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Bullied boy's parents hire lawyer

By [KELLY PEDRO](#), LONDON FREE PRESS

LONDON -- The parents of a seven-year-old say he's been bullied by a junior kindergarten boy, a youngster roughly half his age.

The Oxford County couple say the attacks -- from kicking to tackling -- are so bad, they now only send their child to his rural school on days when the four-year-old isn't there.

Frustrated, Paul and Tanya Kesner have hired a lawyer.

Plattsville and District public school responded by separating the kids during recess, then reintegrating the younger boy and assigning someone to supervise him.

But the Kesners say they and the other boy's parents want the separate recesses to continue. Paul Kesner says the younger boy has attacked his son, Grade 2 pupil Riley, in escalating violence since September.

He said he and his wife -- who don't blame the other boy or his parents, but the school -- are "at the end of our rope."

"My son is (going to school) on days when this other boy is not because I have zero confidence in their (the school's) ability to supervise this little boy," he said.

"The only thing that has worked at this point is having this little boy on separate recesses."

Thames Valley District school board spokesperson Richard Hoffman said no one from the board was available to comment.

Kesner said problems began in September when his son told him the other child inappropriately touched him on the playground.

Another time, Riley was tackled after school and the child jumped on his chest and choked him, Kesner said.

A parent, who is a family friend, broke it up.

The latest incident happened just before March break when Kesner says the younger child was being supervised in a separate classroom during recess.

He said the child somehow went into the schoolyard, climbed equipment where Riley was playing and kicked him in the back, sending him flying down the slide.

"We didn't even get so much as a phone call from the school," he said.

For two weeks after March break, the school placed the little boy in a separate recess, Kesner said, adding it worked well.

But the school decided to reintegrate the younger child and assigned an educational assistant to supervise him, he said.

Kesner said he and the other boy's parents are in "constant contact" and have met with the principal as



Riley Kesner, 7, with his parents Paul and Tanya Kesner outside his school, northeast of Woodstock, Ont., Tuesday, May 12, 2009. The Kesners have hired a lawyer to help them convince the Thames Valley District School Board to take action to stop a younger pupil from bullying Riley. (Sun Media/Elliot Ferguson)

a group, asking to continue the alternate recesses the rest of the year.

Kesner said he wants the separate recesses, because every time the child is back on the field his "son gets attacked."

The incidents have taken a toll on Riley's self-esteem.

"He's afraid to do anything," said Kesner. "When we go to the park and we're playing and some other kids show up that we don't know, he wants to go home because he thinks he's going to get beaten up."

Feeling he wasn't getting anywhere, Kesner hired a lawyer to try to resolve the problem sooner.

He said he's not interested in suing a cash-strapped board.

"I'm not interested in the money. That's not the goal here. I just want them to do the right thing. These kids need to be looked after and they're (the school) not doing that," he said.

Kesner said he will likely move Riley and another son who is to start school next year to another board.

"My trust has been shaken in the school board and the school and I don't trust them to do what's best for my son," he said.

The Kesners aren't the only ones feeling frustrated.

Parents of children bullied in school all have similar stories, said Kathryn Wilkins, co-founder of the London Anti-Bullying Coalition.

That's why the coalition formed and why it was at Queen's Park last week, asking for more teeth in proposed legislation, Bill 157, which would make it mandatory for school staff to report bullying.