

New Jersey Fellows

Creating Safe and Inclusive Anti-Bullying Policy

Authored by
the 2019 Class of
New Jersey Fellows

ACT  **CHANGE**



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Our History

In October 2015, President Obama’s White House Initiative on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPIs), in partnership with the Sikh Coalition and the Coalition of Asian Pacifics in Entertainment, launched **#ActToChange**, a national public awareness campaign on bullying prevention among youth — including Asian American, Pacific Islander, Sikh, Muslim, LGBTQI, and immigrant youth.

The campaign aims to empower students, families, and educators with the knowledge and tools needed to help stop and prevent bullying in our communities.

Since the 2016 election, #ActToChange has transitioned outside of the White House to a grassroots movement, led by actor and former White House AAPI Commissioner Maulik Pancholy. The campaign is now a registered 501(c)3 nonprofit organization working to address the challenges that the AAPI community — which includes Muslim, Sikh, immigrant, limited English proficient, and LGBTQI youth — faces in the midst of an increasingly anti-immigrant and xenophobic political climate. Kids and teens are being increasingly bullied in schools all across the country. Unfortunately, many AAPI youth who are bullied face unique cultural, religious, and language barriers that can keep them from getting help.

#ActToChange is building on its history of success and aims to continue empowering students, families, and educators with the knowledge and tools they need to help stop and prevent bullying in their communities. Bullying is a problem that affects us all and we must act together to put an end to it.

Theory of Change

The Problem

Bullying, including within the Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) community, has severe social, mental, and physical consequences on youth. These range from feelings of isolation, internalized self-hate, and even suicide.

The Roots

- White Supremacy and The Model Minority Myth
- Homophobia, Transphobia, Misogyny and Toxic Masculinity
- Inadequate Resources
- Intergenerational and Intercultural Barriers

Our Pathway to Change

- Support youth agency in responding to bullying with healthy ways
- Elevate public awareness of bullying within the AAPI community
- Connect with students and schools directly to provide culturally-responsive services
- Advocate for systemic change through policy and advocacy

Our Vision for the World

We envision a world where all youth, including within the AAPI community, have the opportunity to grow up feeling proud and supported in the development of their identity and sharing of their stories. Act To Change continues to empower students by advocating for systemic change and providing resources to promote healthy communities.

A Note From Our Chairman

Act To Change is working to elevate the stories and perspectives of Asian American and Pacific Islander communities who experience bullying, witness bullying, or are ever made to feel ‘other’ or different for who they are. Act To Change has laid a strong foundation for achieving our goals. Through our collaboration with partner organizations, municipalities and elected officials, the translation and dissemination of anti-bullying resources, the unification of the AAPI community through live events, and the engagement of young people across social media with the help of influencer and celebrity participation, we have made positive strides towards creating a bullying free future for the next generation.

Together with the New Jersey Leadership Fellows Program, the report that follows are recommendations taken directly from the youth perspective on what is working and not working when it comes to bullying policy. Some of these papers focus mostly in New Jersey, where these fellows attend school, but I think they can be applied to other locations with similar demographics.

Thank you to the fellows who contributed to this document: Ashana, Esha, Moha, Ojas, Sean, Sheaa, and Tulip. When these fellows were not busy fulfilling their intern duties with the New Jersey Leadership Fellows Program, they spent much of their free time researching and analyzing current bullying policies that impact their schools and local jurisdictions. And in addition to that research, they applied how the policies positively or negatively impact their communities, their peers, and themselves. It is from their efforts that we present you ideas and recommendations on how we can improve such policies to improve safety in our schools and communities, and especially amongst youth who identify as Asian American, Pacific Islanders, Sikh, Muslim, LGBTQI, and immigrant youth.

I am beyond excited to introduce the first-ever Act To Change report of bullying recommendations, authored by the fellows of the New Jersey Leadership Program, Class of 2019.

Maulik Panchohy
Chairman and Co-Founder

A Note From NJLP

The New Jersey Leadership Program (NJLP) is honored to collaborate with Act To Change to further engage with Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) youth and elevate their stories and viewpoints on bullying in their schools and throughout their communities.

Through NJLP's broader mission, we are able to focus on addressing issues imperative to the AAPI community, driven in large part by our next generation of community, civic and political leaders in our NJLP Youth Fellows. NJLP is a 501(c)3 nonpartisan nonprofit organization committed to educating South Asian youth towards government and politics in New Jersey, founded with the mission of training and building a pipeline of young leaders in the community towards career paths that the community is not as well represented in the aforementioned public sectors.

We accomplish this mission through the NJLP Fellowship Program, which selects ten South Asian students in high school and college throughout the state every year and place them in a full time Summer internship with the Governor's Office, State Agencies, Member of Congress or State Legislator. In addition to this practical component, NJLP Youth Fellows also take part in weekly speakership series hearing from elected officials, party leaders, business executives, journalists and others; as well as taking part in field trips, networking events and career development workshops.

As NJLP enters its fifth year, we remain cognizant that an important component of the program is for the NJLP Youth Fellows to give back to their local communities to make a difference. Every class of Fellows chooses a Capstone Project that they feel strongly about and one in which they would like to make a difference. We are proud that the NJLP Class of 2019 chose to partner with Act To Change to highlight the issue of bullying in the AAPI community through their report on bullying recommendations.

A special thank you to the following NJLP Youth Fellow who were steadfast in their dedication and resolve to address such a critical issue in the community and provide potential solutions to combat bullying; Ashana, Esha, Moha, Ojas, Sean, Sheaa, and Tulip. We would also like to thank the Act To Change Board for allowing NJLP to take part in this fruitful partnership and we look forward to continue working together in addressing and combating bullying across the community.

Amit Jani
President and Co-Founder

Report No. 1

Implementing New Anti-Bullying Policies to Foster a Safer Learning Environment for Our Students

by Ojas Chitnis

Executive Summary

New Jersey has been on the forefront of bullying prevention since the state passed its first anti-bullying law in 2011 referred to as “harassment, Intimidation, and Bullying” (or HIB). However, in recent years, there has been an increase in bullying towards students of Asian-Pacific Islander decent. With the passage of Assemblyman Robert Karabinchak and Assemblywoman Reynolds-Jackson’s bill creating an anti-bullying policy review taskforce, it is important for the public to examine these policies themselves. It is important to find out what works and what doesn’t, so that we can modify our policies to ensure a safe learning environment for students in the State of New Jersey.

To foster the mental, emotional, and physical safety of young people in this state, effective policy must be established. Through this, we can ensure better social and educational outcomes for students across the state of New Jersey and the country.

Summary of Policy Recommendations

In order to improve the policies in place across the state, the Legislature and the school districts should:

- Make a significant investment in counseling personnel and provide counseling departments with the resources to improve the school environment.
- Provide specificity in the district policies and state laws concerning what constitutes hate speech and under which circumstances racism crosses into harassment, so that schools can properly administer themselves and better educate the parents, staff, and students.
- Require of the anti-bullying taskforce that it consult with students and create a comprehensive report after its consideration.
- Require of school districts that the Superintendent of Schools must present a monthly report on harassment, intimidation, and bullying in the district to the local Board of

Education and an annual report on the same to the state Department of Education each June.

- Create a Division of Student Health within the state Department of Education focused on ensuring the health of the student bodies across the state and the proper administration of the anti-bullying policies.
- Appropriate funds in the state budget specifically for bullying prevention and remediation programs in schools and statewide.

Personal Reflection

I am from Sayreville, New Jersey; a town with a troubled past surrounding bullying and harassment. In 2014, when I was just starting Middle School, our town was shot into the national spotlight – for all the wrong reasons. Sayreville has always been a football town. It is one of the central tenants of our town fabric. And we're good – really good. In 2014, we won three out of the last four state Group V championships. However, it wasn't our 2014 title run which pushed us into national news for the first time in decades.

The reason was a scandal which rocked our entire football program. We just came off an incredible victory against our fierce division rivals, the North Brunswick Raiders, when it was uncovered that the varsity seniors were assaulting some of the freshman. In a district investigation, the freshman expressed the fear that they felt in the locker room and the rush to get out before any of the seniors came in. They also expressed something quite troubling – that this had been going on for years.

In a rush to fix the situation, our Superintendent, Dr. Richard Labbe, forfeited all of our remaining games and canceled the 2015 season – at all levels. (Stump, 2014) The district was determined to fix this issue, which was ultimately determined to be hazing taken to the furthest extreme. I must applaud the district and Dr. Labbe, because they took a holistic and calculated approach, which has worked wonders, not just in the football program but in the general school community as well. The district has made efforts to reduce harassment, intimidation, and bullying incidents across the board. New policies have been coupled with other support systems and trainings, in order to improve the school environment. The school has given more resources to the guidance staff and has made hazing education mandatory for all athletes. Overall, these efforts by the Sayreville district have led to a sharp decline in bullying incidents in recent years and have greatly improved our school community.

I want to see this kind of improvement across the state, to ensure a safe, productive learning environment for all of this state's students. If Sayreville, a town which doesn't have as many resources as many schools across the state, can see this kind of improvement in just a few years, every school can see improved student health with time and effort.

What Is Currently in Place Around the State

It's important to see the various types of policies that are in place around the state. Predominantly, policy is determined by the needs of the student body. Thus, it is essential to look at policies from the different types of schools around the state. Schools can be broken down into three major categories: Public, Selective, and Private, with each having a different outlook on these issues.

Policy in Public Schools

Highland Park High School

The first public school that will be examined is Highland Park High School. The school's stance on bullying is very harsh. Such acts carry a minimum of five days out of school suspension, which is among the harshest examined. The Highland Park school district includes harassment between students, as well as between a staff member and a student as bullying. The district places high punishments on any individual found to be engaging in bullying. The district has also adopted a quite broad definition of bullying, defining it as harassment ranging from jokes about a certain ethnicity to sexual violence, to rumors. This is perhaps the broadest and harshest policy amongst public schools. This district takes bullying especially seriously and has made a tremendous effort to improve the quality of student life to the furthest extent possible. (Highland Park Public Schools, 2019)

Sayreville War Memorial High School

Another public school that should be examined is one that has had a troubled past with bullying.

Sayreville War Memorial High School came into the national spotlight in 2014, for all the wrong reasons. Sayreville's football program which had won three out of the past four state football championships was rocked by a hazing scandal, in which six varsity football players and the varsity football coach were arrested. This scandal prompted the school, led by Superintendent Dr. Richard Labbe, to adopt one of the most stringent and structured antibullying policies in New Jersey.

The Sayreville school district has taken a holistic approach to the prevention and remediation of bullying. While many schools provide harsh punishments for school bullies, Sayreville has adopted punishment, along with support for both the victim and the perpetrator. This policy is one which helps the entirety of the student body. The district provides a broad umbrella of what constitutes bullying and has made an effort to reduce the total number of incidents across the board. The Superintendent is required by district policy to present a report on Harassment, Intimidation, and Bullying within the district to the Board of Education twice annually. This policy has been coupled with other support systems and trainings, in order to improve the school environment. The school has given more resources to the guidance staff and has made hazing education mandatory for all athletes. Overall, these efforts by the Sayreville district have led to a sharp decline in bullying incidents in

recent years and have greatly improved the Sayreville school community. (Sayreville Public Schools, 2019)

Broadly amongst public schools, and more specifically between Highland Park and Sayreville, several contrasting views of bullying appear. Schools such as Sayreville seek to use antibullying policies to reprimand and help bullies, as they recognize that bullying stems from emotional trauma. However, schools like Highland Park take a different approach to bullying, seeing it as an activity that should be punished greatly. Regardless of approach, it is good to know that schools are taking a tough stance on bullying and are taking action to improve their school communities, despite the lack of funds most public schools have.

Policy in Selective Schools

Middlesex County Academy for Science, Mathematics, and Engineering Technologies

Selective public schools have a different atmosphere, along with different goals than public or private schools. The first selective school that will be examined will be the Middlesex County Academy for Science, Mathematics, and Engineering Technologies (colloquially known as Edison Academy). Edison Academy is a part of the Middlesex County Vocational Technical School District, which aims to offer instruction that leads to better vocational performance and higher college placement. (Middlesex County Vocational Technical Schools, 2019) Edison Academy caters to a much more selective student body, having selected the top students from Middlesex County. Little wonder then, that bullying is not a big problem in this school. The policy outlined by school administrators is simply that of the laws that concern this issue. So limited is this issue that the school policy does not even touch upon the issue of punishment for harassment. This policy is quite vague. A theme that can be seen across these policies is that they are catered to their student body. Because Edison Academy has such a limited problem with bullying, they don't need as comprehensive a policy as other schools.

Bergen County Technical Schools

Bergen County Technical Schools, another county-level academy program located in Hackensack, takes a much different approach to bullying. This district has one of the most comprehensive policies that have been identified. Their policy is quite modern and accounts for all facets of bullying. Amongst the schools compared, Bergen County Technical Schools are the only district that has created a policy explicitly to deal with cyberbullying. The policies also deal with false accusations of bullying. Overall, this policy does a lot to deal with bullying, however as with most selective schools, there are not specific punishments for issues that do not arise often, such as bullying. This antibullying policy is one of the best in the state when it comes to the definition of bullying, as it provides a clear definition of the act. This policy also outlines the expected behaviors of teachers and students when confronted with bullying, making it one of the quite thorough. The Bergen County Technical School District has a comprehensive policy which is vague in consequences and reaction, as only

an outline of what constitutes bullying is necessary for this district's student body. (Bergen County Technical Schools, 2019)

Amongst the selective schools, one broad theme can be found: these districts are not in need of bullying policies; thus, they do not have as thorough policies as the public schools. This broad theme is a constant across the selective schools of New Jersey, giving the biggest distinction between public schools and selective schools. Overall, these policies have been shaped by the communities in the schools and have, for the most part, been successful in each district.

Policy in Private Schools

Private schools often have a much different culture than the public or selective schools. These schools often combine the aspects of both other types, while introducing a new power of authority, which is often religious. Public schools are financially penalized for having to remove students, by having to pay for the student's accommodation in another school environment. Selective schools do not deal with this issue, as they can simply return the student to their home district. Private schools have even less of an issue with removing students due to bullying, as they are completely separate from the Department of Education policies. Private schools are also alleviated from some of the bullying issues that face public schools, due to their exclusivity and other factors. Thus, they will have different policies than public and selective schools.

Delbarton School

The first private school that will be examined is Delbarton School in Morristown. Delbarton is a private, Roman Catholic school which is organized by the Benedictine monks of St. Mary's Abbey. The school has many traditional Catholic policies and takes a harsh stance on any person who harasses or bullies any student. This policy is one of the only ones which provides separate definitions for hazing, harassment, and bullying, instead of wrapping it all under the HIB umbrella. This policy fails in the same way as its counterparts in the selective schools. These schools have no use for a well-defined bullying punishment system, as bullying is not an important issue in these school communities. Delbarton provides a well-defined policy, which can provide an example for some of the more ambiguous antibullying policies on the books. (Delbarton School, 2019)

Rutgers Preparatory School

Another type of private school is the preparatory school, which derives its authority from an academic, rather than religious, source. These schools are run in cooperation with the college from which they take their name. One such school is Rutgers Preparatory School, located in Somerset. The Upper School at Rutgers Prep is among the best high schools in the entire state. There is not a strong antibullying policy at Rutgers Prep, and as such has one of the vaguest, frankly nonexistent, policies examined. In fact, the word "bullying" only appears twice in the entire district policy manual. As can be seen by other similar schools,

just as with the previously examined Delbarton, private schools do not have comprehensive bullying policies. Rutgers Prep's policy simply states that the school will not tolerate such acts and will not allow bullying on the school-provided technology. This is perhaps the least sophisticated policy in the entire state, a sign of the school in which it is found. (Rutgers Preparatory School)

These policies have been associated with historically low levels of bullying incidents. Perhaps implying the policy is effective in the student body it caters to.

Takeaways

While it's all well and good to just identify some policies present around the state, it is important to sort through them and see what can be used as a model for bullying policies across the state.

There are aspects of all types of schools that can be used to improve bullying policies across the state. It is important to be stringent and not allow bullying to occur, but it is also important to not be too stringent and allow students to develop their own moral compasses and responsibility. In this way, a blend between the policies identified in two schools particularly stands out: Highland Park High School and Sayreville War Memorial High School.

Each of these schools, both being public schools, has certain qualities which are appealing to a model policy. From Highland Park, the defined nature of the policy stands out. Instead of referring to just harassment or bullying, as many schools do, the Highland Park policy takes great steps to identify what exactly constitutes bullying and gives examples. This is one aspect which is very important to have in a model policy, as it provides no ambiguity surrounding this issue.

Sayreville War Memorial High School, which has taken great steps in recent years, has made some great policy decisions, which should be implemented in a model policy. First, they have made the administration accountable and more involved with bullying in the school district. Instead of just delegating this part of school administration to the counseling department, the school administration has taken an active role in bullying prevention. The policy mandates that the Superintendent of Schools provide regular reports on harassment, intimidation, and bullying to the Board of Education. This is very important for a district, as it makes stopping bullying a major priority of the district. Additionally, the policy mandates that the counseling department take a very different approach to bullying remediation. Instead of simply punishing those students who bully others, the school has identified that bullying stems from trauma. To combat this, the counseling department has been equipped to help those on both sides, to improve the school community holistically. This is something quite admirable, as this takes effective action to combat bullying.

Both of these public schools have shown good policies which can be blended together to make a model policy, however there is still something to be learned from the selective and private schools. School administration needs to learn to trust its students. It is only through

trust that students attain personal growth and responsibility. Any model policy will have to take this into account. By identifying good policies in place around the state, a universal suggested policy can be created, which serves to reduce bullying across the board.

Laws Currently in Force in New Jersey

In addition to the various policies in place around the state, there are a few laws in place which need to be covered. These laws, passed by the New Jersey state legislature, have been groundbreaking in bullying prevention and punishment. By examining these laws, policy can be developed around the laws currently in place.

Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act (P.L.2010, c.122)

The Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act, passed in 2011, was approved unanimously by both houses of the New Jersey state legislature. This law has been described as one of the most stringent pieces of anti-bullying legislation in the country. The law was given an A++ rating by the Bully Police, an organization which rates anti-bullying legislation across the country. (Bully Police USA, 2010) This law has made strides in combatting bullying in the state. The law supplements a previous law, passed in 2002, but combats bullying on a much larger level.

This law moves that the state grade the safety of each school in the state and mandates that this grade be placed on the school's websites. The law changed the state's definition of bullying, changing the definition to any action that creates a hostile school environment or infringes on a student's rights at school. This fundamentally changed how the state approached bullying. The law has been successful in reducing bullying and has inspired similar laws across the country. (The State of New Jersey, 214th Legislature, 2011)

Anti-Bullying Taskforce (P.L.2019, c.179)

Just this past July, a law establishing a taskforce to review the Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act was passed unanimously by both houses of the state legislature. This law, originally introduced by Assemblyman Robert J. Karabinchak and Assemblywoman Verlina Reynolds-Jackson, creates an eleven-member taskforce composed of individuals of various backgrounds. Of these members, two will be appointed from the public. This law represents a great effort by the legislature to take account of the great strides that have been made over the past decade and see what can be done to further reduce bullying in the future. This should be applauded. The report generated by this taskforce will be an essential resource that will allow the state to reduce the prevalence of bullying even further. (The State of New Jersey, 218th Legislature)

Impact on Students in New Jersey

The most vital component of the actions that have been undertaken in recent years is the impact that the policies have had on the student bodies across New Jersey. There is no use to policy, if policy is not effective. In order to ensure the success of the bullying policies and the improvement of overall school health, it is important to periodically evaluate the impact of such policies.

Prevalence of Bullying

The main target of these policies has been to decrease the overall number of bullying incidents. This can go a long way in improving the school environment, as with less incidents, there will always be an improvement in school conditions.

Looking simply from a number's perspective, the number of incidents reported out of New Jersey's schools has dropped steadily since the current laws were implemented in 2011. The number of incidents is one indicator of the overall health of New Jersey's schools; however, several issues have arisen, irrespective of the efforts of school administrators from across the state.

While the number of bullying incidents has decreased over the last several years, the total number of violent incidents has remained stable. This presents several issues, as students are transitioning from bullies to criminals. It is an imperative of the school systems to stop this trend. Incidents of vandalism are also on the rise, as are the incidents of substance abuse. These issues are a direct result of the decrease in bullying incidents, as students are seeing that bullying is not an acceptable release for the pain and trauma they feel. It is important for districts across the state to take the lead of many of the forward-thinking school districts and for them to take a more holistic approach to school health improvement. (Clark and Petenko, 2019)

Ineffectiveness of these Policies in Protecting Threatened Groups

Also, of note is the recent increase in the targeting of certain students according to their gender orientation and race. According to recent studies, anti-LGBTQ bullying, and victimization is on the rise in New Jersey schools. This study showed that up to 79% of LGBTQ respondents to a 2017 study experienced harassment and discrimination on a daily basis. This has been a tremendous issue for schools, as on this front they struggle greatly to ensure a safe and productive school environment. Across the board, schools and state administrators have called for policies which specifically represent LGBTQ students and ensure that no student is harassed on the basis of their orientation. New Jersey State Education Department Spokeswoman Carmen Cusido has identified this issue as one that is prioritized by the current administration and one that they are working very hard to solve. (Flammia, 2019)

One community which faces heightened discrimination and violence is the Asian American community. Almost universally, the antibullying policies are very general and are not targeted to preventing bullying on the basis of race. Around 2009, several bullying events shed light on how big of a problem that bullying is for Asian American students. The study, conducted by the Asian American Journal of Psychology, concluded that Asian Americans face higher levels of social victimization than their peers, due to a variety of factors. (Tamanaha, 2019) There is also numerical data to support these findings, which shows empirically that there is an extreme bullying issue in the Asian American community. In the annual report of the Department of Education, the Commissioner found that students of Asian origin were much more likely to be targets of racial social victimization and bullying. Asian Americans were found to be disproportionately targeted for their race, as nearly 38% of Asian American bullying incidents were rooted in race, much higher than the other races. In addition, Asian American students are disproportionately offenders, with less than 1% of Asian American students being suspended in the study period for bullying and violent harassment (New Jersey Department of Education). The racial component of bullying is one that needs to be tackled, with special interest on the Asian American community.

Laws in the Works

A special spotlight must be shone on the bills that are currently working themselves through the New Jersey state legislature. Currently there is one bill of note. These bills have the ability to change the climate surrounding bullying for the better and provide a better school environment for the students of New Jersey.

“Mallory’s Law” (S3433/A5270)

Some have criticized the current laws of being too lenient. Senators Joseph Pennacchio and Patrick J. Diegnan have introduced Senate Bill Number 3433, nicknamed “Mallory’s Law”, which recently unanimously passed the Senate. This bill was inspired by a place of tragedy, being named after 12-year-old Mallory Grossman, who committed suicide in 2017 after being bullied by classmates (Myers). This bill aims to give schools the ability to combat bullying at the source. The bill also mandates that each school be equipped with a resource officer, in order to combat bullying in each individual district. The bill expands on the reporting process for harassment, intimidation, and bullying incidents, giving each report a trackable number. The reports generated through this do not simply stay with the school district, rather they become available to the parents and state administration. In addition, the bill enables districts to punish the parents of bullies, as it is often inaction by the parents which allows bullying to continue. This bill is currently under consideration by the New Jersey General Assembly. This is just one of many steps being taken by state legislators to completely rid New Jersey’s schools of bullying. (Pennacchio and Diegnan, 2019)

Policy Recommendations

- Make a significant investment in counseling personnel and provide counseling departments with the resources to improve the school environment. It is important to make an investment in counseling departments across the state, as only they can enable the successful implementation of antibullying policies. In addition, they will need resources to effectively counsel both sides of the bullying, in order to holistically improve the school environment.
- Provide specificity in the district policies and state laws concerning what constitutes hate speech and under which circumstances racism crosses into harassment, so that schools can properly administer themselves and better educate the parents, staff, and students. In order to properly administer these policies, there needs to be clarity as to what constitutes racial bullying. This will be very effective in combatting bullying especially in the Asian-Pacific Islander community, as this will equip counseling departments to handle this type of bullying. This should be a priority of school administrations. This should be an additional responsibility of the anti-bullying taskforce, as this will be a good compliment to the report it will provide.
- Require of the New Jersey Anti-Bullying Taskforce that it consult with students and create a comprehensive report after its consideration. While the anti-bullying taskforce, created by Assemblymembers Karabinchak and Reynolds-Jackson, is a great step towards combatting bullying in New Jersey, it is dismaying that only one student in the state is involved. There should be a greater involvement of students from around the state. Students can provide more insight into what is actually going on around the state, making the taskforce more effective. In addition, the 180-day period that the taskforce has been given is far too little. The taskforce should be given additional responsibilities and more time to complete their report, as this will make the review so much more effective.
- Require of school districts that the Superintendent of Schools must present a monthly report on harassment, intimidation, and bullying in the district to the local Board of Education and an annual report on the same to the state Department of Education each June. The Sayreville School District and many others across the state have required Superintendents to present a regular report on bullying in the district. This policy should be mandatory across the state, as it makes bullying prevention and remediation a priority of the school district. By providing this report to the state, it incentivizes school districts to minimize bullying in their district and it allows the state Department of Education to see which districts need improvement. By making the local report monthly, the district can combat a problem before it becomes a greater issue. The annual report gives the state the summer to figure out what is needed to decrease bullying in the coming year. Special attention should also be made in each report on the specific types of bullying, especially bullying against the Asian-Pacific Islander community.
- Create a Division of Student Health within the state Department of Education focused on ensuring the health of the student bodies across the state and the proper administration of the anti-bullying policies. This will enable the Department of Education to make a much more targeted approach to improving school communities. Instead of

delegating this issue to various divisions in the department, creating a new division concerning bullying and school health will allow the Department of Education to make bullying prevention and remediation a top priority.

- Appropriate funds in the state budget specifically for bullying prevention and remediation programs in schools and statewide. Education has been a top priority in the state of New Jersey for a very long time. In the budget for fiscal year 2020, there has been a large investment in education. However, there has been no specific appropriation specifically for student health. By doing this, the state can specifically target bullying and allocate the necessary resources.

Report No. 2

Define the Problem, Then Develop a Solution

by Moja Trivedi

Executive Summary

The current state of bullying in the country today is concerning, and if successful measures are not taken to decrease the prevalence of the action, then the incoming generation will be marred with more problems than they can handle. While commendable work is being done for bullying prevention, not enough is being done. The problem lies in the inconsistency present throughout the country, states, towns, and even schools. The varying “loose” policies and absence of a legal definition for bullying needs to be corrected first, before effective prevention initiatives can have a chance to succeed. Current laws, ordinances, policies are already in effect, but they are ineffective, especially among the Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) communities. A legal definition of bullying, strict federal legislation, and an effective incident reporting system must be developed to assist in combating the bullying epidemic.

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention reported that in 2013, almost one out of every five high school students in the United States reported being bullied on school property. Of that number, 21.7% are Asian American, 17.8% are Hispanic, and 12.7% are African American. Bullying of AAPI students is more prevalent than in other racial groups and the rate is increasing faster than any other social cohort. (Wu and Manzhi, 2015) These communities lack representation in government, so their interests and specific needs are overlooked, along with all students who suffer from common politics. A study found that “commonplace school security measures like metal detectors, locker checks, or school conduct codes make no difference in the level of victimization Asian American teenagers experience. The social context of the school was really what was driving the victimization. Researchers need to examine the racial dynamics and implicit biases not just among students, but also the school staff and faculty.” (Tamanaha, 2019) Bias-based bullying at a young age can have harmful effects even into adulthood shown by a study on the effect of bullying on adolescence. (Hyun, Jin, Okamoto, 2019) The study showed that race-related bullying is strongly associated with negative emotional and even physical health effects along with reports that among American students in grades 8 through 12, Asian-Americans

had the lowest self-esteem. As bullying moves with the winds of technology as well, new perspectives, policies, and initiatives will need to be enacted to decrease the presence of bullying in schools and communities; along with understanding that bullies often have a reason for their actions. New policies can be combined with existing ones to create a common law that would do the most effective job in combating bullying and creating a safe environment for all students.

Define Bullying

According to PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center, "Bullying is an intentional behavior that hurts, harms, or humiliates a student, either physically or emotionally, and can happen while at school, in the community, or online." (Pacer, 2019) The American Society for the Positive Care of Children says, "Bullying is unwanted, aggressive behavior that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. The behavior is repeated or has the potential to be repeated over time." (American Society for the Positive Care of Children, 2019) The American Psychological Association defines bullying as, "...aggressive behavior that is intentional and involves an imbalance of power or strength. It is a repeated behavior and can be physical, verbal, or relational." (American Psychological Association, 2019) Three varying definitions leads to at least three ineffective solutions to combat bullying because there is not a universal definition for the action. As of 2016, one out of every five students reported being bullied. (Lessne, 2016) Students who report experiencing ongoing bullying have been shown to be at an increased risk for poor school performance, sleep difficulties, anxiety, and depression, along with a variety of mental health and behavioral problems — all problems that students already struggle with during their adolescent years. Bullying acts as a harmful catalyst to worsening these problems for students. It also creates a lasting negative impression on victims of bullying. 19% of bullied students indicate that bullying has a negative effect on how they feel about themselves, 14% of their relationships with friends and family and on their school work, and 9% on their physical health. (Pacer, 2019) What is also often ignored in bullying prevention is the rise of cyberbullying. The percentages of individuals who have experienced cyberbullying at some point in their lifetimes has nearly doubled (18% to 34%) from 2007-2016, but only 23% of students who reported being cyberbullied notified an adult at school about the incident.

Bullying in the AAPI Community

While these statistics provide insight into the bullying epidemic through the whole country, the AAPI community faces many problems with bullying themselves. The key factor that sets their predicament aside from other cases of bullying is the unique aspects of their lives which they are bullied for, along with the underrepresentation of their communities in groups that create legislation to prevent bullying.

AAPI students are bullied on everything from their family's immigration status, their appearance, their language skills, race, sexual orientation, and religion. A 2014 study found that over two-thirds of turbaned Sikh youth in Fresno, California reported experiencing bully-

ing and harassment along with a study that showed half of 163 Asian American New York City public school students reported experiencing some kind of bias-based harassment in a 2012 survey, which constituted for a 20% increase since 2009. (Ahuja, 2017) The singling out of students in the AAPI community increases their isolation and the feeling like they no do not have anyone looking out for them.

Another key factor in the targeting of the AAPI community is the September 11th Attacks, which created a significant increase in racial hostility and negative sentiment towards the Muslim population, or anyone who “looks like them.” Sikhs are religiously mandated to wear turbans, and some people link the headwear with some form of terrorist garb. In 2012 and 2013, over half of Sikh students surveyed in Massachusetts, Indiana, Washington and California reported enduring school bullying. (Sikh Coalition, 2019) AAPI students say they are beaten, threatened, bullied, and referred to by ethnic slurs but they do not have an effective platform on which to voice their concerns. A Washington Post article wrote, “Youth advocates say these Asian teenagers, stereotyped as high-achieving students who rarely fight back, have for years borne the brunt of ethnic tension as Asian communities expand and neighborhoods become more racially diverse.” (Texeira, 2005)

A significant reason as to why the negative impact of bullying is so strong for AAPI students is the lack of support and outlets to express themselves that they get. The American Psychiatric Association found that among all ethnicities, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders are the least likely to seek help for mental disorders due to a culture built around the belief that emotional problems are not as important as other facets of life, such as academic achievement. “If parents are not supportive of students’ emotional health, then the students have no place else to turn, so they turn more inside,” said Vincent Cobalis, the Vice Chair of the Austin Asian American Quality of Life Commission. “The Asian culture is very reluctant to admit to mental health issues . . . they don’t seek out help. We need to break out of that perception that dealing with mental health issues is negative,” Cobalis said. Lack of awareness and emotional support often causes the AAPI community’s adolescents to feel more pain as a result of the bullying they face. The growing problem of bullying needs to be addressed on all fronts, including greater advocacy for the AAPI community.

Areas to Improve the Policy

For the state of New Jersey specifically, the statewide bullying policy has its positive and negative aspects.

Not Strictly Enforced in Schools

They key problem stemming from New Jersey bullying policy is the fact that it is not strictly enforced, and schools follow their own bullying policies more than the state policy. This is a major concern due to the fact that schools often have vested interests in certain students or a prejudice towards others, so the punishments being given for the same offense could vary greatly.

First, New Jersey's definition of bullying states that, "Harassment, intimidation or bullying" means any gesture, any written, verbal or physical act, or any electronic communication... "The definition continues to add, "...that takes place on school property, at any school-sponsored function, on a school bus, or off school, that substantially disrupts or interferes with the orderly operation of the school or the rights of other students..." This is confusing and brings a variety of legal issues into consideration as it is not clearly defined as to the jurisdiction schools have over their students when they are off-campus. At that point, it is not outlined whether the incident falls into the jurisdiction of law enforcement or remains under the school's purview, which could create issues surrounding privacy and personal property.

New Jersey policy continues to state that, "...a reasonable person should know, under the circumstances, will have the effect of physically or emotionally harming a student or damaging the student's property, or placing a student in reasonable fear of physical or emotional harm to his person or damage to his property.." Two major problems stem from this statement. First, this does not take into consideration people suffering from a mental illness as they may not know the implications of their actions on other people and this policy is restricting towards that community.

Need More Clarity on "Reasonable Person"

Secondly, a "reasonable person" is a very vague phrase. There are several different interpretations to be made as to the definition of that phrase which creates a loophole for legal arguments. Continuing, the bullying policy explains that for something to be considered bullying it "...has the effect of insulting or demeaning any student or group of students..." This is a negative of the policy once again because of how vague it is. If someone is easily offended, then where is the line drawn as to what is insulting or bullying? By that account, anything that someone says could be considered offensive to a person. While it is imperative to consider the opinions and emotions of everyone, a determination needs to be made as to what falls under bullying rather than offensive speech.

The policy also writes, "...creates a hostile educational environment for the student by interfering with a student's education or by severely or pervasively causing physical or emotional harm to the student." This statement is a negative due to the fact that there is no clear definition as to what a hostile educational environment because it would mean different things to different people. For example, having an extended conversation in class about the religious background of a terrorist and how that affected their actions could be considered very hostile to an AAPI student, but maybe not to a Caucasian student. New Jersey's policy regarding cyberbullying specifically is a positive in the sense that there is at least something outlined combating cyberbullying, but it needs many more specifics as to types of offenses and respective consequences. (StopBullying.gov, 2019) New Jersey anti-bullying laws encourage districts to annually conduct, with the input from the school anti-bullying specialists, a re-evaluation, reassessment, and review of its policy, making any necessary revisions and additions. This is a very good idea with potential to help a lot of students, so it should be required not encouraged to ensure maximum benefit. The overarching issue with New Jersey's bullying policy is the vagueness of the wording.

What's Working in the Policy

New Jersey's bullying policy also contains several positives. A positive about New Jersey's policy is that it includes a very comprehensive explanation of what motivates bullying and the amount of times it occurs. The New Jersey definition of bullying states, "...whether it be a single incident or a series of incidents, that is reasonably perceived as being motivated either by any actual or perceived characteristic, such as race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, or a mental, physical or sensory disability, or by any other distinguishing characteristic."

Another positive of New Jersey's bullying policy is, "New Jersey school districts are required to adopt a policy prohibiting harassment, intimidation, bullying or cyberbullying. District policies must contain key policy and procedural elements, including, but not limited to: statements prohibiting harassment, intimidation, or bullying; definitions of harassment, intimidation, or bullying; descriptions of the type of behavior expected from each student; consequences and appropriate remedial actions for any person who commits an act of harassment, intimidation or bullying; procedures for reporting and investigation; statements prohibiting reprisal or retaliation; statements regarding how the policy will be published within the district; and designation of an anti-bullying coordinator." This is a very comprehensive and detailed list of what school policies should require which demonstrates a strong incentive for an effective policy. New Jersey's inclusive policy which ensures protections for specific groups is one of the biggest positives of the state's policy. "New Jersey anti-bullying laws prohibit harassment, intimidation, or bullying that is reasonably perceived as being motivated either by any actual or perceived characteristic, such as race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, or a mental, physical or sensory disability, or by any other distinguishing characteristics. New Jersey anti-bullying laws also direct the Department of Education to develop and distribute to school districts guidelines concerning the needs of transgender students, including procedures that ensure a supportive and nondiscriminatory environment."

Finally, New Jersey school districts are required to provide training to teachers and other school staff regarding the policy and appropriate procedures relative to policy implementation along with providing a combination of services that are available within the district such as counseling, support services, intervention services and other programs. This is important due to students needing help that they cannot provide for themselves, so it is key to give them the resources to do so.

The Evolution of Bullying

The key differences between the type of bullying that current legislation has been written to combat and the bullying that students experience is the rise in technology and lack of reporting. As mentioned previously, bullying has evolved along with technology, culture, and society in the new millennium. Bullying has progressed from more physical confrontations to a combination of physical and cyberbullying. The rise of social media has increased the avenues in which students can be bullied, which has in turn increased the difficulty of

tracking, finding, or proving that bullying incidents occurred. Students have taken advantage of the fact that they can hide behind a screen and hurt someone's character through a keyboard, but this creates a struggle for regulation and prevention. Legalities complicate the issue further when consequences borderline of infringement of free speech and the belief that school administrators cannot control what students do off-campus. The key issue with this is that electronic communications are often not reported or unseen, so it is very difficult to regulate this form of communication, especially in regard to bullying.

The second problem stems from the fact that students do not want to report what is happening to them as there is an inherent fear instilled in them that people will bully them more for "snitching". The lack of advocacy and a system for victims to report bullying incidents is worrisome, but it outlines a plan of action for communities and legislators to take for an effective method of bullying prevention. It is also important to realize that there is no legal definition for the word bullying. The word is defined differently by schools, states, and organizations, which leads to different consequences and interpretations. Inconsistency is causing problems on top of the issue of bullying itself. Although it is upsetting, communities must acknowledge that bullying will never fully be eradicated. It is simply human nature to feel the need to have power over another person. In a March 2013 issue of Psychological Science, it was concluded that power increased people's satisfaction with life because it enabled people to act how they wanted to in that situation. (Markman, 2013) However, effective solutions can lead to a significant decrease in bullying, or at least, the negative impacts victims face.

Policy Recommendations

The fight for bullying prevention will be ongoing, and it is unfortunately not one at which society will fully succeed. However, creative solutions with new perspectives need to be proposed and regulated at a federal level to ensure that consistency is present for all students of all races, genders, ethnicities, sexual orientations, backgrounds, and beliefs. First, a legal definition, passed by the federal government, needs to be created so confusion about what qualifies as bullying or how it should be handled is eradicated. If there continues to be an absence of a legal definition of bullying, the lasting effects victims face and poor management of authorities to handle bullying incidents will continue. Secondly, federal legislation needs to be passed that outlines the following:

- Specific consequences for the extent of the bullying incident and number of times it has occurred. This would ensure that equal punishment is given to ALL students
- Legal definition of bullying. Include clear definition.
- Take into account different ethnicities, genders, sexual orientations, and backgrounds when outlining the cause for bullying and how the victim was bullied.
- Explain consequences for schools and towns for not following federal policy.

Example: One student of a certain background is given an easier punishment than a student of a different background with no investment in the school's well being

Sample consequences:

1. Incremental fines for schools who fail to follow policy
2. A federal investigation into the school's policies and execution of the law
3. Further action will be taken based on the results of the investigation

- Include a 5-year evaluation to be conducted by a federal agency to evaluate the efficiency and success of the bullying policy so that any amendments can be made to ensure policies are remaining updated with changing times

Federal legislation should require all states, counties, towns, and schools to follow one standard set of rules for preventing bullying, which eliminates the inconsistencies of how bullying is handled at different schools for different people. There is truly no such thing as a “zero-tolerance” policy as some incidents will always go unreported but to ensure that as many as possible are reported, all schools in the country must be required to introduce a fully anonymous reporting system. The victim(s) or a bystander(s) can fill out a form that would outline the people involved, the incident, where/when it occurred, and any other relevant information. The school would then be able to follow up with the people involved without the fear of the person reporting it that they will get bullied. This reporting system creates a safe atmosphere for students to report incidents that they see or are a part of themselves.

To ensure precedent and a pattern of fair punishment is allotted for offenders, schools should be mandated to use an online case management software to input:

- Incident details
- Consequences
- The people involved
- The type of bullying that occurred
- Motivation behind the bullying
- Any other actionable/relevant information regarding the case

This will allow schools and boards of education to determine their district’s specific bullying patterns and collect data on the prevalence of bullying in certain communities. By creating an online software where all the cases of bullying that occurred in the school, it will become easier to combat the problem. Although bullying prevention will forever need to be modified and re-evaluated as time goes on, it is important to know that things can change as long as someone has the will to change them.

Report No. 3

Bullying in Today's Day and Age

by Tulip Sengupta

Executive Summary

In 2019, bullying continues to be an epidemic which lawmakers and school administrators alike are struggling to resolve. Bullies tend to target certain groups more so than others, such as those who identify as LGBTQ+ or who have a disability. While there are federal laws against bullying, the state of New Jersey has also implemented laws to prevent bullying, including the New Jersey Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act. This piece of legislation and others have positively impacted bullying, but bullying persists regardless. In writing this paper, I sought to evaluate the effectiveness of anti-bullying policies, specifically in New Jersey, and how demographics and various other characteristics affect bullying. I also discovered the KiVa program, which is used overseas to combat bullying, and I believe this is instrumental to tackling bullying in New Jersey. My research has led to the development of recommendations which I believe, as a high schooler and as someone who would like to see public schools activate their full potential, will lead to decrease incidences of bullying.

Bullying Debunked

Bullying has become a word that rolls off the tongues of students, parents, school administrators, and many others easily when thinking of adolescence. However, when asked to define bullying, many struggle to pinpoint the exact meaning of it. According to StopBullying.gov, bullying can be defined as “unwanted, aggressive behavior among school aged children that involves a real or perceived power imbalance.”(StopBullying.gov, 2019) Bullying is not just calling another kid ugly; it is any act that causes one child to feel superior to another. In fact, it can be classified into three branches: verbal, physical, and social. It can occur anywhere, whether in person or through online forums. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, 31% of students between the ages of 12 and 18 reported being bullied at least once during the 2017 school year. This staggering statistic exemplifies how far-reaching the capacity of bullying is. Although preventive measures against bullying have only arisen in the past decade or so, bullying has been embedded in society since the 18th century.

Psychologist Dan Olweus has studied bullying tremendously and is often looked to for a deeper insight into bullying. His research has led to the creation of an anti-bullying program in Norway and the United States Department of Health and Human Services' anti-bullying campaign, "Take A Stand. Lend A Hand. Stop Bullying Now." While society has been progressing tremendously in many facets, one area where we are still struggling to reach our entire potential is in our effort to eliminate bullying once and for all.

Bullying Specifically in NJ

While students are being educated to prevent bullying by standing up to bullies, this has not been sufficient enough to combat bullying. Thus, many have looked to the law to help combat bullying. In New Jersey, there are a plethora of laws that regulate all types of bullying in all locations. These laws are wide-ranging but include things like requiring school districts to have services accessible to students who are dealing with bullying and its aftermath, such as counseling. According to the New Jersey Department of Education, in the 2017-2018 school year, "schools reported 18,556 HIB trainings and 25,784 HIB programs." (New Jersey Department of Education) Schools are seeking to educate students regarding the ramifications of bullying.

Additionally, the New Jersey Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act was passed unanimously in 2011. This law established the "Week of Respect" in October, which mandated schools to report all instances of HIB, and required schools to have an anti-bullying specialist present at all times. By requiring schools to report and investigate all instances of HIB, the state can adequately compile coherent information regarding bullying and attempt to identify any patterns or trends. They may deduce that certain demographics are prone to bullying more than others or that certain school districts have bullying occurring more frequently than others. Upon analyzing the school's reported information, the New Jersey Department of Education provides schools a grade which evaluates what measures the school takes against bullying and requires them to post this grade.

My school district, South Brunswick, received a 76 out of a maximum 78 in June 2019. The report online includes a grade for each school in the district and specific grades for various parameters for each school regarding bullying, such as HIB reporting and HIB programs, approaches, or other initiatives. Although this report was easily accessible online, I had no idea that the school had a grade for its approach towards bullying and that it was commissioned by the state's Department of Education. Hence, I believe another measure which should be taken is ensuring transparency.

Bullying by the Demographics

While discrimination is bullying, bullies most certainly do not discriminate when choosing their victims; they may bully anyone. For instance, according to a study by the Journal of Developmental and Physical Disabilities, students with disabilities are more fearful of

bullying than students without disabilities. (Saylor) Additionally, the National Center for Educational Statistics reports that “25% of African-American students, 22% of Caucasian students, 17% of Hispanic students, and 9% of Asian students report being bullied at school.” (National Center for Education Statistics)

Another demographic that is much more prone to bullying than others is the LGBTQ community. In fact, the 2013 National School Climate Survey reported that “74.1% of LGBTQ students were verbally bullied (e.g., called names, threatened) in the past year because of their sexual orientation and 55.2%, because of their gender expression.” (GLSEN) Furthermore, the Human Rights Campaign commissioned the “Growing Up LGBT in America” report which consisted of surveying over 10,000 LGBT youth. The report revealed that “42% of LGBT youth say the community in which they live is not accepting of LGBT people” and “92% say they hear negative messages about being LGBT” in various places, including school. This bullying can be attributed to biases and prejudices many have against the LGBTQ community, which they may believe justifies their offensive and harmful behavior.

Furthermore, certain components of one’s identity often makes them much more vulnerable to bullying. For instance, Sikhs are often bullied or harassed due to their joozas. The Sikh Coalition’s report, “Go Home Terrorist,” sought to investigate bullying against Sikh children in the United States. The study found that “turbaned Sikh children experience bullying at more than double the national rate.” This statistic exemplifies how for Sikhs, the turbans almost instigate bullying. Additionally, many school textbooks educate students about the Sikhs with inaccurate information and “extraneous references to ‘Sikh terrorists.’” One can deduce how the lack of education regarding the Sikh religion and culture can cause people to feel apprehensive regarding the culture. Oftentimes, when faced with something unfamiliar, people resort to cruel words and are unwilling to become acquainted with it. This intolerance and unwillingness to learn can most definitely be traced to the reason some decide to bully.

As a first generation Bangladeshi-American girl, I have always known that my identity could make me a victim to bullying more than others. The American Psychological Association has compiled research regarding bullying of Asian-Americans. It cites data from the Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2010 Report which found that while, “like other racial minorities, more Asian-American students (11 percent) report being frequently target with race-related hate words than was reported by White students (3 percent),” they reported being bullied less than white, African-American, and Latino students. This statistic was surprising to me as I, along with many of my peers, have always assumed that Asians, like any other race besides white, would be bullied frequently. However, the American Psychological Association noted that Asian-Americans are often excluded from data regarding bullying so comparing statistics across various races tends to not be as straightforward. The statistics do reveal that certain demographics are subject to bullying more than others; this can be attributed to biases or certain beliefs that bullies have, including but not limited to, racist and homophobic opinions.

The Effectiveness of Anti-Bullying Legislation

Although lawmakers and many groups geared towards combating bullying have attempted to create foolproof laws that will prevent bullying, these laws have not been completely effective in eliminating bullying once and for all. At the same time, it has been difficult to find a way to evaluate the direct impact of legislation on bullying. A study in the Cornell Law Review by Ari Ezra Waldman concludes that “merely enacting and implementing an anti-bullying law—even a comprehensive one, per the DOE’s metrics—has little to no impact on LGB student health and safety.” (Walderman)

In contrast, a UCLA study discovered an anti-bullying program that was successful by their own measures, known as KiVa. (Wolpert) The program, originating in Finland, “includes role-playing exercises to increase the empathy of bystanders and computer simulations that encourage students to think about how they would intervene to reduce bullying.” What distinguishes KiVa from other anti-bullying programs is that the program seeks to educate students regarding bullying by changing their mindset towards emotional relationships with their peers. KiVa does not approach bullying on a superficial level, just on the surface; instead, it encourages students to be more willing to empathize with others and think carefully before partaking in anything which could be interpreted as offensive. Jaana Juvonen, the lead author of the study, says that the study revealed that “the most tormented children... can be helped by teaching bystanders to be more supportive.”

One can see how while legislation may be a positive step towards eliminating bullying, it is not enough. In order to truly tackle bullying, schools must implement anti-bullying programs similar to KiVa so that students will understand bullying on a deeper level and simply put, learn to be kinder.

Recommendations and Conclusion

While several worthy attempts are being made to eliminate bullying, there is still much more that can be done.

- Improve school curriculum with anti-bullying lessons. For instance, schools can implement more anti-bullying lessons into their curricula for all grades from K-12 in order to ensure that students fully understand the power of bullying and its indelible impact. By integrating concepts from programs, such as KiVa, schools can educate students about the emotional impact of bullying and teach children to be respectful and mindful of each other.
- Easier reporting of bullying incidences. Additionally, schools should make it easier to report bullying and reduce the stigma around reporting bullying so students don’t feel like a “snitch” or “tattle.” For all students, reporting bullying and other situations has often become synonymous with being weak and a “tattle.” In fact, many students tend to refrain from reporting bullying because they are unsure of what will follow. By streamlining the process of reporting bullying and ensuring students of their rights, as outlined by the New Jersey Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act, students will feel more comfortable speaking out regarding their experiences. Furthermore,

I believe we, as a society, must learn to be more open-minded towards people of other backgrounds and identities. By being more willing to educate ourselves about others' opinions and perspectives, I believe people would be less inclined to bully others. While there is certainly much more room for improvement in this realm, as a senior in high school, I can discern the differences in measures taken against bullying back when I was in elementary school versus now, and for that I am very thankful. Now, I can only hope that today's youth will work to empower the youth of tomorrow by taking every measure possible to prevent bullying.

Report No. 4

The Effectiveness of Bullying Prevention Policies in Private and Public High Schools

by Ashana Makhija

Executive Summary

In this paper, I analyzed the effectiveness of the Harassment, Intimidation, and Bullying policies of public and private schools in New Jersey. I focused on two private schools, the Pingry School and Princeton Day School, and two public schools, Bridgewater Raritan High School and Watchung Hills Regional High School. These were chosen based on where I felt I had sufficient resources to collect meaningful data. In the private institutions, the Honor Code is used to encourage honorable behavior among the students. Both Pingry and Princeton schools apply a “zero tolerance” policy for harassment, intimidation, and bullying, a theme common among public schools as well. Public schools are required to comply with the Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act and emphasize the importance of teacher’s setting an example in order to create a safe learning environment. However, all schools, do not address the Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) community in detail as their policies remain mainly generic. This paper also includes interviews from students from each school to gauge the effectiveness of their school’s policy for each of the four schools studied. From my research and these surveys, I provided recommendations on different methods all schools can use to improve their policy, as compared with some of the best harassment, intimidation, and bullying policies in the country.

Summary of Bullying Prevention Policy Recommendations

Public Institutions

- For public institutions, one recommendation is to be more open in the expected disciplinary proceedings as a result of committing an act of harassment, intimidation, and bullying.
- Another recommendation would be to have a more personal approach to handling cases of harassment, intimidation, and bullying.

Private Institutions

- For private institutions, one recommendation would be to have a better gauge on the effectiveness of their Honor Code and anti-bullying policies.
- Another recommendation would be to understand interactions between different student populations within the school and direct the HIB policy in a manner fluent with these interactions.

The generalizations made in this paper are by no means representative of public and private schools across the state of New Jersey.

Introduction

In an effort for students to achieve a comprehensive education, many students will encounter different forms of harassment, intimidation, and bullying. While every school in New Jersey combats harassment, intimidation, and bullying in their institutions, schools vary on their policy of prevention and response to these behaviors. This paper discusses and compares these policies between public high schools and private high schools in New Jersey. I hypothesize that private institutions would be better suited to address harassment, intimidation, and bullying than public institutions because of the ability to dictate policy in a manner not necessarily completely consistent with federal law and a generally smaller student body. Recommendations are made at the end of the paper on how to best improve policies on Harassment, Intimidation, and Bullying in both public and private institutions.

While there are no formal federal laws addressing specifically the topic of bullying, many laws address harassment of students, which often overlap with the definition of bullying. Under laws such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Titles IV and VI), the Education Amendments of 1972 (Title IX), the Rehabilitation Act of 1971 (Section 504), the Americans with Disabilities Act (Titles II and III), and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, discriminatory harassment based on perceived and actual characteristics, including a student's race, color, national origin, sex, disability or religion. It is important to note, however, that these laws do not explicitly protect harassment based on sexual orientation. Yet even without explicitly stating this, many cases of harassment based on sexual orientation overlap with discrimination based on sex, and therefore fall under these laws. Under these laws, schools across the country are required to take specific steps upon the reporting of harassment, through which they are able to thoroughly investigate the harassment claims, take steps to end the harassment, and reprimand the necessary people. If harassment persists, there are a few avenues schools and students can use to help them on a federal level: they can file a formal complaint with their district, contact the US Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights, or contact the US Department of Justice's Civil Rights Office.

Within the state of New Jersey, there are explicit laws preventing and responding to any instances of harassment, intimidation, and bullying. Under New Jersey law, harassment, intimidation, and bullying is defined as:

“Any gesture, any written, verbal, or physical act, or any electronic communication, whether it be a single incident or a series of incidents, that is reasonably perceived as being motivated either by any actual or perceived characteristic, such as race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, or a mental, physical, or sensory disability, or by any other distinguishing characteristic, that takes place on school property, at any school-sponsored function, on a school bus, or off school, that substantially disrupts or interferes with the orderly operation of the school or the rights of other students and that;

- a. A reasonable person should know, under the circumstances, will have the effect of physically or emotionally harming a student or damaging the student’s property, or placing a student in reasonable fear of physical or emotional harm to his person or damage to his property;
- b. Has the effect of insulting or demeaning any student or group of students;
- c. Creates a hostile educational environment for the student by interfering with a student’s education or by severely or pervasively causing physical or emotional harm to the student.”

New Jersey law requires multiple actions to be taken by a school district in an effort to prevent bullying, intimidation, and harassment in schools, starting with a district-wide policy for dealing with Harassment, Intimidation, and Bullying (“HIB”) in schools. This policy must include an advertised statement prohibiting these types of behaviors, stated consequences of taking action that falls under the definition of HIB, and how to report incidents.

It is difficult to measure how heavily Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) students are impacted by bullying at school, as the AAPI community is made up of a diverse array of ethnicities, such as Indian, Chinese, Japanese, etc. Often there is not enough information about these individual groups on a nationwide scale. That being said, a much higher percentage of Asian American victims of bullying said they were bullied because of their race than did any other major group (white victims, African American victims, or Latino victims). It is important to study how AAPI communities are affected by the anti-bullying policies in place in New Jersey, and how these policies can be improved to better target AAPI populations.

HIB Prevention by Private Institutions

Both private institutions, the Pingry School and Princeton Day School, rely on an Honor Code to enforce and bolster their harassment, intimidation, and bullying policy. Under the definition of harassment, intimidation, and bullying at each institution, discrimination against any characteristic or identifier that prevents a student from being able to take advantage of the educational opportunities provided by the school is not tolerated. Both schools gave specific instructions on how to navigate harassment, intimidation, or bullying, and encouraged victims to confront the harasser or inform an adult at the school.

To assess the effectiveness of the policy, I developed a survey for the students at each school. A total of 3-4 students participated at each school. Although this survey is not a

comprehensive analysis of all students in the school, the results provide helpful insight on the school culture. While student surveys retained a mostly constant response across the two private schools, a higher percentage of Pingry students reported a less effective approach to bullying by the Pingry administration. However, PDS students reported seeing more bullying at their institution. The HIB policies were available in their individual handbooks, which were readily available on their school websites, and complied with both federal and state laws against bullying.

The Pingry School

The Pingry School is a K-12 private institution that maintains honorable behavior in its student body through the enforcement of the Honor Code:

“Pingry believed that students should understand and live by standards of honorable behavior, which are essentially a matter of attitude and spirit rather than a system of rules and regulations. Decent, self-respecting behavior must be based on personal integrity and genuine concern for others and on the ethical principles which are the basis of civilized society. The members of the Pingry community should conduct themselves in a trustworthy manner that will further the best interests of the school, their class, and any teams or clubs to which they belong. They should act as responsible members of the community, working for the common good rather than solely for personal advantage. They should honor the rights of others, conducting themselves at all times in a moral and decent manner while at Pingry and throughout their lives as citizens of and contributors to the larger community of the world.” (Pingry Student Handbook)

The Pingry School utilizes the Honor Code as a means to create an inclusive culture within the school, and as a means to prevent creating a hostile environment where students feel welcome to engage in harassment, intimidation, or bullying. Under their student handbook, Pingry retains the ‘honor’ of the Honor Code by following federal and state laws to provide equal educational opportunities to any student and therefore having a zero-tolerance policy towards any instance of harassment, intimidation or bullying. The school defines harassment as “any behavior which threatens or intimidates another person or which creates a hostile or offensive educational or social environment for students.” and bullying as “a physical, verbal, or other intimidating act that causes physical or emotional harm to an individual or group.” The Pingry School does not explicitly discuss the treatment of AAPI students in its HIB policy. However, it prohibits any harassment, intimidation or bullying because of race.

As a victim or witness of harassment, intimidation, or bullying at the Pingry School, an individual has three options to respond to any incident:

1. They can confront the bully or harasser to inform them that their actions are unwarranted and unacceptable.
2. They can report the incident (s) to a trusted faculty or adult staff member of the school. This person would then meet with the Division Director and plan a course of action.

3. They can meet with a school counselor and plan next steps after reporting the incident.

After an incident is reported, the Pingry School will investigate the claim, and confirmed violations will be treated as an Honor Code violation. Any confirmed incidents of harassment, intimidation, or bullying will be disciplined through suspension or expulsion from the school.

Students at the Pingry school did not verify the effectiveness of utilizing the Honor Code to combat bullying. No student rated the effectiveness of the Honor Code higher than a 3 on a scale from 1 - 5. In addition, the majority of the students said that they almost never see students come forward to report cases of bullying, and that these cases are not very well addressed. However, it is interesting to note that no student rated the frequency of bullying higher than a 3 out of 5 at the institution. While bullying may not be very common at the Pingry Upper School, any cases of bullying are not frequently reported or well addressed.

Princeton Day School

In keeping with the Pingry School, the Princeton Day School also encourages students to take part in honorable behavior by means of an Honor Code:

“Princeton Day School is a community of learners. At the heart of this community is an academic, social, and moral education. The school is committed to ethical and personal development and to upholding honorable behavior. Students engage in a continuous process of learning academic and personal integrity, exercising mutual respect, and making ethical decisions. In order to foster the development of a community of learners, students are expected to:

- Uphold personal and academic integrity
- Respect themselves and others
- Act responsibly and lead by example
- Be honest in their own work
- Embrace any values expressed above” (PDS Handbook)

The Princeton Day School uses this Honor Code to set expectations for student behavior. The institution has no tolerance for instances of HIB, and it is considered a primary offense, or the most serious type of offense at the school. The school includes any form of harassment or inappropriate behavior discriminating against race, sex, creed, color, national origin, ancestry, disability, sexual orientation, or any other characteristic protected by law under instances of harassment, intimidation, or bullying. The Princeton Day School also does not have specific policy in regards to the AAPI community, but prevents any discrimination based on race.

If any individual has information on or is a victim of harassment, intimidation, or bullying, the PDS handbook instructs the individual to inform the head of school, assistant head of school, or any other division director. Any victim of this should either inform their harasser that this behavior is unacceptable and against school policy, or speak to a trusted adult

at the school to take action. Any retaliation towards someone's reporting any instances of harassment is not tolerated and will be subject to discipline.

Student surveys indicated that bullying prevention policies at the Princeton Day School are more effective than their Pingry counterparts. The majority of students rated the school 4 or 5 out of a possible 5 for the quality of their response to reports of bullying. However, similar to Pingry, most surveyors reported seeing a low frequency of bullying at the Princeton Day School. In addition, students reported a low chance of bullying being reported to the institution. While students do not commonly experience bullying, those who report cases will most likely see an adequate response by their administration.

HIB Prevention by Public Institutions

Both public institutions, Bridgewater-Raritan High School and Watchung Hills Regional High School, encourage honorable behavior by leading by example; teachers are required to exemplify integrity and honorable behavior while in contact with students. Both schools measured generally effective in complying with the Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act, with Bridgewater scoring a 74/78 on effectiveness and Watchung-Hills scoring a perfect 78/78, according to the HIB self-assessment method used by public institutions. They emphasized the importance of a safe learning environment, and that the presence of any harassment, intimidation, and bullying will come in the way of said environment. Neither school addresses issues specific to the AAPI community, but prohibits discrimination against race within the school community. A comparison of their effectiveness will also be included once student survey responses have been registered. These policies and data are available on their website and in their student handbooks. Students at both institutions exhibited a wide array of responses. Students at Bridgewater reported a lower frequency of bullying but disagreed on the effectiveness of the school's efforts to combat bullying, while students at Watchung-Hills disagreed on the frequency of bullying but reported a less effective response to cases of bullying.

Bridgewater- Raritan High School

The Bridgewater- Raritan High School (BRHS) uses a district-wide policy on harassment, intimidation, and bullying. The district encourages honorable behavior in their students through leading by example. As a result, there is a higher expectation for faculty and other school staff to set an honorable example, and act with integrity and discipline. Bridgewater- Raritan Regional School District believes in the importance of creating a safe environment for students to learn in, and therefore has zero policy towards any cases of harassment, intimidation, or bullying.

If an individual wish to report an incident, they must fill out a form asking for specific details surrounding any case of harassment. These cases are investigated by the school, and consequences are distributed as seen fit by the school. This school allows us to better measure effectiveness of their policy by making public their HIB incident reports from past years. In their HIB Self- Assessment, on a scale from 0-78, the district has maintained a score in the high 70s in the past few years. However, specifically in the case of the high

school, the score has dropped from 74 in the 2014-15 school year to 68 in the 2016-17 school year. This shows a growing lack of enforcement of BRHS anti-bullying policy.

Students from this institution reported a diverse array of responses. However, students agreed that bullying is not very frequent at the Bridgewater High School. However, students disagreed on how effective the administration's response is to cases of bullying; 50% of surveyors believed BRHS a 5/5 on bullying prevention effectiveness, with the other 50% rating BRHS a 1 in the same category.

Watchung-Hills Regional High School

Watchung-Hills' zero tolerance policy for harassment, intimidation, and bullying is measured using Policy 5512, which is an in depth policy outlining programs and services the school offers in an effort to prevent instances of HIB. The district describes the underlying necessity of a safe learning environment: "A safe and civil environment in school is necessary for pupils to learn and achieve high academic standards. Harassment, intimidation, and bullying, like other disruptive or violent behaviors, is conduct that disrupts both pupil's ability to learn and a school's ability to educate its pupils in safe and disciplined environment." The school also encourages faculty and staff to lead by example and demonstrate appropriate and honorable behavior to help combat inappropriate behavior in the student body.

Responses to harassment, intimidation, and bullying include reporting it to the school anti-bullying specialist or the district anti-bullying coordinator. According to policy 5512, students are encouraged to walk away from acts of HIB when they see them, attempt to intervene and stop these acts, provide support to victims of these acts, and report them to the appropriate school staff member. In effectiveness in the 2017-18 school year, Watchung-Hills gave itself a 78/78, meaning that it fully complied with the Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act in response to any instance of harassment, intimidation, or bullying. Watchung-Hills believes itself to be in line with its goals of preventing and intervening in "at risk student behavior, preventing conditions that place students at risk for unsafe behaviors, developing disciplined learning environments that are conducive to student achievement of challenging academic standards and developing factors that promote positive student development."

Student responses were similar to BRHS because of the diverse array of responses. Students disagreed with the frequency of bullying at the institution: 50% of students said bullying was extremely prevalent at the school, while the other 50% rated WHRHS a 1 on frequency of bullying. However, students agreed that the school does not often receive reports of bullying from the student body, and that they are not extremely effective in addressing bullying at the institution.

Private vs Public School Policy on HIB

The biggest difference between the two types of institutions is the influence of the Honor Code. The Honor Code creates a culture by which harassment, intimidation, and bullying should be discouraged. As a result, private institutions enforce their policies both through the stated rules and the created culture. It is interesting to note, however, that most students at private institutions did not believe the Honor Code was very effective in combating bullying at their institutions. However, public institutions replace the presence of the Honor Code through the presence of honorable teachers that lead specifically in an effort to discourage instances of harassment, intimidation, and bullying between students.

Both types of institutions mostly have a “zero tolerance” policy for any instance of harassment. Public schools were less clear about action taken once a report has been filed, but the private schools made it clear that any instances of harassment or bullying would result in suspension or dismissal from the institution. However, all four schools had similar responses to the effectiveness of the response to cases of bullying from the administration. PDS may be considered an exception, as students reported a better response to bullying.

Finally, neither type of school targeted any policy towards handling instances of harassment directed specifically at the AAPI community. However, they clearly stated that any discrimination based on race is unacceptable.

Bullying Prevention Policy Recommendations

Public Institutions

For public institutions, one recommendation is to be a lot more open in the expected disciplinary proceedings as a result of committing an act of HIB. It was unclear what would happen to a student who violates their expectations going forward. Having clearer policies that dictate consequences against bullying can aid in a student body that is less inclined to take the risk of breaking the rules.

Another recommendation I would give to public institutions is to have a more personal approach to handling cases of harassment, intimidation, and bullying. Both schools required students to either fill out a form or reach out to strangers to report incidences. Students are less likely to take action if they are less familiar with the processes. If students are encouraged to build relationships with their teachers and friends, and reach out to these people when they experience an act of HIB, they will be much more likely to report it to a teacher, who can then take the necessary action to report the incident.

Private Institutions

In the case of private institutions, one recommendation would be to have a better gauge on the effectiveness of their Honor Code, and anti-bullying policies. Because the Honor Code

relies so heavily on student's influencing each other, it is important for the faculty and staff to stay in tune with the student culture at the school, and how effective the Honor Code remains in any given school year. Faculty also need to be able to

Neither type of school explicitly addresses bullying within or against the AAPI community. One recommendation I would provide across the board would be to understand interactions between different communities within the school, and direct the HIB policy in a manner fluent with these interactions. Bullying against AAPI communities is on an increasing trend in recent years, as 50% of AAPI students cite being bullied in New York City public schools in 2013, up from only 27% in 2009. Therefore, it is especially important to implement policies specific to bullying against communities of diverse backgrounds.

Discussion

The generalizations made in this paper are by no means representative of public and private schools across the state of New Jersey. Because research was only conducted on 2 public institutions and 2 private institutions, both located in or around central Jersey, this study can not be considered representative of the entire state. In addition, any student surveys cannot be considered wholly representative of the entire school, since a smaller number of the student body filled out the survey, most of which know each other and are friends. This can easily lead to bias within the survey. Finally, it may be important to note that students attending private institutions may come from less diverse backgrounds as they generally will have a higher socioeconomic status than their public school counterparts. This may change the likelihood of bullying within the school, and may play a role in the effectiveness of the HIB policy.

Conclusion

In summary, public and private institutions both take different approaches to addressing harassment, intimidation, and bullying within their community. Private schools, such as the Pingry School and Princeton Day School, utilize an Honor Code to encourage honorable behavior within the student body, while public schools, such as Bridgewater-Raritan High School and Watchung Hills High School, take on a lead-by-example method to encourage honorable behavior among the student body. Based on student surveys and other means of measuring effectiveness, private schools seem to be more effective in preventing harassment, intimidation, and bullying than public schools, although this may not be applicable across the board.

Report No. 5

Harassment and Bullying in New Jersey: Is it Really Gone?

by Esha Peer

Executive Summary

This paper will be discussing the law introduced in 2011 as a bullying prevention law, known as the Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights. The legislation is used in schools across New Jersey, and may be slightly amended to fit the circumstances of specific schools. Harassment, Intimidation, and Bullying (HIB) affects the school environment for students, therefore it is important to study how it can be applied at the local level, as well as how the law can be improved to further help students feel comfortable with their peers and school environment. Although the Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights is a strong piece of legislature, the law should be improved in order to prevent bullying, such as by focusing on the implementation at the local level and broadening the definition of HIB itself.

Personal Reflection

At the tender age of five, I entered my first day of elementary school. I came in believing I would have a fresh start, make new friends, and be loved by my fellow peers. That first day, I made my decision to sit next to a girl who would change this dream forever. Rather than achieving it, I ended up living a nightmare. I was made fun of for eating my food a certain way. I drew people the wrong way. I had awful hair, I blinked in a funny way, and I was not pretty. I never was able to fit in, because I was simply me. When I was in second grade, 2011, our counselor gave the school a lecture about new rules the state had put in place against mean behavior. I thought my life would change. Maybe, that little dream of mine to be accepted into the world would be possible. This paper will be discussing the law introduced in New Jersey as a bullying prevention law, known as the Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights (ABR). The legislation is used in schools across New Jersey, and may be slightly amended to fit the circumstances of specific schools. Harassment, Intimidation, and Bullying (HIB) legislation affects the school environment for students. In 2009, the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported 33% of students ages 12-18 were bullied in New Jersey. From 2015-2016, incidents of bullying dropped by 3.5%, a steady decline since the ABR was signed into law in 2011 (Clark and Petenko). It is important to study how ABR is

applied at the local level, as well as how the law can be improved to further help students feel comfortable with their peers and school environment.

Summary of Bullying Prevention Policy Recommendations

- Clarify definitions of bullying and improve enforcements
- Need more bullying research that is community-specific
- The New Jersey Department of Education should look into how local school districts are implementing the policy themselves and incorporate best practices

What is HIB?

According to the United States Department of Education, 120 separate bills were passed in state legislations from 1999-2010. On January 5, 2011, Governor Chris Christie signed a new and stronger bullying policy into law for New Jersey. Amended several times in the Legislature, the piece is generally known as the Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights. Based on the state of New Jersey, Harassment, Intimidation, and Bullying based on this legislation is “any gesture, any written, verbal or physical act, or any electronic communication, as defined in N.J.S.A. 18A:37-14”.

Policy Pros and Cons of ABR

The U.S Department of Education set guidelines for a strong bullying legislation in states and conducted an analysis of these laws throughout the country using a point system. This point system shows how school districts implemented the state policy in their schools. New Jersey includes all the components the U.S Department of Education identified as necessary for a bullying legislation. It also has the fourth highest ranking for the extent of expansiveness in its state model bullying policies and guidance documents, with 22 out of 26 points covered from the original 2011 legislation (Bell, Springer, and Stuart-Cassel). New Jersey school districts lacked points for enumerated groups, purpose, scope, and transportation. Enumerating groups means the law specifies bullying can include certain acts which are based on a perceived or actual characteristic of a person. This phrasing helps enumerate racial groups, ethnic groups, and groups of different sexual orientations. Although New Jersey does specify in its definition of bullying can be “a gesture based on race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, or a mental, physical or sensory disability”, the Department of Education also believes bullying legislation must generalize bullying does not have to be based on a characteristic. Even with amendments made to the HIB law, New Jersey has not added this to their HIB policy. For bullying legislation to be purposeful, it must include consideration of both bullying’s negative consequences on students, as well as serious consideration of all acts of bullying. The scope of bullying legislation must include the school campus, school-sponsored events and activities at any location, school transportation, school-provided electronics, and must be broadly stated as anything else which disturbs the school

environment. Finally, transportation should include school buses as well as bus stops for the legislation to be considered adequate by the Department of Education.

Effects of ABR on AAPI Students:

One of the many examples of bullying defined under the state law for ABR is “a gesture based on race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, or a mental, physical or sensory disability” (“Harassment, Intimidation, and Bullying”). The Department of Education found race to be the most enumerated, or the most explicitly stated in HIB legislation in the United States, likely because of how commonly it is used to single out students in schools. It is crucially important that the ABR include the mention of race, considering the demographics of New Jersey schools today. The Department of Education found for Middlesex County, the majority of students enrolled in school are Hispanic and Asian, with White students close and Black students more than half that amount. In fact, a 2015 report found 26% of Asian American Pacific Islanders who live in New Jersey are in Middlesex County (Asian Pacific Islander American Vote). Without laws put in place to protect race from being targeted by bullies, more than half of students would be at risk of being bullied without being protected by any laws from this behavior.

In order to better study this, a sample district can be used, such as the South Brunswick High School. South Brunswick has an extremely high minority demographic, with about 70% of the school being a race other than white (US News). Looking at the Asian-Pacific group, the school has about 51% Asian students enrolled. With such a high concentration of these students, in fact the highest demographic in the high school, it would seem expected the bullying policy goes further in depth about enumerated groups in the school. However, as stated in the study conducted by the Department of Education in 2016, New Jersey school districts fail to have the best standard of implementation of enumerating groups. This may be because the Department of Education expects not only for the schools “make... clear that bullying does not have to be based on any particular characteristic” (Department of Education 6). New Jersey is one of two states which specifies bullying as motivated on a characteristic. The South Brunswick School District policy includes this characteristic could be “either any actual or perceived characteristic”, and the characteristic may not be specifically listed in the law (“Harassment, Intimidation, and Bullying” 3). The law seems to suggest bullying only occurs between students of different races, sexual orientation, or gender. According to StopBullying.gov, little to no research has been conducted on students who are bullied by the same ethnicity or race. It is very possible a large demographic of students are bullied by people of the same ethnicity or race. This would disprove the New Jersey law’s definition. It further shows enumerated groups are not protected as well as they could be by HIB.

In 2016, the New Jersey Department of Health has found that suicide rates have decreased in New Jersey by 13%, while U.S. Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that in 2016 the nationwide amount of suicides increased by 24.5%. In fact, the New Jersey Department of Health article from 2016 fails to mention student suicide rates in New Jersey have been on an increasing trend in the past few years. Even with

legislation passed, it seems students are still having trouble in schools because of the policy. Take for example, the story of Mallory Grossman. On June 14, 2017, this twelve-year old committed suicide because of the mass bullying in her school. A few young girls from her school in Copeland began to message her through social media, calling her a “loser” and telling her to even go kill herself. Even with complaints by her parents, the school did not do anything. This is not just a story for Mallory, but many young kids have faced these problems in schools where bullying policies may be in place, but they are not pushed or executed when needed. Policy does not always follow through in the procedure.

Bullying Prevention Policy Recommendations

Clarify definitions of bullying and improve enforcements

Although states may pass such legislation, the problem really comes down to specific schools and how they enforce these laws. If schools do not push for the legislation to be followed through, or have weak legislation, students are at risk of being bullied and targeted, and even falling into depression. In fact, for teens age 10-24 suicide is the third leading cause of death (Another note a few lawyers noticed is that the loophole of the New Jersey legislation is that there must be a reason why a student is being targeted by other children, true or untrue. If students are attacking other students without any reasoning, which is the case for many, no laws can protect them. Take, for example, the case of R.A. o/b/o Board of Education of the Township of Hamilton. A few girls were called names by others, thrown a blown-up paper bag in their faces, had glaring stares, stomping and kicking of her lunch bag, kicking it in the hallway, and even more name calling. The district did not constitute these incidents under their HIB policy, reasoning there was no distinguishable characteristic motivating the girls’ conduct. Furthermore, the ruling claimed a breakdown between a few middle school girls and their friendship “is a mutual non-power based conflict that is not about a characteristic of the targeted student” (R.A. o/b/o Board of Education of the Township of Hamilton, 2016). Yet, in another case from 2016, a 6th grade boy was given five lunch detentions for making remarks such as “it’s not good to not eat meat”, and “he should eat meat because he’d be smarter and have bigger brains” (G.C. o/b/o C.C. v. Board of Education of the Township of Montgomery, 2016). The court ruled it was not arbitrary or capricious of the school board for giving him such a punishment because there was a discernible characteristic, vegetarianism, which the student was targeting his peer for. It is important to understand bullying does not always come down to a reason for mistreating a child, and should not be defined as enumerated as it is. Making the definition more broad may help to encompass more student issues with harassment.

Need more bullying research that is community-specific

Moreover, research could help create this change. The New Jersey Department of Education releases an annual report on school discipline and safety. Although a lot of research goes into this, there are many data points the report still lacks. As previously mentioned, there have been no reports on bullying students face from their own community, which may not be because of a certain characteristic. The Department of Research should have

surveys which specify who students are bullied by in communities, because oftentimes it can be from their own community. And the New Jersey HIB policy does not cover what to do in situations such as those.

The New Jersey Department of Education should look into how local school districts are implementing the policy themselves and incorporate best practices

The Department of Education could also look into how local school districts are implementing the policy themselves. This must be done again, by a survey through students. More often than not, school districts are simply ignoring certain cases of bullying because it is not considered important enough. There are little consequences for school administrators who do not implement the law. Only when there is statistical evidence, not just articles on specific situations, can changes be made to the ABR.

Self-Reflection

I have been bullied. And even after the law was passed, I was still bullied. It was not just because I had brown skin. It was not because of one certain characteristic. I was bullied for just breathing. I am sure many people have had this experience before. I read it in the news, I hear it from my peers. But it never stops. This constant fear that someone will call you out for doing a single action never leaves. And laws from a state building miles away from me does not have as big of an impact as the school administrators could. I am lucky to live in a school district with a much more positive environment than before. But not everyone is this lucky. School administrators are not right all the time, and they find ways to get around the law. That is not fair. Lawmakers have left out a large group of people who are victimized because of their definition of HIB, and local policies are not always followed through. There is a loophole in this policy, and sooner or later, it must be fixed for New Jersey students. I never want a little girl to come into school again and shiver in fear of being made fun of for her personality. Our laws in New Jersey should reflect a positive environment, and this can only be done when a broader definition of HIB is made, and when local policies are given more pressure to be followed through by state legislators.

Report No. 6

Religion Over Reason: How Catholic Schools' Outdated Perceptions and Solutions to Mental Health Issues are Harming Our Nation's Schools

by Yajur Sriraman

Executive Summary

New Jersey State Legislature has done well in combating wide-scale bullying throughout the state's school systems, through its Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act. However, private Catholic schools remain an exception to this notion. Entrenched in deeply religious beliefs, and in the idea that religion is an antidote to all, the majority of Catholic schools in New Jersey have neglected the need for mental health counselors by insisting that priests fill this role instead. This is a dangerous construct for secular students in Catholic schools and has led to many secular students brushing bullying and mental health problems under the rug. It is time for NJ State Legislature to step in and mandate a solution to Catholic schools prioritizing religion over reason.

Personal Reflection

When I walked into the cafeteria for the first time, one thing was clear: I was very different from most of my classmates. Surrounding me were white faces and plates piled high with meat, a slightly intimidating sight to the vegetarian, Indian boy. I am a recent graduate of Delbarton School, one of the top ranked Catholic high schools in the nation. It is an experience that I would not trade for the world, but in some ways I was very lucky. As someone without any mental health conditions, the "pressure-cooker" feeling of being one unique individual among a sea of homogenous people never really affected me that much-- I enjoyed it in its own distinct way. This is not always the case around our nation.

Demographics

In the United States, 66% of catholic school students are white. In contrast, 16% are Hispanic, 8% are black, 5% are Asian, 4% biracial, and 1% or less identify with another racial label. Because of this white-dominated private school population, ethnic minorities can often feel alone, isolated, and left behind in private school atmospheres. One of my good friends in high school was a black student who often felt left out considering that he was

the only black individual in the entire grade, making him feel like an outsider. This both affected his mental health and his academic performance. Being an ethnic minority can be difficult in a private school atmosphere, but being a non-Catholic in a Catholic school is the biggest problem of all. To clarify, there are many aspects of Catholic education that are absolutely fantastic; it's why so many non-Catholics enroll in Catholic schools both for the academic rigor as well as the spiritual education. However, their outdated policies and procedures regarding mental health cast a grim shadow over a system in need of immediate change.

In most public schools around the nation, subject to government regulation, there are concrete policies set to deal with bullying/mental health issues. However, in most Catholic schools, the Church steps in. Rather than having someone on campus to go to and discuss my problems like most of my friends in public schools do, I have to head up to the church and talk to a priest order to discuss my issues. As mentioned earlier, a significant portion of Catholic School students (specifically non-white students) are not actually Catholic. Because of this, it becomes a very uncomfortable situation to actually have to approach a priest with mental health problems. This is an area where religion should NOT interfere with common sense policy: Catholic schools must make mental health a priority in a secular manner.

I remember the first time I felt a big disconnect between the Catholic Church and myself in my freshman year of high school. When I talked to a priest in my school's affiliated abbey, I was asked to pray to a God that did not align with my religion in order to make me feel less isolated in my school environment. The disconnect was so stark, yet I had no other options or alternatives. Nowhere to go. Eventually, I had a thriving friend group and was able to have an amazing experience, but I know many others who didn't believe this was the case for them. The Catholic Church claims to be about inclusivity, but its education must reflect this notion: bullying issues and depression-related ailments are shoved under the rug of religion, and thoughts and prayers pretend to cover the wounds of students, yet are as effective as a Band-aid without any adhesive. The long term consequences of Catholic School's religion-centric bullying/mental health policies are dangerous and particularly deleterious to ethnic and religious minorities.

There tends to be this false perception that because a child goes to a Catholic school, there will be no bullying and it will be a peaceful and happy educational environment. No school is immune to bullying and turbulence, and Catholic School parents must be aware of this in acting to initiate change in their children's schools. We, as a society cannot get away with these institutions continuing to push problems under the rug-- change must occur now.

In writing this paper for Act to Change, I am tasked to come up with a potential solution to this critical issue. Drawing from my own personal experience as a Hindu graduate of a Catholic School, I want to bring positive change to a type of community feels needs it the most; ethnic/religious minorities in Catholic schools. I propose that the New Jersey State Government sign into law a bill that requires all Catholic high schools in the state of New

Jersey have a secular mental health counselor in addition to the priests that comprise their affiliated church. By doing so, an outlet can be provided for non-Catholic students to comfortably and reasonably talk about problems they are facing in school, thus improving the overall mental health of the institution as a whole.

While we have made strides as a society in combating mental health, we have plenty of work still to do. Mandating secular mental health/bullying prevention counselors for religiously-affiliated schools would be a monumental step forward in the right direction, and one that I hope that NJ state legislature will take strongly into consideration.

Report No. 7

We Started the Fire

by *Sheaa Amin*

Personal Reflection

While it'd never crossed my mind to use the term "bullying" to describe my experience growing up as an Asian American, in retrospect, that's exactly what it was. Bullying was something I knew I had experienced, but I didn't realize the extent of it and how it impacted my childhood. In retrospect, being bullied for being an Asian American changed the way I viewed myself, my culture, and my place in the world.

Growing up, my mom only knew how to cook regular traditional Indian meals, with the occasional burrito here and there. It was never something I was ashamed of when I was super young. In fact, in preschool I looked forward to having Indian food for lunch everyday. Nobody questioned my meals; it was actually appreciated and interesting to my teachers and classmates because it was different from the typical chicken nuggets and fries. One of my lasting memories from preschool is when I brought my favorite dish, Dahi Vada, to school with me. My teacher came up to me and I was so excited to share my love for the dish with her.

Flash forward to the first grade.

Lunch was now an hourly block during each day with every kid in the school. At first, I would bring what my mom was comfortable cooking, such as samosas and Indian-style sandwiches. I didn't realize there was an issue with it until I saw my classmates looked at me differently because of my lunches. During elementary school, I went to a predominantly Caucasian school; I was one out of eleven Asian-Americans in my grade of seventy. Most of these kids also purchased hot lunch from school, which consisted of pizzas, burritos, mac and cheese, and such- most being foods that I'd never tried before. I had pinpointed my food as the reason for not fitting in, and I soon became enamored with it. As I began going to classmates birthday parties I realized that Indian food smells, and most kids my age don't like the smell of it. I also realized hair oil, which is something most Asian Americans put in their children's hair growing up to protect it, also smells and is looked up as being gross by those around me. I would throw tantrums at home when my mom put oil in my hair and refused to go anywhere with it in in fear of people hating me for the

smell. I'd always thought of these experiences as trying to assimilate to American culture, but while it wasn't intentional, it was most definitely bullying because I was ashamed of my own identity and it carried on in my day-to-day life. My mom started to teach herself how to make American food at home, and effort I now really appreciate.

My identity also struggled in context of religion- I wasn't interested in learning about it because I thought no one else was. All my classmates began going to CCD and came to school with their new knowledge of the testaments and whatnot, and I felt ashamed because I didn't know anything about their religion. Was the next step of fitting in learning the Bible? My Indian friends, though I knew they with Hindu, never spoke about religion at school, and so I thought by learning my religion I was doing myself a disservice. I was wrong.

Growing up in a primarily Caucasian Elementary school, I had very different experiences than my peers who I ended up going to middle school with. In my township, we had four elementary schools come together for form my middle school, which was one of five. This is where the stigma against Asian Americans began.

The Stigma

“You smell like curry...”

“Indians don't know how to wear deodorant!”

The idea that Indians as a population smell was a festering idea in our school. Having grown up at 26 surrounded by white people, my brain instantly went on defense mode saying “Hey I'm Indian but I'm better than them!” for no other reason than I had assimilated. Looking back, I'm not better than them- I'm actually at a disadvantage because I am nowhere near as culturally immersed as my classmates were.

As middle school continued, it wasn't flat out “bullying” but there definitely was a stigma that took root in the sixth grade and expanded over time and changed the ways Indians viewed themselves in my town. A specific term really took root in the sixth grade to describe the Indians who hadn't assimilated- FOB, standing for “Fresh off the Boat.” That word was used to describe any Asian American who was not a native English speaker/ chose to speak a different language in the hallway to their friends, who brought Indian food to school, or dressed in native cultural attire.

I started to realize that most of these kids just moved to this country- they were trying to adapt in the best way they could. To judge them on how American they are is hypocritical- while I was born here and had time to adapt to the culture shock between home and school, these kids are doing their best in a foreign environment. I also realized that many of those kids live in the apartment complexes dominated by South Asians because as immigrants to a new country it was affordable housing and it was the best way for them to find their route in our society. But these realizations took a few years to come as I expanded my friend group and started becoming friends with the “FOBs,” which was looked down upon by some friends. In all honesty, it was a close

friend of mine, an Indian American, who started using the term in school and was proud that she was the one who started the trend.

“That’s definitely a FOB”

“Their friends are all FOBs”

“That’s such a fobby thing to do”

FOB became an adjective used to describe anyone who didn’t assimilate to American culture. I refused to take Indian food to school at all during middle school because I was afraid someone would make comments about my locker smelling like curry and being called a fob. It was a de-meaning term that made me feel that if I embraced my ethnicity I would be lower than everyone else, and I was used to being somebody who always tried to be at the top so the idea of being knocked down terrified me. And so I never learned about my culture growing up, I only knew the basics. I was familiar with what Hinduism was but I never sat down and actually learned about my family’s religion and the guidelines and expectations it sets for us. I’d never watched any Indian movies or listened to Indian songs, as my parents didn’t really care for either of those things. My dad had immigrated to the country in the early eighties and was well accustomed to American life when I was born. He still watched Indian serials and shows, but we never went out to the local Indian movie theater the way other Indian families did. My mom listened to music here and there, but it wasn’t anything I’d paid attention to. My middle school experience could be defined as being afraid to embrace my culture out of fear of not fitting in and being disliked for my ethnicity.

Once high school came around, I noticed that the same kids who went the extra mile calling people fobs and actively stereotyping were the ones who were heavily immersed in their cultures outside of school. They would go to the temple, do traditional Indian dancing, and other cultural activities in their free time. The same thing they made fun of other kids for doing, they were doing in their day to day lives.

During junior year was when I realized that everyone around me is into their respective religions, cultures, and families, and the same could not be said for myself. My parents never enforced religion or culture on me because they wanted me to live out the American Dream and be somebody. I was born an American citizen and they didn’t want to jeopardize my status in a cultural manner because of forcing a culture on me. While I appreciated it up to the age of sixteen, I now regret not embracing my culture as a part of my identity, because the same kids I was trying to fit in with had been doing so this entire time. While some of my friends went to India every year or every few years, I have only been once in my seventeen years of existence and that was when I was three for my aunt’s wedding.

and. I’ve searched realize now that there wasn’t really like an isolated bullying that happened in my school I would definitely say Constable fog in middle school is definitely feeling like there’s no excuse for that and people should be able to make excuses for that because in a minute is generally turning on itself. And I realize that our community is so like isolated and divided because it stopped featured among themselves. You either fit into three categories your white washed and

you don't want to be a part of any Community you think it's gross pretty much be a white girl or you're a father you a super new community in like family is everything to you and Elgin. But like thinking about it all people by extremes because it's not who they are and to do that is isolating and it's cream such a stigma around Indian people. Like why is people another culture calling you like Curry that's not nice and you shouldn't just a lot that I didn't like how I act like I really don't care like no it's the same thing as like a honey another culture and just because we have taken root in American history yet doesn't mean that we should accept any prejudices or like mean comments against us because we are Paving we are creating a negative environment for ourselves in our community and that's our own fault if you continue to he's at the Divide. and our community we are attacking ourselves and we are going to be packed for other people to attack us and Bully us. I have never experienced bowling because I'm an Asian-American at the hands of another culture it has only been at the hands of people who experience are of the same ethnicity as myself. And text app that reality is kind of gruesome I didn't want to accept it for like a long time but I'm realizing that we are our own like enemies and the situation and we shouldn't we should be uniting and give me like a united front at the same time like we're the same as immigrant experience at one point or another and being with somebody that doesn't make you any better. the stigmas that grow in the Middle School like Indian food smells bad or everybody calls everybody Auntie or that Indian people are just less than everybody else it's just like a plague in everybody is mine and I find myself singing some of these things not out of hatred which is out of like instinct. I will be driving an Oak Tree Road and I will say I'll look at these Bob's across the street. Physical show me jaywalking but I shouldn't be chastising them for being a specific race like oh yeah you like you just came to America you don't know like doing that I am bullying my own race and by not confronting it in my Society I am which is dangerous. and these prejudices don't justify the Indians like after the 2016 election there was definitely a Muslim stigma growing in my Society. I so remember when dating afraid this girl who sat next to me turn to me and was like yeah I'm happy that jumps in a band like wasn't for me in this country because they really are the terrorists and I expected me to agree with her and I quit because it's not true like your research like you're being a Muslim religion like a defining characteristic in North should you let it be. You are who you are and your religion does not define who you are but it is a big part of who you both know actually it's a part of who you are but it's not your defining characteristic I took me a long time to realize that. I can be an Indian American and also be like a successful woman one day. so there is a large me to go with bullying and it would liquid in the Asian American Community but genuinely I need to start with reform and itself. Ice Age American should bash on between Lake North Indians and South Indians or Muslims vs. Hindus or I've been here in this country for 10 years and you have only been here three. That's such a dividing character mentality and bullying in our schools is only going to get worse if we don't take action now if you need a nip it in the bud and re-evaluate the way you look at our society. I personally need to re-evaluate the way I think about like people in my town because I'm not saying everybody's afraid or whatever but like there is definitely room for improvement and people are people and I should learn to embrace like living in an Indian Community and not say Alex I can't wait to get out of his when there's so many Indians. Like you felt school always feel like you're only Indians like why why don't you like white people my school is has like 40% Indians but 30% white the Indians don't outweigh the white people by like about lunch it's just weird or not cuz they're not be a white majority and that's honestly the reality is coming towards America like I think I like 2050 they say like majority-minority. And by creating a stigma now before like the minority population is growing is just so dangerous and so

divided. I think it's really important like this youth generation 2 really reevaluate how they look and how we look at ourselves and really start to understand that we have a place in society we don't need to does settle I think a lot of us are afraid to speak out and like actually hold our own ground because we always here like you don't fit in like we don't belong here and if we believe that we will never go out with me we need to start fighting back and forth way to stop is for kids to stop settling for stereotypes of big money Society.

Bullying because of ethnicity doesn't really happen at my high school.

My personal reflection

- Doesn't mean it wasn't a part of growing up
- Look at some suppressed memories
- My mom only knew how to cook traditional Indian meals and the occasional burrito, so that's what I had for lunch growing up
- When the container opened, smell would be strong and very different from everyone else's
- Smell festered in classroom
- Middle school is where it got really bad
 - All the elementary schools came together
 - One specific school, Kennedy Park, had a class of almost entirely Indians
- Middle school i refused to take Indian food to school for lunch "it smells"
 - Stigma that grew within myself to hate my cultures food
 - Never listened to Indian music
 - Granted my parents didnt either
 - Never watched indian movies
 - Stopped putting oil in my hair
- The term FOB started up in sixth grade
 - Fresh of the boat
 - Smells like curry
- My friends and I all used the term to describe indians who weren't as assimilated
- It became such a part of the culture that looking back at it I can describe it as nothingbut bullying and a growing hatred towards my own culture
- High school came around and in junior year I started noticing the same kids who went around calling people fobs were heavily immersed in their ethnic communities outside of school
 - Did traditional dance styles
 - Were super religious/ went to the temple often
- Started to question how I'd loss my sense of culture in order to fit in with everyone around me and blend in, when really everyone is very immersed in their culture
- Now i'm starting to understand and embrace my place in society as an indian american
 - Learning about movies and music
 - Learning about my religion
- No individual offenses, but stigmas
- Indian community has a self-hatred and a divide among itself
 - "White-washed" and dont want anything to do with their communities
 - "Fobs" are too immersed in their communities

- Most of us fall in the middle and are trying to find our place
- Internalized prejudices against muslims due to political climate
 - Girl said to me in the eighth grade “trump isn’t wrong... we need to ban muslims they are terrorists”
 - Said it in a hushed tone, thought I would understand
 - I didnt.

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