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Bullying Policies in Iowa Schools

Terri A. Buettell

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BULLYING POLICIES IN IOWA SCHOOLS

An Abstract of a Thesis
Submitted
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Educational Specialist

Terri A. Buettell
University of Northern Iowa

December 2012

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ABSTRACT

This review examines research on bullying. Bullying is defined, along with the various roles filled by children, including bully, assistant, reinforcer, defender, outsider, or victim. The outcomes for participants and the systems in which they interact are cause for action. Bullying usually occurs in the school setting, making it an appropriate environment for intervention. Components of successful programs are discussed, specifically, the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program, Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS), and Bully Busters, highlighting the successes associated with them and the importance of the teacher's role, along with increasing awareness in the school, organizational strategies, and rewards and consequences for students. A study is described which examines the content of bullying policies in Iowa school districts. Finally, recommendations are made for further research regarding bullying policies and their impact on school efforts to curb harassment. Also, recommendations are made for further research in culture specific aspects of bullying within the United States, cyberbullying, effective programming for high schools, and the role of bully/victims.

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This Study by: Terri A. Buettell

Entitled: BULLYING POLICIES IN IOWA SCHOOLS

has been approved as meeting the thesis requirement for the

Degree of Educational Specialist

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to AJ, who inspired me to begin this work and continues to inspire me daily in my efforts to make the world a better place for all children. I love you.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Bullying and school violence came to the forefront of America's attention with the shootings at Columbine High School in 1999. This violence has continued to be a concern in this nation. More recent examples include the October 2006 suicide of Megan Meier of O'Fallon, Missouri after cyberbullying by peers and the mother of a former friend; the beating of a Belleville, Illinois high school student on his school bus captured on tape in September 2009; and the suicide of Phoebe Prince on January 14, 2010 after purported daily taunting by classmates in South Hadley, Massachusetts.

According to the National Youth Violence Prevention Resource Center (2002), bullying occurs whenever one or more people persist in trying to hurt or intimidate someone. The components of bullying, along with implications for those affected by it and some strategies that have proven effective for prevention of bullying, are reviewed in this paper. One of the most basic of these strategies, found commonly throughout effective programs, is the implementation of policies and procedures for education for the prevention of bullying and consequences for those who engage in such behavior.

The No Child Left Behind Act (United States Department of Education, 2002) requires schools to take steps to ensure that they are providing safe learning environments. In an effort to comply with this requirement and curb bullying, in 2007 Iowa implemented Senate File 61 that requires schools to take steps to address this serious issue through school policy. This legislation outlines specific components that are required to be included in all schools' policies in order to continue to be accredited by the state of Iowa by September 1, 2009.

This study is a review anti-bullying policies in Iowa schools and the findings of a content analysis of these policies will be reported. Recommendations for further research are also included.

CHAPTER 2

OVERVIEW OF BULLYING

What Is Bullying?

Bullying may be defined as repeated, deliberate efforts to hurt or intimidate someone of lower status. In order to be considered bullying, three major components must be present--efforts to hurt or intimidate someone (National Youth Violence Prevention Resource Center, 2002), a power imbalance between the bully and the intended victim (Heinrichs, 2003), and the absence of provocation (Olweus, 1993). The efforts to hurt or intimidate can take many forms, including direct attacks such as verbal insults, threats of or actual physical violence, or theft or vandalism of personal belongings. Bullying can also take the form of sexual harassment or dating violence (Espelage & Holt, 2006). It can also be indirect through the fostering of social isolation through spreading rumors or using peer pressure to induce others to reject the victim (Fleming & Towey, 2002). This indirect form of bullying is often referred to as relational bullying because of its use of relationships as a weapon (Horne, Bartolomucci, & Newman-Carlson, 2003).

Within the second component in bullying, the power imbalance, the victim often feels helpless and lacks the ability to respond effectively (Heinrichs, 2003). Although this is often the result of the victim being smaller in stature or of lower social status, there may be other factors impacting the victim's perceptions. The bully may be committing these acts while with a group of peers when the victim is alone (Rigby, 2002). It may also be that the victim has a physical, mental, or emotional disability that leads to feelings of vulnerability (Heinrichs, 2003; Rigby, 2002).

Finally, the third component of bullying is known as proactive aggression (Olweus, 1993), meaning that the actions are taken without provocation or threat. The bully spontaneously engages in the behavior without provocation or apparent reason.

Thus, according to Olweus (1993), bullying may be defined succinctly as repeated threats or intimidation inflicted on a vulnerable individual without provocation.

Bullying Roles and Their Long-Term Implications

Bully. A bully is a person who implements tactics to keep the power imbalance present. The characteristics of bullies may be surprising to some. Olweus (1993) found that, contrary to popular beliefs about the presence of insecurity in bullies, they actually tend to be arrogant and need to control others. They also tend to favor aggressive reactions to situations, are very impulsive, and have little or no sympathy for their victims (Gini & Pozzoli, 2006). They are often described by peers as hot-headed and short-tempered, but they usually report ease in making and keeping friends, although it appears likely that they tend to associate with other children who value bullying (Ellis & Zabatany, 2007; Nansel et al., 2001).

There are numerous negative outcomes for bullies. They are more likely to engage in high-risk behaviors, such as smoking, drinking, theft, vandalism, and refusal to obey parents (Haynie et al., 2001). The American Medical Association also recognized a great risk for behaviors such as shoplifting and frequent drug use (Fleming & Towey, 2002). Bullies also have lower academic achievement and poor perceptions of school climate (Nansel et al., 2001), and a detachment that makes empathy less likely because they feel little emotional attachment to their school or the people therein. Children who engage in bullying and find such tactics effective may also continue to use these tactics in adulthood, resulting in abusive behaviors in their homes, jobs, and personal lives (Heinrichs, 2004; Rigby, 2002). Because they do not learn appropriate ways of interacting with others, they develop dysfunctional social patterns (Haynie et al., 2001) which may help explain why those showing bullying behavior by age six have six times the chance of having a criminal record as young adults and, by age 30, are five times as likely as others to be convicted of a serious crime (Olweus, 1993).

Victim. There is an intended victim, sometimes called the target, in a bullying scenario. Victims tend to suffer from poor social skills, high levels of insecurity and anxiety, and low self-esteem (Nansel et al., 2001). One study found that peers rated those that they identified as victims with the lowest social status ratings, including peer rejection scores and level of social acceptance (Salmivalli, Lagerspetz, Bjorkqvist, Osterman, & Kaukiainen, 1996).

There are two types of victims-passive targets and bully-victims (Olweus, 1993; Horne et al., 2003; Heinrichs, 2003). Children who have few friends, cry easily, or have very negative reactions to conflict or failure are more likely to become targets (Newman, 2000). These traits are found in the passive target (Heinrichs, 2003; Horne et al., 2003).

Victims suffer greatly from the tactics used by bullies—terrorism, isolation, and corruption. Terrorism involves using fear to frighten or manipulate targets. Isolation cuts victims off from supportive relationships. Corruption impairs their ways of thinking, speaking, and acting, leading to socially unhealthy and inappropriate behavior (Garbarino & deLara, 2003). Haynie et al. (2001) found that victims have difficulties similar to bullies, specifically, increased risk of drinking, smoking, theft, vandalism, and parental disobedience. Other findings contradict this claim, finding that victims have a decreased risk of alcohol use and inconclusive results concerning smoking (Nansel et al., 2001). Some other results of victimization include illness, truancy, lower academic achievement, plummeting self-esteem, sleep difficulties, and depression or suicidal thoughts and behaviors (Horne et al., 2003). Victims show poor emotional and social adjustment, reporting great loneliness. This loneliness reported by victims is part of a cycle. They are rejected by peers who fear victimization through association which leads to isolation and loneliness, making them vulnerable as targets (Nansel et al., 2001).

Bully-victims. Bully-victims, also called provocative victims (Olweus, 1993; Solberg, Olweus, & Endresen, 2007), are a smaller group than passive targets. Although this group is not as well understood as the others, researchers note that these individuals have a mix of anxiety and aggressive reaction tendencies. They are hot-headed, tend to irritate those around them, and are likely to be perceived as ones who are deserving of bullying (Veenstra et al., 2005). It is not completely understood what leads to the dual roles of victim and bully. One study of 301 bullies found that over half reported having been victimized in the past year (Haynie et al., 2001). They may have become bullies as an expression of frustration at having been bullied. Or, it is possible they were bullies who became victims when their victims retaliated for their heavy-handed behavior (National Institutes of Health, 2001).

Youth who have participated in both the roles of bully and victim have the poorest prognosis of all. They have the worst social and emotional adjustment of any group studied and the highest incidence of problem behaviors (Nansel et al., 2001). This group of children also tends to have the highest incidence of depression (Klomek, Marrocco, Kleinman, Schonfeld, & Gould, 2007), lower self-control, and poorer academic outcomes than any other (Haynie et al., 2001). Espelage and Holt (2006) found that bully-victims experience significantly more dating violence and emotional abuse in relationships than any other group. They also found that the degree of anxiety and depression had a positive correlation to the degree of abuse in these relationships, meaning that bully-victims are at the highest risk for mental health problems resulting from abusive dating relationships. Sexual harassment by peers is also a danger for bully-victims, who, along with passive victims, experience greater levels of this type of bullying than any other group (Espelage & Holt, 2006).

Outcomes for Schools

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 (U.S. Department of Education, 2002) requires schools to become safer places. A study released by the National Institutes of Health (2003) found that boys were more likely to carry weapons to school if they had been bullied and even more likely to do so if they had engaged in bullying behavior themselves. When teachers fail to prevent bullying, they effectively turn over to the bullies some of their own power and authority regarding the way the school functions. As a result, there may be an increase in gang activity or students may decide they must take matters into their own hands in order to protect themselves (Garbarino & deLara, 2003). Perhaps the most frightening implication for schools is the possibility for school violence as a result of bullying. The Safe Schools Initiative (Fein, Reddy, Borum & Modzeleski, 2002) studied all school shootings, or other targeted violence, since the 1970's and found that 71% of attackers reported having been the victims of bullying. Prior violence was not a commonality as almost none of the attackers had demonstrated prior violent behavior. Furthermore, almost 98% of them had reported a significant loss, such as the death of a loved one or breakup of a romantic relationship, prior to the shooting. For 66% this meant a perceived failure or loss of status (Fein et al., 2002) and subsequent corruption. As previously described, corruption is a common consequence of bullying which manifests as faulty thinking, lower self-esteem, and poor social and emotional adjustment. Thus, it can be seen that bullying prevention is critical for the safety of students and schools, on an individual basis as well as system-wide.

Foundations for Prevention

Increase awareness. Increasing awareness of the presence and nature of bullying includes educating school staff and parents or guardians about the extent of bullying at their school. It is also critical at this stage that these adults become

committed to doing something about solving the problem (Olweus, 2003). Part of increasing awareness involves gathering information through questionnaires from students, teachers, and other stakeholders about the nature and extent of bullying present in the school (Heinrichs, 2003; Newman, 2000; Olweus, 2003). In addition to commercially available questionnaires, schools in Iowa participate in the Iowa Youth Survey, a collaborative effort between human services, education, and justice agencies, which assesses the attitudes and perceptions of 6th, 8th, and 11th grade students in the state on a number of aspects of their schools and communities, including safety (<http://www.iowayouthsurvey.org/>) Also, group discussions and interviews may be used to gather this data. It may also be advisable to hire outsiders to serve in this evaluative process to help eliminate bias (Garbarino & deLara, 2003), since school personnel may be tempted to minimize the problem in their building. The implementation of Iowa Senate File 61 (2007) has already set this ball in motion by forcing Iowa schools to have an awareness of the issue of bullying.

Organizational Meeting. It is helpful to hold a meeting in order to develop a plan for implementation of the intervention program when a formal bullying prevention program is being implemented. A group of support staff should meet to determine the details. This group should include teachers, administration, the school psychologist, school counselors, the school nurse, and some parents and students. Information that has been gathered from surveys or discussions should be available at this meeting, if possible (Newman, 2000; Olweus, 1993; Rigby, 2001). The purpose of this meeting should be the establishment of policies for prevention of bullying as well as procedures for intervention when bullying occurs (Olweus, 1993; Rigby, 2001). This process will support school compliance with the mandates of Iowa law. It is important to continue to have meetings on a regular basis to assess and monitor the success of the program implemented by the school. The time frame for these continuing meetings should be

determined at the outset and representatives selected to form this support team (Newman, 2000).

Policy Development. Even if a school does not plan to implement a formal bullying prevention program, one way to start combating bullying is through school board policy. Establishing a strong policy against bullying and procedures for reporting and investigating complaints lays the groundwork for development of safe schools and is now a requirement for accreditation for all schools in the state of Iowa. Olweus (1993) and Rigby (2001) have both identified this as one of the earliest steps to be taken by prevention committees. All stakeholders can be informed and empowered to stop bullying and participate in prevention efforts by having access to well-written policy.

This study examines the bullying policies in Iowa schools. It compares the required components of Iowa law with the actual content of existing Iowa school policies. The required components include a definition of harassment and bullying consistent with the legislative sample, a statement that clearly indicates that such behavior is against policy, a description of expectations for prevention efforts, consequences for bullying, procedures for reporting and investigating bullying complaints as well as designated personnel in charge of handling such matters, and a statement about the manner in which the policy will be publicized. A full description of the law can be found in Appendix A.

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

Compliance with the Iowa law concerning bullying policies in schools was systematically examined for this study. First, a stratified random sample of Iowa school districts was identified. Efforts were made to obtain the bullying policies for each of the identified school districts. Policies were then examined to determine whether or not they contained the required components.

Sampling Procedure

There are 366 public school districts in the state of Iowa. The complete list of school districts was accessed through the Iowa Department of Education's website at www.iowa.gov/educate/. This list was then sorted and grouped by enrollment size to ensure adequate representation of the various district sizes found within the state (see Table 1 for the categories used to sort districts).

In an effort to have adequate representation of each size district, the names were run through SPSS software to randomly select 10% of districts within each enrollment category. The only exception to this process was with the enrollment category of 7500+, comprised of 10 districts, because 10% would have only yielded one district. Instead, because of the relatively small number of districts involved in this category, all 10 districts were examined. This had the additional benefit of representing a much greater percentage of Iowa school children overall. Table 1 shows the distribution of districts studied by enrollment size.

Table 1

Sample Distribution by Enrollment Size

Enrollment size	Total number of districts	Number of districts studied
7500+	10	10
2500-7499	22	2
1000-2499	81	8
600-999	93	9
400-599	70	7
250-399	59	5
Less than 250	31	3

The selected school districts were located geographically throughout the entire state with varied mixtures of socioeconomic status, racial and ethnic representation, and educational ability. No attempt was made to select schools based upon student characteristics. Only district size was considered. All districts were public school districts with no private schools included in this study.

Efforts were made to obtain bullying policies from all identified school districts. First, each district website was searched for current policies. If policies were not available online, school district secretaries were contacted via email, mail, and in person, where practical, to request a copy of their district policy. The request included an explanation that the policy would be used in a study of bullying prevention policies

in Iowa schools for a thesis and an assurance that participants would have anonymity. The option of sending the policy electronically or by mail was offered, along with an offer to pay for any copying costs and postage. A follow-up request was made if no response was received within one month of the original contact. When a district did not respond after these attempts, a substitution was made by using the school district adjacent to the original selection in the list that was sorted by enrollment size.

Participants

A total of 44 school districts were selected, including all 10 districts with an enrollment over 7500. Of those, 43 policies were obtained through the initial and follow-up efforts, and only one substitution had to be made. For this substitution, the adjacent school just below the original selection had an enrollment size of only two fewer students and was located in the same geographical region, thus providing a comparable replacement.

Procedure

Each policy was examined by the author for compliance with the individual standards mandated by the Iowa Department of Education (see Appendix B), based upon the requirements outlined in Iowa Senate File 61 (2007). A sample policy, provided by the Iowa Department of Education on its website, was also used as a guide for clarification on the verbiage and expectations of the department regarding the law (see Appendix C). A practice review was done early in the study to determine clarity of the standards. If the standard was ambiguous or required any subjective decision-making, it was re-written to be more specific. Once the criteria were deemed to have adequate objectivity for the study, all district policies were examined and rated as compliant or non-compliant. After an initial examination, the author went back through the policies a second and third time for the same purpose and compared the results of each subsequent review to the previous ones. If there was disagreement

between the results, they were examined more carefully to make a final determination. The following standards were used to determine compliance, based upon the legislation:

Table 2

Standards Used to Determine Compliance with Iowa Senate File 61

Component	Full compliance	Non-compliance
1. Definition of Bullying	Definition of bullying which includes specific designation of all 17 protected classes	No definition of bullying or some definition of bullying which may or may not include designation of some protected classes, but not all
2. Policy Statement	The policy includes an official statement that bullying is a violation of board policy and includes scope of coverage	No statement or statement fails to declare it a violation of policy and/or include scope of coverage
3. Behavior Expectations	The policy includes a statement regarding the behavior expectations for prevention, reporting, and investigating bullying	The policy includes no statement or fails to cover one or more of the three areas of prevention, reporting, and investigating

(table continues)

Component	Full Compliance	Non-compliance
4.Consequences	The policy outlines specific consequences which may be imposed for those found to have engaged in bullying behavior	The policy fails to provide any indication that there will be any consequences for bullying or to indicate what the consequences may be
5.Reporting Statement	The policy includes a statement about the procedure for reporting bullying and the person responsible, designated by name or title, for taking the report	The policy includes no statement about procedures for reporting bullying and/or the person responsible for taking the report
6.Investigation Procedures	The policy includes a statement about investigation of complaints and consideration of totality of circumstances along with designation of person by name or title responsible for investigating complaints	The policy does not include a statement about investigation or fails to include a statement that there will be a consideration of totality of circumstances and/or designate a person responsible for investigating complaints

(table continues)

Component	Full Compliance	Non-compliance
7. Publication Methods	The policy includes a statement about the planned method for publication of the policy	The policy does not include a statement about the planned method for publication of the policy

Each element was judged according to these criteria. The quality of the statements was not judged beyond the most minimal adherence to the definitions above in an effort to be as objective as possible.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Overall Compliance

Analysis of the board policies for the selected districts yielded the following percentages, indicating compliance or non-compliance with the mandated components of Iowa’s law regarding bullying prevention policies (see Table 3):

Table 3
Percentage of Districts Compliant with Policy Components

Component	Compliant	Non-compliant
1. Definition of Bullying	73%	27%
2. Policy Statement	93%	7%
3. Behavior Expectations	55%	45%
4. Consequences	93%	7%
5. Reporting Statement	77%	23%
6. Investigation Statement	41%	59%
7. Publication Methods	52%	48%

Although the criteria were meant to provide a comprehensive, dichotomous approach, not all incidents of non-compliance were so clear cut. On the first

component, the Definition of Bullying, all policies examined actually included a definition, but 22% did not include reference to all 17 of the protected classes of bullying. There were no schools that completely failed to include a definition.

Most of the Non-compliance ratings on the third component, Behavior Expectations, were the result of an absence of a written expectation that schools would take efforts to prevent bullying. Many schools had no statement about behavioral expectations of staff or students related to bullying at all.

The highest rate of compliance was found for two criteria-Policy Statement and Consequences. Schools seemed willing to state that bullying is against their policies and identify specific consequences for those found to have engaged in such behavior, with compliance rates in both areas at 93% of the districts studied.

Many of the schools examined not only included a statement about how to report bullying, but also included a copy of a reporting form to be used. The policies often also included statements about efforts the student could make to stop the bullying on their own.

Despite the provision of information about how to report bullying, schools most often failed to designate the specific individuals, by name or by position, who would be responsible for investigation of reported incidents. This area had the lowest rate of compliance in the study.

Although 86% of the districts in the study had bullying policies published online, often in parent and student handbooks, they failed to indicate within their policies what method of publication would be used. Because the law requires this as a component of the policy, these schools were found to be non-compliant for this component.

Compliance By Enrollment Size

To examine whether district size had any apparent effect on compliance, the results were also compiled by district size (see Table 4).

Table 4

Rate of Compliance by District Size

District Size	<u>Mandated Component</u>						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7500+	90%	100%	50%	100%	90%	70%	80%
2500-7499	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	50%	50%
1000-2499	63%	100%	75%	100%	88%	75%	75%
600-999	67%	89%	44%	89%	78%	11%	44%
400-599	71%	100%	71%	86%	43%	43%	86%
250-399	60%	80%	20%	80%	80%	0%	20%
<250	33%	67%	33%	100%	67%	0%	0%
Total	73%	93%	55%	93%	77%	41%	52%

The null hypothesis is that district size would not affect compliance with Iowa Senate File 61 (2007) on any component. However, the results above would seem to suggest that larger school districts have higher rates of compliance than smaller ones. It was noted that the smallest districts also have the smallest sample sizes which may result in misleading results. For this reason, the sample districts were combined into two samples by enrollment size and the variance was examined by computing a chi-square test for independence using SPSS software. Twenty school districts with enrollment sizes 1000 or above were grouped together and 24 school districts with enrollments below 1000 were combined into the second group. Each mandated component was computed separately, with the two enrollment categories in a 2x2 table. The results of this calculation are reported below (see Table 5).

Table 5

Analysis of Variance by Enrollment Size

Policy Component	N	df	Pearson chi-square	P
Definition of Bullying	44	1	1.605	.205
Policy Statement	44	1	2.683	.101
Behavior Expectations	44	1	1.616	.204
Consequences	44	1	2.683	.101
Reporting Procedures	44	1	3.382	.066
Investigation Procedures	44	1	12.836	.000
Publication Methods	44	1	3.839	.050

These results indicate, using an alpha of .05, that the null hypothesis can be accepted for the definition, policy statement, behavior expectations, consequences, and reporting procedures. In the areas of investigation procedures and publication methods, the null hypothesis must be rejected. Of greatest significance, with a *p* of .000, was the difference in compliance in the area of investigation procedures. Seventy percent of larger districts met this standard, with only 17% of the smaller districts complying. This difference had an effect size of .54, which is a large effect. Thus, it can be accepted that there is a strong relationship between district size and compliance with the requirement to have clearly-defined investigation procedures outlined in anti-bullying

policies. There was also a significant difference in the publication methods component, ($p = .05$), with 75% of districts in the larger enrollment category compliant with the requirement to describe their planned publication methods, compared to 46% of the smaller districts. This component had a moderate effect size at .30.

Complete compliance was also examined by district size (see Table 6). Only 25% of the districts in the sample have fully compliant policies. The smallest districts studied had a lower rate of compliance than the larger ones, with only 8% meeting all the standards in the law. Some of this difference may be explained by the significant difference in compliance on the standards related to publication methods and investigation procedures by district size.

Table 6

Number of School Districts Fully Compliant by District Size

Enrollment Size	Number of Districts Compliant/Number of Schools
7500+	4/10
2500-7499	1/2
1000-2499	4/8
600-999	1/9
400-599	1/7
250-399	0/5
<250	0/3

In order to see if the difference was significant, the districts were combined in the same manner as above--20 school districts with enrollment of 1000 or above and 24 school districts with enrollment below 1000. A chi square was tabulated on the difference. The result was χ^2 (1, N=44), 7.822, $p=.005$ which indicates that the difference is significant. Forty five percent of sample districts with larger enrollment were fully compliant with the expectations of the law, whereas, 8% of districts with smaller enrollment were in full compliance. The effect size of this difference was .42, indicating a moderate, almost strong, relationship between district size and complete compliance with the requirements of Iowa law.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Conclusions

Iowa's Senate File 61(2007) provides a specific and universal standard for what constitutes bullying and its inappropriateness in school settings across the state of Iowa. These policies also provide an avenue for accountability of districts regarding compliance to the requirements under No Child Left Behind (United States Department of Education, 2002) to ensure that schools provide safe learning environments for students. This study indicates that only 25% of Iowa school districts are meeting this requirement in full compliance with the state law.

Almost all districts had a clear statement that bullying was against their district policies and identified potential consequences for such behavior. The results suggest that the most common areas of weakness in anti-bullying policies are those which require clear definitions of the expectations of staff, specifically, investigation procedures and behavioral expectations--especially the requirement to enact school- or district-wide prevention efforts, along with publication methods.

Given that Olweus (1993) and Rigby (2001) have identified strong policies as important foundations for the prevention of bullying, it is concerning that schools fall short in this area. Of perhaps greatest concern is the failure to identify the actual actions to be taken by systems and individuals that lead to enforcement of policies and create a school-wide climate against bullying. The absence of such standards in district policies will make it difficult to enact and enforce strong anti-bullying efforts within the school. It fails to hold everyone accountable and leaves much to chance.

Although the results of this study of Iowa school district bullying policies indicate that some Iowa school districts are establishing strong rules against bullying, most districts are not yet at complete compliance with state code. Eleven of the forty-

four districts had total compliance, four of which were from the largest enrollment size category. No schools in the bottom two enrollment size categories had complete compliance. Overall, this study suggests larger schools are more likely to have policies that meet the requirements of Iowa Senate File 61 (2007).

Because policies are an important part of reducing bullying in schools, it is critical that districts have well-written policies. The requirements outlined in Iowa Senate File 61 (2007) are thorough and appropriate. Further, the Iowa Department of Education has provided districts with a suggested policy (see Appendix C) to enable them to more easily implement compliant policies. Districts should be able to easily adopt appropriate anti-bullying policies to support further prevention efforts. Policies without all of the required components lack the backbone and clarity needed to hold all stakeholders accountable.

Limitations

This study has some limitations. The reliability is not well-established since there was no test for inter-rater reliability. The results could be strengthened by having an additional researcher examine the same policies to check the results for comparison.

Another limitation of the study is that it does not examine the quality of the components. Any statement that met the most minimal requirement of the state law was considered compliant. This may or may not indicate an effective anti-bullying policy in a particular district.

Another limitation relates to the purpose of the study. The original intent of the research was to get an indication of Iowa school districts' commitments to prevention of bullying by looking for the presence of these policies. There was no mandate requiring such a policy, therefore the presence of an anti-bullying policy in a district could have served as an indicator that the district was taking steps to examine and address this problem. However, the change in state law in the midst of the study rendered this

conclusion moot. Although it is commendable that any state's department of education would consider this a matter serious enough to require such a policy in every district, it weakened the impact of the presence of such a policy on the original research question.

Also, the focus here is limited in its impact on anti-bullying efforts. Although this study looks at the percentage of districts which have policies against bullying, it does not examine the effectiveness of such policies. The presence of a policy does not guarantee that it will be enforced; nor does it guarantee that bullying will be reduced.

Despite these limitations, this study provides a baseline for district compliance with the Iowa legislation. The results of the study also suggest a number of additional research questions.

Implications for Future Research

There are many possible areas for further research about the effects of anti-bullying policies in schools. Establishment of strong anti-bullying policies is just the first step in a school's efforts to combat bullying. Further research could be conducted to see how many of these districts have actually implemented serious prevention programs. Research in districts with these policies could also examine the extent to which they follow and enforce their existing policies.

It would also be beneficial to examine student experiences with bullying in Iowa and states which do not mandate such policies to see whether or not such policies have an impact on students' experiences in school. Another way to examine this would be to conduct a comparison study of student perceptions of the occurrence of bullying in schools which are compliant and schools which failed to meet minimal standards of compliance of Iowa law.

Another possible focus for additional research is attitudes of staff and other stakeholders. Staff attitudes about bullying and prevention efforts are critical to the success of efforts to prevent victimization. It could be interesting to do a qualitative

study comparing staff attitudes about the topic in districts wherein anti-bullying policies are mandated by the state and districts in which policies have been enacted voluntarily or have not been developed at all. In addition, the significance in the difference between some of the results of this study based upon enrollment size indicates that further research is warranted in this area. It could be important to understand why these differences occur in order to provide support that would enable more consistent compliance across all district sizes.

In conclusion, the results of this study suggest that some Iowa school districts are to taking a stand against bullying by including anti-harassment and anti-bullying statements in their official policies. However, they often fail to meet the minimum requirements of Iowa Senate File 61 and it is unknown how well these policies are being enforced. Larger districts are more likely to have compliant policies than the smallest districts. The components most likely to meet compliance requirements are the existence of a policy statement in general that indicates that bullying is against district policy and the mention of the possibility of specific consequences for anyone deemed to have violated said policy. The components most likely to fail the compliance test are those which outline behavioral expectations of staff, especially in the area of prevention, and those which identify by name or role who will be responsible for investigating complaints.

Bullying is not just a normal part of growing up. It will not be outgrown. It is up to responsible educators and professionals to find solutions to eliminate this scourge in America's schools in order to foster a safer, more supportive school climate and train children to become adults who are emotionally healthy. As Iowa strives to improve their educational services to children and meet the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act (United States Department of Education, 2002), more work needs to take place on development and implementation of strong anti-bullying policies in schools. This may

be an opportunity for ancillary staff, such as those working for area education agencies, to support their respective districts by helping develop good quality policies and increase local buy-in to encourage implementation integrity. There remains much work to be done and many opportunities for further research as the movement to stop bullying galvanizes.

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APPENDIX A

IOWA SENATE FILE 61

1 3 AN ACT
1 4 RELATING TO THE ESTABLISHMENT OF STATE AND SCHOOL
ANTI HARASSMENT
1 5 AND ANTIBULLYING POLICIES, PROVIDING DATA COLLECTION AND
1 6 REPORTING REQUIREMENTS, AND PROVIDING FOR IMMUNITY AND
1 7 OTHER RELATED MATTERS.
1 8
1 9 BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF IOWA:
1 10
1 11 Section 1. Section 280.12, subsection 2, Code 2007, is
1 12 amended by adding the following new paragraph:
1 13 NEW PARAGRAPH. f. Harassment or bullying prevention
1 14 goals, programs, training, and other initiatives.
1 15 Sec. 2. NEW SECTION. 280.28 HARASSMENT AND BULLYING
1 16 PROHIBITED == POLICY == IMMUNITY.
1 17 1. PURPOSE == FINDINGS == POLICY. The state of Iowa is
1 18 committed to providing all students with a safe and civil
1 19 school environment in which all members of the school
1 20 community are treated with dignity and respect. The general
1 21 assembly finds that a safe and civil school environment is
1 22 necessary for students to learn and achieve at high academic
1 23 levels. Harassing and bullying behavior can seriously disrupt
1 24 the ability of school employees to maintain a safe and civil
1 25 environment, and the ability of students to learn and succeed.
1 26 Therefore, it is the policy of the state of Iowa that school
1 27 employees, volunteers, and students in Iowa schools shall not
1 28 engage in harassing or bullying behavior.
1 29 2. DEFINITIONS. For purposes of this section, unless the
1 30 context otherwise requires:
1 31 a. "Electronic" means any communication involving the
1 32 transmission of information by wire, radio, optical cable,
1 33 electromagnetic, or other similar means. "Electronic"
1 34 includes but is not limited to communication via electronic
1 35 mail, internet-based communications, pager service, cell
2 1 phones, and electronic text messaging.
2 2 b. "Harassment" and "bullying" shall be construed to mean
2 3 any electronic, written, verbal, or physical act or conduct
2 4 toward a student which is based on any actual or perceived
2 5 trait or characteristic of the student and which creates an
2 6 objectively hostile school environment that meets one or more
2 7 of the following conditions:
2 8 (1) Places the student in reasonable fear of harm to the
2 9 student's person or property.
2 10 (2) Has a substantially detrimental effect on the
2 11 student's physical or mental health.
2 12 (3) Has the effect of substantially interfering with a

2 13 student's academic performance.

2 14 (4) Has the effect of substantially interfering with the
2 15 student's ability to participate in or benefit from the
2 16 services, activities, or privileges provided by a school.

2 17 c. "Trait or characteristic of the student" includes but
2 18 is not limited to age, color, creed, national origin, race,
2 19 religion, marital status, sex, sexual orientation, gender
2 20 identity, physical attributes, physical or mental ability or
2 21 disability, ancestry, political party preference, political
2 22 belief, socioeconomic status, or familial status.

2 23 d. "Volunteer" means an individual who has regular,
2 24 significant contact with students.

2 25 3. POLICY. On or before September 1, 2007, the board of
2 26 directors of a school district and the authorities in charge
2 27 of each accredited nonpublic school shall adopt a policy
2 28 declaring harassment and bullying in schools, on school
2 29 property, and at any school function, or school=sponsored
2 30 activity regardless of its location, in a manner consistent
2 31 with this section, as against state and school policy. The
2 32 board and the authorities shall make a copy of the policy
2 33 available to all school employees, volunteers, students, and
2 34 parents or guardians and shall take all appropriate steps to
2 35 bring the policy against harassment and bullying and the
3 1 responsibilities set forth in the policy to the attention of
3 2 school employees, volunteers, students, and parents or
3 3 guardians. Each policy shall, at a minimum, include all of
3 4 the following components:

3 5 a. A statement declaring harassment and bullying to be
3 6 against state and school policy. The statement shall include
3 7 but not be limited to the following provisions:

3 8 (1) School employees, volunteers, and students in school,
3 9 on school property, or at any school function or school=
3 10 sponsored activity shall not engage in harassing and bullying
3 11 behavior.

3 12 (2) School employees, volunteers, and students shall not
3 13 engage in reprisal, retaliation, or false accusation against a
3 14 victim, witness, or an individual who has reliable information
3 15 about such an act of harassment or bullying.

3 16 b. A definition of harassment and bullying as set forth in
3 17 this section.

3 18 c. A description of the type of behavior expected from
3 19 school employees, volunteers, parents or guardians, and
3 20 students relative to prevention measures, reporting, and
3 21 investigation of harassment or bullying.

3 22 d. The consequences and appropriate remedial action for a
3 23 person who violates the antiharassment and antibullying
3 24 policy.

3 25 e. A procedure for reporting an act of harassment or
3 26 bullying, including the identification by job title of the
3 27 school official responsible for ensuring that the policy is
3 28 implemented, and the identification of the person or persons
3 29 responsible for receiving reports of harassment or bullying.

3 30 f. A procedure for the prompt investigation of complaints,
 3 31 either identifying the school superintendent or the
 3 32 superintendent's designee as the individual responsible for
 3 33 conducting the investigation, including a statement that
 3 34 investigators will consider the totality of circumstances
 3 35 presented in determining whether conduct objectively

4 1 *constitutes harassment or bullying under this section.*

4 2 g. A statement of the manner in which the policy will be
 4 3 publicized.

4 4 4. PROGRAMS ENCOURAGED. The board of directors of a
 4 5 school district and the authorities in charge of each
 4 6 accredited nonpublic school are encouraged to establish
 4 7 programs designed to eliminate harassment and bullying in
 4 8 schools. To the extent that funds are available for these
 4 9 purposes, school districts and accredited nonpublic schools
 4 10 shall do the following:

4 11 a. Provide training on antiharassment and antibullying
 4 12 policies to school employees and volunteers who have
 4 13 significant contact with students.

4 14 b. Develop a process to provide school employees,
 4 15 volunteers, and students with the skills and knowledge to help
 4 16 reduce incidents of harassment and bullying.

4 17 5. IMMUNITY. A school employee, volunteer, or student, or
 4 18 a student's parent or guardian who promptly, reasonably, and
 4 19 in good faith reports an incident of harassment or bullying,
 4 20 in compliance with the procedures in the policy adopted
 4 21 pursuant to this section, to the appropriate school official
 4 22 designated by the school district or accredited nonpublic
 4 23 school, shall be immune from civil or criminal liability
 4 24 relating to such report and to participation in any
 4 25 administrative or judicial proceeding resulting from or
 4 26 relating to the report.

4 27 6. COLLECTION REQUIREMENT. The board of directors of a
 4 28 school district and the authorities in charge of each
 4 29 nonpublic school shall develop and maintain a system to
 4 30 collect harassment and bullying incidence data.

4 31 7. INTEGRATION OF POLICY AND REPORTING. The board of
 4 32 directors of a school district and the authorities in charge
 4 33 of each nonpublic school shall integrate its antiharassment
 4 34 and antibullying policy into the comprehensive school
 4 35 improvement plan required under section 256.7, subsection 21,
 5 1 and shall report data collected under subsection 6, as
 5 2 specified by the department, to the local community.

5 3 8. EXISTING REMEDIES NOT AFFECTED. This section shall not
 5 4 be construed to preclude a victim from seeking administrative
 5 5 or legal remedies under any applicable provision of law.

(Iowa Senate File, 2007).

APPENDIX B

IOWA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION ON SENATE FILE 61

Anti-Bullying/Anti-Harassment Policies (July 2007 School Leader Update)

All school boards, public and those of accredited nonpublic schools, are to have the new anti-bullying/anti-harassment policy adopted on or before September 1, 2007. **This is an accreditation issue.** Failure to adopt a policy with all required components could subject a school or school district to a Phase II visit and possible loss of accreditation. A sample policy is on the websites of the Iowa Department of Education and the Iowa Association of School Boards. Those required elements are as follows:

A definition of harassment and bullying that is consistent with the definition in the legislation (this is in the sample policy), and which includes all of the following 17 traits/characteristics: real or perceived age, color, creed, national origin, race, religion, marital status, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, physical attributes, physical or mental ability or disability, ancestry, political party preference, political belief, socioeconomic status, or familial status.

A statement declaring harassment and bullying to be against state and school policy, and making the policy applicable to all school employees, volunteers, and students in school, on school property, or at any school function or school-sponsored activity.

A description of the type of behavior expected from school employees, volunteers, parents or guardians, and students relative to prevention measures, reporting, and investigation of harassment or bullying.

The consequences and appropriate remedial action for a person who violates the policy.

A procedure for reporting an act of harassment or bullying, including the identification by job title of the school official responsible for ensuring that the policy is implemented, and the identification of the person or persons responsible for receiving reports of harassment or bullying.

A procedure for the prompt investigation of complaints, either identifying the school superintendent or the superintendent's designee as the individual responsible for conducting the investigation, including a statement that investigators will consider the totality of circumstances presented in determining whether conduct objectively constitutes harassment or bullying under this section.

A statement of the manner in which the policy will be publicized.

(Iowa Department of Education (n.d.). Anti-harassment/anti-bullying policies [Data file]. Retrieved May 5, 2011 from <http://www.iowa.gov/educate/>).

APPENDIX C

SAMPLE ANTI-BULLYING/HARASSMENT POLICY

Harassment and bullying of students and employees are against federal, state and local policy, and are not tolerated by the board. The board is committed to providing all students with a safe and civil school environment in which all members of the school community are treated with dignity and respect. To that end, the board has in place policies, procedures, and practices that are designed to reduce and eliminate bullying and harassment as well as processes and procedures to deal with incidents of bullying and harassment. Bullying and harassment of students by students, school employees, and volunteers who have direct contact with students will not be tolerated in the school or school district.

The board prohibits harassment, bullying, hazing, or any other victimization, of students, based on any of the following actual or perceived traits or characteristics: age, color, creed, national origin, race, religion, marital status, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, physical attributes, physical or mental ability or disability, ancestry, political party preference, political belief, socioeconomic status, or familial status. Harassment against employees based upon race, color, creed, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin, religion, age or disability is also prohibited.

This policy is in effect while students or employees are on property within the jurisdiction of the board; while on school-owned or school-operated vehicles; while attending or engaged in school-sponsored activities; and while away from school grounds if the misconduct directly affects the good order, efficient management and welfare of the school or school district.

If, after an investigation, a student is found to be in violation of this policy, the student shall be disciplined by appropriate measures up to, and including, suspension and expulsion. If after an investigation a school employee is found to be in violation of this policy, the employee shall be disciplined by appropriate measures up to, and including, termination. If after an investigation a school volunteer is found to be in violation of this policy, the volunteer shall be subject to appropriate measures up to, and including, exclusion from school grounds. "Volunteer" means an individual who has regular, significant contact with students.

Harassment and bullying mean any electronic, written, verbal, or physical act or conduct toward a student which is based on any actual or perceived trait or characteristic of the student and which creates an objectively hostile school environment that meets one or more of the following conditions:

- Places the student in reasonable fear of harm to the student's person or property;
- Has a substantially detrimental effect on the student's physical or mental health;
- Has the effect of substantially interfering with the student's academic performance; or
- Has the effect of substantially interfering with the student's ability to participate in or benefit from the services, activities, or privileges provided by a school.

"Electronic" means any communication involving the transmission of information by wire, radio, optical cable, electromagnetic, or other similar means. "Electronic" includes but is not limited to communication via electronic mail, internet-based communications, pager service, cell phones, electronic text messaging, or similar technologies.

Harassment and bullying may include, but are not limited to, the following behaviors and circumstances:

- Verbal, nonverbal, physical or written harassment, bullying, hazing, or other victimization that have the purpose or effect of causing injury, discomfort, fear, or suffering to the victim;
- Repeated remarks of a demeaning nature that have the purpose or effect of causing injury, discomfort, fear, or suffering to the victim;
- Implied or explicit threats concerning one's grades, achievements, property, etc. that have the purpose or effect of causing injury, discomfort, fear, or suffering to the victim;
- Demeaning jokes, stories, or activities directed at the student that have the purpose or effect of causing injury, discomfort, fear, or suffering to the victim; and/or
- Unreasonable interference with a student's performance or creation of an intimidating, offensive, or hostile learning environment. Sexual harassment means unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, or other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature when:
 - Submission to the conduct is made either implicitly or explicitly a term or condition of the student's education or benefits;
 - Submission to or rejection of the conduct by a school employee is used as the basis for academic decisions affecting that student; or
 - The conduct has the purpose or effect of substantially interfering with the student's academic performance by creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive education environment.

In situations between students and school officials, faculty, staff, or volunteers who have direct contact with students, bullying and harassment may also include the following behaviors:

- Requiring that a student submit to bullying or harassment by another student, either explicitly or implicitly, as a term or condition of the targeted student's education or participation in school programs or activities; and/or
- Requiring submission to or rejection of such conduct as a basis for decisions affecting the student.

Any person who promptly, reasonably, and in good faith reports an incident of bullying or harassment under this policy to a school official, shall be immune from civil or criminal liability relating to such report and to the person's participation in any administrative, judicial, or other proceeding relating to the report. Individuals who knowingly file a false complaint may be subject to appropriate disciplinary action.

Retaliation against a person because the person has filed a bullying or harassment complaint or assisted or participated in a harassment investigation or proceeding is prohibited. An individual who knowingly files a false harassment complaint and a person who gives false statements in an investigation shall be subject to discipline by appropriate measures, as shall a person who is found to have retaliated against another in violation of this policy. A student found to have retaliated in violation of this policy shall be subject to measures up to, and including, suspension and expulsion. A school employee found to have retaliated in violation of this policy shall be subject to measures up to, and including, termination of employment. A school volunteer found to have retaliated in violation of this policy shall be subject to measures up to, and including, exclusion from school grounds.

The school or school district will promptly and reasonably investigate allegations of bullying or harassment. The *(state the title of the investigator)* or designee will be responsible for handling all complaints by students alleging bullying or harassment. The *(state the title of the*

investigator) or designee will be responsible for handling all complaints by employees alleging bullying or harassment.

It also is the responsibility of the superintendent, in conjunction with the investigator and principals, to develop procedures regarding this policy.

[OPTIONAL, BUT STRONGLY SUGGESTED THAT IT BE INCLUDED AND FOLLOWED:] The superintendent also is responsible for organizing training programs for students, school officials, faculty, staff, and volunteers who have direct contact with students. The training will include how to recognize harassment and what to do in case a student is harassed. It will also include proven effective harassment prevention strategies. The superintendent will also develop a process for evaluating the effectiveness of the policy in reducing bullying and harassment in the board. The superintendent shall report to the board on the progress of reducing bullying and harassment in the board.

The board will annually publish this policy. The policy may be publicized by the following means:

- Inclusion in the student handbook,
- Inclusion in the employee handbook
- Inclusion in the registration materials
- Inclusion on the school or school district's web site,
- (other) _____,

and a copy shall be made to any person at the central administrative office at (street address).

ANTI-HARASSMENT/BULLYING COMPLAINT FORM Name of complainant:

Position of complainant:

Date of complaint:

Name of alleged harasser or bully:

Date and place of incident or incidents:

Description of misconduct:

Name of witnesses (if any):

Evidence of harassment or bullying, i.e., letters, photos, etc. (attach evidence if possible):

Any other information:

I agree that all of the information on this form is accurate and true to the best of my knowledge.

Signature:

Date: _____

(Iowa Department of Education (n.d.). Anti-harassment/anti-bullying policies [Data file]. Retrieved May 5, 2011 from <http://www.iowa.gov/educate/>).