

Recommendations of the Illinois School Bullying Prevention Task Force

Executive Summary

Public Act 96-952 (the Illinois Prevent School Violence Act¹ (PSVA)), signed into law by Governor Pat Quinn on June 27, 2010, amended Illinois' bullying prevention law to broadly define bullying, name the categories of students particularly vulnerable to bullying and school violence in our schools, expand the reach of the law to non-sectarian private schools, and create the Illinois School Bullying Prevention Task Force (Task Force).²

Bullying, School Violence and Consequences

Recent youth suicides only highlight a persistent problem in US schools – bullying.³ Illinois is not immune; indeed, bullying and school violence are serious problems in our schools across the state.⁴ Bullying and violence have serious consequences to youth, schools, and communities.⁵ In Illinois, youth who experience bullying, (whether they engage in bullying behavior, are the targets of bullying behavior, are bystanders to bullying, or all of the above), have alarmingly negative health, social, and academic outcomes. Youth who are targets of bullying and school violence are more likely to report that they feel unsafe in school and are more likely to skip school.⁶ Youth who feel unsafe at school are less likely than others to have college plans.⁷ Further, they are more likely to carry a gun to school and receive injuries that require hospitalization.⁸ They are more likely to use drugs and alcohol, suffer with depression, and attempt suicide.⁹ Youth who engage in bullying behavior are more likely to commit crimes. Nearly sixty percent (60%) of boys classified as bullies in grades 6–9 were convicted of at least one crime by age 24 and forty percent (40%) of them had three or more convictions.¹⁰

Being a target of bullying often has a major impact on school engagement, academic achievement, and test scores.¹¹ For each 1 point rise in the grade point average of 7th, 9th, and 11th graders in an urban public school district, the odds of being a victim, versus a bystander, decreased by 10 percent.¹² A study of 930 6th graders in the first year of middle school found that students who were bullies, victims, or bully-victims showed poorer school adjustment (e.g., doing well on schoolwork, getting along with classmates, following rules, doing homework) than their uninvolved peers over three assessments into the end of the 7th grade.¹³

Recommendations

The Task Force recommends that, to effectively prevent and address bullying and school violence, education stakeholders in Illinois commit to engaging in overall school transformation in order to create ideal conditions for development and learning. The Task Force reached this conclusion after studying research detailing that most bullying prevention programs do not work when divorced from overall work to address school climate and culture.¹⁴ To accomplish transformation, schools must:

- Engage and support leaders at all levels of the school community, including youth
- Recognize the impacts of systemic cultural issues such as racism, sexism, classism, ableism, disability discrimination and homophobia that contribute to negative and hostile environments for youth and adults

- Fully and consistently implement mandated Social and Emotional (SEL) Learning standards
- Undertake a data-driven decision making process involving input from all levels of the school community to develop a transformation plan and steps to monitor its implementation and impact
- Wholly replace zero-tolerance bullying and harassment policies and punitive school discipline practices with restorative discipline policies and practices¹⁵
- Provide effective youth programming with
 - Strong ties to theoretical constructs related to bullying, child development, and behavioral change
 - An evaluation component
 - Methods and strategies for adapting programs to unique school contexts (e.g., race, age, gender) and ecological domains (e.g., peer relationships, family relationships)
- Provide professional development to all school personnel (including not only administrators and teachers, but bus drivers, maintenance workers, security, cafeteria workers, etc.) on issues of:
 - School-wide expectations, as well as reporting and monitoring requirements when expectations are not met
 - impacts of systemic cultural issues such as racism, sexism, classism, adultism, ableism and homophobia that contribute to bullying and school violence, as well as hostile environments for youth and adults that inhibit learning and development

In order to support schools in the school transformation process, the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) and other governmental agencies, where possible, should:

- Support amendment of the PSVA and implementing regulations to, among other things, cover all public and non-public schools, require more detail in mandated anti-bullying policies, and more effectively support school transformation efforts
- Develop two to four common indicators (e.g., incidence rates, discipline referrals related to bullying, overall school climate) that address bullying and school violence and require all schools and districts to report annually
- Add a school safety indicator/measure on the Illinois Interactive Report Card
- Establish an administrators' academy to teach all school administrators ways to establish and maintain a positive school climate
- Make available quality technical assistance and professional development to schools engaged in the school transformation process
- Ensure all pre-professional education for school personnel prepare them to engage in and lead school transformation processes
- Define a standard for identifying schools in crisis and collaborate with school districts to develop an emergency plan to address the crisis factors, during which time the district will be release from purely academic indicators

- Fully fund pilot projects to collect and evaluate data on the efficacy of the proposed school transformation model to comprehensively prevent and address bullying and school violence

Additional recommendations made by the Task Force include:

- Any state funding or grant program related to bullying or school violence prevention, intervention and reduction, as well as any funding or grant funding for school safety efforts, should require grantees to collect specific types of data as a part of their funded project or include an evaluation and monitoring plan as part of their proposals.
- The Illinois Department of Human Services, in partnership with other agencies and organizations where necessary, should review the Illinois Youth Survey (IYS) to add several questions to the core survey to address issues of school violence and bullying, disaggregated by each of the categories of students enumerated in the PSVA and reported to ISBE. In addition, question modules (15 questions) should be developed to allow schools to explore more in depth particular aspects of bullying and school violence (e.g., sexual, racial, or gender based harassment, cyberbullying, relational aggression).

¹ See <http://www.ilga.gov/legislation/publicacts/96/PDF/096-0952.pdf>.

² Name and affiliations of members of the Illinois School Bullying Prevention Task Force are posted on the website of the Illinois State Board of Education, <http://www.isbe.net/SBPTF/pdf/members.pdf>.

³ As used in these recommendations, the definition of the term bullying comes from the Illinois Prevent School Violence Act. It includes bullying behavior that occurs in person, is done through the use of technology (cyberbullying) and other types of behavior such as that which is verbal or written.

⁴ GLSEN, 2009. *Inside Illinois Schools: The experience of LGBT students* (Research Brief).

⁵ Berger, 2007.

Chicago and Illinois Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS), 2007.

Espelage, D., & Horne, A. (2007). School violence and bullying preventions: From research-based explanations to empirically based solutions. In S. Brown & R. Lent (Eds.). *Handbook of Counseling Psychology*, 4th Ed, 588-606.

⁶ Chicago and Illinois YRBS (2007).

⁷ Kosciw, J.G., Greytak, E.A., Diaz, E.M., & Bartkiewicz, M.J. (2010). *The 2009 National School Climate Survey: The experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth in our nation's schools*, 46.

⁸ Chicago and Illinois YRBS (2007).

⁹ Brikett, M., Espelage, D., & Koenig, B. (2009). LGB and questioning students in schools: The moderating effects of homophobic bullying and school climate on negative outcomes. *Journal of Youth Adolescence*, 38, 989-1000; Centers for Disease Control, 2009;

Espelage, D. L., Aragon, S. R, Birkett, M., & Koenig, B. (2008). Homophobic teasing, psychological outcomes, and sexual orientation among high school students: What influence do parents and schools have? In D.L. Espelage, & S.M. Swearer (Eds.), *Sexual Orientation, Homophobia, Bullying, and Psychological Adjustment during Adolescence* [special issue]. *School Psychology Review*, 37, 202-216.

Kosciw, J. G., Diaz, E. M., & Greytak, E. A. (2008). 2007 National School Climate Survey: The experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth in our nation's schools. New York: GLSEN. Available at: www.glsen.org/research.

Russell, S., Seif, H., & Truong, N. (2001). School outcomes of sexual minority youth in the United States: evidence from a national study. *Journal of Adolescence*, 24, 111-127.

¹⁰ Fight Crime: Invest in Kids (2003).

¹¹ Glew, G.M., Fan, M.Y., Katon, W., Rivara, F.P. & Kernic, M.A. (2005). Bullying, psychosocial adjustment, and academic performance in elementary school. *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine*, 1026-31.

¹² Glew, G.M., Fan, M.Y., Katon, W., Rivara, F.P. (2008). Bullying and school safety. *The Journal of Pediatrics*, 123-8, 128.e1.

¹³ Nansel, T. R., Haynie, D. L., & Simons-Morton, B. G. (2003). The association of bullying and victimization with middle school adjustment. *Journal of Applied School Psychology*, 19, 45-61.

¹⁴ Anti-bullying programs are struggling for four critical reasons:

(1) Most anti-bullying programs are not well grounded in a guiding theoretical framework that would inform program development and evaluation.

(2) Most anti-bullying programs fail to direct interventions at the social ecology that promote and sustain bullying perpetration, such as peers and families.

(3) Many of these programs do not address the changing demographics of communities and fail to incorporate factors such as race, disability, and sexual orientation.

(4) Many packaged programs are not integrated into curriculum, but are seen as “add-on” programs, and therefore are not sustained over time.

In contrast, “promising” programs and the components of such programs are highlighted later in this document.

Espelage, D. & Horn, S. (2011) (presentation to Illinois School Bullying Prevention Task Force).

¹⁵ When utilizing data from a national data set, zero-tolerance policies do not improve overall school safety and are associated with lower academic performance, higher rates of dropout, failures to graduate on time, increased academic disengagement, and subsequent disciplinary exclusions. Achilles, G.M., McLaughlin, M.J., & Croninger, R.G. (2007). Sociocultural Correlates of Disciplinary Exclusion Among Students With Emotional, Behavioral, and Learning Disabilities in the SEELS National Dataset. *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders*, 15(1), 33-45.

Higher rates of suspension are related to higher rates of future anti-social behavior and involvement in the juvenile justice system. American Psychological Association, 2008.

The use of zero-tolerance policies and punitive school discipline practices have led to the wholesale push-out of young African-American men and the partial push-out of students of color more broadly. Fenning, P. & Rose, J. (2007). Overrepresentation of African-American students in exclusionary discipline: the role of school policy. *Urban Education*. 42(6): p. 538-552.