

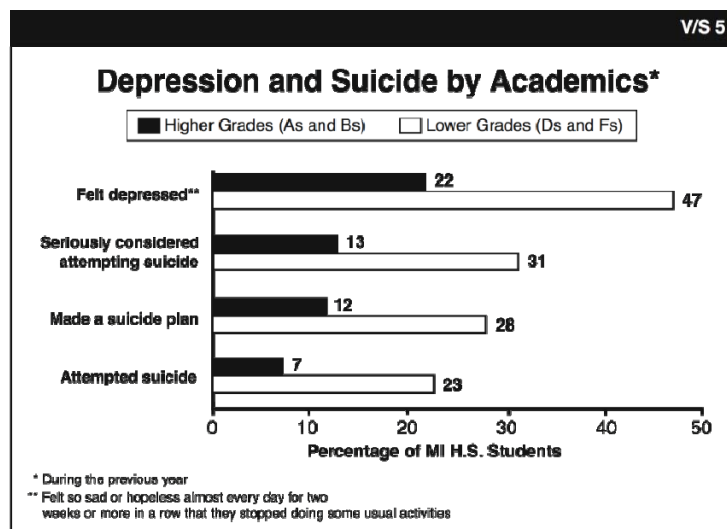
**Bullying and School Safety**

One of Michigan's Children's top legislative and administrative priorities is to ensure that all Michigan youth are ready for post-secondary education, work and life. This readiness is predicated on success in a quality system of education. As Michigan's Children listens to the voices of young people who have experienced challenges in their education around the state, many identify school safety as one of the factors influencing their decision to drop out of school and the need to feel safe and connected to their school and community in order to have long term educational success. Nearly one in ten Michigan high school students reported in the 2009 Michigan Youth Risk Behavior Survey (MYRBS) that they did not go to school because they felt unsafe at school or on their way to or from school.

The harm caused by bullying is not under debate. Bullying is not simply a matter of physical assault in schools; it includes physical (hitting, kicking, shoving, spitting), verbal (derogatory comments, name calling), financial (money or possessions taken), social (exclusion or isolation, rumors or lies), threats (forced to do things), and cyber-bullying (cell phones or via the internet).

The 2009 MYRBS indicated that fully one-fourth of all high-schoolers in the state had been personally bullied at school over the course of their school year. This is just the tip of the iceberg, however. A 2009 study of the mental health of youth who have observed bullying at school indicated that bullying effects most students; more than 72 percent of students reported some involvement in bullying; either as a victim, bully or witness, in the previous year.<sup>1</sup> School staff and administrators are often unaware of the pervasive nature of bullying in their schools and the extent to which it harms the academic environment. There is a strong perception that bullying is a harmless and typical part of adolescence, yet it has been shown to cause deep and long-lasting consequences – for the victim and the perpetrator.

Studies over the course of many years have shown that bullying leads to low self-esteem, depression, poor academic achievement, truancy, and even suicide. At least 10 youth suicides in the United States have been linked to bullying in the past 10 years. Additional results from the 2009 MYRBS showed the link between depression and suicide and academic performance for high school students – the number of students who felt depressed or had considered suicide and had low grades was double the number of students with similar feelings and high grades. The 2009 MYRBS also revealed that 7 percent of students did not go to school on one or more of the past 30 days because they felt unsafe, however the rate for students with high grades was 6 percent and the rate for students with low grades was 13 percent.



Source: 2009 Michigan Youth Risk Behavior Survey

Students need to feel safe in order to be prepared to learn and school is not a place of learning for a bullying victim. Schools need to be given the tools and access the partnerships needed to build an atmosphere conducive to learning by supporting effective discipline practices. School districts that do not have effective bullying policies and procedures are failing to provide an equal opportunity to a quality education to all students.

<sup>1</sup> Rivers, I., Poteat, V.P., Noret, N., Ashurt, N. (2009). Observing Bullying at School: The Mental Health Implication of Witness Status. *School Psychology Quarterly*. 24:4, 211-223.

In his Education Reform message this year, Governor Rick Snyder expressed the need for comprehensive anti-bullying legislation to be passed and in effect for the beginning of the next school year and stated his support for the State Board of Education's model policy. Even though the State Board of Education adopted their model policy in 2006, and legislation to require school districts to adopt anti-bullying policies has been introduced every session for the past 10 years, there is still no statewide standard for the prevention and remediation of bullying. The Michigan Department of Education has estimated that 90 – 95 percent of school districts in Michigan have adopted anti-bullying policies but the state does not collect or compile the requirements within those policies. A legislative mandate would require all public schools to have, at least, a minimum standard of requirements in their anti-bullying policies. Michigan is currently one of only four states with no statewide standard.

### **What is currently being proposed in Michigan?**

This year, three distinct packages of bills have been introduced. Committee hearings have been held on Senate Bill 137 and House Bill 4163. Variations in them, and the debate for the past 10 years, revolve around whether or not to include a list of personal characteristics which are the perceived cause of the bullying, typically referred to as enumeration.

A compromise to the three packages has been developed in partnership with the bill sponsor, Senator Rick Jones (Grand Ledge – R), the Michigan Department of Education and the Michigan Office of Civil Rights. It includes *requirements* that school districts must meet, as well as a list of additional steps that are *encouraged*. The compromise does not include enumeration. The legislation includes:

#### **Required:**

- The prohibition of bullying and retaliation against reporting of incidents.
- That all children are covered.
- Notification of parents of both the victim of bullying and the perpetrator of the bullying.
- Where the policy applies and when.
- Cyber-bullying
- Reporting requirements for school personnel.
- Documentation of incidents.
- Consequences and remedial action.
- Appropriate strategies for intervention, services, and family involvement.

#### **Encouraged:**

- Development of bullying prevention task forces, teen courts, prevention programs and other initiatives involving school administration, law enforcement, community members and other stakeholders.
- Require annual training for administrators, employees, and volunteers on how to identify, respond to and report incidents of bullying.
- Require educational programs for students, parents on how to identify, respond to and report incidents of bullying

### **What We Believe**

The implementation of fairly and consistently applied school-wide policies that commit to ending bullying, have been shown to reduce bullying by up to 50 percent. Legislatively mandated anti-bullying policies will help to ensure that all schools provide a similar minimum standard for prevention, parental notification and appropriate disciplinary methods. A written anti-bullying policy, distributed to everyone in the school community, can help to send the message that bullying incidents will be taken seriously.

We appreciate the work that has been done to come to a compromise; however the steps that are simply encouraged are not only important, but crucial in order to provide a safe and effective learning environment. Anti-bullying legislation needs to include comprehensive professional development for school staff including effective classroom and playground management techniques, prevention and intervention strategies, and developmentally appropriate discipline measures. Community involvement and appropriate disciplinary action, including alternatives to zero-tolerance policies, are necessary for effective anti-bullying policies that will keep our youth in school and prepared for post-secondary success.

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**Michigan’s Anti-bullying Legislation 2011**

The packages of legislation introduced in 2011 intended to prevent and mitigate the consequences of bullying are vastly different. The chart below outlines many of the similarities and differences. Hearings have been held on SB 137, HB 4136 and SB 137 (S-2) which is a compromise between the bill sponsor, the Michigan Department of Education and the Michigan Office of Civil Rights.

Bill Number and Sponsor	SB 137 (Sen. Jones) HB 4163 (Rep. Potvin)	SB 137 (S-2) (Sen. Jones) HB 4163 (H-2) (Rep. Potvin)	SB 45 (Sen. Anderson) HB 4173 (Rep. Meadows)	SB 147/148 (Sen. Whitmer) HB 4391 (Rep. McCann)
Animus (actual or perceived characteristics)	X	X		
Community Involvement in Bullying Prevention Task Forces, Teen Court...		Recommends		
Consequences to Schools That Fail to Act			X	X
Cyber-bullying (online)		X		X
Enumeration (a list of characteristics, including religion, race, color, national origin, age, sex, gender, sexual orientation, disability, height, weight, gender identity, and socioeconomic status)			X	X
Guidelines for Law Enforcement				X
Michigan School Violence Hotline utilized for reporting bullying				X (148)
Parental Notification of Both Parties	X	X	X	X
Telecommunication Device (via cell phone or computer)	X	X	X	X
Require School Personnel to report incidents		X	X	X
Training for School Personnel		Recommends	X	
Policy developed through public hearing with community input		X	X	X
Public Schools, including traditional, charter and ISD-run schools	X	X	X	X (148)
Timeline for School to Act		1 day	3 days	