?

- all persons, regardless of their role, are valued and respected
- standards for appropriate conduct are developed collaboratively and apply to all persons and in all school-related activities
- all partners recognize that they contribute to the learning/working environment

What makes it work?

The policy requires that each school, in consultation with its students, parents, Parent School Support Committee, teachers, administrators, resource and support staff, and volunteers develop a plan to ensure a positive environment.

This dialogue is essential for deciding such things as: the school's priority areas; responsibilities; rules and processes; appropriate, fair approaches and interventions; and expectations for behaviour and consequences for actions.

What kinds of conduct are identified as unacceptable?

The following behaviours are not tolerated from any person in the New Brunswick public school system. This means intervention, as agreed upon in the school's plan, is consistently and uniformly required when these behaviours occur.

- harassment, intimidation and violence
- discrimination based on gender, race, colour, national or ethnic origin, religion, culture, language group, sexual orientation, disability, age or grade level
- dissemination of hate propaganda including hate literature
- use or possession of alcohol or illegal drugs
- possession/use/selling of illegal substances or weapons
- theft or intentional property damage
- any behaviour which threatens the health or safety of any person. (e.g. arson, bomb threats and tampering with safety equipment such as fire alarms)
- accusations involving known falsehood or malicious intent
- creating or attempting to create a disturbance, using threatening or abusive language and speaking or acting in such a way as to impair the maintenance of order and discipline on school property.

How was the policy developed?

The policy was developed in consultation with parents, students, Education staff, volunteers, the teachers' associations and many non-governmental groups that are concerned about the quality of school life. It is based on best practices in New Brunswick schools as well as on current research.

It is the third of three policies which have been implemented to ensure positive learning and working environments. The first was the government's *Harassment in the Workplace Policy*, introduced in 1993, which protects all employees, including school staff and volunteers, from various forms of harassment. The second was *Policy for the Protection of Students from Misconduct by Adults in the Public School System* (Policy 701) which was introduced in 1996 to afford students the same protection.

Resources

The public education system is increasingly receiving children who live in fragile families that have a multitude of needs.

In introducing the *Positive Learning Environment Policy*, it was recognized that a policy framework, coupled with willingness and cooperation among education stakeholders, although a big part of the solution to discipline problems, is not the entire solution.

In addition therefore, government has provided districts with substantial fiscal, human and training resources to support positive learning and working environments in New Brunswick schools.

Debunking Some Misconceptions

It has come to our attention that there are some public misconceptions that are damaging to positive learning environments. We would like to take this opportunity to address a few of these by asserting that ...

... School staff may ...

... hug a child who needs comforting.

Those who care for children have always used their good judgment in deciding when and with which child it is appropriate to use physical comforting. A well-timed hug or pat is a kindness that is needed and will be remembered by a child.

... restrain a child.

The use of physical force or restraint has not been removed as an intervention when it is required to keep students and others safe, to protect an orderly learning environment or to protect school property. It has been abolished as a form of punishment, expression of anger and technique for intimidation.

... expect to work as a team with their administrators meet the needs of hard to serve students.

The *Education Act* states that teachers can expect advice and direction from their principal. It also requires principals to ensure that reasonable steps are taken to create and to maintain a safe, positive learning environment. Further, the requirement of the *Positive Learning Environment Policy* that each school develop a plan in collaboration with its partners will empower staff, parents and students. The plan will promote clear expectations and a consistent, unified approach from one classroom to another and one situation to another.

... expect assistance from the district office.

The *Education Act* places a responsibility on the Superintendent to require that “every student avoids idleness, profanity, falsehood and deceit, quarrelling and fighting, is kind and courteous, obedient to his or her instructors, diligent in his or her studies and conforms to school rules.”

In addition, the *Positive Learning Environment Policy* requires the school district to develop a plan to support schools in creating and maintaining positive learning/working environments.

... expect parents to work with their child and school personnel to support the learning of their child and the learning environment of the school.

The *Education Act* asserts certain expectations for parents. These are to:

- meet the basic needs of their child;
- ensure their child attends school;
- encourage their child to complete assigned homework;
- attend to their child’s conduct while the child is at school and on the way to and from school;
- communicate reasonably with school personnel.

... remove a student whose conduct poses an immediate threat to the safety of others from a situation immediately.

The *Positive Learning Environment Policy* states: “A pupil whose conduct poses an immediate threat to the safety of others will be removed from the situation at once and will be permitted to return when safety can reasonably be assured.” This is done according to each school’s intervention plan.

... suspend a student from school attendance for cause.

The *Education Act* grants principals the authority to suspend students from school attendance for a maximum of five consecutive days. Superintendents have the authority to suspend students from school attendance for longer periods.

Pupils who are removed from the regular classroom setting may continue to be assisted with their learning and will be returned to the regular classroom setting as soon as practicable.

... request that a person who is creating a disturbance on school property, while it is being used for school purposes, leave the premises.

The *Education Act* gives teachers the authority to do this - except when this would be tantamount to suspension of a student (see below). The Act states that any person who refuses to immediately leave school property when requested by a teacher in this circumstance commits an offence under the *Provincial Offences Procedure Act*. This carries a penalty of a fine of up to \$500 for the first offence and \$1,000 for a repeat offence.

Examples of this power include situations where the conduct of students or spectators at extracurricular activities, such as dances or sports events is unacceptable, situations where students from other schools are disrupting the learning environment and situations where parents are acting inappropriately or being abusive to school staff or to students. This section does not permit a teacher to send home, during school hours, a student who is registered at the school, since this would be considered a suspension from school attendance. The authority to do this rests with the principal.

... expect assistance when an allegation of abuse is made in bad faith.

Malicious attacks on a person’s reputation will not be tolerated in the public school system. The accuser and the employer have a joint duty to “make things right” as much as possible. Accusations shown to involve falsehood, malicious intent or that are made in bad faith, will result in disciplinary action. Policy 701 confirms this position.

... expect protection against harassment.

The *New Brunswick Public Service Harassment in the Workplace Policy* provides protection for school employees and volunteers. This policy is intended to address poisoned work environments and to deal with objectionable behaviour such as threats, intimidation and sexual harassment against employees and volunteers by other employees, parents and other members of the public who may be present in the workplace. Harassment is also addressed through the *Positive Learning Environment Policy*.

Would you like more information?

The Director of Education for your school district, or Educational Programs and Services Branch (Student Services) of the Department of Education (506)453-2816 can provide you with additional information about this policy and its supporting programs and services.

The full text of the Education Act can be viewed at:

<http://www.gnb.ca/acts/acts/e-01-12.htm>

Policy 701 and Policy 703 can be viewed at:

<http://www.gnb.ca/0000/policies.asp>

Ce document est également disponible en français.