

Former Teacher Michael Fuchigami Puts Spotlight On Lack Of Student Mental Health Protection

Ontario School Refuses To Inform Parents About School Shooting Lesson, And Ontario Courts Uphold Decision

OTTAWA, ONTARIO, CANADA, January 18, 2024 /EINPresswire.com/ -- In a recent decision, the Ontario Divisional Court ruled in favour of the Ontario College of Teachers, affirming their decision not to pursue a disciplinary complaint against school staff involved in a controversial bullying lesson at Longfields Davidson Heights in Ottawa. (Fuchigami v. Ontario College of Teachers, 2024 ONSC 106. Divisional Court file No. 239/22)



Mike Fuchigami

The complaint stemmed from a 2018 incident in which a mental health lesson on bullying, delivered to elementary students, ended with a fictional reenactment of a school shooting. The performance allegedly caused distress and raised significant concerns about student mental health safeguards.

The lesson depicted a bullied student responding to his situation by killing his bullies and justifying his actions, a scenario not vetted by mental health professionals. Teachers were not provided with training to support at-risk students, and no appropriate messaging about school shootings was part of the mental health lesson.

Mike Fuchigami, a teacher at the time, filed the complaint, seeking to address these shortcomings and the systemic failures in protecting student mental health. He made the complaint because the Ottawa Carleton District School Board refused requests to inform parents about the potential risk of suicidal ideation following the lesson. According to Fuchigami, this decision left potentially vulnerable students with mental health challenges without support.

However, with the court's recent decision in *Fuchigami v. Ontario College of Teachers*, 2024 ONSC 106, the concerns about safeguarding at-risk students still need to be addressed. Fuchigami expresses disappointment with the outcome, but remains committed to raising awareness about the case. He aims to engage mental health professionals, student mental health advocates, and the public in a dialogue to improve mental health support and educational practices. Fuchigami emphasizes the importance of active citizenship and the need for courageous conversations to bring about collaborative change in Ontario's educational system.

"The bullying lesson at my school failed to consider invisible students with undisclosed mental health challenges," said Fuchigami. "As chief psychologist Dr. Elizabeth Paquette from the Ottawa Catholic School Board once noted about '13 Reasons Why', 'In a classroom, there's always going to be some vulnerable students, and it's always those students that are our concern in the mental health field.'"

Regarding the issues with parental communication in this matter, Fuchigami remarked, "Actively refusing to inform parents about this controversial school shooting lesson is something I believe most elementary teachers in Ontario would find inappropriate. However, the court primarily considered whether I have the limited standing required to challenge the College's decision, and did not delve into the steps that should have been taken by the staff members who put on the play."

Fuchigami found the process of raising his concerns with relevant education bodies to be a frustrating experience. As he explained, "I didn't have objective evidence from a mental health expert to question the school shooting bullying lesson and the College dismissed the testimonial I provided from a public health nurse / parent who withdrew their child from the lesson because it would be triggering."

The College of Teachers did not contact the OCDSB school board psychologist whether there were vulnerable students at risk; However, in response to an internal work health safety complaint filed by Fuchigami, the school board psychologist created a mental health policy that would have blocked this controversial lesson if the policy existed at the time.

"The College of Teachers dismissed my concerns as subjective," Fuchigami added. "They said 'you have pre-existing, undisclosed mental health challenges. The school can't be held responsible for your response to the lesson.' But I think my anxiety, depression, and paranoia help me appreciate what vulnerable students might be going through."

Despite the legal outcome, Fuchigami believes that this case underlines a crucial shortfall in how Ontario's education system and regulatory bodies like the College of Teachers safeguard (or don't safeguard) vulnerable and invisible students with anxiety, depression, or other mental health challenges. He said, "Schools are doing some great things to promote student mental health. But when things go wrong if the College of Teachers isn't going to stand up for our vulnerable students with mental health challenges, who is?"

Fuchigami's commitment to this issue is grounded in a fundamental question he poses to parents: "If your child was taught by a school that a solution to bullying is killing the bullies, would you want to be informed?"

He remains available for interviews and further comments on the case and its broader implications for student mental health advocacy. For more information or to schedule an interview, please visit <https://michaelfuchigami.ca/media/>

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