



The Society for Safe and Caring Schools and Communities  
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## News Release

### **Alberta Students Present Their Views on Safe and Caring Schools**

*December 1, 2004 Edmonton*

Over 150 industrial oil and gas executives, First Nations band councillors, deans, government officials, teachers, bank executives, school superintendents, board chairs, directors of charitable agencies, students and mayors gathered for dinner to listen to ten children from across the province present their winning poetry and essays on bullying, violence prevention and character building. The children, winners in the *Niska Student* contest, were honoured at the Society for Safe and Caring Schools and Communities (SACSC) Provincial Supporters' Meeting on November 30, 2004.

The newly appointed Education Minister, the Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, brought greetings and congratulated the student winners. Representatives from Alberta Children's Services, the Solicitor General, and Alberta Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development spoke briefly about the commitment of their ministries toward building safe and caring schools and communities in Alberta. The Honourable Gary Mar, Minister of Community Development who was unable to attend, sent a message of recognition and thanks, which was delivered by the SACSC Executive Director.

The winning entries in the SACSC *Niska Student* competition are included in the charter issue of a new student newsletter, one of many projects the Society undertakes to meet its goals. "The Provincial Supporters Meeting has not only been an opportunity to celebrate the accomplishments of these students and others like them who are putting an end to bullying and harassment in their schools" said Dr. Vicki Mather, director of the Society for Safe and Caring Schools and Communities, "but it was also a forum for us to share our goals and resources with the public,"

The Student winners of the competition are: Ashley Hart, Claire Hosford and Nick James from Wes Hosford School in Sherwood Park; Elizabeth Ellsworth and Ashley Heilemann from West Country Outreach School in Rimby; Rebecka Carriere



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*Safe and Caring Schools add one*

and Ben Fonteyne from Sacred Heart School in Wetaskiwin, Calvin McLeod from Canyon School in Pincher Creek; and Darla Fremmerlid, Paula Gladue, and Stacey Young from Mistasiniy School in Wabasca. All students presented their winning entry, except for Ben Fonteyne, who was unable to attend. The two student Masters of Ceremonies were M J Yellowknee and Gordon Naylor from Mistasiniy School, one of three SACSC implementation schools in Wabasca.

Violence has been one of the top youth related issues in Alberta for the last several years. According to Statistics Canada one in ten youth come in contact with the police for violations in the criminal code. Aboriginals, ethnic minorities, and sexual minorities comprise the groups at the highest risk of being victims of youth violence. By teaching youth respect for diversity, the programs will help to reduce students' prejudicial attitudes and beliefs, and decrease bullying and other discriminatory actions not only toward high risk groups, but toward all students.

Without core funding for its programs the not-for-profit Society for SACSC relies on the in-kind and financial support of people and organizations like those represented at the Provincial Supporters Meeting. This dinner provided an opportunity for the Society to present the public with an overview of the comprehensive violence prevention and character building programs that are available to schools and communities.



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## Backgrounder

The SACSC programs teach knowledge, skills and attitudes that are needed to build positive interpersonal and collaborative relationships and manage conflicts peacefully. Young people develop attributes that will help them put a stop to bullying and prevent violence and crime. The programs which are based on the core concepts of respect and responsibility develop positive, social character in children and youth. The Society, through its programs, strives to affect a child's total environment.

### Current SACSC Projects

#### ***Building Safe, Caring and Inclusive Schools and Communities for Aboriginal Children and Youth—Creating a Community-Based Model for Positive Social Development***

A 1.4 million dollar project with support from the federal government's National Crime Prevention Strategy, this project aims to reduce risk factors and increase protective factors among youth. The program does this by: enhancing respect, responsibility, and trust; increasing scholastic achievement and school completion among Aboriginal students; reducing suicide rates among Aboriginal youth; and preventing violence and crime through the development of knowledge, skills, and attitudes that promote pro-social behaviour.

#### ***Respecting Diversity and Preventing Prejudice: Promoting Social Development in Schools and School Communities***

Schools need to adapt to their growing diversity so that they can continue to provide a safe haven where all students have equitable opportunities to learn and ultimately make a contribution to Canadian society. This project involves a comprehensive social development and education approach that promoted positive change in school culture, encouraging people of different backgrounds to live and learn together in harmony.

#### ***Dealing With Homophobia: Resources for School Communities in Alberta***

Daily, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) students are taunted, put down, subjected to ridicule and physically abused, and comprise one of the most at-risk groups in Alberta schools and communities. The goal of this project is to involve school administration and staffs, community members and parents in understanding issues and taking action to address homophobia and reduce discrimination directed toward LGBT students.

#### ***Interfaith Education Project***

The United Nations Association of Canada, the Edmonton Interfaith Centre and SACSC are implementing a project to increase public awareness and understanding about interfaith issues. Creating more awareness of religious diversity in schools, and developing practical strategies for cross cultural understanding that goes beyond religious tolerance, will help students discover new levels of mutual understanding and respect for one another's faith. This project is not designed to "convert" any student or attempt to alter people's current beliefs but simply build a safe and discrimination-free school environment. It will provide resources for parents, students, teachers and the public and will promote learning and teaching about religious diversity.

#### ***SACSC Character Education***

The values promoted through SACSC character education are acceptable among all cultural and religious groups. SACSC supports the values that parents instil in their children, without being offensive to any of Canada's diverse cultures or religions. These values include respect,



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inclusiveness, caring, compassion, and responsibility. The programs promote consistency at home and at school, as school programs support the positive values that parents instil in their children.

When children feel safe, their learning increases, and they have more success in the other areas of their lives. According to brain research, when people feel stress or in danger, the brain enters “fight or flight” mode. In this mode the brain reverts to repetitive behaviours and is not capable of higher cognitive functioning like perception, association or analysis. The hormones released into the body suppress memory, and keep the body in an alert and agitated state. These experiences are often the cause of behavioural problems.

The SACSC program promotes problem solving discipline over punishment. The former encourages positive behaviour by helping students learn from their mistakes, and understand why some behaviour is inappropriate. The latter simply punishes disruptive behaviour without teaching students why the behaviour is inappropriate. This problem solving style of discipline expects students to “fix their mistakes and ensures that students experience and understand the consequences of their actions and how they affect other people.

**The core SACSC topics that are integrated into Alberta curriculum are:**

1. Building respect and responsibility
2. Building self-esteem
3. Respecting diversity and preventing prejudice
4. Managing anger and dealing with bullying
5. Managing and resolving conflicts peacefully

## SACSC Program Area descriptions

### **Supporting a Safe and Caring School**

The objective of this program area is to build a safe and caring school culture through developing a climate of trust and inclusiveness. There are many resources available for teachers, parents and students, that the Society developed after extensive research. The program uses school climate assessment instruments and provides schools with guides, manuals, videos and booklets to assist in implementation.

### **Toward a Safe and Caring Curriculum**

The objective of this program area is to develop safe and caring knowledge, skills and attitudes through study of prescribed curriculum. Resources have been developed to help teachers integrate violence-prevention and character education into all subject areas in the Alberta Program of Studies and Western Canadian Protocol Initiatives from Kindergarten to Grade 12.

### **Toward a Safe and Caring Teaching Profession**

This program area focuses on Staff development through professional learning communities, curriculum and workshop facilitator training, and micro-workshops.

### **Toward a Safe and Caring Community**

In order to affect students’ attitudes and behaviours both in and out of school, a school program must include parents and other people in the community. The community program consists of a series of workshops for adults and older teens which help all adults who work with children to model and reinforce positive social behaviour, whether at school, at home or in the community.



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## Fact Sheet

- A nurturing environment, where adaptive behaviours are modeled, improves students' relationships, behaviour, and achievement in school.  
Walker, H., Colvin, G., & Ramsey, E. (1995). *Antisocial behavior in school: Strategies and best practices*. Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks Cole.
- In order to be safe and caring, a school culture must teach students to stand up and speak out against bullies.  
Orbit (2004). Interview with Barbara Coloroso. *Orbit*. Vol 34, No 2 (2-5).
- Students need to be empowered to work with each other and with adults to keep schools safe.  
Orbit (2004). Interview with Barbara Coloroso. *Orbit*. Vol 34, No 2 (2-5).
- Successful violence-prevention programs teach students conflict resolution, stress relief, anger management, mediation and communication skills.  
Zuker, M.A. (2004). A legal perspective on school violence and bullying. *Orbit*, Vol 34, No 2 (14-17).
- Cooperative learning reduces conflicts among different racial, ethnic, social, and economic groups by providing opportunities for students to make and maintain friendships  
Coghlan, R. (2000). The teaching of anti-violence strategies within the English curriculum. *English Journal*. May 2000 (84-89).
- Violence prevention programs must be fully integrated into the student's program of study in order to be effective.  
Coghlan, R. (2000). The teaching of anti-violence strategies within the English curriculum. *English Journal*. May 2000 (84-89).
- School districts that reported academic improvements based on achievement test results had made partnerships with community agencies.  
Maguire, P. (2003). *District practices and student achievement: Lessons from Alberta*. SAEE.
  
- In 2001, 1.3 million Canadians reported having Aboriginal ancestry, equalling 4.4 per cent of the total population
- From 1901 to 2001 the Aboriginal population multiplied by ten, compared to the total population growth which multiplied by six. The majority of this Aboriginal population growth occurred between 1951 and 2001
- In 2001, the median age for the Aboriginal population was 24., while the median age for the non-Aboriginal population was 37.7
- Children under the age of 14 comprise one third of the Aboriginal population, whereas 19 per cent of the non-Aboriginal population fall into that age group.
- Approximately 50 per cent of Aboriginals live in urban areas.

Statistics Canada

2001 Census: Analysis Series

Aboriginal peoples of Canada: a demographic profile.

<http://www12.statcan.ca/english/census01/Products/Analytic/companion/abor/pdf/96F0030XIE2001007.pdf>