

QUEST OUTDOOR EDUCATION PROGRAM REVIEW

PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF REVIEW:

On December 15, 2006 Tom Ellison, a former teacher employed by the Vancouver School Board (The V.S.B.), was convicted on seven of sixteen charges of gross indecency and indecent assault. All charges resulted from incidents that took place when Ellison was a teacher at Prince of Wales Secondary School in Vancouver. With one exception,¹ all matters occurred either within or in circumstances associated with a V.S.B. outdoor initiative known as the Quest Outdoor Education Program. At the material time Quest operated out of Prince of Wales Secondary. Ellison was one of the program's three teacher leaders.

Not surprisingly, the Ellison trial and revelations about what had transpired within the Quest Program generated a considerable amount of public concern. During the course of the criminal proceedings against Mr. Ellison, the V.S.B. directed that a review be undertaken of the record and circumstances associated with the Quest Outdoor Education Program. The information gathered through that review was then to be utilized as the background for an assessment of the sufficiency of existing V.S.B. policies and practices regarding student safety and security. The Terms of Reference² for the review gave particular emphasis to the operation and supervision of field study and outdoor education programs and, in addition, sought recommendations regarding:

- a) standards of conduct for employees;
- b) practices for communicating and disseminating standards of conduct to all distinct employees; and
- c) procedures applicable to allegations of employee misconduct.

To assist in the review the V.S.B. provided an extensive, albeit incomplete³, body of documents regarding the operation of the Quest Program. This included internal reports regarding allegations of misconduct, the correspondence record and several other materials including transcripts of interviews conducted in respect of related teacher discipline proceedings.

¹ The other matter involved alleged incidents that took place with a 15 year old student while Ellison was a teacher at Prince of Wales but prior to his assignment to the Quest Program.

² A copy of the Terms of Reference can be found at Appendix 'A' to this report.

³ Several documents relevant to these matters are no longer available either as a result of loss/disposal during the relocation of the V.S.B. offices or as a consequence of the V.S.B.'s record destruction protocols. This practice is addressed later in this report.

A number of further interviews were also carried out during the course of this review⁴. This was done to facilitate an adequate understanding of the operation of the Quest Program and of the program's supervision both by the administrative staff at Prince of Wales Secondary School and by the senior administration of the V.S.B. The lessons learned there, one hopes, might prove useful in reducing the likelihood of similar occurrences in the future.

It is important to note from the outset that the V.S.B. established a review. This was not a public inquiry and, as a result, those persons interviewed during the course of this process were not required to provide their information under oath and interested parties did not have an opportunity to challenge the reliability of the information provided. Accordingly, no findings of credibility are offered. Despite this, the available documentary evidence and the content of the additional interviews have provided a sufficient basis upon which to identify some of the key things that went wrong in the Quest Program.

The report consists of two parts. It begins with a background summary of the Quest Program, the relationship between Quest and Prince of Wales Secondary School, the emergence of concerns about what was happening within Quest and the response of school administration and senior V.S.B. staff to those events. This aspect of the report also includes a summary of the facts established at the trial of Tom Ellison.

The second part of the report details policy and practice changes implemented by the V.S.B. in the period of time subsequent to the termination of the Quest Program. It also offers recommendations the V.S.B. may now wish to consider to further strengthen policies regarding student safety and security.

PART I - BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

1) The Origin and Operation of Quest:

The Quest Outdoor Education Program, which began with considerable promise, was developed and implemented at Prince of Wales Secondary School in the early 1970's. The "BC Quest Program," as it was known during its initial phase, was substantially influenced by the principles and practices of the Outward Bound movement. Chris Harris, a former Prince of Wales teacher and the Quest Program's originator, has indicated that Quest had two core goals:

⁴ Additional interviews included discussions with former Prince of Wales Principal John Chalk, Dr. Ted Hunt who was a Vice-Principal at the school towards the end of the Quest Program, Dr. Dante Lupini who was the Superintendent of Schools for the V.S.B. during the material period in time; Mr. Ken Denike of the Vancouver School Board and Mr. Chris Kelly who is currently the Superintendent of Schools for the V.S.B. Telephone interviews were also completed with former Secretary-Treasurer, Mr. David Yuen, who conducted a financial review of the Quest Program in his then capacity as an accounting manager with the V.S.B., with Mr. John Allan who was the Associate Superintendent responsible for Prince of Wales and with the female teacher who was hired to replace Tom Ellison after he had left the Quest Program.

1. "To provide an outdoor education program to inspire personal growth and self-reliance through shared outdoor experiences and challenges. The program was also to develop a concern for the environment and to involve community service.
2. To build self-confidence and academic growth by having students present their academic studies to their peers by method of oral seminars rather than the traditional written exam."⁵

The Quest Program was operated, at least theoretically, as a district wide program. Students from schools other than Prince of Wales Secondary were equally eligible for acceptance into the Quest Program. The teachers operating the program actively engaged in recruiting and interviewing prospective students. In reality, the bulk of participating Quest students came from schools to the west of the intersection of Broadway and Granville Streets in Vancouver. School administration have indicated that approximately sixty percent of the Quest Program student population in any given year would come from schools other than Prince of Wales.

According to Chris Harris, by "the third year, 90 students were accepted per year from a vastly larger number of applicants. As a result, the accepted students were a group of highly motivated individuals. In the early years of the program, approximately seventy-five percent were female as athletic males usually opted for high school sports teams rather than outdoor adventure".⁶ (emphasis added)

Quest rapidly developed a substantial, indeed a national, reputation as a high quality alternative education program that challenged students to challenge themselves. For many, it was an extraordinarily positive experience and this, in part, would lead to high levels of competition for access into the program and to an environment where students and parents would prove to be exceptionally supportive of the Quest Program and of the teachers responsible for its operations.

By most accounts, the early years of Quest were successful and the senior administration both at Prince of Wales and at the Vancouver School Board regarded it as a very worthwhile initiative.

2) The Emergence of Quest's Summer Programs

At the end of Quest's fourth year of operations the leadership of the program shifted as the program's original leader left Prince of Wales to pursue a full time interest in commercially-operated outdoor enterprises which, among other things, included guided trips into the Canadian Rockies. By that fourth year, the nature and extent of the program offerings available through Quest was going through a significant transitional period. The original school-based program that had operated from September to June continued, but it was supplemented by a summer-based program that made more advanced outdoor expeditions available to Quest students or Quest "graduates." With the departure of Mr. Harris the program's leadership fell to teacher

⁵ Chris Harris website - a description of the history of the Quest Outdoor Program.

⁶ Chris Harris Website

The rationale for the development of Quest's summer programs was that they provided an opportunity for students to increase their knowledge, experience and skills in the outdoors. This was considered both necessary and appropriate as many students had begun to engage in much more ambitious challenges that were perhaps beyond the skill level that could be achieved in the regular program.

led summer canoe expeditions in British Columbia and the Yukon. Tom Ellison, who had taught at Prince of Wales since the fall term in 1972, and who joined Quest on a full-time basis for the 1975 - '76 school year, was also a key participant in Quest's summer program, leading sailing expeditions with Quest students and "graduates" along the BC Coast. These trips were paid for by parents and, to some extent, by the students themselves.

The summer expeditions operated commercially by teachers became an integral part of the Quest Program and it appears that there was little meaningful separation between the program that took place during the formal school year and the summer operations. Much of the planning and the recruitment for the summer trips took place during the school year and many of the activities were carried out with equipment actually owned by Prince of Wales Secondary. Although the numbers of students participating in the summer expeditions would be smaller than those that passed through the Quest Program during the course of the school year, it must be understood that there was little break in the continuity between the one and the other. The evidence at the Ellison trial would later establish that it was on these summer expeditions that Tom Ellison initiated his criminal conduct against a number of his female students.

It certainly seems clear that many, if not most, of the parents of Quest students believed that the summer-based activities were, in fact, school sponsored field trips.

The net result of the ambiguity regarding the status of the summer programs is that no action was taken by anyone to assess the nature of the summer activities either to make it clear that the activities were not associated with the school or, in the alternative, to make proper provision for the appropriate supervision of students.

3) The Decline in Supervision and Control

In the formative years of the Quest Program the administration at Prince of Wales had given the program room to grow but not at the expense of yielding administrative responsibility for the

overall supervision and control of school programs both on, and off, school premises.⁷

The record also discloses that, in the early phase of the program, alert to potential problems in the structure and leadership of Quest. In the lead up to the commencement of the 1974 - '75 school year a written request was made to the V.S.B. asking that an additional staff position be made available to provide for adult female supervision within the Quest Program. Given that as many as three quarters of the students participating in the Quest Program were female, and given the extent to which the program already involved extended overnight trips to remote locations, this was a prudent request.

The request for the female staff position was considered at a meeting of Assistant Superintendents, attended by the V.S.B.'s Superintendent, on September 3, 1974. The minutes of that meeting state that "there are two male teachers in the program, and the school wishes to appoint a female assistant for the second semester of the program, when McGee and Point Grey students will also be involved." The Assistant Superintendent responsible for the area recommended approval of the request and, in addition, confirmed that an eligible woman with the appropriate skill sets was both available and interested in the opportunity. The meeting's participants commented that the Quest Program was "very worthwhile, but that there was some question as to whether alternative programs should be given additional assistance when regular programs are not". The minutes of that meeting reflect that the Superintendent was to inform the Principal of Prince of Wales that "his request would not be met."

Another opportunity to remedy the concern about inadequate female supervision presented itself at the commencement of the 1975 - '76 school year when a third teacher was authorized for Quest. Regrettably, that new position was used to add a third male teacher - Tom Ellison. Remarkably, the Quest Program would see the addition of a further male teacher - a male replacement for that person in 1977 - and another male added to the program in 1980. A qualified female teacher was not added to the program until September of 1986 following Mr. Ellison's departure. By that point in time, the male dominated leadership of the Quest Program was so entrenched that the addition of a female colleague was actively resisted. When the successful female candidate was introduced into the program without proper support or preparation, she found herself in an environment that was consistently hostile and often unprofessional. Former administrators would later describe the treatment of the female teacher as "shameful". That assessment is accurate.

It is also apparent that, as the school's leadership changed, the linkage between school administration and the Quest Program was not maintained at levels similar to what had existed during the formative phase of Quest.

⁷ The School Act and the regulations thereto, together with V.S.B. policy, are unambiguous about the obligation of a school's principal to exercise control and supervision over all school activities including those matters sponsored by the school that take place off school premises.

During the course of its existence Quest operated out of a converted music room near the front entrance of the school and, when they were there, both students and teachers generally kept their distance from the school's mainstream. The students were actively encouraged to think of themselves as different from the general student body. Parental support was robust and all of the senior personnel interviewed during the various inquiries into these matters have vivid recollections of the escalation in aggressive and confrontational responses from the teachers, from some parents and from some of the students whenever the program, or any one of the Quest's teachers, was criticized or subject to what, in the mainstream school, would be considered quite normal supervisory questions.

By the 1976 – '77 school year Quest was operating essentially as an independent entity within Prince of Wales Secondary School. Quest appears to have been left substantially alone to chart its own course from September of 1976 to at least September of 1981. It was during that period of time that the bulk of the offences committed by Tom Ellison were taking place.

By 1981 – '82, there were growing concerns about problems in the Quest Program.

More telling are the subsequent statements of several students, and of others, who assert that inappropriate relationships between students and at least some of the teachers in the Quest Program was essentially an "open secret" in parts of Vancouver.⁸

⁸ This point was consistently made during the testimony of former Quest students at Ellison's trial. And an article detailing the experience of a student in the Quest Program, (Vancouver Magazine, May 2007, p. 54) said, "If ever there was an open secret on the west side of Vancouver, it was Tom Ellison's relationships with "his girls" and the sexualization of the program went well beyond Tom."

4) Allegations of Abuse

5) The Evidence at the Ellison Trial:

The evidence at Ellison's criminal trial would later provide a clear picture of what had actually been happening while Ellison was involved with Quest.

In the Fall of 2006 Ellison was tried on 16 counts of gross indecency and indecent assault. All, save one, of those charges involved students of the Quest Program or Quest "graduates" who took part in summer sailing trips that Ellison captained along the British Columbia coast. On December 15, 2006 Ellison was convicted on seven of the sixteen charges. It should be noted, however, that there was no substantial dispute regarding the facts associated with those matters where acquittals were ordered. Each of those matters involved egregiously unprofessional conduct on the part of Ellison and most, if not all, would have been sufficient to warrant termination of employment.

The first allegation of Ellison's improper sexual contact with a student took place on board Ellison's sailboat in the Fall of 1974. For reasons explained by the trial judge, he was not convicted for that matter but the incident(s) were established and accepted by the Court. These matters took place when Ellison was early into his second year of teaching at Prince of Wales. He had not yet joined the teaching staff of the Quest Program. The matters for which he was convicted, and other instances of unprofessional conduct involving sexual interference with his students, spanned the period from 1975 to 1981.

The facts associated with each of the charges against Mr. Ellison are set out in detail in the reasons for judgement of the Honourable Provincial Court Judge M. Takahashi. For purposes of this report, it is sufficient to summarize the following:

1. Twelve of the complainants had been students, or former students at Prince of Wales School. Almost all of them came into contact with Ellison as a result of involvement in the Quest program.
2. The offences and/or unprofessional conduct generally took place on board one of two sailboats that Ellison used for summer Quest-related sailing trips on the BC Coast. Ellison lived on board one of those boats during all material times.
3. The pattern of Ellison's conduct was disturbingly similar throughout the time period set out in the charges against him. According to the trial judge, *"the sexual contact started with a massage, progressed to kissing, fondling and digital vaginal penetration and cunnilingus. The conduct sometimes involved an invitation to touch his penis but usually did not involve sexual intercourse."*

This is not a case where a teacher became infatuated with a student and acted to engage the student in a serious sexual relationship. Mr. Ellison was not interested in a permanent commitment to an exclusive relationship with any one of his students. He occasionally became sexually stimulated during the encounters but rarely did he bring himself to ejaculation or involve the students to do that. He seemed primarily interested in sexually stimulating the female students. He seemed directed to establishing and maintaining himself as the sole focus of the sexual attention and adoration of a contingent of female students.

The students were aware that there were other classmates competing for the attention of Mr. Ellison. Sexual satisfaction seemed secondary to the notion that he would choose them as a partner if they were compliant with his ministrations.

On the boat, Mr. Ellison promoted competition between the female students by choosing different ones to sleep with each night. Also, it was no coincidence that a female student would often be seen leaving the boat when another came for a pre-scheduled tryst."

4. The sexual contact between Ellison and his students happened both during the school year and on the commercially operated sailing excursions that Ellison led in association with Quest.
5. While Ellison encouraged secrecy and non-disclosure, it seems quite clear that his behaviour with some of the female students became, particularly in the later years, an "open secret".
6. Ellison's conduct was rightly described as insensitive, indifferent and narcissistic.

The evidence at trial confirmed that Ellison was very aware that his conduct was the kind of fundamental breach of trust which, if disclosed, would have warranted dismissal. Furthermore, it was established that he had turned his mind to the potential criminal consequences of his conduct as he kept a box of letters from students to help to establish consent if that was to become necessary at some future point.

Much has been said about Mr. Ellison's criminal and contemptible behaviour. His conduct was calculating and predatory. His demeanour during his trial indicated that, even now, he may not grasp the gravity of the offences he committed against his students or the extent to which he breached the trust that both students and parents had placed in him. It should also be observed, as Justice Paris of the British Columbia Supreme Court did in R. v. Robert Noyes,¹¹ that this kind of crime is also a base betrayal of the profession of teaching. The following passage from the Noyes case, which was published in the same year Tom Ellison left teaching, warrants repeating here:

"I am sure this matter has caused great distress and consternation among the teachers of this province. The profession of teaching by its nature is devoted to serving others. Those who exhibit that spirit of service do not deserve to be faced with the suspicion and reduced confidence from the public that the conduct of the accused may have caused."

6) The Post-Ellison Period:

After the departure of Tom Ellison from Quest it had been hoped that the situation would improve for the following school year. It did not.

As was noted earlier, a female teacher was finally added to the teaching staff.

At the commencement of the 1986 – '87 school year Dr. Ted Hunt was added to the administration as a Vice-Principal at Prince of Wales.

Ellison was no longer a teacher in the program at this

¹¹ R. v. Noyes, (1986), 6 B.C.L.R. (2d) 306

point in time but he apparently continued to be involved with the Quest teachers and continued to come in to contact with Quest students.¹²

With these departures the Quest Program essentially came to an end. It would subsequently be replaced with the TREK Outdoor Education Program of which more will be said later in this report. Once the Quest Program had been brought to an end, the school and V.S.B. administrators, with the exception of Dr. Hunt, did little to follow up. Many years would pass before there was any meaningful examination of the events which transpired within Quest.

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1. The failure to properly address the female supervision issue right from the outset was a mistake and the error was compounded by the failure to use any of the several subsequent staffing opportunities to remedy the situation.

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¹⁵ The record is not clear as to how it came to pass that, in both cases, the administrative transfer was replaced with admission into the Career Transition Leave incentive program. The Vancouver School Board practice of record destruction seven years after the end of employment has been a complicating factor.

PART II - THE VANCOUVER SCHOOL BOARD POLICY CONTEXT - FURTHER IMPROVEMENTS REMAIN NECESSARY

As part of this review, the Vancouver School Board has asked whether, given the events that took place within the Quest Program, current policies and guidelines governing field studies and outdoor education programs require further improvement.

There have, in fact, been several important policy changes made by the Vancouver School Board to significantly improve V.S.B. procedures and to ensure that all employees understand what their respective obligations are in circumstances where sexual abuse is suspected or alleged. There are, however, some remaining areas where further important changes can, and should, be made.

It is important to first record the fact that, as Quest was drawing to a close, efforts were already underway within the Vancouver School Board's Sexual Abuse Prevention Committee to begin to address the need for more effective policies in relation to allegations of abuse. The report of that committee was considered, and accepted, by the Personnel and Staff Services Committee of the V.S.B., and later by the Board, in the spring of 1987. It is interesting to note that, after making passing reference to the insufficiently precise language of the BC Teachers' Federation Code of Ethics, the V.S.B. Committee used the following language to elaborate upon appropriate and inappropriate behaviour toward pupils:

"The onus is on the employee to remove him/herself from physical or verbal contact with pupils that could lead to the initiation of any form of sexual abuse. Because the employee is in a position of much greater authority and persuasive and coercive power it is inappropriate for any employee to engage in any action, verbal or non-verbal, which has sexual overtones and could offend or abuse a pupil." (emphasis added)

This was a good start towards an improved policy environment. Action was also taken to make certain that the replacement program for Quest was provided with the foundation necessary to help restore confidence in alternative outdoor education programs and to build upon the original promise of Quest. The TREK Outdoor Educational Program appears to have done very well in this regard.

With TREK a comprehensive manual on policies and practices was established under the direction of an Associate Superintendent. Those policies, which were examined as part of this review, have been regularly updated. Steps were taken to address the need for an appropriate gender balance amongst the teaching staff. The policies are clear that, "for any overnight activity TREK Program staff will have both male and female leaders." The obligations of leaders are more specifically delineated and issues like prohibitions on nudity have also been addressed. Appropriate procedures have also been set in place regarding accounting and fund-raising activities.¹⁶ Particularly encouraging is the inclusion of Section 5 of the TREK policy

¹⁶ This had also been an area of concern with the operation of the Quest Program.

document which sets out the respective obligations and responsibilities of the principal of Prince of Wales Secondary School and of the teaching staff. The policy is unambiguous about the fact, as was always the case under the School Act, "the principal is responsible for the management and supervision of the TREK program, staff and facilities," (emphasis added). The TREK policy is very clear that this contemplates all activities whether on, or off, school premises.

The TREK policies also include extensive reference to the obligations of the Vancouver School Board staff to report abuse and the document offers comprehensive information regarding procedures for the reporting of sexual abuse or sexual harassment. While TREK policies should continue to be updated on a regular basis, no specific amendments are considered necessary at this time. In fact, the TREK policy document could – and should – be used as a model for policies of more general application that apply to all field study, outdoor and alternative education programs.

Policies regarding the conduct of field studies have also been improved and now specifically set out the obligations of both school administration and the teacher responsible for such programs to ensure that they have attended to the necessary approvals and, where applicable, have made arrangements for gender appropriate supervision for all overnight trips. It must be pointed out, however, that the Vancouver School Board did not make this formal change to their policies until December of 1995, almost ten years after the termination of the Quest Program.

During the course of this review, it was suggested that the absence of clear procedures was a significant problem for those involved. That may be true. There is little doubt that a greater degree of procedural clarity may have been of some assistance

A principal faced with an allegation of sexual abuse in today's context would now have the benefit of the relatively new "Interagency Protocol and Procedures for Reporting and Investigating Alleged Physical and/or Sexual Abuse of Students by Vancouver School Board Employees." This protocol document, which was signed off by the Vancouver School Board, the Vancouver Police Department and by the Ministry of Children and Family Development in December of 2003, provides a step-by-step set of procedures to govern any allegations of physical and/or sexual abuse. These procedures are very clear that an employee who has reason to believe that abuse has taken place, "must report this immediately to either the School Administrative Officer or the Associate Superintendent" responsible for the area. A disclosure then results in the activation of several other obligations of responsible Vancouver School Board officials who are to make prompt reports to the applicable child protection agency and to the Vancouver Police Department. The protocol document makes it very clear that "protection of the student is the paramount concern." The quality of the document itself, the procedures that it sets out, and the clear articulation of the obligations and commitments of the Vancouver School Board, are all excellent and no further amendments are recommended or considered necessary at this time. What is not clear is the extent to which this document, and a summary of a document entitled "Child Protection Initiatives" which summarizes the applicable provincial law, V.S.B. policies and reporting protocols, have been adequately disseminated to all employees. These

materials should be provided to all staff at the point of hire and these matters should be addressed in regular in-service training. Furthermore, prospective administrators should receive specific training regarding these procedures and protocols before they assume administrative and supervisory responsibilities.

The applicable procedures and protocols should also be summarized and included within the V.S.B. policy on "Reporting Child Abuse." The current policy document makes it clear that all school employees have a legal obligation to report any suspected case of neglect or abuse but offers little useful guidance on the specific procedures to be followed. Incorporating the requirements of the Inter-Agency Protocol in to the Board policy document would be a useful place to start. Similarly, the existing Board policy on Supervision of Students, while adequate, would benefit from a revision that made more explicit reference to appropriate gender supervision for all field studies or other activities that involve overnight travel.

Generally speaking, the improvements to the policy context within the Vancouver School Board have been quite good. Interviews with the current leadership of the V.S.B. staff have also been encouraging as they indicate a deep commitment to making certain that policies are more fully embedded within practice.

One area that still requires attention, however, is the preservation of Vancouver School Board personnel records. Until recently, V.S.B. practice was to destroy personnel records seven years after an employee had completed his/her employment with the V.S.B. This became a complicating factor in this review as several files that may have been relevant to this review were no longer available. In light of the circumstances associated with the termination of the Quest Program, the appropriate course of action would have been to freeze and hold all potentially relevant personnel files and other related documents. This should be the norm in any case where an allegation of abuse has been made.

As a result of the concerns that emerged during the examination of this matter, the practice of record destruction has apparently been suspended. It is strongly recommended that the Board should instruct staff to fully review the relevant policies with a view to making any changes necessary to modernize records management policies and procedures.

The Vancouver School Board must also take action to ensure that they have appropriate protocols and understandings in place with the BC College of Teachers to ensure that reporting obligations to the College are discharged in an appropriate and time-sensitive manner.¹⁷ The V.S.B., the College and, most importantly, the interests of students, would be best served if clear understandings were established in this regard. More specifically, the V.S.B. should take the lead in working with the College of Teachers and with provincial authorities to widen the reporting obligations regarding all matters that should reasonably be brought to the attention of the College. A resignation, re-assignment to other duties or relocation to another district should not be permitted to frustrate the communication of information that may be relevant to student safety and security.

¹⁷ The College was not in existence at the time of the Quest Program.

It should also be made clear by the Province, by the College and by the Board that the duty to report child abuse – or suspicions of child abuse – is on-going. If a person has made a report but subsequently obtains further relevant information there must be a positive obligation to report that additional information to the appropriate authorities. The Quest experience provides clear insight as to why the obligation should be stated in these terms.

The V.S.B. would also be wise to adopt hiring practices and protocols which, in addition to the requirement for criminal record checks, also require discipline record checks with the previous employer(s) of applicants. To the extent that this may be limited in any way by freedom of information and privacy legislation, which is likely not the case, that matter should also be addressed with the appropriate provincial authorities.

Another recommendation resulting from the examination of the Quest Program relates to the standard of records regarding allegations of abuse. Quite apart from the deficiencies in the available historical record, it also became very clear during this review that many significant events, observations, conversations and requests were never reduced to written form. All employees should be encouraged to understand that it is in their interest, in the V.S.B.'s, and in the public interest, that such serious matters should be consistently and appropriately documented.

A NEW V.S.B. CODE OF CONDUCT:

It is also recommended that the V.S.B. should consider the development and implementation of a V.S.B. – specific Code of Conduct for all V.S.B. employees. At present the core document in this regard is the V.S.B. policy on "Staff – Student Relations" which incorporates by reference the following provision of The Code of Ethics of the BC Teachers' Federation:

"The teacher speaks and acts towards pupils with respect and dignity and deals judiciously with them, always mindful of their individual rights and sensibilities."

The Code of Ethics provisions, while useful, are not sufficient. No issue is taken with the Federation's Code. It is, in fact, quite appropriate that the Federation have established guidelines applicable to the conduct and professional standards of their membership.

The V.S.B. should take steps, after consultation with all employee groups, with parents and with students, to develop and implement a Code that clearly articulates the V.S.B.'s expectation regarding the conduct of all staff and, where applicable, volunteers. In so doing, the Board should endeavor to establish an environment where students feel comfortable coming forward when their security is at risk.

Creating an environment where students are comfortable about making disclosures is only part of what will be required. Teachers and administrators must also be supported if they have concerns

regarding the safety or security of students. In this regard it would be wrong to suggest that all the lessons of Quest have been fully learned. There was then, and to some extent there still is, a culture of caution and risk avoidance that may operate to discourage disclosure. This too must change.

Lastly, while it is not within the scope of this review, the observation is offered that the School Act provides the most effective vehicle for a clear and unambiguous expression of public expectations regarding the conduct of school personnel. The Government of the Province of British Columbia deserves credit for moving ahead with the establishment of a Teacher Discipline Registry. A revitalization of the conduct expectations set out in the School Act would be a further important step towards improved student protection across British Columbia.