REPORT ON BILL 13: THE ACCEPTING SCHOOLS ACT AND ANTI-VIOLENCE EDUCATION

THE MISS G PROJECT FOR EQUITY IN EDUCATION
MAY 2012
About The Miss G Project

The Miss G Project for Equity in Education is a grassroots young feminist organization working to combat all forms of oppression in and through education, including sexism, homophobia, racism, classism and ableism.

Dedicated to feminist anti-oppression politics with a strong focus on education, our mandate is to provide young people, - especially young women, transgender, and gender non-conforming youth - with the opportunities, support, and resources necessary to analyze and influence issues that affect their lives and futures. This includes acting as a community resource and mounting political actions towards the ongoing improvement of publicly funded education to meet its own policy commitments to equity in education, respect for diversity, critical thinking, and the provision of a safe and secure environment.

Acknowledgements

The Miss G Project would like to thank all of the Advisory Committee members (see Appendix A) whose work and contributions have made this report possible.
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In January, 2012, The Miss G Project struck an advisory committee of teachers, lawyers, and education experts to comment on the strengths and weaknesses of Bill 13, “The Accepting Schools Act,” which proposed amendments to the Education Act to deal comprehensively with school bullying. This report is the result of that undertaking.

Overall, the members of The Miss G Project’s advisory committee felt the government’s intentions were sound and that the spirit of the Accepting Schools Act was one that strove for safety and inclusivity in education. In the wake of recent tragic suicides in Ontario due to bullying, now is clearly the moment for a law to address harassment and discrimination in schools. Even if passed as is, observed one committee member, “all schools operating in Ontario (public and private) would have to acknowledge this document and incorporate practices that reflect these equity issues.” Likewise, another adds that with Bill 13, “we finally have legislation that compels the school system to name and deal with bullying based on human rights grounds.” The progress offered by Bill 13 is in its validation of, “the efforts of educational workers, parents, and students who have already been trying to name and deal with these issues.” For this, Minister of Education Laurel Broten and all members of provincial parliament who support legislation that tackles bullying deserve praise.

However, our interveners were concerned about several key areas where Bill 13 seemed to fall short of the noble gestures laid out in its preamble. These included, primarily: vagueness in language that leaves many points open to misinterpretation and could render the bill ineffectual or even harmful; failure to account for wider systems of power and privilege in which bullying occurs, including attitudes held by educators and other authority figures responsible for implementing anti-bullying policies; failure to detail the degree of support teachers and students may expect for discussing and curbing violence in schools; and the highly punitive rather than preventative measures laid out by the bill, among other critiques. These are described in greater detail below,
followed by recommendations attending to each heading in section 2. Together, sections 2 and 3 synthesize critiques and recommendations received from an advisory committee of experts we assembled to remark on Bill 13’s strong points and weaknesses. We have included them here because we share and endorse their recommendations for improving Bill 13. The final section includes further recommendations by The Miss G Project based on how we envision a truly “accepting school” and anti-violence education.

Overall, The Miss G Project takes the position that Bill 13 is an important step in the right direction and, after some critical revisions, will be a vital piece of education legislation. By that token, we are gravely concerned that without these recommended changes, this Bill may negate its positive outcomes by subjecting many students, including those it purports to help, to greater harms.

2. Critiques

a. Language

Our interveners raised numerous issues regarding the language used in Bill 13, including omissions and conflations, as well as vagueness and generalizations that need to be refined to avoid loopholes and misinterpretations. For many of our interveners, the term ‘bullying’ was itself problematic in that it obviates and papers over the many dimensions and factors that result in violence against some students.

Chantal Mancini, a teacher and union President for the Ontario Secondary School Teachers Federation in Hamilton-Wentworth, directs our attention to recent reports on violent conditions in Ontario schools, including Julian Falconer’s “The Road to Health” (2008) and the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health’s report, “Sexual Harassment and Related Behaviours Reported Among Youth from Grade 9 to Grade 11” (Wolfe, 2008). Both reports illustrate clearly that much ‘bullying’ in schools is a product of gender-based violence and heterosexism/homophobia. As Falconer concludes, “as long
as schools refuse to acknowledge and deal with gender-based violence, much of what has been called ‘bullying’ will continue to be a daily reality for many students.”

On amendments to Subsection 1.1, Sasha Cocarla, doctoral candidate in Women’s Studies at the University of Ottawa, points out the difficulties that arise from “the emphasis on ‘intent’ and phrases like ‘ought to know’.” She subsequently asks,

“Does that mean that acts considered to be joking, flirting, or “light-hearted fun” can not be considered to be bullying? This section doesn’t give allowance for the ways in which youth are socialized to believe that certain actions are acceptable and even wanted, and instead places too much weight on personal responsibility to ‘know better’.”

b. Bullying in a bubble?

Many of our committee members pointed out that Bill 13 seemed to imagine bullying in isolation from systemic social problems and inequitable power relations. Michelle Miller, a doctoral candidate with the Faculty of Education at York University, noted that the language of the bill,

“hold[s] that bullying itself is the problem that needs to be addressed rather than recognizing that bullying is only a symptom of the systematic injustice that queer citizens face in schools, communities, and with regard to the law.”

On the same note, Alison Fisher, a doctoral candidate in the Faculty of Education, York University, offers several studies on bullying and why measures to address it so often fail. For instance, Gerald Walton (2005) concluded that the term “bullying” has been used predominantly from a psychological perspective, which understands school violence on individualistic and behavioural terms. And Elizebeth Meyers’s (2007) literature review of bullying demonstrates that this research frequently ignores broader social relations of power that inform and/or structure violent words and actions between individuals. As she writes,

“Schools operate within heterosexist (among other inequitable) frameworks, which exacerbates school violence (Walton, 2004); these systemic issues
need to be recognized and addressed in order to truly tackle school violence.”

The mention of “electronic” bullying was noted and praised by several committee members.

c. Complicity of authority figures

Following from point 2.b, above, Bill 13 pays attention only to students’ behaviours, overlooking the complicity of teachers and other authority figures in supporting discrimination and inequity in schools. Several of our interveners pointed out that the Bill immediately and repeatedly identifies the instigator of bullying as a pupil. Meanwhile, there are numerous reports of teachers’ sexual harassment and homophobic violence toward students, which, when they are reported, often go unpunished.¹ Before these educators and other staff members are held accountable for their actions, how can we expect the same of students?

To this effect, Toronto high school teacher Raneem Azzam observes that,

“[A] great deal of work needs to be done with school officials to have them think critically about their complicity in systemic oppression before policies such as the ones likely to result from the Accepting Schools Act can work.”

Mirroring this sentiment, Michelle M. adds that,

“[S]chools, teachers and administrators themselves are often the nexus of homophobic bullying against students, other teachers, administrators, and families, and so asking these adult figures to police homophobic bullying assumes an adult benevolence or neutrality around adolescent and childhood sexuality.”

¹ See highly publicized examples in school boards in New Jersey (http://bit.ly/pV89Vh), Missouri (http://huff.to/s7S2sw), Minneapolis (http://bit.ly/HltFYx), as well as reports of unpunished homophobic harassment starting as early as elementary school (http://abcn.ws/I6GSFM).
The daily microaggressions that constitute unsafe and exclusionary environments in schools include,

“Curricular silencing around queer issues, improper bathroom spaces for queer and gender queer students, hiring practices that discriminate quietly against gender non-conforming teachers, parents’ ability to move their children out of classes taught by queer teachers, assumptions around who students’ parents might be, jokes about who is gay or why and sideways mentions of sexual perversity as well as hallway insults like ‘dude, you’re a fag.’” (Michelle M.)

Josh Cole, a PhD student at Queen’s researching the history of education in Ontario and Canada, approved of the inclusion of a clause in the amendment to section 301 mandating that outside persons or entities that enter into agreements with a school must abide by the school board’s code of conduct. However, he cautions that this wording suggests that only groups or individuals from “outside” (not inside, like teachers, principals, etc.) affect a school environment that otherwise adheres by reasonable and responsible codes of conduct.

d. Resources and institutional supports

Extending from the previous section, some of our experts, particularly Chantal M., Michelle M., Josh C., and commenters from the YWCA Girls Centre were also concerned that the language of Bill 13 assumes a level of understanding and training among educators on the nature and causes of violence and harassment in schools. The Bill does make reference to providing resources to school boards, but the nature and extent of this support is unclear. Does this include special paid training days, activity and lesson guides, specialized literature, online resources, peer support and discussion, etc.?

For Chantal M., this was one of the greatest pitfalls of the Bill:

“This Act mandates training, but it doesn’t specify that it must be meaningful and well thought out. It lays out all the expectations of schools, but doesn’t say how they are going to get there, and with what resources. It says that the
Minister ‘may’ check out individual Board policies, but really doesn’t specify how she will hold Boards’ feet to the fire.”

Her concern is based on her experiences with Bill 157, which, she explains, requires teachers to report bullying behaviours, but which rarely bears results, since administrations are slow or hesitant to act, or do not see these problems as important, or because teachers lack the training and thus lack confidence to address these issues appropriately.

With only four Professional Development days per year, educators have little time and resources to devote to every new law and policy to which they are accountable, she argues. As a result, accountability itself slips. The Ministry seems to be stacking more responsibilities onto teachers and boards without in turn providing the time and resources they deserve.

e. Punitive measures and re-victimization

Many on The Miss G_ Project’s Bill 13 Expert Committee were deeply concerned over the expansion of punitive powers and the potential to criminalize student behaviours rather than engender real critical thought and lasting social change. Meaghan Daniel, a lawyer at Falconer Charney LLP, suggests that for subsequent drafts the writers of Bill 13 refer to the “plethora of studies on deterrence [that] show that harsher punishments [are] not effective.”

Rebecca Roach, Curriculum Leader of Student Success and English teacher with the TDSB, and Dr. Dominique Rivière, Research Officer in the Centre for Urban Schooling at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (University of Toronto), stressed the potential of Bill-13 to reinforce other disparities, such as through the disproportionate punishment heaped on young men of colour. Furthermore, Alison F. offers the evidence amassed through numerous studies on racialized students and bullying:

“The overwhelming result of research in the field of suspension and expulsion suggests that students who are ‘excluded’ from school tend to be among the
Research by Ruck & Wortley (2002) and Fenning and Rose (2007) has shown that school staff and administrators are more likely to pay attention to the behavior of racialized students. “Once students are excluded, they frequently become part of the ‘school to prison pipeline’ (Fenning and Rose, 2007: 537),” she notes.

Again, with regards to language, some commenters were alarmed by the vagueness of the sections on punishment. Josh C., for instance, raised issues with clause (5) in the section outlining the Bill’s purpose (300.0.1): “To establish disciplinary approaches that promote positive behaviour and use measures that include appropriate consequences and supports for pupils to address inappropriate behaviour.” He finds this, “at once vague and punitive,” and wonders, “What ‘disciplinary approaches’ exactly? What ‘appropriate consequences’? What supports? This needs to be made much more explicit.”

Many criticisms directed toward other sections in Bill 13 (especially but not limited to section 301 (6)) that emphasizes punishment overlapped with general concerns about dealing with bullying in isolation (see section 1.b of this report, above), such as Sasha C.’s questioning, “how [we] can punish students for (example) calling each other ‘retards’ (a slur commonly heard in bullying) without calling into question how our society is ableist and actively works towards othering people with disabilities/mental illness.”

Overall, Meaghan D. observes, “it seems that the most significant concrete change to the Education Act arising from this Bill is increased punishment powers.” Addressing how this is reflected in actual classroom settings, Raneem A. writes that it is, “important to my students that the social dynamics that lead to bullying not be addressed in a primarily punitive way.”
Meanwhile, the few mentions of “prevention” in Bill 13 are not elaborated in any detail.

**f. Monitoring effects of the Bill / Enforcement**

This was a major point of contention voiced by many members of the expert committee, for various reasons.

The section of the Bill dealing with “Bullying Prevention” week raised the point that annual events like this, such as Black History Month, are derived from ‘multiculturalism’ approaches that satisfy outward demonstrations of tolerance and compliance but leave structures intact (Dominique R., Raneem A., and Michelle M.).

On the use of a bi-annual survey to monitor the bill’s effectiveness, Dominique R. expressed concern that such surveys “only monitor ‘compliance,’ not acceptance or endorsement.”

Amendment 29.1 to Subsection 1.1 drew several criticisms, particularly for the open-ended terms laid out for provincial assessment. Sasha C., Chantal M., and Josh C. felt that the provisions requiring boards to, “develop and implement an equity and inclusive policy, and if required by the Minister, submit the policy to the Minister and implement changes [...] as directed by the Minister” was too vague. Josh C. worried that the degree of discretion being left to the boards creates lots of room for inequity, in cases where some boards were more sensitive or proactive than others. Where boards were resistant, he added, “This is exactly where [the Minister] should push boards in the right direction.”

More generally, Meaghan D. points out the practical difficulties of “‘policing’ so much ‘bullying’ (oppression) between students, especially as much of it is ‘passive’ in that it involves quietly excluding students from social activities, projects, etc.” and not always outwardly aggressive or discernibly harmful behaviour.
3. Recommendations

a. Language

In the preamble, reference is made to a long list of traits and (self-)identifications that should not preclude a student’s right to safe and equitable education. Our experts generally approved of these sections but almost all of them urged that “sex” be differentiated from “gender identity,” and that gender identity be included as a separate category. Alison F. suggests the inclusion of “citizenship” and “socio-economic status,” while Sasha C. would also like this section to include “physical appearance” and “body size.”

Several recommended more use of the terms “harassment,” “gender harassment,” (Alison F.) and “gender-based violence” (Chantal M.), where appropriate, in addition to and/or instead of “bullying.” Meaghan D. suggests moving the conversation from bullying to oppression. As she writes, “Bullying makes it seem like a schoolyard and finite problem, rather than the younger version of a larger ongoing societal problem.” For amendments to Subsection 169.1, Alison F. suggests that, “discriminatory harassment, assault, and/or use of personal or social power over another person” would be more politically relevant and meaningful than “bullying.”

The Bill should include more specifics and examples following its provisions for resources and other support for teachers (see also: point 3.d, below). For instance, Rebecca R. recommends that in subsection 8 (1) stating the bill’s purposes, clause “(a.2) promote the prevention of bullying” should be followed by examples of how.

b. Pop the Bullying Bubble

Bill 13 should be modified to include language that recognizes the wider contexts of bullying (ie. oppression, prevalent attitudes), and should acknowledge the role of
education as a crucial site of intervention, where students develop reflexive thinking and critical consciousness as citizens and members of communities. Although these are conversations already being had in professional education circles, their inclusion in Bill 13 can help shift the public discourse toward better understanding of bullying.

To enhance its and the public’s understanding of bullying and harassment, Josh C. suggested that the Ministry, “strike a committee of ‘experts’ to look into the sociological, psychological, philosophical, and historical nature of the problem.” Presumably, this has not been done before, or at least not recently and the Ministry’s information requires updating.

c. Tackling complicity

As seen in point 2.c, above, this point was reiterated by nearly all of our interveners. Beyond acknowledging that “everyone has a role to play” including “government, educators, school staff, parents, students and the wider community” in “creating a positive school climate,” Bill 13 should include clear statements that acknowledge the complicity of school authority figures and other community members who are not students in creating unsafe environments for students.

Wording such as “opportunities” (clauses [b] and [c] in amendments to Subsection 301 (6)) should be eliminated since the government should make a strong point that “understanding [these forms] of harassment shouldn’t really be optional.” We recommend that restorative justice and conflict resolution training for teachers form an integral part of the Bill’s wording and subsequent programs (see: point 3.e and “Miss G’s further recommendations, below).

Alison F. points out that at the level of Faculties of Education more can be done to ensure teachers receive the right training to foster equitable, safe, and inclusive environments. To support the objectives and efficacy of Bill 13, the Ministry of Education should introduce new avenues and partnerships with Ontario Faculties of Education to
fund and otherwise actively support workshops, literature, and online resources for teachers in training.

d. *Supporting educators, students, and communities*

As legislation, the efficacy of Bill 13 cannot be assured or gauged only through punitive measures and surveys. Many of the measures that would help address complicity of authority figures (see point 2.c, above) are contiguous with the establishment of institutional supports: namely, training and funding. While some sections of the Bill mentioned support mechanisms for students and educators (such as “early and ongoing intervention strategies” and “training for all teachers and other staff”), these deserve more emphasis and explanation. Chantal M. asserted that, “it is unethical to even attempt to address the issues raised by this Act if there is refusal to provide real and actual support once a problem is identified.” Thus, the Ministry of Education and the Ontario government must reinforce the weight of Bill 13 and their commitment to ending violence in schools by enumerating its supplementary and supportive mechanisms. Our experts made several recommendations as to how the government and Ministry of Education can make more explicit their support for educators and students working toward safe and accepting schools, and deliver that support effectively.

Professional training around these issues must be ongoing, recommends Chantal M., and not “a one-shot deal.” To ensure the endurance and efficacy of the Bill, the Ministry of Education must either mandate Ministry-created training for educational workers and administration, or have Boards submit their training plan to the Ministry for approval.

Dominique R. recommended that the Ministry make available anti-bullying and equity resources that focus on systemic change, and not the modification of individual behaviours. Carly Bickle, an occasional teacher for the TDSB, suggested that the Bill clearly detail, “how teachers should intervene, as well as [provide] more direction for teachers on how to educate for social justice as preventative to harassment in schools.”
Raneem A. suggested that funding for more professionals working within classrooms to “help students recognize the ways they participate in oppressive social dynamics,” and build the social skills “necessary to engage in healthy relationships based on equity and respect,” is one way integrate preventative rather than only punitive measures. Likewise, Chantal M. suggested that, “Social workers, Child and Youth Workers, alternative education programs—all must be put into place if this policy is going to make any real, meaningful change.” Alison F. acknowledges that, “it is not the role of the Education Act to link funds to programs and resources,” however, when speaking of changes they are making to the Education Act through Bill 13, “the issue of funding needs to be addressed by the government.”

Regarding institutional supports for students, several committee members were adamant that school boards not have the prerogative to opt-out of Bill-13’s obligations. Rebecca R. notes this very problem in the clause denoting “gay-straight alliance or another name” in the section (303.1(d) our emphasis) denoting students’ rights to form clubs and organize activities: “Nancy Kirby of OCSTA [Ontario Catholic School Trustees Association] has stated that she sees that as allowing Catholic Boards to force students to rename their GSA groups.”

This imprecise language that creates loopholes and thus blunts the very point of such legislation must be corrected. Alison F. urges that:

“There can be no allowances or loopholes on the issue of homophobia; discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity violates the Ontario Human Rights Code and the values protected in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.”

It follows that, as per Chantal M.’s recommendations, the Bill must, “make it explicit that it will fall to students to name clubs that deal with any form of harassment,” and that it leave no basis for any external groups to, “challenge the naming of clubs in individual public schools.” Otherwise, Alison F. warns, “the government is opening itself up to
future legal battles if it refuses to protect students and staff from homophobia in schools."

e. **Avoiding re-victimization: restorative and preventative measures**

Ultimately, many of the same support measures that would foster safer environments through prevention would also help avoid re-victimizing students through punitive measures. Future drafts of the Bill should create space for transformative and restorative possibilities that would be enabled by holistic, anti-oppression education infused throughout curriculum and other programming. This is in keeping with Bill 13’s own nod to the importance of a “whole-school approach” to bullying and harassment.

Further detail must be added to the descriptions of “disciplinary approaches,” “appropriate consequences,” and “progressively more severe consequences” mentioned in Bill 13, particularly in its amendments to subsection 301 (6). Our interveners expressed a hope that these consequences, upon further explanation, would...

“not be punitive in nature but rather support the student in taking responsibility for his/her actions and assisting him/her in the development of a greater sense of confidence, security, compassion, empathy and sensitivity to power, among other values. These transformative consequences may be facilitated by strategies such as conflict resolution, restorative justice practices and other methods.” (Alison F.)

Approaches and programming that are limited to extra-curricular activities risk relegating violence-prevention by students, parents, and educators to the margins of school community-building. If Bill 13 or any proposed law dealing with violence and harassment in public education is taken up, it should not give undue weight to centralized legislation, set apart from other crucial policy areas that shape public education spaces. Alison F. points to the curriculum and the classroom as important sites of intervention and reform:
"The Bill neglected to speak to changes to the curriculum, which might better address these equity issues and engender 'the development of a critical consciousness that allows [students] to take action on making their schools and communities more equitable and inclusive for all people, including LGBTTIQ… people.' This is another gap in the Bill."

Chantal M. echoes this, adding that:

“The ideological framework for this policy must also frame learning within courses so that theory can reflect action. This is why the gender equity courses that The Miss G Project has been lobbying to get into Ontario Schools must be running simultaneously as this policy is implemented. The classroom must be the site where issues of inequity are deconstructed, critically analyzed, and addressed.”

**f. Monitoring effects**

Bill 13 should include clearer measures and benchmarks to enhance the Ministry’s capacities to monitor compliance and foster acceptance. Commenters from the YWCA Girls Centre liked the use of surveys to reach students who are afraid or reluctant to talk about bullying with teachers, but Josh C. points out that surveys every two years is not enough, and suggests increasing their frequency. Further details should be included in the Bill that explain the intention of these surveys and how they propose to track and quantify harassment.

Carly B. writes that while she is, “glad to see parental involvement being encouraged,” she wonders, “how this will play out in reality, given the often very different value systems of some parents.” How, for instance, will the parental involvement encouraged by Bill 13 interact or perhaps conflict with stipulations that outside partners adhere to a given school’s code of conduct?

Following from points made in section 2.f, above, Rebecca R. writes that the word “may” should be changed to “will” in the section mandating that the Ministry of Education and school boards establish policies and guidelines, and develop and submit policies and guidelines, respectively (clauses 7.1 and 11 of amendments to Section 301). Rebecca
R. and Chantal M. recommend that while the Bill mentions the creation of policies by individual boards, these policies must be vetted by the Minister, who will have the power to enforce changes. Rebecca R. also recommends that Bill 13 use the language in the amendment to subsection 169.1 (1) to establish criteria for the Ministry’s vetting of such programs developed by boards.

4. “What is a truly ‘Accepting School’?”

The Miss G Project believes this to be a very important moment for public education in our province. With the introduction of the Accepting Schools Act, as well as the Anti-Bullying Act (Bill 14), critical questions have been raised about who has access to safe spaces in schools, and who is included as part of the “public” in public education. Above all, the acknowledgment of sexual assault, gender-based violence, and homophobic bullying in the Accepting Schools Act are important first steps. While we applaud the important effort represented by this proposed legislation, we are nonetheless wary of its potential side effects if the concerns expressed above are not addressed.

In other words, if this Act is to realize its intended outcomes – building ‘accepting schools’ and fulfilling policy that promises safe and accessible education to all Ontario students – it must have ‘teeth.’ By this, we emphatically do not mean the expanded power to punish students, which we believe will take policy in the wrong direction. While many teachers are certainly deeply committed to creating safe, equitable, and inclusive learning environments for students, it seems misguided to give increased punitive license to the many other educators and authority figures who are, unfortunately, inadequately trained in or committed to these principles. It seems better to create policies and resources that empower teachers with anti-oppressive outlooks and pedagogies. By teeth, then, we mean the establishment of institutional supports, programming, professional training, time, and funds to see the Bill’s objectives through.
If we are willing to pass a landmark law, why not invest in building a culture of anti-violence and anti-oppression in our education system? What is an ‘accepting school’ if not one that functions within and serves to create this culture in concrete ways?

In addition to our interveners’ recommendations, The Miss G Project suggests the following mechanisms for building institutional supports that will strengthen any anti-bullying legislation that is passed:

- The Ministry of Education should invest in research, resource development, and training related to methods of Restorative Justice and Conflict Resolution. These terms should be included in the Bill and subsequent mechanisms and other resources should be developed by the Ministry with these preventative and restorative, rather than punitive, strategies at their core.

- The Ministry of Education should coordinate with the Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities to endow grants, chairs, and/or individual and collaborative projects in education, sociology, psychology, social work, and other relevant departments on bullying/harassment, violence-prevention, restorative justice, and conflict resolution in Ontario public education. The object of this is to lay the foundation for a sustained research community that also builds a bridge specific to this issue from the Ministry of Education to faculties of education other departments doing similar research.

- The Ministry of Education should provide boards with a guide to the legislation and violence-prevention for teachers and students at implementation time that covers any ground not dealt with explicitly in the Bill itself.

- To reiterate a point made by several of our commenters, the Ministry of Education should make critical revisions to the curriculum – and in particular, it should release already-created curricula such as the Gender Studies course without further delay. The classroom is an important site of intervention, where young citizens learn about the world and their roles in it, and where
their critical skills and perceptions are shaped. Without attention to the content being offered in classrooms any anti-violence legislation risks futility.

Finally, we agree with our interveners that the Bill must assure support for students working to create student-led organizations and safe spaces, including Ministerial oversight of board policies. That said, there is no guarantee that future governments and Ministers of Education will have the political will to enforce anti-violence measures. Thus, the efficacy of Bill 13 rests in large part on striking an appropriate balance between centralized oversight and local board jurisdictions that are directly engaged in responding to community needs, as well as on emphasizing the principles set out in the preamble as the ultimate criteria for assessing a given school board’s adherence to the Bill.

The Miss G Project continues to believe that to truly prevent bullying from happening in the first place, to work in a meaningful way towards anti-violence in our schools and in our communities, we must start at the root—through education. Education remains one of the best tools we have for the prevention of violence and the building of an equitable society. What kind of school, and what kind of education, is effective at bullying- and violence-prevention? A truly ‘accepting school’ promotes and provides education that is critical, inclusive, empathetic, and recognizes the way in which power dynamics work to create violence. An education that names problems, calls them out, works on challenging them so they do less harm, that is an education worth speaking up for.
APPENDICES

a. Advisory Committee (alphabetical order)

Raneem Azzam – secondary alternative school teacher with the Toronto District School Board (TDSB); PhD candidate at OISE (beginning in September)

Carly Bickle – occasional teacher for the TDSB

Sasha Cocarla – doctoral candidate with the Institute of Women’s Studies at the University of Ottawa; formerly co-chaired the Waterloo Chapter of the Miss G Project

Josh Cole – doctoral candidate at Queen’s, specializing in the history of education in Ontario and Canada

Meaghan Daniel – lawyer with Falconer Charney LLP

Alison Fisher - doctoral candidate in the “Language, Culture and Teaching” program, Faculty of Education, York University; on temporary leave from secondary teaching with the TDSB

Chantal Mancini – teacher and union President for the Ontario Secondary School Teachers Federation in Hamilton-Wentworth

Michelle Miller - doctoral candidate in the “Language, Culture and Teaching” program, Faculty of Education, York University

Dr. Dominique Rivière – Research Officer, Centre for Urban Schooling, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto

Rebecca Roach - Curriculum Leader of Student Success, teacher of English literature, TDSB

The Miss G Project also solicited remarks from members of the YWCA Girls Centre, a girls-only space where girls 9 to 18 years of age develop skills, discuss topics, and learn to understand and challenge the world around them in a safe place.


b. References


