The province has named two respected Canadian experts to review the approach of Halifax Regional School Board, and associated agencies, to the events that led to the tragic death of a student.

The two out-of-province experts, Debra Pepler and Penny Milton of Ontario, will begin their review immediately.

Ms. Pepler is a professor of psychology at York University. She is co-founder of PREVNet, Promoting Relationships and Eliminating Violence Network, and has been on the Ontario Minister of Education's Safe Schools Action Team since 2004. One of her research areas is bullying.

Ms. Milton is former CEO of the Canadian Education Association and a former deputy minister of the Premier's Advisory Council on Health, Wellbeing and Social Justice in Ontario. Her primary area of interest is the engagement of young people in learning.

"The review of Halifax Regional School Board will be independent and have a broad mandate," said Marilyn More, Minister responsible for the Status of Women. "We need to take a close and sensitive look at the programs, supports and policies we have in place now, and figure out how to improve them. In this way, we are continuing to support the family."

The panel will report to Ms. More.

"Nova Scotia is not alone in dealing with these difficult issues and challenges," said Ms. Pepler. "There is an opportunity here to learn from this heartbreaking situation, and ensure the supports and programming in place for our young people meets their needs, across the spectrum, from health to education."

"Schools share with families and communities a responsibility for the well-being of all of their students," said Ms. Milton. "We must all learn from this tragedy so that students are supported in the best ways that we know how."

The panel will have until June 14 to:
-- determine whether policies and procedures were followed
-- examine current policies, procedures and support
-- make recommendations to ensure the safety and well-being of all students
identify issues that may have a negative impact on students and their mental health
provide recommendations to address gaps and/or deficiencies of policies, procedures, programming and protocols at Halifax Regional School Board, and its co-operation and interaction with departments and agencies

The review will include the mental-health system and its role in this case. The reviewers will look at aspects of Capital District Health Authority and IWK Health Centre programs that support youth.

An interim report is expected May 10.

The independent review was requested by the Halifax Regional School Board.

"We requested the independent review because we need to take a critical, unbiased look at how we provide services to students," said Gin Yee, chair of the Halifax Regional School Board. "Our teachers, staff and administrators work very hard every day to meet a wide range of needs, but that doesn't mean we can't look for ways to improve our support to students.

"The two individuals the province has appointed are well-known, respected experts in education and we are committed to working closely with them throughout the process."

The panel will be in regular communication with Ms. More. The minister may take immediate steps to act on time-sensitive issues raised by the panel before the final report is complete.

The review will not impact criminal investigations or proceeding. The province announced April 15 that an independent review of the actions of police and the Public Prosecution Service will begin as soon as the criminal investigation is finished.

FOR BROADCAST USE:

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The reviewers will deliver an interim report May 10th and a final report to Status of Women Minister Marilyn More on June 14th.

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independent and have a broad mandate.

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