



Federal, state, and local leaders have committed to improving student achievement and closing achievement gaps in K-12 schools. As education leaders work to achieve these goals through increased accountability, higher standards, and aligning curriculum with college- and work-readiness goals, they must also meaningfully address bullying and harassment, which adversely affects students' learning environments and abilities to succeed. Consequently, the federal school safety framework should include a focus on reducing bullying and harassment.

Bullying and harassment are widespread problems with significant adverse consequences for students

Bullying and harassment directly interferes with student learning and achievement, while threatening the safety and well-being of millions of students each year.

- One national study demonstrates that bullying affects nearly one in every three American school children in grades six through ten and another confirms that harassment in schools is experienced by a majority of students;
- Bullying can result in long-term social, academic, psychological, and physical consequences, including decreased interest in school, increased absences, and decreased concentration levels for students;
- Student behavior – specifically including bullying and other inappropriate student behavior – is the most commonly cited problem in schools by middle school students.

Action is needed to ensure that every student in our schools is safe and free to learn

Despite evidence confirming the power of prevention in reducing the short- and long-term consequence of bullying and harassment, federal law does not comprehensively protect students from these destructive behaviors. The new Administration and Congress should "bridge the gap" in current federal discrimination and school safety law by strengthening the *Safe and Drug Free Schools and Communities Act* to ensure that:

- Schools and districts have comprehensive and effective student conduct policies that include clear prohibitions regarding bullying and harassment;
- Schools and districts focus on effective prevention strategies and professional development designed to help school personnel meaningfully address issues associated with bullying and harassment;
- States and districts maintain and report data regarding incidents of bullying and harassment in order to inform the development of effective federal, state, and local policies that address these issues.

Comprehensive bullying and harassment prevention activities and policies make a difference

Evidence demonstrates that comprehensive and proactive efforts – such as clear and detailed policy development, professional development, data collection – are likely to be effective in preventing incidents of bullying and harassment. Preventative steps can be taken to raise the consciousness of the school community and to educate teachers, staff, parents and students regarding the nature of the issues, as well as effective responses, before bullying and harassment become a serious problem. Comprehensive policies should enumerate (i.e. specify or list) traits (such as race, color, national origin, sex, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity and religion) that commonly make students targets of bullying & harassment in order to ensure that all students are safe and are able to achieve to their highest academic potential. This approach has been championed by Rep. Linda Sanchez (H.R. 3132 in the 110th Congress) and was included as part of the Senate ESEA reauthorization discussion draft circulated in late 2007.

The **National Safe Schools Partnership** includes over 30 education, health, civil rights, law enforcement, youth development, and other organizations that have informally joined together in support of federal legislation reflecting these recommendations. For further information please contact Reg Leichty (202) 545-2918 or Art Coleman (202) 545-2912 at EducationCounsel, LLC