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ENDING BULLYING IN MICHIGAN: NEW REPORT PROVIDES POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Are current efforts by the state of Michigan enough to end bullying? A new report by Wayne State University researchers looks at current policies and provides suggestions on how to further reduce bullying in Michigan.

According to the report, 50.5 percent of the respondents reported that bullying is a problem at their school and 59.7 percent of the respondents reported seeing another student bullying someone else. The data came from a large rally in the Detroit area, where students of diverse backgrounds met to discuss many issues related to youth.

“We appreciate Governor Snyder’s efforts to reduce bullying in Michigan, but there is still much left to be done,” said Kevin Lignell, Communications Director of the School-Community Health Alliance of Michigan.

In 2011, Michigan followed the lead of the vast majority of states when Governor Snyder signed anti-bullying legislation requiring school districts throughout the state to develop anti-bullying policies. In 2015, cyber bullying was added to the requirement. Despite the passage of the statewide anti-bullying law, a quarter of all high school students in Michigan reported being bullied at school during the past 12 months.

According to WalletHub, Michigan is among five states with the highest percentage of high school students who reported being bullied on school property. It is also among the states with highest percentage of high school students’ cyberbullied.

“For schools, the financial burden caused by bullying is a serious problem. Public schools can lose more than \$2.3 million on federal funding due to students' misbehavior (e.g., suspensions, etc.),” said Jun Sung Hong, Assistant Professor at Wayne State University, “Despite the implementation of bullying programs and policies, these findings suggest that they are not doing enough in the state of Michigan.”

Many anti-bullying programs have been implemented in an effort to prevent or reduce school bullying. However, finding a one-size-fits-all solution to the issue has been a disappointment. A few evidence-based prevention efforts that have been found to be useful include the KiVA National Anti-Bullying Programme, Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS), Second Step, and Steps to Respect.



In Michigan, the response to bullying is primarily funded and supported at the local level. Many adolescent policy experts agree that addressing this issue would take a serious investment that goes above and beyond the current anti-bully legislation. Advocates argue that current requirements, reporting initiatives and public awareness efforts are great first steps.

“Where communities are seeing real progress is when they include starting early to build social and emotional skills in children, youth and their families; addressing trauma at all ages and through systems; and focusing on building positive behaviors, rather than punishing negative ones,” said Matt Gilliard, President and CEO of Michigan’s Children, “If Michigan is going to become a top ten education state, these local efforts need to be better supported through state and federal policy and investment.”

John Austin, President of the State Board of Education, emphasized the importance of taking action to reducing bullying in Michigan.

“We can never accept or give a pass to bullies and bullying,” said Austin “It's hugely destructive.”

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