


## Bill toughens N.J. anti-bully law; sponsor says "no child should ever be afraid of going to school"

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By DIANE D'AMICO, Education Writer | Posted: Tuesday, October 26, 2010

*With a poll: How do you feel about bullying?*

Almost a year after a state commission said New Jersey's school bullying laws should be tougher, state legislators on Monday introduced an "Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights" they said is designed to raise awareness and spur action at schools, colleges and homes in the state.

Officials at area schools said they already take the issue seriously, but any increased awareness is good, especially with the growing concern over cyberbullying that may happen outside of school.

"Bullying has become an issue we cannot deny occurs," said Northfield Community School Superintendent Janice Fipp. In 2009, the school was named a New Jersey Middle School of Character.

On Monday, Jim Jordan of reportbullying.com gave a workshop to teachers. Today, he will hold an assembly for students and a session for parents.

State Senate Majority Leader Barbara Buono, D-Middlesex, a sponsor of the bill, said children today can be bullied at any time and place, either face-to-face, through hateful messages or on a cell phone.

"Our efforts today are based on the very simple belief that no child should ever be afraid of going to school," Buono said during a news conference announcing the bill in Trenton. The bill grew out of a December 2009 report by the New Jersey Commission on Bullying in Schools, which

commended the state's 2002 law but recommended changes to strengthen and adapt it to 21st century issues.

The bill would require all school staff to get training in harassment, intimidation and bullying, or HIB, and require, rather than just encourage, schools to have anti-bullying programs. It would expand the school's reach to off-site bullying and require districts to give a public report on bullying to the local school board twice a year. The state Department of Education would set aside grant funds for training.

October is traditionally school violence awareness month in New Jersey. The state DOE is scheduled to release the statewide 2008-09 violence and vandalism report this week. According to the 2007-2008 report, 2,976 incidents of HIB were reported in schools that year.

But Jordan and school officials said many incidents are not reported because students are afraid of retaliation. Jordan puts a lot of emphasis on bystander influence and the idea that students, teachers or anyone who knows of bullying but chooses to ignore it is part of the problem.

"Complacent is complicit," he told Northfield teachers Monday. Allowing a child to get away with one or two incidents encourages the child to continue and even escalate. He prefers to use "target" rather than "victim" because bullying involves someone being targeted for aggressive, intentional and ongoing harassment designed to control.

That targeting, he said, is why bystanders are crucial to reporting and stopping bullying. Girls who pass along gossip are complicit in the bullying. Boys who watch another child get punched, but do nothing, encourage the bully to repeat the behavior and send the message to the target that no one wants to help.

Northfield, which also uses the Olweus anti-bullying and character education program, will set up a "bully box" where students can drop off anonymous reports, and there also will be an online reporting system they can use at home.

"It's foolish to say it doesn't happen," said Brigantine eighth-grade teacher and Student Council adviser Melissa Knoff, who is coordinating Red Ribbon Week at the school this week to focus on making good decisions. The school recently brought in a representative from the Atlantic County Prosecutor's Office to talk about online predators and cyberbullying, and in 2009, Brigantine Elementary School also was named a state School of Character.

A Northfield student survey found more than a third of students said they have been called names, teased or threatened once or twice, but not regularly. Fipp said a few students also wrote that they do not want to come to school because of teasing about how they look or dress. Fipp said the school is concentrating on the lunchroom and playground for more supervision because that seems to be where most incidents happen.

"It's a looser, less-structured period of the day," she said.

Galloway Township is instituting the Bully Busters program, and Superintendent Annette Giaquinto said one of the challenges is to differentiate between adolescent teasing and chronic bullying in developing a response. Neither is acceptable, but the reaction has to be appropriate, she said.

"You have to identify who is chronically instigating," she said, "and it can be a challenge because students don't always want to come forward."

That's why Jordan said he focuses on bystanders, making all students responsible for incidences of bullying in an effort to develop a school culture that says bullying will not be tolerated.

Asked whether bullying was a problem at his school, Northfield elementary school Principal Joseph Campisi paused, then said, "It's a tough problem when we don't know about it."

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### **Key points of proposal:**


- All school board members, teachers and administrators, as well as school law enforcement, must get training in harassment, intimidation and bullying, or HIB.
- Requires, rather than just encourages, school districts to establish bullying-prevention programs.
- School districts must form a school safety team in each school to receive complaints, identify and address patterns of HIB, and educate the community.
- Designates the week beginning with the first Monday in October of each year as a "Week of Respect" with age-appropriate instruction focusing on preventing harassment, intimidation and bullying.
- Amends the definition of "harassment, intimidation or bullying" to specify that the "harm" could be physical or emotional.
- Eliminates the requirement that the disruption to the school be "substantial."
- Adds a conviction of "bias intimidation" to the list of crimes for which a person may be disqualified in seeking employment in a school.
- Includes harassment, intimidation and bullying in the types of conduct that may constitute good cause for suspension or expulsion.
- District policy must include responses to actions that occur off school grounds.

- A school administrator who fails to initiate or conduct an investigation of an incident is subject to discipline.
- The superintendent of schools must report all HIB incidents publicly to the board of education twice a year. The report will be used by the state DOE to grade schools and districts in their efforts to identify harassment, intimidation and bullying.
- Include HIB data in the annual state School Report Card.
- Require the addition of an anti-bullying policy and enforcement of the student code of conduct of every public college and university.

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**Robyn Margulis** Oct 28

I agree John Vento. And the biggest bully of all among govt. officials is our sitting governor. There's a big difference though. You and I are adults. We can handle it. We can do something about it on election day. Or we can complain to the school board, city council, etc. if we are not happy about the state of our local or state govt. The same cannot be said about kids who live silently with the fear of being harassed and intimidated on a daily basis.

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**John Vento** Oct 28

So Robin Margulis says , and I quote : " Bullies take pleasure out of controlling other people. It makes them feel superior" . Hmm ... " controlling other people " ? " makes them feel superior " ? . People , I don't know about you , but , I think the real Bullies are Government officials and School officials .

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**Robyn Margulis** Oct 27

I attended the parents workshop last night at NCS and found it very informative. I was pleased to see that our school is taking bullying so seriously and I also appreciated the decent turnout of interested Northfield parents. Bullying is learned behavior, either from other bullies or from parents. Bullies take pleasure out of controlling other people. It makes them feel superior. No child should be deprived a good education because they fear going to school, walking the halls, walking home, or taking the bus. No child should want to miss school out of fear of violence, harassment, or intimidation. Those that are bullying are not going to get the message from their parents. School involvement is necessary. The most interesting part of the message of the workshop I attended (which was also given to students) was that the complacent bystander is the most important factor in allowing bullying to continue. If the bystander speaks up to the bully, or reports what's going on to parents or teachers, the bully loses the control, he is no longer impressing his peers with his superiority, and he no longer gets pleasure out of it. The proposed program is excellent. I am not in favor of over-regulation. But this is the right move. I fully support the proposed legislation. The cost to school districts would be minimal. The reward has the potential to be great.

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**Harry F Mehlman Jr** Oct 27

"A Northfield student survey found more than a third of students said they have been called names, teased or threatened once or twice, but not regularly." How horrible!! Look, the left leaning whimps have already stopped the practice of running around during recess, what's another restriction? Really, send your kids to school for breakfast, lunch and (in some parts of our country) dinner. Barry O also wants to extend the hours the kids are in school and increase the school year to all year. Have them spend so much time with these teachers-of-political correctness and then wonder why they don't respect you, the parent.

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**Linda Biamonte** Oct 27

Seriously Paul? Owning slaves and woman not voting has not one thing to do with a right of passage, maybe you should look up the definition. It will never be changed it is part of being human, we have adult bullies too. This is an issue that parents are the first defense to teach a child not to bully others and schools to reinforce it. We don't need another law to stop something that is human nature. You want to create a law go after the parents pockets when their kid seriously injures another for bullying. Laws like this leave laws of unintended consequences. What in the bill will be considered bullying, hitting, name calling, social network abuse? It's another waste of time for something that won't ever end in human existence.

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