

# State of Connecticut

## GENERAL ASSEMBLY



### COMMISSION ON CHILDREN

## Stand Up to Bullying: A Safe Learning Environment for All Students

**When we fail to prevent bullying, the results impact learning, safety, and personal well-being.**

Targets of bullying often feel isolated, lonely or depressed. Sometimes they attempt suicide. Schools can become violent, dangerous places where children feel unsafe to go and less able to concentrate and learn.

**Bullying is an early warning sign that some students may be heading down a path of more serious antisocial behavior.** Bullies are more likely to drop out of school and to commit other antisocial acts such as truancy, fighting, theft, intoxication, and vandalism. Bullies are more likely to become adult criminals. Moreover, victims of repeated bullying can explode in ways that harm themselves and others.

**In Connecticut and throughout the United States, bullying is a very serious education issue:**

- In a national study, one-fifth of children and youth reported experiencing bullying (e.g. peer picked on, chased or grabbed) and one-fourth experienced teasing or emotional bullying (e.g. harassment). (Finkelhor et al., 2005)
- Nearly three in ten (29 percent) Connecticut high school students – and 35 percent of the state’s 9<sup>th</sup> graders – reported having been bullied on school property in the past year. (DPH, 2007)
- Over 50 percent of Connecticut 9<sup>th</sup> graders who reported being bullied at school said it was because of their weight, size or physical appearance. (DPH, 2005)
- Eight percent of Connecticut high school students reported being threatened or injured with a weapon at school in the past year; one-quarter of those students were threatened or injured six times or more. Nearly one-third (31 percent) of Connecticut high school boys had personal property stolen or damaged at school. (DPH, 2007)
- Children with identified special needs make up less than 11 percent of the Connecticut student population, but are involved in 30-50 percent of bullying cases as the target or alleged bully. (SDE, 2010)
- Nationally, 65 percent of students surveyed reported having been harassed or assaulted at school during the past year because of their appearance or their actual or perceived race/ethnicity, disability, gender, sexual orientation, gender expression or religion. (Harris Interactive & GLSEN, 2005)
- High school boys in Connecticut who were bullied about their perceived sexual orientation were four times more likely than other boys to have attempted suicide at least once in the past year. (DPH, 2005)
- Nearly three-quarters of school shooting attackers in the U.S. felt bullied, threatened, attacked, injured or persecuted prior to the shooting incident. (U.S. Secret Service & U.S. Department of Education, 2002)

- Every day, approximately 160,000 U.S. students miss school due to fear of being bullied. (Lumsden, 2002)
- As of Feb. 2010, 59 school districts have not revised their bullying policies in response to the 2008 state law, and 14 percent of Connecticut school districts provide no bullying prevention training to staff. (SDE, 2010)

## **Bullying May Occur in Various Forms**

A person is being bullied when he or she is the target, repeatedly and over time, of negative actions undertaken by one or several other individuals who are more powerful than the target in some way. Negative actions can begin with name calling or social isolation, build to actual attacks or attempts to injure or humiliate another person, and involve physical and verbal aggression, social alienation, intimidation, racial or ethnic harassment or sexual harassment. Bullying not only hurts the bully and the target, it also impacts the overall school climate and learning environment. Bullying is a form of repetitive and ongoing harassment, which crosscuts geographic, race and socio-economic segments of society.

## **Commission on Children Urges Schools to Adopt Anti-Bullying Best Practices**

**Bullying prevention efforts should be based on rigorous scientific research.** Creating an untested program and calling it “bullying prevention” doesn’t mean it will work.

**Proven anti-bullying programs that have been determined to be best practices are the best bet for Connecticut schools.** Several nationally recognized anti-bullying strategies take a whole-school approach. Anti-bullying models that focus on the whole school reap the fullest gains.

For example, the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program has been recognized by the U.S. Department of Justice and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services as a model program. First developed in Norway after a number of bullying victims committed suicide, the program has now been implemented in several hundred schools in the United States and around the world. It produced a 50 percent reduction in bullying and other antisocial behavior in Norway and a 20 percent reduction in a South Carolina test.

As a whole school approach, Olweus aims to increase awareness and knowledge about bullying, to initiate action on the part of all adults in the school community, to engage students in creating clear rules against bullying and aggressive behavior, and to develop support systems for the bully and the target.

## **State Action Must Begin by Helping Schools Implement Proven Approaches**

### **The Connecticut Commission on Children supports:**

- Re-funding of the Safe Learning Grant Program to assist school districts in developing a school environment where children learn in safety without fear of physical or verbal harm or intimidation
- Regular statewide review and analysis of the effectiveness of bullying policies adopted by schools
- Distribution of information about best practices to reduce bullying, promote school safety and engage students, teachers, administrators and parents in ensuring a safe learning environment
- Technical assistance to help school districts achieve a safe learning environment.

For more information, contact the Commission on Children at 860-240-0290; [www.cga.ct.gov/coc/bullying.htm](http://www.cga.ct.gov/coc/bullying.htm).

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