

**Announcement of Guidelines for School Codes of Conduct
Stride Elementary School, Burnaby B.C.
Premier Gordon Campbell
March 22, 2004**

Check Against Delivery

I think that sometimes we spend a lot of time thinking about the challenges we face, but we also have to recognize when people do a really good job of something. Here, at Stride Elementary School, you've done a really good job of something: you've been real leaders. You've helped yourselves; you've helped your classmates; you've helped the people in your school. So I wanted to thank all of the people that have been part of your success.

First, I want to thank the trustees of the Burnaby school board for the leadership and support that they've shown. I want to thank your RCMP school liaison officers - I know that you have worked very closely with them as well - and all the volunteers from the community that have helped to make your school an exemplary school, a school that we hope that others will be able to follow.

Most importantly, I want to thank your principal and the leader of your school. Dr. Lee has shown exceptional leadership and ability to reach out and bring together the community as we deal with some fairly challenging issues.

I know they're challenging for each of you in different ways in your lives, and I know that different individuals respond differently to these things. So it is important for us to find ways we can talk about them and understand them a little bit better. I think that you've done that just incredibly well at your school.

I also want to thank Terry for being her with us today. Terry Watson is the president of the B.C. Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils. They've been very active in trying to make sure that we can reach out and share with other schools and districts the things that they've learned.

I'm joined today by Patty Sahota, MLA for Burnaby-Edmonds; Harry Bloy, MLA for Burquitlam; and John Nuraney, MLA for Burnaby-Willingdon. Those Burnaby MLAs have all been very interested in what you're doing here and have been very impressed.

We also have a couple of MLAs here today who were part of our Safe Schools Task Force. Lorne Mayencourt, MLA for Vancouver-Burrard, was the chair of the task force. We also have Wendy McMahon here from Columbia River-Revelstoke. That's about as far east as you can get in terms of the province, but bullying is something that we have to deal with in schools all over British Columbia.

Finally, we have with us the Minister of Education, Tom Christensen, who is also very concerned about improving the quality of education and the quality of life for each of you as students.

If there's one place that every student should feel safe, it's at school. If there's one place that every student should feel like they can pick up the tools they need to pursue their dreams and their goals, it's at school. If there's one place that you should be able to imagine all the things that you'd like to do and be, it's at school.

We know that a safe and secure learning environment is really important. We know that every person that comes to school needs to feel safe and secure. And we know that right now we're not doing as well as we'd like to. We know that there are areas where we're not reaching our full objective, which is to have every student, in every classroom, feel safe and secure.

Right now we know that 25 per cent of students across all grade levels say that they've experienced some form of teasing or bullying or being picked on. That can have lifelong consequences. We know that 60 per cent of the boys who are characterized as bullies between grade six and grade nine will have a criminal conviction by the time they're 24.

So we don't want to have bullies in our schools. We want to understand the challenges that kids face, and we want to make sure we deal with those challenges openly and directly to create an even safer place for people.

There's one volunteer here in Burnaby that talked to one of our MLAs. She's volunteering with one of these task forces in a local school safety program. You know why she got involved? She didn't get involved because her kids were bullied or felt unsafe. She didn't get involved because her grandkids were bullied or felt unsafe. She got involved because she was bullied, and she's carried that for the 60-some-odd years of her life. So she volunteered because she thought it was something that she could do that would make the school environment better for her grandchildren than it was for her.

The safe schools task force found that we have to work with teachers, with principals, with students, and with parent advisory councils to get to the roots of the problems.

One way that you're doing that here is the Roots of Empathy program. Every student from kindergarten to grade four is part of that. Teachers and students learn how to deal with emotional issues that they have, to emotionally respect one another and learn how to understand what it means when you're hurting one another with what you say.

We also know that we have to empower students and give kids a sense of control over what's taking place. The new peer mediation program that you have here, involving all 600 of your students, is a great example. Instead of teachers or counsellors intervening in disputes in the playground or in the classroom, trained student mediators are doing that to help resolve differences between other students.

The result of your work, your leadership and your commitment has been a substantial increase and improvement in how safe the kids feel. Sixty-three per cent of grade four students of Stride Avenue said they were satisfied with their safety just two years ago.

Today after that program, the number's up to 75 per cent: that's very good progress. I know you won't stop until you get 100 per cent, and I want to say thank you for that.

Schools and school boards all across British Columbia are already doing very good work to increase safety, but we have to share that to make sure that other schools and other school districts know about your successes here at Stride Elementary.

Schools and school boards need autonomy. In different parts of the province they may respond to these challenges of bullying in different ways than you have here. But if you're willing to share what you know and what you've learned with other schools, then they can improve too.

The School Act, which governs all the schools in British Columbia, gives boards the responsibility for developing what's called codes of conduct; that's not going to change. But we do know that your codes need to reflect the nature and needs of your school or your community because in a province as big as British Columbia, we know that one-size-fits-all solutions don't work.

The province can help by providing resources and tools. So we will be establishing new provincial standards to guide schools in developing their own codes of conduct. Those standards reflect principles that you've developed here. We're going to involve parents and students and staff in developing the standards. We're going to promote, teach and enforce those codes. We're going to make sure everyone understands how they work. We're going to monitor progress. We're going to watch, and we're going to see how much safer children feel in their schools, whether we're eliminating those issues because we know that's what the real goal is here. It's not just to pretend something's happening; it's to have something actually happening that's making a difference in your life, in your classroom.

We're going to ensure compatibility across grades and schools and communities. We're going to make sure that this is something that carries on. It's not just one grade we're doing this in, or another; it's right across the school.

Those standards are part of a detailed guidebook that we're going to make available across the province. It has a whole bunch of information in it about practices, about how to keep records, how to report whether we're being successful or not, and how to encourage parent advisory councils and parents and teachers to be involved.

We're going to make that available to all 1,750 schools across the province. There will be three given out to each of the schools: one for the principals, one for the school planning councils, and one for the parent advisory councils, because again, what you've shown here is that when everyone works together, you have a significant impact and you improve the sense of safety and security that students have.

The parent advisory councils have already produced two other resources, and you might have seen these when you developed your program. One is: *Call it Safe*. One's a guide for

elementary schools, and there's another one for secondary schools. We're trying to make sure that everyone has these tools to make sure that they can help build on your success here.

The B.C. Parent Advisory Councils' successful guides will be made available in French, Korean, Punjabi and in Chinese because we know that when we share the success of your programs and other programs across the province, we improve the quality of education for everyone.

I want to say to you kids, particularly: you're the ones that actually make these programs work. As adults, we can try and say that we hope this works or we hope that works. If you're not willing to tell us what does and doesn't work, if you're not willing to share what you experience and how you feel with us, then we won't be nearly as successful as we can be.

Right here, you've done a great job. Every once in a while you should pat yourselves on the back for doing such a good job. When I think of the work that you must have done when you developed *The War Within*, I know that many of you have been out on the stage and out in public sharing your thoughts with people. It is you that's made this work.

So today I was very pleased to be able to come and be part of your school and make this announcement because, first and foremost, I want to say thank you to all of you. You've been great. Thanks a lot.