



## **Reduce bullying in NH schools by strengthening the roles and responsibilities of school personnel in the prevention of bullying and cyberbullying**

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### **Issue Overview**

Reports and estimates vary; however, we know that in the United States a child is bullied every seven minutes. There are more than seven million incidents of bullying reported in public schools each year. Thirty percent of school age children report having been the victims of bullying and thirty percent report they have bullied someone else. Thirty two percent of children who use the internet say they have been targets of cyber-bullying behaviors. More than fifty five percent of all 8-15 year olds think bullying is a bigger problem than drugs, racism and HIV/AIDS in their school.<sup>1</sup> Bullying is most likely to occur at school<sup>2</sup> although cyberbullying may occur anywhere a child has access to computer, phone and data networks.

Bullying has serious consequences. Child victims of bullying are more likely to suffer from depression than other children and have a higher risk of suicide. Victims of bullies can show signs similar to those of child abuse, including traumatic stress disorder, and the effects of being bullied have even been carried by victims into adulthood.

Currently, accurate record keeping of bullying incidents in NH are impeded by unclear definitions of what constitutes bullying, no clear recordkeeping requirement and a disparity of attention to the problem among districts.

However, national trends and anecdotal information indicate that bullying is increasing, particularly among girls. There is also research indicating the severity of bullying is increasing as are the severity of its repercussions among victims.

### **Proposed Solution**

We are proposing changes to Chapter 193-F, "The Pupil Safety and Violence Prevention Act" which would strengthen NH school's rights and responsibilities in dealing with this growing trend. Among the proposed changes that do not currently exist are:

- Clear definitions of both bullying and cyberbullying
- Procedures for recordkeeping and reporting incidents
- Victim assistance
- Protections for victims, bystanders and perpetrators from retaliation
- Training recommendations
- Clear immunity from prosecution for school personnel who report bullying

### **Call to Action**

An ad hoc committee has been meeting, consisting of parents, educators, legislators, researchers and social service professionals to draft the proposed changes. Representative Donna Schlachman will be the prime sponsor of the legislation. The Family Education Collaborative is a consortium of the YWCA of NH, UNH Cooperative Extension, UNH Manchester and Child and Family Services of New Hampshire. A parent group, called Bully Free NH, will also be actively involved in supporting this Priority. By supporting this legislation, NH CAN will be contributing to the safety and well being of every school student in New Hampshire.

<sup>1</sup>Miller, 2009

<sup>2</sup>Olweus, 2003