

Oregon School Psychologists Association
Testimony for Oregon Senate Bill 1555
2/13/2012

Chair and Members of the Committee. My Name is Jim Hanson. I am the school psychologist at Lincoln High School and I am representing the Oregon School Psychologists Association. Our address is 25 NW 23rd Place #6, Portland, OR 97210. I have also been authorized to speak for the Oregon Safe Schools and Communities Coalition. The Oregon School Psychologists Association and the Oregon Safe Schools and Communities Coalition endorse SB 1555. In 2008, OSPA and the OSSCC joined a coalition of supporters of the last Oregon anti-bullying statute. In 2012, OSPA and the OSSCC are here to give support to the enhancements that Senator Verger has proposed. We advocate for SB 1555 and its additional protections against cyber-bullying, its provisions regarding school accountability, and its requirement for public posting of anti-bullying laws and policies.

Cyber-bullying is a significant problem. Research (Kowalski, R. M., & Limber, S. P., 2007) indicates that 32% of boys and 36% of girls were victims of cyber-bullying. 18% of boys and 16% of girls reported they had harassed someone online. Bullying is associated with increases in suicide risk in young people who are victims of bullying (Kim, Leventhal, Koh, & Boyce, 2009) as well as increases in depression and other problems associated with suicide (Fekkes, Pipers, & Verloove-Vanhorcik, 2004). One study found that victims of cyber-bullying had higher levels of depression than victims of face-to-face bullying (Wang, Nansel et al., 2010). In short, cyber-bullying, and especially chronic bullying, has long-term effects on suicide risk and mental health that can persist into adulthood (Arseneault et al., 2010).

A particular challenge for prevention of cyber-bullying is that it occurs largely in the private, virtual worlds of children and youth. Therefore, in addition to regular bullying prevention strategies and seminars, schools should institute specific policies that target cyber-bullying. Schools can make a difference. Research (McCabe, P.C., Rubinson, F., 2008) indicates that having an anti-bullying policy and making this policy known reduces instances of bullying and harassment. So does follow through by school administrators when they receive reports of bullying from students and staff.

Oregon is not alone in passing anti-bullying legislation. Forty- five state laws direct school districts to adopt anti-bullying policies; thirty-six states now include provisions in their education codes prohibiting cyber-bullying or bullying using electronic media (US Department of Education, 2011). With your help, Oregon will become the thirty-seventh. Oregon's efforts would align with national movements. The National Association of School Psychologists is urging the United States Congress to pass H.R. 4530, the Student Non-Discrimination Act and SB 506/H, the Safe Schools Improvement Act.

As you have heard from our Lincoln High School students, having a strong anti-cyber-bullying bill is only the first step. We need education for students, parents, and school staff. Peers can provide a supportive social context that discourages bullying (Baldry & Farrington, 2005). One of the best school-wide strategies to prevent bullying is to create a climate of fairness and trust, where others actively intervene rather than act as bystanders, and provide mutual support through positive peer systems. School psychologists can educate other school personnel about the general causes of bullying, and cyber-bullying in particular, and assist them in developing and implementing school-wide bullying prevention programs. Oregon and the National Association of School Psychologists stand ready to provide these resources to you. As school- and community based professionals whom this law affects, we urge you to pass SB 1555. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. I would be happy to answer any questions.

References:

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