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PRESS RELEASE

December 11, 2025

For Immediate Release

**Office of the Child and Youth Advocate Releases Second Report Monitoring the
Implementation of Recommendations to the Education System**

The Office of the Child and Youth Advocate (OCYA) is releasing its report *Prioritizing Student Safety: Working Together to Establish a Child Rights-Respecting Culture in Education*. This report evaluates the implementation of 6 recommendations issued by this Office to the Department of Education and Early Years (DEEY), the Public Schools Branch (PSB) and la Commission scolaire de langue française (CSLF) in a submission presented by the Advocate to the PEI Legislative Assembly Standing Committee on Education and Economic Growth in October 2022.

These recommendations focus on children's rights in education. The Advocate called for the development of a child rights model for including child and youth participation in education matters; for children's rights to be embedded into the *Education Act*; for children and youth to have the right to appeal decisions that affect their education, health or safety at school independently of a parent or guardian; for the development of child- and youth-friendly policy and procedure documents for student complaints; for the integration of children's rights into provincial curricula; and for OCYA consultation and child and youth participation in the development of consistent, province-wide dress codes in schools. The OCYA emphasizes that these recommendations were endorsed by the Standing Committee on Education and Economic Growth at the time.

The Office of the Child and Youth Advocate, pursuant to its statutory mandate under the *Child and Youth Advocate Act* (s. 12(1)(d)) to monitor the implementation of and compliance with its recommendations and reports, highlights that current issues in the education system necessitate returning to these historical recommendations, which are inextricably linked to student safety.

"Public attention has, rightly, focused of late on the safety of children in Island schools," said Child and Youth Advocate, Marvin Bernstein. "Rights are foundational to safety. When children and youth are aware of their rights, they are equally aware of the rights of others. They are also empowered to recognize when their rights and the rights of their peers are not being upheld."

The Advocate reports that, of the 6 historical recommendations being evaluated, none are fully implemented; none are substantially implemented; 3 are partially implemented; and 3 recommendations have seen minimal or no action toward implementation.

“Over time, many of these recommendations have drifted with no sense of urgency and it is concerning that the responses from the Department of Education and the Education Authorities have been lacklustre at best,” noted Bernstein. “This is especially disappointing since these recommendations were advanced over 3 years ago. There has been ample time in which real, meaningful progress could have been made towards establishing a truly student-centred and child-rights respecting education system.”

Each of the recommendations currently under evaluation explicitly required consultation with children and youth, and with the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate. “Unfortunately, there does not appear to be an overall strategy within the education system to systematically consider and implement recommendations,” stated Bernstein. “The required targeted consultation with my Office regarding recommendation implementation has not occurred even though consultative meetings would have been easy to arrange. This is a missed opportunity, as the goal of such consultation is to ensure that the spirit and intent of OCYA recommendations is fully understood and collaboration toward implementation is fostered.”

“While I acknowledge the recent efforts of the Education and Early Years system to begin strengthening safeguards for children and youth, it is troubling that those efforts have a history of getting stalled – whether it is the Inclusive Education Framework and Action Plans or the proposed amendments introduced in this past session of the Legislature to amend the *Education Act*, the *Early Learning and Child Care Act* or the *Private Schools Act*, none of which proceeded past first reading,” commented Bernstein. “It is disappointing that there has been exceptionally slow progress towards embracing a child- and youth-centred education system. When children’s rights are at the centre of education – in legislation, policy, practice, and curricula - children and youth are positioned to be active participants in their own safeguarding.”

Background

Pursuant to the *Child and Youth Advocate Act*, the Advocate may advise or make recommendations to any public body or community organization responsible for providing reviewable services to children and youth on any matter relating to the rights, interests and well-being of children and youth (s. 12(2)(h)). The Advocate is then mandated to monitor the implementation of and compliance with recommendations and reports issued by the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate (*Child and Youth Advocate Act*, s. 12(1)(d)).

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