

New Reports Call Bullying in Oregon Schools a Major Problem

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Advocates back stronger anti-bullying legislation; call on Legislature to take action.

(SALEM, Ore.) - A coalition of advocacy groups today released a pair of reports pointing to the prevalence of bullying in Oregon schools, calling the hostile campus climate a serious detriment to educational achievement.

The groups are joining with lawmakers to strengthen Oregon's anti-bullying law and create safeguards for youth in Oregon schools.

A new report demonstrates that minority youth are far more likely to be the targets of bullies than white youth.

"African American, Latino and Native American youth report up to 23% higher levels of harassment in our schools than white students," said Ebony Smith, of the Oregon Students of Color Coalition. "We have a responsibility to take action now, to ensure that our schools are safe for all youth."

A second report analyzes a survey of 3500 Oregon college students about the climate for gay and transgender students at high schools and universities.

"One in three gay and transgender students in Oregon indicate that the hostile climate in their high school created a significant barrier to graduation," stated Tash Shatz, of the Oregon Students Equal Rights Alliance.

"And more than half of gay and transgender college students concealed their sexual orientation or gender identity for fear of personal safety, discrimination, or rejection."

Advocates released these reports as the Legislature begins deliberations on House Bill 2599, legislation designed to strengthen and enhance Oregon's existing anti-bullying statute. HB2599 would ensure statewide adoption of anti-bullying and anti-harassment policies, create clear notice and complaint procedures and establish a comprehensive approach to address bullying.

The proposal strengthens existing statute by clarifying the definition of bullying, adding specific guidelines for making the policy available to the school community, and encouraging training programs. The legislation is expected to have its first hearing in the House Education Committee in early March.

"House Bill 2599 will strengthen Oregon's anti-bullying law, ensure statewide implementation, and help keep all children safe," said Sonya Fischer, a disability advocate and Board Member with Family and Community Together. She added, "This will make a difference for youth with disabilities who are too often the targets of bullying."

House Education Committee Chair Rep. Sara Gelsler (D-Corvallis) joined advocates today, saying, "All kids should grow up free from fear of intimidation and harassment at school. By strengthening school anti-bullying policies, we can make Oregon schools safer, stronger and more secure." Gelsler, a mother of four, chairs the House committee that is considering legislation to update and strengthen the bullying statute.

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