



ASSEMBLY MEMBER MIKE ENG

Assembly Bill (AB) 1156 – Bullying In Schools

Sponsor: The California State PTA

SUMMARY

AB 1156 redefines California anti-bullying law by expanding the definition of bullying and linking it to academic achievement. It will also strengthen policies and procedures to reduce bullying in schools and keep students safe.

PROPOSAL

Specifically, this legislation will encourage the inclusion of policies and procedures aimed at the prevention of bullying in comprehensive school safety plans, and would require the Department of Justice and the State Department of Education to contract to provide the training of school-site personnel in the prevention of bullying. It will also provide that a pupil complies with the residency requirements for school attendance in a school district outside the pupil's school district of residence, if he or she has been determined by the superintendent, or by the principal of the school district of residence to have been the victim of an act of bullying, he or she is unable to transfer to another school within the school district of residence, and he or she is unable to receive authorization for interdistrict attendance in a timely manner. Finally, it would amend the definition of bullying by specifying that bullying includes causing a substantially detrimental effect on a reasonable pupil's physical or mental health, substantially interfering with the pupil's academic performance, or substantially interfering with the pupil's ability to participate in or benefit from the services, activities, or privileges provided by a school.

BACKGROUND

Physical and emotional safety at school plays a crucial role for students. When students fall victims to bullying, often in the form of violence and/or harassment, it interferes with their education and healthy development. Research shows that children and youth who are bullied are more likely to be depressed, to think about and attempt suicide, have behavior problems at school and difficulty learning and succeeding in school.

In California, schools do not always provide an environment conducive to learning, because there are a significant number of students who worry that they will be targeted for physical violence or harassment by their peers, especially in middle school. For example, nearly 30% of boys and girls in the 7th grade reported that they had been afraid of being beaten up at school once or more in 2008.

In a recent special issue of the Journal of Early Adolescence, UCLA psychologists find that bullying cannot be ignored when trying to improve educational outcomes, because academic performance was substantially worse for students who were most bullied than their peers. It concluded that for administrators and educators where academic pressures are greatest with the lowest performing students (and schools) on improving achievement scores, ignoring or not being able to 'afford' to address social-emotional issues, such as bullying, may be a very short-sighted view of educational progress.

AB 1156 will address the issue of bullying in a comprehensive and effective manner by requiring the training of school site personnel in the prevention of bullying, providing a mechanism under which the option is available for the victim to be removed from an unhealthy setting, and expanding the definition of bullying by linking it to academic achievement. The goal is to provide a safe environment designed to support a healthy learning experience for every child.

For more information, please contact Edmundo Cuevas with the Office of Assemblymember Mike Eng at (916) 319-2049 / Edmundo.Cuevas@asm.ca.gov