



Centre for
Women's
Studies in
Education

For YWCA Staff, OSSTF, Miss G Supporters, Ministry of Education staff, teachers
April 25, 2008

**STUDENTS PRESENT EDUCATION MINISTER WITH THEIR IDEAS FOR IMPROVING SAFETY:
Girls demand change and equity at "Voices Behind the Stats" Summit.**



On Friday April 18, 2008, the Miss G_Project, YWCA Toronto and The Centre for Women's Studies in Education at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education hosted The Voices Behind the Headlines: A Girls Summit on Safety and Equity in Education. Thirty girls representing high schools from across Ontario assembled to discuss their concerns about the education system and shared their solutions with The Honourable Kathleen Wynne, Minister of Education.

In light of reports released earlier this year by the School Community Safety Advisory Panel and by the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health that describe the increased rates of gender based violence in schools in the GTA and Ontario in general, this forum presented girls with the opportunity to give voice to their own concerns and share their own experiences. Through facilitated small group discussions the girls identified issues such as body image issues, sexual harassment in schools, not feeling comfortable to talk to teachers about problems.

They presented Minister Wynne with numerous recommendations to the issues that girls are facing in schools including, ensuring that the curriculum includes a mandatory anti-oppression course to combat stereotypes, empowering and educating boys and girls in elementary schools about gender and violence, improving the connection between students and teachers by building trust and providing professional support and training to teachers and more social workers. Minister Wynne listened intently and pursued their ideas by asking follow-up questions. She praised the students for their insight and eagerness to participate.

One student from London, Ontario described the event as "a really rare opportunity," and expressed hope that this summit would become an annual event. Genevieve Flavelle, from Toronto, Ontario insisted that the best way to improve the education system is to "make schools communities, not institutions." Many students raised the point that extreme cases of harassment and violence often

begin with everyday language used in and outside the classroom, and called for media-literacy curricula and more teacher-training around these problems.

"We were so inspired by the energy and the enthusiasm of the young women who participated in the Girls Summit. It is reassuring that YWCA Toronto is already on track with their recommendations. We have long held fast to the thinking that the education system and the social service agencies must work together to ensure girls safety and equality by providing violence prevention and intervention programs in girl-only spaces both in schools and in the community," said Heather McGregor, CEO YWCA Toronto.

"Events like this are crucial, since students are the greatest stakeholders in the education system, and should have frequent and open communication with the Minister of Education, one of the most important decision-makers in that system," said Sarah Ghabrial, a co-founder of The Miss G__ Project for Equity in Education.

The Miss G__ Project for Equity in Education is a grassroots young feminist organization working to combat all forms of oppression in and through education, including sexism, homophobia, racism and classism. Their main objective is to get a Women's & Gender Studies Course into the Ontario Secondary School Curriculum.

YWCA Toronto is the city's only multi-service organization by, for and about women and girls. Last year we were a turning point in the lives of more than 26,000 people across the city by providing services in our four program areas: housing and support, employment and skills development, girls and family programs and advocacy.

For the complete report or to arrange an interview with a representative from the Miss_G Project or YWCA Toronto, or a participant in the Girls Summit please call Raine Liliefeldt, 416-961-8101 ext.326