

School safety program gets update

Policies were expanded to include progressive discipline and relationship building.

By DANIELA SIMUNAC, SUN MEDIA

The London District Catholic school board is taking aim at bullies with an expanded, updated version of its school safety program.

Trustees last night were presented with revisions to the Safe Schools Policies, which outline in further depth how to deal with students who behave badly.

The London board, like all boards across Ontario, already has policies and procedures on dealing with cases of bullying.

However by Feb. 1, school boards are required to submit to the Education Ministry eight new policies outlining "progressive discipline" in their codes of conduct.

"We've always embraced the concept of progressive discipline," said Tamara Nugent, acting superintendent of education who made the presentation to the board last night at its inaugural 2008 meeting.

Because of the revisions, trustees will have a greater role in dictating long-term suspensions or expulsions in worst-case scenarios. A long-term suspension is anywhere between five and 25 days, she said.

School staff already use a multi-tiered approach when disciplining students, meaning a child may get a detention for a first offence and a call home the second time.

Now, the emphasis for school staff will be to restore relationships that may have broken along the way in disciplining the child, she said.

Nugent described the newly-expanded guide as "more thorough" and "comprehensive."

The change "brings consistency across boards in the province," she said.

The board will be presented in January with a proposal on a new anti-bullying program.

In other business last night, former board chairperson Paul Whitehead handed the gavel over to newly-elected board chairperson John Ferris.

Ferris, a London trustee, was elected chairperson Nov.26, and London trustee Loren Demelo was named vice-chairperson.

