

**Outcomes for Suspended and Expelled Youth: Examining Community Involvement, Education  
and Support**

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# OUTCOMES FOR SUSPENDED AND EXPELLED YOUTH

EXAMINING COMMUNITY  
INVOLVEMENT, EDUCATION  
AND SUPPORT

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## 03 ABSTRACT

This report was commissioned by Dalhousie Youth Support Services, an organization that assists youth in conflict with the law, to analyze school influences on the future outcomes of Peterborough youth. The overall purpose is to determine if there is a connection between suspension and/or expulsion and youth crime, combined with other community aspects relevant to youth outcomes including: available services or a need for services; class size significance to delinquency; and if early-intervention services are cost-effective. A literature review was conducted to contextualise the current suspension and expulsion rates in Ontario and determine how these punitive strategies impact youth outcomes. Peterborough secondary school data was also analyzed to determine if these punitive practices were being used significantly and if intervention services are available to mitigate future misbehaviour. It was determined that suspensions and expulsions increase the probability of youth being involved in the youth justice system and committing crime as an adult. Peterborough secondary schools use suspensions and expulsions extensively while lacking preventative services to address root causes of youth misbehaviour thus increasing the probability of those students having poor outcomes later in life.

## INTRODUCTION

### OVERVIEW

Dalhousie Youth Support Services (DYSS) is a local Peterborough organization that assists youth in conflict with the law in overcoming their misconduct through the development of positive social and personal behaviours. DYSS commissioned this report detailing the rates of suspension and expulsion under the Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board along with currently available supports within the Peterborough community to determine future outcomes for Peterborough youth. The key questions provided for guiding research include:

1. What are the demographics locally for justice involved youth and suspended/expelled youth? Do we expect to see a change in these demographics?
2. Is there a need for services for at-risk youth in the Peterborough community?
3. Is there a relationship between large class sizes and suspension and expulsion rates?

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4. Is there a relationship between youth being suspended and expelled and youth in the youth justice system?
5. What is the cost impact to reaching youth at-risk before coming into the youth justice system?
6. Can government money be saved by addressing issues with at-risk youth before they come into the youth justice system?

These questions will be addressed by reviewing literature on the impacts of suspension and expulsion on youth and an analysis of community demographics to determine the influence of school discipline on Peterborough youth. Reviewing the policies implemented in the last 15 years will also be included to assist in understanding the changes in Ontario that influenced suspension and expulsion use in schools and laid the foundation for the current rates of suspension and expulsion today. Once influencing factors are determined, Peterborough community data and issues within school policies can be analyzed to reveal changes that need to be made to positively impact youth outcomes in the future.

## POLICY BACKGROUND

In the 1980s, Zero Tolerance (ZT) school discipline philosophies sprouted up in the United States involving policies that mandated the use of predetermined punitive consequences for any instances of misbehaviour regardless of the circumstances, level of behaviour, and situational context (Bailey, 2017; Sander, 2010). The origin of these policies was rooted in the “war on drugs” and “tough-on-crime” political agendas being backed by the US government at the time, but the societal push for these policies amplified across North America following the Columbine Shooting in 1999 as an unyielding emphasis on safety at any cost was adopted as the education system’s guiding principle (Bailey, 2017, 149). Once the policies following this principle had been implemented in schools, an explosion occurred in the number of youths being incarcerated across the US and literature emerged studying the effects of ZT policies on youth delinquency. In the 1990s, ZT policies began gaining traction in Canadian public policy debates when societal misconceptions inflating the rates of violent youth crime incited policy reform (Bailey, 2017). The transition to ZT policies began with the implementation of the Violence-Free Schools Policy in 1994 by Ontario’s Ministry of Education (MOE) which involved a “2-part framework that required all school boards to have a violence-free set of policies by September 1995” and “had to include codes of conduct with established consequences for unacceptable behaviour and outline

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provisions for the mandatory reporting of violent incidents to the police” and the MOE (Findlay, 2008, 129).

After 15 years the MOE implemented ZT policies through the Safe Schools Act (SSA) amendment to the Education Act in 2000. The main changes to the Education Act that resulted from the addition of the SSA were increased power given to the principals of schools allowing them to “expel students and create mandatory provisions for situations requiring suspension, expulsion and/or police involvement with few discretionary factors,” teachers were also given the power to suspend and expel students, and the list for infractions demanding suspension and expulsion were extensive (Bailey, 2017, 153). Within the first year of implementing the SSA, suspensions and expulsions across the province increased by 1.49% and 0.06% respectively, and after 4 years suspensions increased from 5.11% to 7.03% and expulsions increased from 106 to 1908 students (Winton, 2013, 474).

In 2005, an amendment to the Education Act called Student Success: Learning to 18 (SS/L18) was introduced. This amendment sought to address decreasing graduation rates and had goals of increasing Ontario’s graduation rate to 85% and reducing the early leaving rate. SS/L18 included a number of initiatives: “an expansion of cooperative education; e-learning; dual credits; school-college-work initiatives; special high skills majors; a focus on transitions from elementary to high school; credit rescue and recovery; apprenticeship programs; teaching resources for numeracy and literacy; dedicated personnel; and re-engagement support for returning students” that had a drastic positive impact on the graduation rate over time and also reduced suspension and expulsion rates slightly (Winton, 2013, 472). Although the suspension and expulsion rates still continued to increase Canada lacked any substantial data on the inequity the ZT policies produced in local school environments. This did not stop the Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC) from making a complaint against the MOE as they used the abundant US data portraying the disproportionate negative impacts to suggest the rights of children in Ontario were being ignored. In 2005, the OHRC initiated a complaint against the MOE alleging that the application of the SSA was disparately affecting racialized and disabled students by preventing them from accessing their education and/or terrorizing them in the school environment (Bailey, 2017).

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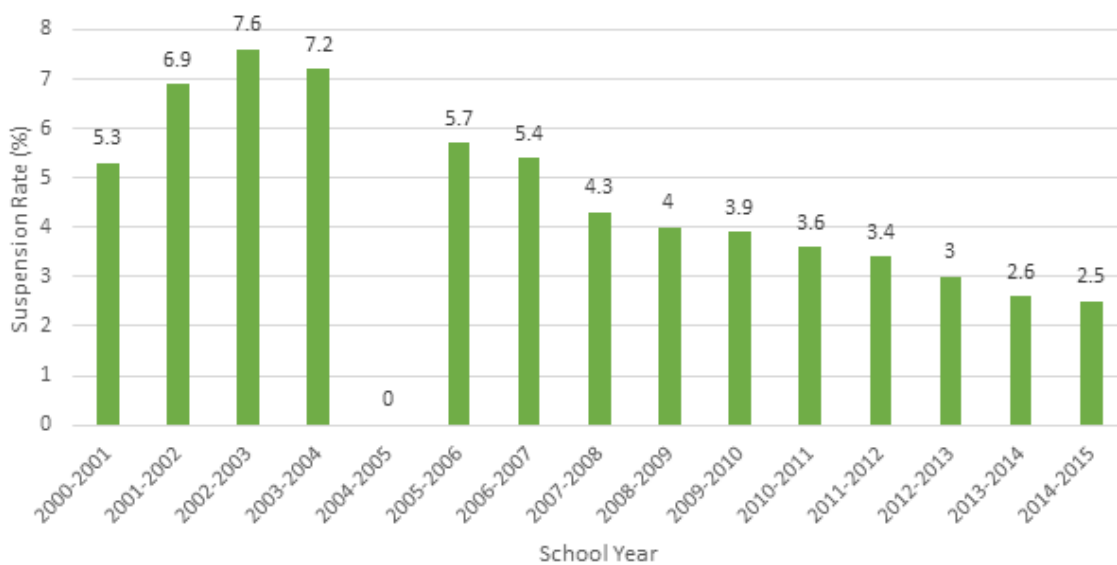
After the OHRC complaint was settled in 2007, Bill 212 (An Act to Amend the Education Act in Respect of Behaviour Discipline and Safety) was implemented. It contained the following: more discretion when reviewing incidents of misbehaviour in schools; a change in the wording around instances that would warrant a suspension/expulsion to make those practices a suggestion rather than mandatory; the inclusion of bullying and off-school misbehaviour as infractions for suspension/expulsion consideration; and mandating that at least one program to be available for all suspended/expelled students (Findlay, 2008; Winton, 2013). New mitigating factors were outlined for mandatory consideration which included: “the student’s history; whether a progressive discipline approach has been used with the student; whether the activity for which the student may be or is being suspended or expelled for was related to any harassment of him/her because of his or her race, ethnic origin, religion, disability, gender, or sexual orientation or to any other harassment; how the suspension or expulsion would affect the student’s ongoing education; and the student’s age” (Winton, 2013, 477). Another important change was the removal of power from teachers to issue suspensions or expulsions; under the amendment, only principals could issue limited expulsions. Further revisions were applied in 2008 through the Education Amendment Act (Progressive Discipline and School Safety) which reverted back to more mandatory suspensions for any misbehaviours involving weapons, any form of assault, or possession of drugs which only used mitigating factors to determine the length of the suspension or if an expulsion was also necessary (Bailey, 2017). In 2009, the OME released Ontario’s Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy which outlined a new, inclusive curriculum that was meant to create positive, harassment-free school environments. A second Education Amendment Act (Keeping Our Kids Safe at School) was applied in 2010 which required board employees to report violent incidents to the principal, principals to contact the parents of the victimized students, and a general increase in communication between school staff, students and parents (Bailey, 2017).

In 2012, the Accepting Schools Act was implemented to include cyber bullying in bullying prevention programs, the expansion of the list for mandatory suspensions with the addition of activities that were “motivated by identity-based bias, prejudice, or hate” which do not require any discretion from the principal, and required School Climate Surveys every two years (Bailey, 2017, 171). The continuing inclusion of infractions

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that require mandatory suspension provide principals and school boards with ZT policies to prolong the use of punitive measures rather than restorative or preventative practices that could limit the use of suspension/expulsion to address misbehaviour. In 2013, the Model Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan was released to identify how “biases, prejudice and hate can lead to bullying” to create awareness of the factors that contribute to “safe, inclusive, caring and accepting school climates” while also teaching students how they can help prevent bullying (Bailey, 2017, 173). Which leads us to the current state of the MOE’s policies surrounding school climates and discipline.

Figure 1: Change in the Rate of Suspensions in Ontario Over Time



(Ministry of Education, 2010a; Ministry of Education, 2010b; Ministry of Education, 2010c; Ministry of Education, 2019a; Ministry of Education, 2019b)  
 Note: Ontario suspension data for the 2004-2005 school year was unavailable.

As seen in Figure 1, the implementation of the SSA prompted a drastic increase in the number of students suspended throughout Ontario, but the policy changes made after the OHRC complaint was made has been steadily reducing the number of suspensions each year. Key contributions to the initial increase in suspensions that must be highlighted are the use of ZT policies and the lack of preventative or restorative practices which were later removed and introduced (respectively) to induce the gradual decrease in suspensions. Important changes in policy that decreased suspension and expulsion rates included the increased necessity to keep



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students in school or alternative learning programs (SS/L18), due process when determining appropriate disciplinary actions for misbehaviour rather than mandatory punitive procedures (Bill 212), and reforming school climates to be more accepting and inclusive through curriculum changes (Model Bullying Prevention & Intervention Plan). Each of these new policies or initiatives utilise suggested changes from relevant academic literature to reduce the number of suspensions and misbehaviour incidents; each of the implemented approaches will be explored thoroughly in the literature review section as they relate to the research questions and purpose of this paper.

DYSS has commissioned this project to determine (i) if there is a relationship between suspension/expulsion and youth crime, (ii) if increased class size is related to suspension/expulsion rates (or levels of misbehaviour), (iii) if there is a need for preventative services in Peterborough, and (iv) if there will be a change in suspended and expelled youth demographics in the near future. To address the relationship between suspension/expulsion and youth crime a literature review of the current and past information on the topic has been conducted to determine if research shows evidence of a direct correlation. Highlighting different risk factors that lead to youth participating in delinquent activity further develops the relationship between suspension/expulsion and youth crime by exploring individual, family and peer, community and school environment influences that contribute to misbehaviour. These factors will be used when analyzing Peterborough demographics, school policies, and suspension/expulsion data to determine whether Peterborough requires preventative services and whether there will be any change in suspended and expelled youth demographics without changing current conditions. Within these factors, information on the influence of class size was also considered. DYSS wanted to know if an increase in class sizes will affect the suspension/expulsion rates in Peterborough schools because of semi-recent policy propositions by the Ontario government to gradually increase the maximum class sizes to 40 students for grades 4-12 over the next 4 years (Stone & Alphonso, 2019). Determining the influence of class size will be crucial for determining future outcomes for at-risk students if class sizes are increased over time, but determining if there are also underlying issues within the Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board prior to this potential change is also relevant to future outcomes.

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# LITERATURE REVIEW

## RISK FACTORS

All of the literature that addresses at-risk and criminal youth conclude that misbehaving youth are influenced by a combination of different risk factors or internal and external stressors that lead them to expressing their emotions of distress through misbehaviour. It is important to ensure all parents and teaching staff are aware that cognition does not precede misbehaviour, as youth rarely knowingly choose to misbehave, and choosing to address their behaviour with a punitive method based on the idea that the youth was aware of each aspect of their actions (i.e. future consequences and impacts on others) would only exacerbate the misbehaviour (Findlay, 2008). The risk factors can be subdivided into 5 different categories including: individual factors, family or home life conditions, school experience and conditions, peer relations, and societal/community conditions. Most of the more intrapersonal and direct factors, such as individual and family stressors, are universally acknowledged as significantly influential when determining the root causes of misbehaviour in youth while more external factors tend to be controversial when determining their influence on youth behaviour.

Individual factors that at-risk and delinquent youth tend to exhibit include: low academic achievement, interpersonal aggressiveness, poor social skills, mental health issues, low cognitive abilities and/or learning disabilities (Findlay, 2008; Hartnagel & Krahn, 1989; Hinton, Sheperis, & Sims, 2003; Knowles, Eccles, Daiches, & Bowers, 2016; Sander, 2010; Winton, 2013). Low academic achievement isn't a causal factor but does attribute to ongoing juvenile crime and delinquency as a youth's level of achievement is linked to their school experience which influences their ability to graduate (Sander, 2010; Winton, 2013). At-risk youth tend to show antisocial or oppositional behaviours that manifest as aggression, poor social skills such as low levels of empathy, and learning disabilities or academic problems (Hinton et al., 2003). These behaviours can be caused by internal issues such as mental disabilities, mental health issues, or brain injuries. They can also be caused by external influences such as poor coping strategies displayed by family members which can include "aggression towards others, self-harming behaviours, and cognitive blocking of painful and difficult experiences" (Knowles, et al., 2016, 448). These factors tend to be unanimously supported as significant in the behavioural development of youth, either individually or in combination with one another, but there are some individual factors that are more

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controversial in the Canadian context versus the American context.

Most US literature on ZT policies focuses on the idea that these policies disproportionately impact Black and Hispanic youth on the basis of race which leads their physical traits to become determining factors in their likelihood to complete high school, have increased involvement in juvenile crime, or exhibit delinquent behaviour. As previously mentioned, the OHRC used this US conclusion to initiate its complaint against the MOE, but it is important to keep in mind they did not have access to real Canadian data to rely on (Bailey, 2017; Dupper, 1998; Findlay, 2008; James & Taylor, 2010). Within several years we see the emergence of Canadian studies including Zhang (2011) who conducted an empirical study of data collected from the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth which included youth aged 12-15 (boys and girls) from 1996-2000 to determine the correlates of delinquent youth outcomes. It was determined that minority status was not a significant correlate for boy's outcomes but did have some influence on the probability of interpersonal fights for girls (Zhang, 2011). Although this is only a single study, the analysis of empirical evidence showing no correlation could be significant in addressing delinquency in Canada and implicates a significant cultural/societal difference between Canada and the US that should be considered when addressing suspension/expulsion rates issues and developing preventative services for at-risk youth.

Typical family conditions experienced by at-risk youth include low emotional cohesion, poor parental management and monitoring skills, poor parental problem-solving skills, poor communication skills, socioeconomic adversity, physical, emotional or sexual abuse, substance misuse, and a non-intact family structure (Hinton et al., 2003; Knowles et al., 2016). Parenting styles have shown a consistent impact on youth behavioural/emotional outcomes and most poor parenting skills stem from some other underlying issue with the parent(s) or guardian(s) such as poor communication skills, mental health issues, substance abuse, and/or poor coping strategies (Zhang, 2011). These poor displays of emotional management from key role models are reflected in the external expressions of distress by some delinquent youth (i.e. children who witness domestic violence may dominate other children and be overly aggressive) (Knowles et al., 2016). Some other common characteristics of communication within families with delinquent children include intense and/or long-standing conflicts within the family, confusion or a lack of differentiation on the influence of the parents' and the children's

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decisions, a lack of positive effects or expressions with coercion used frequently, misunderstood communication attempts, and 1 or 2 family members dominating most of the communication time (Hinton et al., 2003). It was found that families with an absent or erratic paternal influence have children with more influence in decision-making within the family. Canadian data only, however, links non-intact families as significant for boys' school performance and not for girls' outcomes (Hinton et al., 2003; Zhang, 2011). These discrepancies between delinquent boys and girls are apparent in several aspects of each risk factor which could imply different reactions to life stressors between the sexes that may need to be addressed through different services.

Although not as crucial as parenting style, communication and instances of trauma, household income is associated with cognitive, behavioural, and physical health outcomes for youth. Higher household income is positively related to above-average school performance, but it also is related to a higher probability of fights for girls. In the opposing instance of requiring social assistance boys and girls become more involved in violent crime with boys also involved with more property crimes (Zhang, 2011). The reasoning for these correlations were never explored in the literature but understanding how income affects the lives of youth could be an important topic that may assist in forming programs for youth struggling with their financial situations at home.

A youth's school experience is considered one of the most important external influences as it can impact multiple individual factors including academic performance, social skills, and the type of "locus of control" youths develop from interacting with authority figures (Dupper, 1998, 356; Winton, 2013). When punitive disciplinary practices are used frequently, especially in a ZT manner, youth will tend to view authority figures as unjust and begin to perceive that they no longer have control over their own actions or choices. Overbearing authority figures manufacture an external locus of control in youth that is associated with aggression, lack of responsibility/accountability, and increased misbehavior rather than an internal locus of control where the youth is able to understand they are responsible for their own actions and future (Dupper, 1998). Having an internal locus of control is also considered necessary for academic competence, independence and social maturity. Ensuring that punitive measures are reserved for serious offences and the youth is provided an explanation of the reason for the punishment along with methods for improvement are necessary means to prevent further instigating

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misbehaviour issues by teaching delinquent or at-risk youth why their misbehaviour is unacceptable and how to cope with their emotions properly (Dupper, 1998; Findlay, 2008).

School factors that affect school quality and experience for youth include “teachers’ lack of cultural competency, racism, cultural inappropriateness of the curriculum, negative school culture, lack of support services, negative relationships with teachers and admins, bullying, and a lack of teacher support” (Winton, 2013, 470). Some school factors are more controversial in their influence on youth behaviour such as school/class size, teacher education attainment/quality, and the type of school which all tend to be conventional measures of school quality. Winton (2013) considers large schools and class sizes to be significant factors in determining youth behaviour or if a student is at-risk for not completing high school. Winton does not support this claim with empirical or qualitative evidence thus making it difficult to determine any real effects on youth behaviour. Zhang (2011) considers the conventional measures listed previously as insignificant for youth outcomes while the impact of group activities in the classroom indicate positive school outcomes and reductions in criminal activity among youth. Education expenditure is also associated with less crime for boys suggesting the importance of appropriately allocating resources in the school environment (Zhang, 2011). Peer relations are strongly associated with the school environment as the most important peer interactions that influence youth behaviour occur in the classroom (Zhang, 2011; Hinton et al., 2003; Knowles et al., 2016). If youth become associated with other delinquent peers or lack substantial connections with other peers then behavioural outbursts become more common, although these relationships are not as significant within neighbourhoods or communities (Hinton et al., 2003; Zhang, 2011).

Community or neighbourhood influences are also controversial as conclusions regarding their significance vary. Some articles claim that community influences such as “socially unstable, poor, high crime, gang-ridden and unsafe neighbourhoods and areas with a high percentage of single-parent families, adult early leavers, ethnic/minority and blue-collar families and high unemployment rates” are directly related to poor youth outcomes whilst other articles suggest these influences are filtered through family characteristics (Winton, 2013, 470; Hinton et al., 2003). Zhang (2011) considers most community influences to have little significance in youth outcomes and any significance found is removed once other family and individual variables are controlled for.

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## SUSPENSIONS & EXPULSIONS

The use of punitive measures such as suspension and expulsion tend to fail in addressing misbehaviour and enhance other risk factors in at-risk youths' lives (Dupper, 1998; Kupchik & Catlaw, 2015; Ryan & Zoldy, 2011; Wolf & Kupchik, 2017). The use of suspensions under ZT policies was strongly associated with increasing rates of crime and delinquency, instilling distrust towards adults in youth, and teaching youth that there is a lack of justice or fairness in education systems and other levels of authority (Findlay, 2008; Kupchik & Catlaw, 2015). ZT policies were originally meant to assert the school's authority for the sake of implementing the rules rather than for the betterment of students which only lowered students' self-esteem and created feelings of anger towards authority (Findlay, 2008; Kupchik & Catlaw, 2015). Discipline strategies that serve only as punishment, such as suspension or expulsion, without an instructional element have not been shown to decrease inappropriate behaviour and does not change the conditions that triggered the misbehaviour as youth are only taught to comply with the school's authority (Kupchik & Catlaw, 2015; Ryan & Zoldy, 2011). This goes against the "Procedural Justice Theory" that determines citizens are "more likely to abide by laws and follow legal authorities they perceive to be just" and instead enforces perceptions of unfair policies that deteriorate the school social climate (Wolf & Kupchik, 2017, 411). These ZT strategies are what manufactured the "School-to-prison pipeline" metaphor which represents the phenomenon where students who are subjected to exclusionary school discipline are removed from positive school connections and academic success and are instead lead to increased levels of criminal activity to be placed in juvenile and criminal justice systems (Sander, 2010; Wolf & Kupchik, 2017). Even without the use of ZT strategies the use of suspension and expulsion as methods of punishment still inflict multiple immediate and future individual and school environment stressors that negatively impact youth outcomes.

Most of the literature views suspension as "substituting collaborative problem-solving for the exclusion and physical removal of students" typically as an easier alternative that utilises fewer resources for the school (Kupchik & Catlaw, 2015, 95). Students who are suspended or expelled experience exclusion from the school environment, which prevents those students from learning alongside their peers with their teachers' guidance (Kupchik & Catlaw, 2015; Ryan & Zoldy, 2011; Sander, 2010; Wolf & Kupchik, 2017). Exclusionary practices are found to have direct associations with decreased school connection, academic failure,

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trouble returning to school, poor relationships with teachers, negative attitudes towards education and authority figures, increased misconduct, dropping out of school, grade retention, and future juvenile justice system involvement (Findlay, 2008; Kupchik & Catlaw, 2015; Ryan & Zoldy, 2011; Sander, 2010; Winton, 2013; Wolf & Kupchik, 2017). The impacts of exclusionary punitive practices are caused by miscommunication between teachers and students and a lack of student involvement in their own improvement strategies which prevent a constructive or therapeutic response to problematic behaviour (Kupchik & Catlaw, 2015). In the US, more than 30% of students who had been suspended had dropped out nationwide and nearly 1/3rd of juvenile offenders in residential facilities had been expelled from school which indicates how effective suspension and expulsion are at influencing positive future behaviour (Findlay, 2008; Sander, 2010).

Exclusionary practices also reinforce labelling theory which is when a student is publicly labeled as a deviant and they have difficulty with shedding the label. Labelling can lead to youth embracing the label as part of their identity or fate, which further alienates them through heightened monitoring and presumptions of future involvement in misbehaviour by authority figures (Findlay, 2008; Wolf & Kupchik, 2017). School disengagement and alienation may also impact youths' long-term mental health and negatively influence future democratic participation by socializing students into docility and obedience (Kupchik & Catlaw, 2015; Wolf & Kupchik, 2017). The school experience has powerful socializing effects that are meant to prepare youth for future social, political, and economic roles, but the use of exclusionary school punishment teaches students they have little social value or social capital and shapes long-term behaviours well into adulthood (Kupchik & Catlaw, 2015; Wolf & Kupchik, 2017). These stressors caused by school environments enable students to permanently drop out of school which leads to unemployment, aggression, higher rates of crime, victimization and incarceration in adulthood (Hartnagel & Krahn, 1989; Wolf & Kupchik, 2017).

## CLASS SIZE

The literature surrounding the effects and impacts of class size on student behaviour and academic achievement are heavily mixed and tend to be biased depending on the occupation or political stance the researcher or writer has. Multiple studies and articles show that smaller class sizes increase academic achievement levels from kindergarten to grade 3,

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but the size of the increase is contradictory as it is either claimed to be a vast or modest change depending on the article (Addonizio & Phelps, 2000; Guillemette, 2005; Januszka & Dixon-Krauss, 2008). If the increase in academic achievement isn't significant then attempting to transition to smaller class sizes is more dangerous than helpful as the process to reduce class sizes allows for a decrease in teacher quality which is unanimously considered a more important factor in determining academic success and school environment influence (Addonizio & Phelps, 2000; Guillemette, 2005; Januszka & Dixon-Krauss, 2008; Zhang, 2011). There is also the claim that smaller classes can be beneficial to young children from disadvantaged backgrounds and classrooms with students who have low to moderate learning disabilities (Addonizio & Phelps, 2000; OECTA, 2018). There are also claims that smaller class sizes prevent disruptions in the classroom and allow teachers to manage misbehaviour easily, but a Canadian narrative analysis shows that disruption levels are consistent in all sizes of class indicating the lack of significance class size has in determining behaviour (Guillemette, 2005; Januszka & Dixon-Krauss, 2008). Considering the contradictory nature of the available evidence and the lack of data from the US or Canada that could be more applicable to the community-based portion of this project, the influence of class sizes will be removed to prevent hypothetical discussions or assumptions from being included.

## PREVENTATIVE PROGRAMS & SERVICES

Schools are considered to be primary settings for early intervention and prevention for at-risk youth where better outcomes are seen through positive school experiences and connections to the school environment (Sander, 2010). To provide these experiences exclusionary punitive practices must be reduced, but preventative measures used must also be universal in nature to ensure these alternative practices are not exhibiting exclusionary traits as well (Winton, 2013). Separate behavioural classrooms and special disciplinary processes, along with individual-level interventions like psychotherapy and social casework, have not been shown to be helpful in reducing aggressive and disruptive behaviour (Sander, 2010; Hinton et al., 2003). Recent methods of providing an overarching reach to all students to prevent misbehaviour is through the creation of respectful learning environments where respect, tolerance, and empathy are encouraged through the curriculum (Bailey, 2017; Findlay, 2008). Group activities in the classroom are proven to increase social capital among all students as youth are able to see themselves as valuable members of a



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group where increased competence and social adjustment can occur (Zhang, 2011; Dupper, 1998). Increasing student engagement in school-related planning, decision-making, problem-solving, and other activities that affect them provide students the feeling of being active, “rights-bearing” individuals that have control over their lives which can prevent misbehaviour from starting or prevent misbehaviour from happening again (Kupchik & Catlaw, 2015, 99).

There are many evidence-based practices that can replace traditional suspension practices such as positive behavioural supports, inclusive social climates, behavioural counseling in school, investigations of circumstances, restorative justice, and progressive discipline (Kupchik & Catlaw, 2015; Dupper, 1998; Findlay, 2008; Ryan & Ruddy, 2015; Ryan & Zoldy, 2011). Restorative justice is a consistently referred to method of discipline that engages the student in peer mediation and conflict resolution and creates an educative moment out of misbehaviour incidents to repair relationships (Findlay, 2008; Ryan & Ruddy, 2015). An important distinction with alternative discipline approaches is that they have a higher likelihood of inducing long-term effects when they occur within the school environment. When implementing these strategies teachers who are accustomed to ZT policies may have power balance issues when transitioning to new forms of discipline which may cause unforeseen issues in alternative discipline methods (Ryan & Ruddy, 2015; Sander, 2010).

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**ANALYSIS****KPRDSB SUSPENSION & EXPULSION DATA**

The Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board (KPRDSB) has maintained suspension and expulsion rates above the Ontario provincial average since at least the school year of 2007-2008 and seems to be slightly increasing in recent years. Once the OHRC complaint was settled in 2007, the suspension and expulsion rates of the province and KPRDSB have gradually been decreasing over time, although KPRDSB has seen some small increases in both punitive practices in the most recent years as seen in Figures 2, 3, 4 and 5 (Ministry of Education, 2019a). Determining the cause for these increases will be difficult, but it is most likely related to some sort of internal policy or practice changes by KPRDSB that have impacted the school environment as a risk factor. An interesting trend in the suspension and expulsion data from KPRDSB is the prevalence of special needs students being included in both rates. In Figure 2 special needs students represent typically 40% of all suspended students and in Figure 3 they represent typically 50% of all expelled students with the highest representation at 80% in the 2014-2015 school year. The high rates of students with special needs being suspended and expelled reflect the literature that claims youths with learning disabilities tend to exhibit delinquent behaviour due to academic difficulties and sociability issues (Findlay, 2008; Hartnagel & Krahn, 1989; Hinton, Sheperis, & Sims, 2003; Knowles, Eccles, Daiches, & Bowers, 2016; Sander, 2010; Winton, 2013). These statistics could indicate some lack in appropriate education programs, educator knowledge or preventative services within schools to address academically or socially struggling students. The group with the highest representation overall is male students and it seems approximately 30% of all suspension cases involve repeat offenders, as seen in Figure 2.

Figure 3 shows that expulsion cases doubled over a 5-year period suggesting a lack of progressive principles recommended in the Ontario Education Act. The significant difference between the Ontario suspension and expulsion rates and the rates coming from the KPRDSB over the 5-year period is shown clearly in Figures 4 and 5. The KPRDSB consistently maintains suspension rates 2-3 times higher than the provincial average and expulsion rates up to 6 times the provincial average. The highest rates of suspension and expulsion occur in the most recent school year of 2016-2017 which is interesting because of the notable decrease in the total number of students attending secondary schools, as seen in Table 1.

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It seems that although the number of students enrolled is decreasing, the number of suspension and expulsion cases are increasing. It could be assumed that as student enrollment decreases then school expenditure per student increases, but the number of students being suspended and expelled would be decreasing if expenditure per student increased. Either school funding is decreasing overall as student enrollment decreases or expenditure is being distributed in a way that is harming students' capabilities to engage positively with the school environment and causing increases in the use of punitive discipline. The use of punitive disciplinary actions increases the likelihood of more delinquency and youth crime in Peterborough, so determining the root causes for these increases is pertinent to initiating positive changes and applying appropriate prevention strategies.

Figure 2: KPRDSB Secondary School Suspensions Between 2012-2017

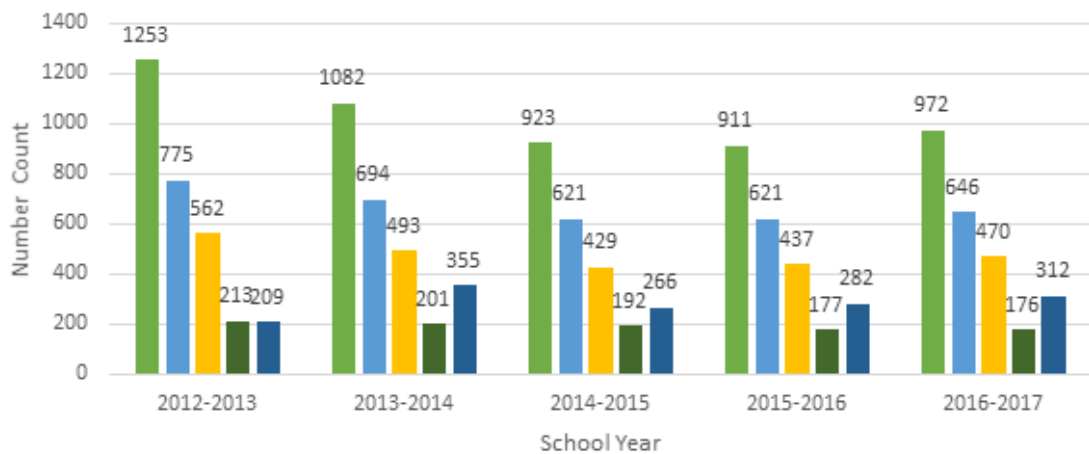
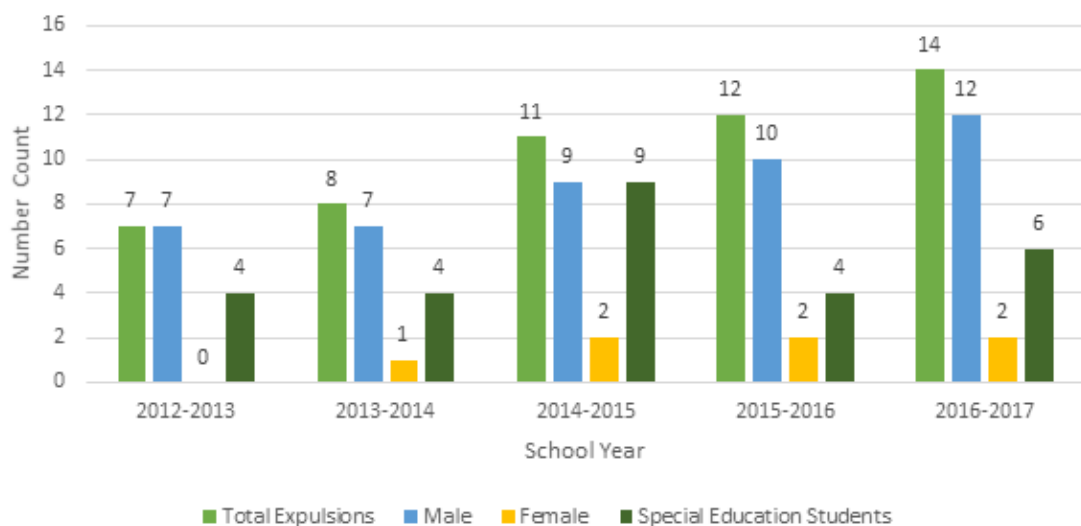


Figure 3: KPRDSB Secondary School Expulsions Between 2012-2017



(S. Pickett, personal communication, February 14, 2020)

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Table 1: The Total Number of Secondary School Students Enrolled Under the KPRDSB for Each School Year Between 2012-2017

School Year	Number of Secondary Students Enrolled Under the KPRDSB
2012-2013	12225
2013-2014	11184
2014-2015	10065
2015-2016	N/A
2016-2017	9226

Figure 4: Ontario Total Suspension Rates Compared to KPRDSB Secondary School Suspension Rates Between 2012-2017

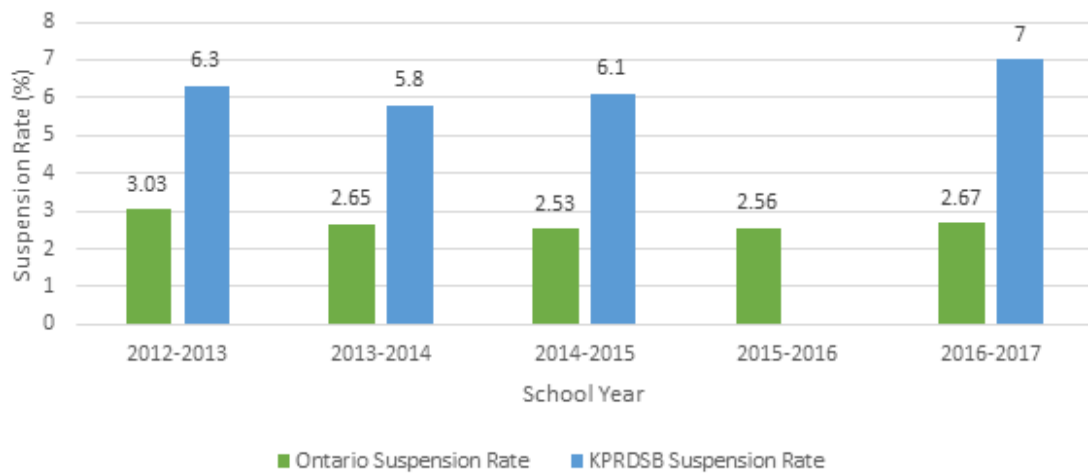
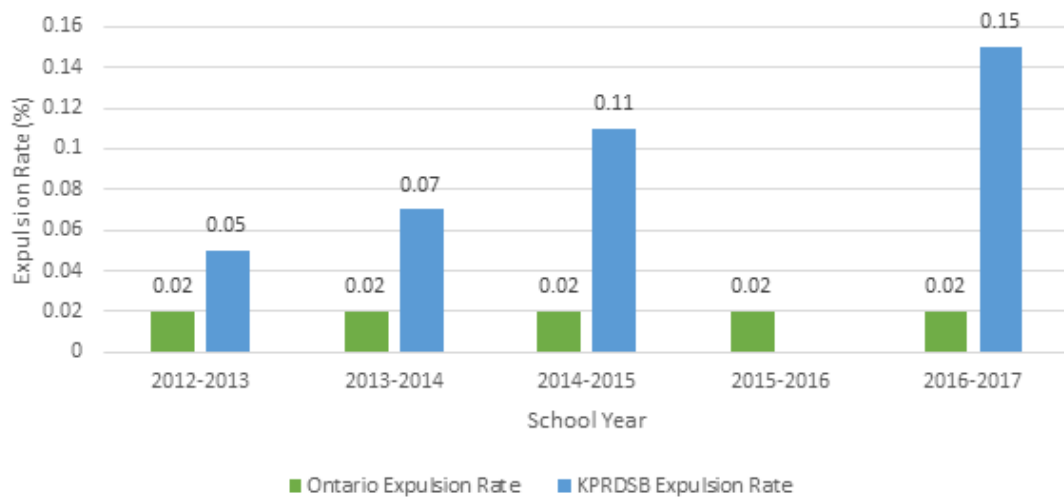


Figure 5: Ontario Total Expulsion Rates Compared to KPRDSB Secondary School Expulsion Rates Between 2012-2017



(Ministry of Education, 2019a; KPRDSB, 2012; KPRDSB, 2013; KPRDSB, 2015; KPRDSB, 2017b) Note: Data for the KPRDSB suspension and expulsion rates from the 2015-2016 school year were unavailable.

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## PETERBOROUGH DEMOGRAPHICS

Although issues within the school environment may end up being the most influential factors, analysing the typical characteristics of Peterborough families from available demographic data can also provide some insight into the large amount of delinquent youth under the KPRDSB. As discussed in the literature review, family structure is a significant factor in outcomes for boys and Peterborough has a large amount of single-parent families (Zhang, 2011). Around 31% of all families in Peterborough have a single-parent and 78% of them have a single mother as the lone parent, as seen in Table 2. Considering the trend of delinquent youth coming from single-parent and typically single mother households the demographics of Peterborough could be relevant to the over-representation of male youth being suspended and expelled as shown in Figures 2 and 3 (Hinton et al., 2003). The average income for single-parent families is also significantly lower than families with 2 parents placing an added risk factor to those homes as lower income is correlated with lower academic achievement and both boys and girls are more likely to become involved with violent crime if social assistance is required (Zhang, 2011). Most children are also considered to be in low-income status households, shown in Table 2, further solidifying the importance of income as an influential factor on youth in Peterborough. Peterborough has a small number of immigrants compared to their population size and an even smaller number of visible minorities who only represent 0.04% of the population. The suspension and expulsion data provided by KPRDSB does not show racial representation in punitive cases so this factor of risk cannot be further explored. Given that American data show a relationship between race and suspensions and expulsions, it is possible that one exists in Canada but without data we can go no further in developing and understanding this.

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Table 2: Relevant Demographics of Peterborough County in 2016

Category	Total	Male	Female
Total population	138236	N/A	N/A
Total population (0-19 years)	27260	10150	9745
Total families	20920	N/A	N/A
Couples with children	14430	N/A	N/A
Total lone-parent families by sex of parent	6490	1395	5100
Average total income of couple economic families with children in 2015 (\$)	125138	N/A	N/A
Average total income of lone-parent economic families in 2015 (\$)	55186	N/A	N/A
Low-income status in 2015 for the population in private households to whom low-income concepts are applicable (0 to 17 years)	23625	12015	11615
Number of immigrants	11410	N/A	N/A
Total visible minority population	5905	N/A	N/A

(Statistics Canada, 2016)

Peterborough also has an issue with substance misuse among both adults and youth populations as outlined in the Peterborough Drug Strategy (PDS). As of 2009, adult drinkers in Peterborough were the most at risk for experiencing severe harms from alcohol consumption for engaging in heavy (or binge) drinking at 9.1% higher than the provincial average. The most common illicit drugs identified when people seek treatment in Peterborough are crack/cocaine at 21% and cannabis at 26%, since cannabis was still illegal in all capacities in 2009 (Knightly, 2012). Intermediate students in Peterborough (grades 7-12) had an alcohol consumption average 10% higher than the provincial average (56% vs. 46%

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respectively) and those students also engaged in binge drinking more than Ontario students at 78% versus 71%, respectively. Around 29% of high school students in Peterborough used marijuana where the average age students tried marijuana for the first time was 14 years old (Knightly, 2012). These types of statistics are currently unavailable for recent years in Peterborough specifically, but in 2018-2019 471 people aged 24 and younger went to Fourcast (Peterborough's main addiction treatment center) to receive assistance in treating addictions to problem substances (Annual Report, 2019). The PDS lists the people with the highest risk of addiction are youth who are disconnected from school, people and youth who have experienced adversity in their childhood, LGBT+ youth, people with mental health issues, and people who are in detention centres, jail or prison (Knightly, 2012).

### KPRDSB POLICES & PRACTICES

The policies and regulations created by the KPRDSB should be indicative of the foundational elements of the school environment in Peterborough that would contribute to increased or decreased rates of delinquency. The education policies and regulations currently used by the KPRDSB read verbatim to the Education Act amendments between 2007-2013. In the case of Bill 212, the KPRDSB Safe, Caring and Restorative Schools (SCRS) policy ensures discretion is used when determining punishments for students through investigations into the circumstances leading to misbehaviour and that suspension and expulsion are not mandatory measures against misbehaviour but are to be considered in certain instances (Findlay, 2008; Winton, 2013; KPRDSB, 1998a). Progressive discipline strategies are also included from the 2008 Education Amendment Act along with an emphasis on increasing inclusivity in the overall curriculum and school environment, as described in the 2009 Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy. There are also repeated references made to the board's intolerance of bullying and to prevention strategies that reflect both the 2012 Accepting Schools Act and 2013 Model Bullying Prevention and Intervention Act (Bailey, 2017; KPRDSB, 1998a). The only instance of potentially problematic phrasing occurs in the suspension section of the SCRS policy where the response to incidents indicates "appropriate action must consistently be taken by schools to address behaviours that are contrary to provincial and Board Code of Conduct" (KPRDSB, 1998a, 1). The use of "consistently" in describing responses to individual cases is problematic because it can be interpreted as prescribing equality among cases that should actually be dealt with

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equitably to ensure all circumstances are considered appropriately in the decision-making process. The rest of the SCRS policy reflects that investigations and discretion are used in the development of responses to incidents of misbehaviour so this interpretation may not be used often, but the potential for the interpretation to occur is still present. Since the SCRS policy contains all the appropriate information, phrasing and strategies, determining what is occurring in the school environment to continue the increasing trend seen in Figures 2 and 3 becomes more difficult.

In the SCRS policy there is the inclusion of a “School Well-Being Team” (SWBT) meant to further foster positive school environments in every school under the KPRDSB. This SWBT must consist of “at least one student, one teacher, one parent, one support staff member, one community member, and the principal,” but the policy fails to explain in detail what this team does specifically in the school environment (KPRDSB, 1998c, 2). There are no other references to this team on their board website which may indicate that they perform no other purpose than to plan universal strategies to continue promoting an inclusive school environment rather than attempting individualized prevention strategies for at-risk students. This type of school team has the potential to increase school quality and provide better individual support for struggling students if the appropriate programs are assigned to the team, but for privacy reasons the team would have to be reconfigured to remove student, parent and community representatives. The SCRS also lists preventative practices used before issuing suspensions or expulsions such as character education and mentorship programs (KPRDSB, 1998b). Character education is the KPRDSB’s name for the insertion of inclusivity and respect in the school environment by focusing on individual characteristics such as honesty, integrity, empathy, fairness, perseverance, courage, optimism, and personal responsibility to encourage responsible citizenship within schools (Character Education, 2004). The mentorship program presented by the KPRDSB is for students who have committed crimes who are sent to participate in the program as an extrajudicial measure (KPRDSB, 2017a). This program has been shown to improve academic performance and reduce the probability of the youth participating in violent crime (Gougeon & McGee, 2009). If the mentorship program was available and recommended for at-risk youth as well, the number of youths being recommended to the program as an extrajudicial measure would be reduced significantly as it would prevent youths from committing criminal offences by providing a caring role model that is capable of teaching them coping mechanisms and paying attention to their needs, especially if that



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type of role model is unavailable in their family environment. The majority of preventative and early intervention strategies are focused on the universal rather than the individual level, such as the extensive use of restorative practices seen in the SCRS and board website, which does help the overall student body perform better as a whole but fails to address struggling individuals who require further assistance.

When youth are suspended or expelled there is a mandatory program available called Long Term Suspension and Expulsion Program (LTSEP), in accordance with the Education Act, that provides students the option to participate in an alternative education program with a Student Action Plan where academic and non-academic supports are provided to ensure the student continues their education. Even if a student refuses this program, there are still academic options available and recommended by the school and board to provide the possibility for continuing the student's education (KPRDSB, 1998b). Providing students who have potentially committed punishable crimes with opportunities to continue their education is key to preventing future crime involvement as school completion is causally related to better outcomes for at-risk and criminal youth (Sander, 2010). Although it is important to have these types of programs ready and available, they should not need to be used as frequently as they currently are under the KPRDSB.

In 2017, KPRDSB implemented their Mental Health Strategy which aims to increase the mental health resources in schools across the KPRDSB by increasing training for teachers and support staff, increasing mental health information in classes, and providing informative media across school boards. Important new developments include the introduction of mental health workshops for parents on locally significant topics chosen by a Community Committee and the increase of mental health professionals in the school environment (KPRDSB, 2017c). The potential for these changes to have substantial positive effects on the rates of suspension and expulsion is highly probable because of the multi-systemic approach of providing parents or guardians with mental health resources that could tackle both family and individual mental health stressors at once, but the data for the years where this strategy is applied is currently unavailable so the effects cannot be analysed (Knowles et al., 2016).

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## DISCUSSION

### ISSUES & RECOMMENDATIONS

The majority of Peterborough youth have potential family, peer and individual factors that increase their risks of becoming involved in delinquency and youth crime from the general demographic statistics and presence of substance abuse in the county. The initial indicator that puts the Peterborough community at a higher risk for youth delinquency is the proportion of youth living in homes considered to be of low-economic status; Statistics Canada (2016) data put this number at a little over 23,000 youths. As mentioned previously, low income is associated with multiple outcomes for youth including lower academic achievement and can even result in increases in violent crime if social assistance is used. Although boys tend to perform better academically in low-income neighbourhoods, the association between academic performance and community income levels is also related to the communities consisting of new immigrants who have high values surrounding education attainment which Peterborough lacks currently, as seen in Table 2 (Zhang, 2011). With most youth already having a higher probability of lower academic performance the high percentage of single-parent families (31%) in Peterborough impacts youth outcomes as youth are more likely to leave school early, have poor school performance, and have behavioural problems from a lack of parental monitoring and/or parental authority in decision-making (Statistics Canada, 2016; Winton, 2013; Zhang, 2011).

The most important peer and family factors are displayed through the extensive misuse of drugs and addiction in both adult and youth populations in Peterborough. As described previously, adults in Peterborough abuse alcohol and participate in excessive (or binge) drinking at much higher rates than the provincial average along with the most common drugs people seek treatment for at addiction centers being cannabis and crack/cocaine. Intermediate students participate in alcohol consumption, binge drinking, and cannabis use at even higher rates than Peterborough adults indicating youth are mimicking the people they are around whether its close family members or delinquent peers who they can relate to (Knightly, 2012; Hinton et al., 2003; Knowles et al., 2016). Substance abuse is most likely being used as a coping mechanism learned from either parental figures or peers which further increases the probability of youth being suspended, expelled or dropping out and, in turn, increases the likelihood of those youth becoming involved in both the youth justice system and the criminal justice system once they are adults

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(Ryan & Zoldy, 2011; Winton, 2013; Wolf & Kupchik, 2017). When these factors are combined the result is that issues in the academic or school environment, e.g. academic difficulties, bullying, antagonistic relationships with teachers, have more influence on students who experience any combination of the previously mentioned family or peer stressors because of the already difficult to cope with conditions of their personal life or individual circumstances.

Although the school environment is attempting to be progressive and focus on the needs of the child, the current data reflects a disconnect between the school environment and the KPRDSB policies. The reason for this could be in a lack of available resources, specifically school funding, as it was determined that higher levels of education expenditure are related to better outcomes for youth (Zhang, 2011). Since each school under the KPRDSB cannot be individually evaluated for their school environment factors such as funding amounts and distribution, rates of bullying and substance abuse, universal preventative curriculum, counselling and preventative program quality and usage, the influence of schools in Peterborough cannot be determined as a crucial factor for youth outcomes currently, aside from the impacts of exclusionary discipline. Since the majority of youth in Peterborough have some sort of combination of family, peer and individual risk factors that impact their future outcomes, it should be KPRDSB's highest priority to ensure that no further risk factors are added from the school environment. KPRDSB should be going above and beyond in addressing individual needs through specialized programs or services while maintaining strong, universal preventative measures to properly solve the issue of increasing suspensions and expulsions in Peterborough schools.

Some recommendations for the KPRDSB include expanding the duties of the mandatory School Well-Being Teams (SWBT) in every school to include evidence-based preventative programs and services that address individual students. Since the team is already established it would be easier to adjust the purpose of the team rather than creating a whole new department or group to address these issues. KPRDSB could also work with DYSS and insert employees from DYSS as members of the SWBT to increase the quality of the services provided. The programs that could work best for schools under the KPRDSB include:

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1. Behaviour Education Plan (BEP): a check-in/check-out program where at-risk students meet with counselors to check on their conduct and are offered counselling, programs that teach social skills and anger management techniques. The student also creates a behaviour support plan. BEPs provide positive feedback and adult attention and works best alone without other prevention programs. Daily checklists are used that are signed by a staff member and parent to ensure the student is meeting their goals.
2. School Survival Group (SSG): comprised of focus group sessions to provide opportunities for students to make better choices. The primary goal to increase the participants' conscious awareness of the distorted social cognitions that underlie their unproductive school behaviour. Students learn that there are always choices and consequences for their actions. Students learn to think before they act and the difference between having feelings and acting on feelings. The goals of misbehaviour are outlined and allows for students to analyse their behaviour objectively.
3. Behaviour Contracting: creating a contract around the misbehaviour between the teacher and the student. An alternative education plan and a consequence are included to ensure the success of the student (Ryan & Zoldy, 2011).

Each of the listed preventative programs were chosen because of their low resource requirement and high effectiveness in reducing violent behaviour, increasing personal responsibility, social competence, positive school connections and education attainment (Ryan & Zoldy, 2011; Sander, 2010). Once these programs are implemented, the schools utilising these programs should also see a decrease in funds being used in suspension and expulsion processes as was noted in the Waterloo Region District School Board where nearly \$100,000 was saved in 2005-06 because of reduced suspensions and expulsions after implementing restorative justice policies (Findlay, 2008). These savings could also allow for increased expenditure in other areas of the school environment such as an increase in group-related activities in the classroom to increase social capital between students further reducing school risk factors (Zhang, 2011).

## FUTURE RESEARCH

There are many attributes of the school and home environments that need further research in the Peterborough context to determine their influence on suspensions and expulsions. Further statistics on the magnitude of substance abuse in Peterborough schools including the types of substances

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used, frequency, and the demographics of who is abusing substances are all relevant to addressing drug and alcohol use as a factor in youth outcomes. Further individual school analyses would also be helpful in determining if certain schools are applying universal preventative strategies appropriately and effectively as well as addressing instances of misbehaviour with discretion and progressive ideals. The data provided by KPRDSB did not show how many suspensions or expulsions came from individual schools, so it is possible that there are schools that are overrepresented because of individual school characteristics rather than overarching school board directives. Once the new mental health initiatives have been implemented and run, assessing the effectiveness of the programs, workshops and actions facilitated by the KPRDSB Mental Health Strategy would help determine if further program initiatives are necessary to address other individual needs. Overall, there are many pieces of unknown data that would assist in determining the root cause of the KPRDSB's increasing suspension and expulsion issues that can be addressed in future research projects.

The effects of class size on youth outcomes and the cost-benefit analysis of providing new, on-site programs in schools both require further research as they were research questions that could not be addressed in this report. Class size requires more attention within the North American context as most previous research tends to conflict with conclusions on the effectiveness of increasing academic achievement and decreasing delinquent behaviour. Its important to grow the literature in the context relevant to Peterborough because using resources from other nations, such as Sweden where smaller class sizes are shown to have better influence or Japan where larger class sizes are shown to increase academic performance, is unhelpful as their social and cultural factors are extremely different to Canada and the US (OECTA, 2018). The cost-benefit analysis requires extensive research into the amount of money Peterborough schools receive, what that money is spent on, and how much money it costs to suspend or expel a student in contrast with the amount of money to run even one of the aforementioned preventative programs and then also contrast that data with the amount of money it costs to convict youth under the youth justice system and future costs of adult convictions. This analysis could potentially be included in the future research of individual schools as the cost benefit seen in a single problematic school could be the most effective way to justify the relocation of funding.

## CONCLUSION

The review of literature conducted as part of this study shows that youth who are suspended and/or expelled are more likely to become involved with crime if their misbehaviour is not addressed appropriately. It is argued that this occurs as a manifestation of their personal distress caused by multiple influencing factors. For youth who begin to misbehave, there is evidence to show that the severity of their offences increases if misbehaviour is unresolved (Hinton et al., 2003). When youth have their displays of distress punished rather than mitigated through interpersonal treatment and analysis of their actions, they are more likely to continue their misbehaviour into adulthood as well. Peterborough schools have consistently been above the provincial averages in suspension and expulsion rates. It is worth noting though that all suspension and expulsion rates across the province have been steadily decreasing as provincial policy changes introduced between 2007 and 2013 have transformed the use of suspension and expulsion as punitive measures. When analyzing secondary school data from Peterborough the rates of suspension and expulsion are markedly higher than provincial averages and are seen to be increasing over time which indicates significant room for improvement within Peterborough schools. The KPRDSB appears to lack appropriate services for addressing at-risk youth who may require more individual assistance in addressing the root causes of their misbehaviour. Based on the literature, new on-site services would be best to apply early-intervention methods that address individual students and provide services that address multiple levels of behaviour influencing factors (e.g. family stressors that would not be addressed by universal approaches). Class size continues to be a hot topic in debates determining education effectiveness and funding and tends to take priority over the evidence-based services that are already well-researched and readily available. There is still not enough Canadian and US research on class size relevance to academic achievement or delinquency influence to provide an accurate class size limit or range that addresses relevant cultural, social and economic characteristics of North American regions. The cost impact of reaching at-risk youth through the development and implementation of on-site services in schools cannot be determined currently as the cost-benefit analysis that would need to be undertaken is out of the scope of this report. In the future, analyzing a

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single Peterborough school with high rates of suspensions and expulsions could provide a clearer understanding of both the issues in punitive practices within KPRDSB schools and emphasize the savings implementing early-intervention programs can bring.

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