

SCHOOL VIOLENCE

February 2025

INTRODUCTION

Over the past few years, from across Canada and around the world, teachers and fellow educational workers have been reporting rising levels of violence in schools (both in number and severity of incidences). Nova Scotia is not immune to this trend and the Nova Scotia Teachers Union has long advocated for change. It is well accepted that safety in schools is an essential component for children and youth to experience a positive developmental trajectory; further, the mitigation of school violence is critical for a safe and healthy workplace for everyone. This paper will look at international and national trends, recent NSTU advocacy, highlights from Kim Adair's (the Nova Scotia Auditor General) recent report, a recent case study regarding school violence as workplace violence, and will conclude with current NSTU beliefs regarding methods to address school violence.

INTERNATIONAL SCAN

In terms of international studies regarding children there are two organizations at the forefront of advocacy, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the World Health Organization (WHO). Though both organizations express great concern for the health and safety of children and adolescents both give insight into the magnitude of violence against children worldwide and offer paths to solving or mitigating the problem. Both organizations are referenced by Kim Adair in her report.

UNESCO is the specialized agency of the United Nations for education worldwide with the aim of promoting world peace and security through international cooperation in education, arts, sciences, and culture. UNESCO has many reports and news items related to school violence and violence against children and youth. This position paper will examine two reports from UNESCO in detail. The WHO is the specialized agency of the United Nations with a stated purpose to achieve the highest possible level of health for all the world's people, defining health as – *"a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity"*. The WHO independently and with other agencies, works towards health and well-being including social and psychological well-being internationally. This position paper will examine one report from the WHO in detail.

In 2017 UNESCO published *School Violence and Bullying – Global Status Report* as presented to the International Symposium on School Violence and Bullying – From Evidence to Action, in Seoul the Republic of Korea.¹ This report was truly global in nature, including countries in every continent, and sadly reports that school violence and bullying occurs throughout the world and affects a significant proportion of children and adolescents (estimating 246 million children and adolescents affected each year internationally). Though UNESCO's greatest concern is for the health and welfare of students, this report is significant in its findings for anyone concerned with safe and inclusive schools. From their 2017 publication, UNESCO's definition of school violence is:

School violence encompasses physical violence, including corporal punishment; psychological violence, including verbal abuse; sexual violence, including rape and harassment; and bullying, including cyberbullying.

Further, UNESCO highlighted the interconnection between physical, psychological, and sexual violence. For example – it shows the possible overlap of bullying, harassment, and abuse falling under all three forms of violence; and the overlap of rape and sexual abuse falling under both sexual and physical violence. This emphasises the complexities of defining violence and violent acts.

Though violence and bullying could happen to anyone, unsurprisingly UNESCO identified that those at the greatest risk of experiencing violence and bullying are children and adolescents who are vulnerable based on their identity or social status. In particular, they illustrated the prevalence of violent acts perpetrated against individuals based on disability, gender, sexual orientation or gender identity, poverty or social status, ethnic or cultural differences, and physical appearance.

In the report's summary, UNESCO gave six priority actions that they believe were required to address key challenges in tackling school violence and bullying so all children and adolescents can have access to safe and inclusive learning environments. UNESCO's six actions directed at governments and governmental agencies are:

1. Strengthen leadership and commitment to eliminating school violence and bullying.
2. Promote awareness of violence against children, the benefits of violence-free schools and the harmful impact of school violence and bullying.
3. Establish partnerships, including active participation of children and adolescents, to tackle school violence and bullying.
4. Build the capacity of education staff and learners to prevent and respond to school violence and bullying.
5. Establish systems to report school violence and bullying and to provide support and services.
6. Improve data and evidence on the causes, nature, extent and impact of school violence and bullying and effective responses to it.

In 2020, the World Health Organization produced the *Global Status Report on Preventing Violence Against Children*, which reported on the extent to which governments around the world are taking evidence-based actions to achieve the Convention on the Rights of the Child including the right to freedom from violence.² The report provides a baseline against which governments can monitor their progress over the next decade. For this report, over 1,000 decision makers from 155 countries collaborated to build a picture of global efforts to end violence against children. This report is not solely about violence in schools; it more broadly looks at violence against children and youth; however, it includes useful recommendations for the overall reduction of violence in society.

The authors estimate one billion children – or one out of two children worldwide – suffer some form of violence each year; however, and perhaps over optimistically, the report states – “*Ending violence against children is increasingly within our reach*”. This report offers some stark data regarding the magnitude of violence perpetrated against children and youth worldwide:

- 120 million girls and young women under 20 years of age have suffered some form of forced sexual contact.
- 40,150 children aged 0 to 17 years die per year as a result of violence (28,160 boys and 11,990 girls).
- Nearly 3 in every 4 children aged 2 to 4 years regularly suffer physical and/or psychological violence at the hands of a parent or caregiver.

- 1 in every 4 children aged 5 or under live with a mother who is a victim of intimate partner violence.
- 1 in every 3 students aged 11 to 15 years suffered bullying in the past month (girls 30% and boys 35%).
- 1 in every 3 students aged 13 to 15 years were in a physical fight in the past year (boys 45% and girls 25%).
- Children aged 11 to 15 years who are bullied are 13% less likely to graduate.
- Adults who experience 4 or more adverse childhood experiences (physical, sexual, and/or psychological violence) are 7 times more likely to be involved in interpersonal violence as a victim or a perpetrator and 30 times more likely to attempt suicide.
- Adults who experienced physical and/or sexual violence as children are 14 times more likely to perpetrate physical and sexual intimate partner violence as men or 16 times more likely to suffer physical and sexual intimate partner violence as women.

In 2016, the WHO along with nine other agencies launched INSPIRE, a set of seven evidence-based strategies for countries and communities to follow when working to eliminate violence against children. The WHO collaborated with the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (US CDC), the Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children (End Violence), the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), the President's Emergency Program for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), Together for Girls, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and the World Bank.

The four stated aims of the WHO report are to document if governments:

- Have in place national plans of action, policies and laws that are consistent with those identified as effective by INSPIRE.
- Are accurately measuring fatal and non-fatal instances of violence.
- Have established quantified baseline and target values against which to monitor their progress in ending violence against children.
- Are supporting the implementation of evidence-based interventions along the lines of those included under the seven INSPIRE strategies.

Government decision makers and program planners are the primary target audience for the WHO report; offering five national recommendations and three global recommendations as follows:

National Recommendations

- Promote good governance and coordination.
- Prioritize data collection and national action plans.

- Strengthen legislative frameworks.
- Use evidence to enhance the effectiveness of prevention and service programming.
- Ensure adequate funding.

Global Recommendations

- Ensure full use of international support mechanisms by countries.
- Increase funding for evidence-based prevention.
- Strengthen implementation research.

In 2024, UNESCO published *Safe to Learn and Thrive – Ending Violence in and through Education*.³ This report explores the multifaceted nature of violence in educational settings, identifies its root causes, and underscores the urgent need for a holistic approach to create safe, inclusive, and equitable learning environments. The report gives six components of a holistic approach to end violence in and through education. The components below are expanded on greatly in the publication itself:

Curriculum, teaching and learning

- Gender transformative pedagogy
- School-based education programmes
- Extracurricular activities
- Comprehensive teacher training

School environment

- Codes of conduct
- Policies, regulations, and protocols backed by leadership and accountability
- Safe, inclusive physical spaces
- Positive school climate

Reporting and response

- Child-friendly reporting systems within schools
- In-school services
- Training for teachers and staff to respond and refer appropriately

Education policy, laws and systems

- Violence prevention in education plans
- Child protection and gender-based violence laws
- Linking education and child protection systems

Partnerships and mobilization

- Collaborations with governmental, non-governmental organizations, teacher unions, youth, and civil society

Data and evidence

- Research, routine data collection, and analysis
- Comprehensive evaluations to inform policy and programmes

It is important to note a few common themes from UNESCO and WHO – the need for leadership from government and government agencies, the need for adequate funding, the need for appropriate training for professionals, and the need for data and evidence-based decision making. It is interesting to note UNESCO's inclusion of teacher unions as part of the component for partnerships and mobilization. The NSTU has long advocated to have a seat at the table when educational policy is being developed by the provincial government.

CROSS-CANADA SCAN

Across Canada there are several reports and surveys regarding school-based violence. The Canadian Teachers' Federation/ Fédération canadienne des enseignantes et des enseignants (CTF/FCE) is at the forefront of pan-Canadian research on everything related to public school working conditions for educators. Teacher organizations across Canada have also conducted surveys and reports regarding school violence in their jurisdictions. This section includes three recent pan-Canadian surveys, a brief look at data from Nova Scotia, and a few other provinces and territories.

The International Barometer of Education Staff (I-BEST) is a biennial survey conducted by the Education and Solidarity Network (ESN) and the Foundation of Public Health/(Fondation d'entreprise pour la santé publique (FESP) based in France).⁴ ESN believes that education and health are interdependent and at the heart of all human development. FESP aims to identify ways of promoting the health of populations. The CTF/FCE promoted and distributed the Canada-specific I-BEST 2023 survey to its member organizations and reported back to these organizations regarding the survey report.

The I-BEST survey was conducted between March and June of 2023 with 910 educational staff taking part from across Canada. As of the date of the survey, 75% of respondents indicated that they had witnessed a violent act and 40% indicated they were the victim of a violent act, at their workplace in the preceding 12 months. Respondents indicated that the perpetrators of the violence against them were students (84%), parents/caregivers (29%), other member of the school staff (25%), a person(s) external to the school (8%), and unknown (8%). The top three forms of violence they experienced at the hands of students were direct insult/verbal abuse, physical abuse, and threat. The top three forms of violence they experienced at the hands of non-students were direct insult/verbal abuse, defamation/indirect insult, and humiliation. When asked about the level of stress since the start of the school year 63% indicated it was very or quite stressful with only 1% saying not stressful at all.

In mid-January of 2025, CTF/FCE released their initial findings from the first pan-Canadian educator survey series, *Parachute*.⁵ *Parachute* surveyed almost 5,000 educational professionals, including teachers, principals, education assistants, and support workers during the late fall of 2024. Though the survey was not solely about school violence several of the key findings have considerable overlap with maintaining a safe and inclusive school environment. Key findings include:

1. Lack of Support from Ministers of Education

Ministerial failure: A majority (63%) of educators deem their provincial or territorial ministries of Education as “not supportive at all,” highlighting widespread systemic neglect.

2. Untenable Working Conditions

Nearly 80% of educators report struggling to cope with unpredictable and mounting workloads. 70% cite poor working conditions as a major factor. Lack of student support: A staggering 95% of educators observe that staff shortages are negatively impacting students. The most severe consequences include unmet academic needs and the erosion of specialized services and supports.

3. Overloaded and Complex Classrooms

Increased complexity: 77% of educators report that students’ needs have become “significantly more complex” compared to five years ago. High-needs students: The number of high-need students without adequate support, along with the diversity of their needs, are the main factors contributing to classroom challenges. Special needs neglected: Students requiring special education support are being systematically left behind, exacerbating inequities in the classroom.

4. Rising Violence and Aggression

Unsafe environments: Over half (55%) of educators have experienced violence or aggression in the past year. Inadequate responses: While 84% reported these incidents, only 25% indicated that appropriate actions were taken by health and safety committees or officers to address them. School administrators are overwhelmed.

5. Overwork and Insufficient Preparation Time

Excessive workloads: 73% of educators work more than 45 hours per week, with 35% exceeding 48 hours. Unmanageable demands: Three-quarters of educators report that their job demands have become less manageable over the past five years, and 20% describe them as “very unmanageable”. Need for preparation time: 65% of educators identify increased preparation time as a top priority for improving working conditions.

CTF/FCE conducts a biannual tracking survey of Canadian adults (general population) in partnership with Abacus Data. They poll 2,000 individuals on issues related to public education twice a year.⁶ These polls aim to gather insight into the general populations’ knowledge and understanding of issues facing educators today. The polling results confirm that Canadians are aware of the issue of school violence and agree with the position taken by CTF/FCE. Key findings from the January 2024 polling are below (results from June 2024 are nearly identical to January’s results and are not reported here):

January 2024

- 86% of respondents reported being concerned about the rising level of violence in public schools (number of incidents and severity), including 40% who “strongly agree” and 46% who “somewhat agree”.
- 87% of respondents agreed that teachers and staff should have the right to physically intervene if needed when students are physically violent towards another individual, including 42% who “strongly agree” and 43% who “somewhat agree”.

The NSTU polled its membership in early spring of 2023 (between March 27 and April 13) regarding school violence, with 2,534 members taking part (approx. 26% of our membership), and issued two news releases on April 27 and May 11, 2023.⁷⁻⁸ Beyond the survey results the releases also highlight recent police interactions at Halifax area high schools – police responded to 424 incidents that resulted in 77 criminal charges (between 2018 and March 2023). Further, the releases included a report of 13,776 incidents of physical violence in Nova Scotian public schools in the 2021-2022 school year as reported by the province. Key findings from the survey were:

- 55.3% responded that they have personally been threatened or injured by an act of violence in their role.
- 50.8% and 36.0% responded that in the past 5 years they believe violence in schools has “greatly increased” and “somewhat increased” respectively. This means that 86.8% believe violence has increase in schools in the past 5 years.
- 52.6% and 38.6% responded that they were “very concerned” and “somewhat concerned” respectively when asked regarding how concerned they were with the level of violence in schools. Therefore, 91.2% have concerns regarding school violence.

Three recent (post-COVID-19) surveys/reports from other Canadian teacher organizations will be discussed here.

The Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO) partnered with Strategic Communications to conduct a survey in the winter of 2023.⁹ A third of ETFO's membership took part in this voluntary survey with 24,872 respondents from the total membership of 76,409 (32.6%). It is important to note that ETFO represents elementary teachers and other educators including early childhood educators; however, they do not represent administrators. Further or note, ETFO's membership is predominantly female (approx. 80%). Among the key findings from the report:

- 38% and 34% responded that they think the number of incidents of workplace violence against educators have increased “a great deal” and “somewhat” respectively since before the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 80% think there are more incidents of violence since they have began working in the public school system and 66% think the severity of the violence is worse.
- 52% have experienced an attempt of physical force against them in the 2022-2023 school year.
- 44% have experienced actual physical force against them.
- 56% have experienced a statement or behaviour that could be interpreted as a threat of physical force against them.
- Among members who submit written/online or verbal reports, 47% think the actions or steps taken were ineffective in preventing a recurrence of the violent incident(s). Only 8% deem it effective.
- When subjected to actual physical force against them, 13% never or only sometimes submit a report in writing/online.
- Only 58% of incidents of actual physical force against members are reported in writing, online, or verbally to administrators.
- 88% have experienced harm as a result of violence against them (actual, attempted or threats).

In December 2023, the Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA) surveyed 2,148 teachers and school leaders in Alberta and published their findings in a report entitled *Reporting on Class Size and Complexity, Aggression, and Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Alberta's K-12 Schools (Fall 2023)*.¹⁰ Though not solely related to school violence a major portion of the report focused on this one issue. It is important to note that administrators are part of the ATA and that reported incidents were for the current school year (approx. three and a half months into the school year). Among the key findings from the report:

- 52% of teachers experienced bullying or violence in their work environment at some point since the beginning of this school year.
 - 95% of these experiences were perpetrated by students and mainly in the teachers' own classrooms 60%.
- 71% of teachers and school leaders reported observing students making demeaning or hateful remarks toward classmates who have differing views, which has led to hostile exchanges outside the classroom. These remarks have been related to:

- sexual orientation and gender identity 69%,
- race 63%,
- COVID-19 policies 50%, and
- climate change science 31%.
- 64% of teachers and 68% of school leaders reported an increase in aggressive behaviour in their schools post-COVID19.
- 32% of school leaders and 63% of teachers indicated they have never received training in de-escalating potentially aggressive situations.
- 55% of the respondents reported that they did not feel comfortable in their ability to effectively de-escalate a situation that has the potential to escalate to aggression.
- Only 22% of respondents reported feeling somewhat or very happy, whereas:
 - 89% per cent reported feeling stressed,
 - 93% per cent reported feeling exhausted at the end of the day, and
 - 45% reported that they did not feel hopeful; however,
 - 76% reported that they experience moments of joy at school each day.

The Nunavut Teachers' Association (NTA) conducted a survey in the spring of 2024.¹¹ Due to a decrease in the number of incidents being reported the NTA wished to do a scan of its membership. Among the key findings from the report for the 2023-2024 school year:

- 87% of members witnessed violence in their school
- 76% of members dealt with or experienced violence personally.
- 68% of members personally experienced and 80% witnessed verbal abuse.
- 38% of members personally faced physical abuse.
- 40% of members personally dealt with the destruction of property.

Several pre-COVID-19 surveys/reports were also conducted by teacher organizations in Canada. These are listed here for interest without reporting on them in any real detail. The Alberta Teachers' Association's report Understanding Aggression(s) in Alberta Schools and School Communities is dated 2020 but the survey supporting the report was conducted in 2019.¹² The Quebec Provincial Association of Teachers (QPAT) conducted a survey of randomly-chosen members in the spring of 2018 to better understand the problem of school violence.¹³ The Ontario English Catholic Teachers Association (OECTA) produced a report entitled Safer Schools for All – Addressing Violence and Harassment against Teachers in 2017.¹⁴

Possibly also of interest to readers is a study on harassment and violence against educational workers in Ontario. Though the report is dated November 2021, the survey was conducted between February and March of 2020 just prior to lockdowns in this country. C. Bruckert, D. Santor, and B. Mario of the University of Ottawa surveyed 3,854 Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) workers in the education sector of Ontario. They published their work in November of 2021 entitled *In Harm's Way: The Epidemic of Violence against Education Sector Workers in Ontario*.¹⁵

NSTU ADVOCACY FOR SAFER SCHOOLS

The NSTU has long advocated for safe and inclusive schools through many avenues.

In 1999 the NSTU established the Sheonorail Foundation, a board run charity to support research, inquiry, reflection, writing, distribution of information, and interventions that focus on all forms of violence in the public school system, including anti-violence and peaceful school initiatives. The foundation awards grants for anti-violence programs that have a direct and immediate impact on classrooms, students, teachers, staff, administration, and community.

In the fall of 2006, the NSTU was one of four unions working together as the Coalition Against Workplace Violence along with the Nova Scotia Government and General Employees Union (NSGEU), the Nova Scotia Nurses' Union (NSNU), and the CUPE. An archive of a news story from the National Union of Public and General Employees (NUPGE) entitled *N.S. unions call for workplace anti-violence legislation* highlights some of the details from that time.¹⁶ Mary-Lou Donnelly, the NSTU President of the day stated – “Some 85% of those polled reject the suggestion that there is no need for legislation because in certain jobs the risk of violence is just part of the job.” Prior to 2007, workplace violence was not part of the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* in Nova Scotia. The four Union presidents of the day pledged to keep lobbying until amendments were made to Nova Scotia law; the result of which is the current *Violence in the Workplace Regulations* made under Section 82 of the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* S.N.S. 1996, c. 7 O.I.C. 2007-200 (April 4, 2007, effective April 1, 2008, Except Sections 1 to 6, which are effective October 1, 2007, N.S. Reg. 209/2007).¹⁷

In more recent years the NSTU has advocated for the broader requirements needed to create safe and healthy schools from air quality in schools, COVID-19 restrictions, contact tracing, the harm of reducing school staffing, etc.; however, it took a truly horrendous act to finally garner the government's attention. In the late winter of 2023, a violent attack against school staff that occurred at Charles P. Allen High School was the wakeup call the government needed. See the NSTU's news release of March 22, 2023 – *NSTU calling for increased staffing and a provincial strategy to address school violence*.¹⁸

Finally, after several months of the NSTU's direct activism regarding the importance of this issue there were two governmental actions that shed some hope for its Members. In December of 2023 it was announced that the NSTU, along with the Public School Administrators Association of Nova Scotia (PSAANS), and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (EECD) would form a senior-level *Safe and Inclusive Schools Working Group*. In January of 2024 it was announced that the Nova Scotia Auditor General would investigate the issue of violence in Nova Scotian public schools. As then NSTU President, Ryan Lutes stated – “This is welcome news, as members know, we have been strongly advocating for safer schools for some time now.” During this time the NSTU was actively keeping the pressure on the government and department.

In February of 2024 the NSTU announced findings from a survey – *Eighty-four percent of teachers have considered quitting according to NSTU survey.*¹⁹ President Lutes stated – *“It is time for Government to realize the status quo in our schools is unsustainable and to take action.”* The top six reasons given for considering leaving the profession were:

1. 76% burnout,
2. 66% high workload,
3. 66% lack of resources available to support students,
4. 54% lack of support from employer,
5. 54% lack of respect or mistreatment from the employer and/or Government, and
6. 42% because of rising levels of school violence.

While embroiled with the government regarding negotiations, the NSTU once again had to stress the importance of NSTU members’ voices regarding school safety. In March of 2024, the NSTU was not permitted to speak to a public accounts committee on the issue of school violence. In a news release on the issue of lack of voice, *NSTU blocked from speaking on school violence at Nova Scotia Legislature,*²⁰ President Lutes stated – *“Teachers know first-hand the devastating impact of school violence on children, school staff and their families. It’s disrespectful to these hard-working professionals, dedicated to the betterment and wellbeing of our kids, that their Union will not be able to share their perspective at this public meeting.”* Following public pressure, including a letter writing campaign to members of the public accounts committee, government changed course and allowed the NSTU to speak to the legislative committee.

In June of 2024 the Auditor General released her report which is detailed below in the next section. Following the report, President Lutes stated – *“... the release of the Auditor General’s report into school violence validates the concerns that the NSTU has been raising for the past two years.”* See NSTU news release June 11, 2024 – *NSTU welcomes Auditor General’s Report into School Violence* and from June 19, 2024 – *NSTU outlines key priorities for creating safer schools.*²¹⁻²² At the time the NSTU stated:

According to the NSTU any plan to address the issue of school violence will need to include:

1. Adequate human resources to address increasingly diverse and complex student needs and school supervision.
2. Clear consequences that address all incidents of school violence.
3. Clear reporting requirements that include individual incidents, school lock-down incidents, safe and secure school and classroom evacuation incidents.
4. Province-wide training on Occupational Health and Safety Training with RCE and CSAP personnel dedicated to school safety.

In the early fall of 2024, the newly elected NSTU President Peter Day called on members to ensure their voices were heard by taking part in the Provincial School Code of Conduct survey undertaken by the EECD. In the message President Day stated – *“The NSTU continues to advocate for additional school-based resources and system responses to address the issue of school violence.”* The NSTU has continued to work with the department and other partners at the most senior levels to ensure this key component of school safety, the Student Code of Conduct Policy, is implemented correctly.

November of 2024 saw a provincial election and the Houston government being returned to office with a stronger majority. President Day congratulated the Premier but also took the opportunity to stress the work that still needs to be done in a news release following the election – *NSTU looking forward to continued collaboration with Houston government.*²³ In the release President Day stated – *“School violence and the ongoing teacher shortage need to be addressed and the establishment of the Safe and Inclusive School Leadership Committee, the Teacher Recruitment and Retention Committee, changes to the provincial cell phone policy, increased number of school counselors, and the ongoing work on the student code of conduct are steps in the right direction.”*

This work is ongoing, the NSTU at the senior level continues to engage the Minister and Deputy Minister in discussions regarding safe, inclusive, and equitable schools for all.

NOVA SCOTIA AUDITOR GENERAL’S REPORT

In June of 2024 Kim Adair, the Auditor General of Nova Scotia, submitted her report to the House of Assembly under Section 18(2) of the *Auditor General Act* entitled *Preventing and Addressing Violence in Nova Scotia Public Schools*.²⁴ The Auditor General gave three reasons for the need for the report as:

- 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.

Further, the following three key messages were identified as:

- 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.

The Auditor General relied heavily on UNESCO's definition of school violence along with the list of unacceptable behaviours found in the Department's Code of Conduct to create a list of 11 categories that would fall within the definition of school violence used for the report. The list of conduct used are – *bullying, cyberbullying, discriminatory behaviour, physical violence, racist behaviour, sexual assault, sexual harassment, sexual misconduct, verbal abuse, weapons use, and weapons possession*. The definition for educator in the report was – *all staff who work with students in schools including principals and vice principals, classroom teachers, learning centre teachers, teacher assistants, and other school support staff who work directly with students*.

The Auditor General used reported incidents in PowerSchool to arrive at the figure of 60% increase in violent incidents (from 17,000 to 27,000 reported incidents) over a seven-year period. A voluntary province-wide survey of all school staff regarding preventing and addressing violence in Nova Scotian public schools was conducted with over 5,200 responses from over 18,000 recipients (an almost 28% return rate). In short, the report concluded with the following five recommendations:

1. We recommend the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, in consultation with educators, develop a provincewide strategy to address incidents of violence in schools.
2. We recommend the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development update the Provincial School Code of Conduct Policy.
3. We recommend the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development improve violence in schools' data collection, accuracy and reliability of incidents.
4. We recommend the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development require Regional Centres for Education and Conseil scolaire acadien provincial to track incidents of lockdowns and hold-and-secures with details of the nature of the incident and require the Regional Centres for Education and Conseil scolaire acadien provincial to perform regular trend analysis.
5. We recommend the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development verify school Emergency Management Plans include all essential components of the Emergency Management for Nova Scotia Schools Provincial Guidelines.

The report included the following infographic to highlight the key findings:



CASE STUDY OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY

In October of 2024 a landmark decision on school violence was reported by the New Brunswick Teachers' Federation (NBTF) following a successful grievance.²⁵ In *NBTF v. His Majesty in Right of the Province of New Brunswick as Represented by the Department of Finance and Treasury Board (EED)*, adjudicator Trisha Perry found a New Brunswick school district failed to protect school personnel from repeated physical and psychological harm caused by a student who acted violently.²⁶ It is clear from Perry's statement in the report – “*The employer's obligation to provide inclusive education to students does not outweigh the employer's duty to ensure a safe, violence-free workplace to employees*” that the employer can not relinquish its responsibility to its employees. Two excerpts from the report include:

Though some inherent risk is associated with inclusive education, extreme, consistent, and frequent incidents of violence and harm should not be considered the 'norm' for educational providers ...

Children are entitled to an education, and school employees deserve to work in a safe environment. The solutions are not straightforward, but we need to strive to improve the experience of students with complex behavioural exceptionalities without sacrificing the health and safety of staff.

NBTF concluded with five key take aways from this decision (please note: in New Brunswick Districts are regional employers):

- Employees in education are not required to tolerate incidents of violence and harm at school.

- Districts must take reasonable precautions to ensure the safety of their employees.
- Districts must be particularly vigilant in addressing extreme cases, in terms of severity or frequency, early so as to ensure a safe working environment for employees.
- Blaming school staff when intervention plans fail is not an option.
- Where Districts fail to adequately protect their employees, remedies are available through the grievance process.

NSTU POSITION ON ADDRESSING SCHOOL VIOLENCE

The NSTU has several stated policies that relate to classroom conditions, peaceful schools, teaching peace, safe and inclusive schools, occupational health and safety, harassment and bullying, staffing allocations, teacher voice in policy development, etc., please see details in the NSTU Guidebook.²⁷ A list of relevant policy statements include:

- Governance, Policy 6 – Gender Identity, Gender Expression, and Sexual Orientation Discrimination,
- Governance, Policy 7 – Human Rights,
- Curriculum, Policy 4 – Class Size and Composition,
- Curriculum, Policy 6 – Conflict Resolution,
- Curriculum, Policy 12 – Peace Education,
- Economic Welfare & Working Conditions, Policy 1 – Abuse, Bullying, Intimidation, and Harassment,
- Economic Welfare & Working Conditions, Policy 10 – Mental Health in the Workplace,
- Economic Welfare & Working Conditions, Policy 12 – Occupational Health and Safety,
- Economic Welfare & Working Conditions, Policy 15 – School Counsellors,
- Economic Welfare & Working Conditions, Policy 16 – School Psychologists,
- Economic Welfare & Working Conditions, Policy 17 – Speech-Language Pathologists,
- Government, Policy 5 – Education Policy – Teacher Input,
- Government, Policy 9 – Integration and Inclusion, and
- General, Policy 1 – Appropriate Online Cyber conduct.

Specifically, regarding solutions to the current safety issues facing Nova Scotian schools the NSTU holds several beliefs that they developed in the aftermath of the release of the Auditor General's Report. The NSTU believes the following regarding the requirements needed to ensure safe, inclusive, and equitable schools in Nova Scotia:

1. Adequate human resources to address increasingly diverse and complex student needs and school supervision.
2. Clear consequences that address all incidents of school violence.
3. Clear reporting requirements that include individual incidents, school lock-down incidents, safe and secure school and classroom evacuation incidents.
4. Province-wide training on Occupational Health and Safety Training with RCE and CSAP personnel dedicated to school safety.

ACRONYMS

ATA – Alberta Teachers' Association

CTF/FCE – Canadian Teachers' Federation/Fédération canadienne des enseignantes et des enseignants

CUPE – Canadian Union of Public Employees

EECD – Department of Education and Early Childhood Development

ESN – Education and Solidarity Network

ETFO – Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario

FESP – Foundation of Public Health (acronym based on the French Fondation d'entreprise pour la santé publique)

I-BEST – International Barometer of Education Staff

NBTF – New Brunswick Teachers' Federation

NSGEU – Nova Scotia Government and General Employees Union

NSNU – Nova Scotia Nurses' Union

NTA – Nunavut Teachers' Association

NUPGE – National Union of Public and General Employees

OECTA – Ontario English Catholic Teachers Association

PSAANS – Public School Administrators Association of Nova Scotia

QPAT – Quebec Provincial Association of Teachers

UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

WHO – World Health Organization

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