

Preventing and Addressing Violence in Nova Scotia Public Schools

Department of Education and Early Childhood Development

Key Messages

- There is an inadequate focus on preventing and addressing violence in schools at the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.
- Educators not adequately supported to manage violence in their workplace.
- Department does not know the full extent of violence in schools due to significant data collection weaknesses.

Why We Did This Audit

- Reported incidents of school violence against educators and students increased by 60 per cent over the past seven years.
- According to UNESCO, school violence has severe and lasting consequences on the mental health, well-being and education of children.
- *Occupational Health and Safety Act* requires employers ensure the health and safety of employees.

Pervasive School Violence Requires Strong Leadership and Community Commitment to Ensure Safe Learning Environments

- The Department does not have a provincewide strategy to address violence in schools.
- The Provincial School Code of Conduct Policy is the primary guidance to help educators manage violence in schools, however, significant weaknesses identified.
- School violence incidents against students and educators increased provincewide by 60 per cent over the last seven years, from 17,000 to 27,000, with roughly 50 per cent occurring in Halifax Regional Centre for Education (HRCE).
- Over 18 per cent (26,000) of reported violent incidents over the last seven years had no record of any action taken by school administration.
- Training for educators on how to manage violence in schools is limited.
- Data collection does not identify if a student or educator is repeatedly impacted by violence.
- Educators indicated a variety of reasons for not reporting incidents including the perception no action will be taken by school administration.
- We found significant reliability and accuracy weaknesses with school violence data. The World Health Organization highlights the importance of quality data to inform decision makers to identify trends and monitor where change is needed.
- Educators identified several potential reasons contributing to increased violence in schools including increasingly diverse and complex student needs.
- Halifax Regional Centre for Education and Conseil scolaire acadien provincial (CSAP) are not monitoring whether schools are appropriately developing and implementing workplace violence risk assessment and prevention plans as required by the Occupational Health and Safety (OH&S) Violence in the Workplace Regulations.
- Tracking improvements needed for lockdown and hold-and-secure incidents to improve management monitoring and oversight.
- Parents and guardians play an essential role in preventing and addressing violence in schools.