



December 15, 2008

Linda Darling-Hammond, Ph.D.
Education Policy Transition Team Leader
The Office of the President Elect
Washington, D.C.

Dear Dr. Darling-Hammond:

As the new Executive Director of the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN), I am writing to share GLSEN's recommendations for addressing the widespread problem of bullying and harassment in the nation's public schools.

As you know, bullying and harassment seriously disrupt school environments and often hinder student learning and achievement. Studies conducted by GLSEN, the U.S. Department of Education, and other entities show that students who are bullied and harassed are more likely to skip school or classes and are less able to focus on academics. Working with, and on behalf of, over 30 other education, health, civil rights, law enforcement, youth development, and other organizations, including the National Education Association, National Council of Secondary School Principals and American Association of School Administrators, we are seeking improvements to federal law to address this pervasive problem. GLSEN and allied groups have been working closely with Senator Kennedy and Representative Linda Sánchez to address this problem through reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), which includes the Safe and Drug Free Schools and Communities Act (SDFSCA).

As the transition team continues developing the new administration's education agenda, we ask that you consider making bullying and harassment prevention a high priority by strengthening the SDFSCA to ensure that:

- Schools and districts have comprehensive and effective student conduct policies that include clear, enumerated prohibitions against 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; and
- 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.

Senator Kennedy's ESEA reauthorization discussion draft bill (circulated in September 2007) addresses these three core areas and Representative Linda Sánchez has introduced bipartisan model legislation (H.R. 3132) in the House. Both the Kennedy draft bill and the Sánchez bill include vital language specifying the traits (such as race, color, national origin, sex, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity and religion) that



commonly make students targets of bullying and harassment, in order to ensure that all students are safe and are able to achieve to their highest academic potential.

In addition to the above recommendations, we would be grateful if the new Administration would highlight the importance of addressing this important problem, including using the new Education Secretary's "bully pulpit" to sound the alarm about the importance of this issue and adding language to the President-elect's FY 2010 budget request seeking funding to expand the Department of Education's bullying and harassment prevention work, including greater resources for teacher and leader professional development, and technical assistance designed to help schools and districts address this serious problem.

Finally, we recommend that the Administration give serious consideration to improved coordination between existing federal safe schools and anti-bullying programs throughout the federal government. Current programs exist within the Department of Education's Office of Safe and Drug Free Schools (e.g. Exploring the Nature and Prevention of Bullying) and the Department of Health and Human Services' Health Recourses and Services Administration (e.g. Stop Bullying Now). These programs provide valuable information to distinct audiences, and we believe these efforts can be improved through consistent government-wide efforts.

Thank you for your service to the transition. We appreciate your leadership. Please let us know if we can answer any questions about this important issue or otherwise serve as a resource to your team.

Sincerely,

Eliza Byard, Ph.D.
Executive Director
GLSEN

Encl:

Bridging the Gap in Federal Law: Promoting Safe Schools and Improved Student Achievement By Preventing Bullying and Harassment

Bridge the Gap: Promote Safe Schools and Student Achievement (1 Page Summary of Bridging the Gap in Federal Law)

Safe Schools Improvement Act of 2007 - H.R. 3132 (with technical corrections)

The 2007 National School Climate Survey, Executive Summary

GLSEN Policy Recommendations

