



STATE OF MICHIGAN
STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

POLICIES ON BULLYING



As previously expressed in our *Policies on Safe Schools* (May 18, 2000), providing a safe school environment for our students is of the utmost importance for Michigan's public schools. Bullying is one particularly troubling aspect of student misbehavior that endangers school safety. Bullying, which is the repeated abuse of a student over time by other students, can take many forms including any combination of physical, emotional, and verbal abuse, all of which are unacceptable in our schools.

Recent tragedies involving violence in schools across the nation have involved the issues of bullying and revenge. The consequences of bullying are far-reaching and cause problem behaviors, poor psycho-social functioning, avoidance of school attendance, severe emotional problems (including suicide), and physical problems. Some students who observe unchallenged bullying behavior are likely to copy this anti-social behavior. We recognize that bullies are often children who have been bullied or abused themselves. Bullying and being bullied are indicators that something is wrong, and children who experience either or both need help.

Studies have reported that individuals with a history of bullying are likely to exhibit criminal behavior by the time they reach their mid-20s. Individuals who have been bullied are found to have a higher rate of depression and poor self-esteem. By striving to prevent bullying, schools reduce risks of violence and teach students resiliency skills.

POLICIES

The *Policies on Safe Schools* adopted by the State Board of Education on May 18, 2000, states that public schools and state education programs over which the State Board has policymaking authority should undertake proactive, preventive approaches to ensure a safe school environment. In fact, many school districts have found that implementing a successful anti-bullying program can reduce bullying and other anti-social behaviors among students, and produce positive changes in the school climate. Therefore, it is the policy of the State Board of Education that public schools and state education programs over which the State Board has policymaking authority should develop a plan designed to prevent bullying, and develop methods to react to bullying when it occurs, as an integral part of a district-wide safety and discipline plan.



We recognize that the causes of bullying are varied. Home and/or environment, individual temperament, and social context are factors that contribute to the bullying problem. Much bullying occurs without the knowledge of teachers, and parents, and many victims are reluctant to tell adults of their problems with bullying. Thus, an anti-bullying program must address supervision of students; encouraging students to be involved in the program by asking and listening to them; educating teachers and other staff members on the nature and seriousness of bullying on a student's physical, emotional, social, and academic well-being; training teachers and other staff members to effectively intervene when bullying occurs; providing individualized interventions with bullies and victims; and strongly advocating meaningful communications between teachers and parents. We also recognize that each school has its local circumstances and challenges. Accordingly, each school district should select the course of action that best addresses its needs. Developing a clear formal policy regarding bullying provides everyone with a clear understanding of acceptable behavior. To determine which course best suits a school's needs, we recommend that the program contain elements that involve the entire school community in assessing the nature and prevalence of bullying at each school, and in crafting and implementing the anti-bullying programs. School administrators, faculty, non-instructional staff (e.g. secretaries, bus drivers, food service, maintenance), parents, the student body as a whole, as well as the students identified as bullies and victims, therefore, should all be included in this process. Anti-bullying programs consisting of these components have resulted in substantial reductions in reported and observed incidents of bullying. Moreover, these programs have resulted in significant reductions in anti-social behavior and significant improvements in the school learning and social atmosphere. Therefore, it is the policy of the State Board of Education that public schools and state education programs over which the State Board has policymaking authority should institute an anti-bullying program incorporating the basic elements described herein, to promote a positive school atmosphere that fosters learning, and to create a safe and fear-free school environment in the classroom, playground, and at school-sponsored activities.

Adopted July 19, 2001