## Washington State PTA/Safe Schools Coalition

## **Bullying Report in Brief**

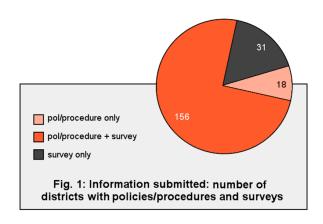
**December 2003 — FINAL EDITION** 

### **Background**

This report examines the variety and scope of anti-bullying policies and procedures that school districts in Washington state have adopted in accordance with the *Anti-Bullying Act*, which took effect Aug. 1, 2003. It also describes how districts are implementing policies and procedures, training staff, and preparing students to be able to address the problem of bullying themselves. The study was conducted on behalf of the Washington State Parent Teacher Association and the Safe Schools Coalition.

#### The Response

A total of <u>205 districts</u>, or 69% of all districts in the state, responded to a request to submit policies, procedures, and/or reporting forms, as well as a short survey asking districts to describe their efforts to disseminate information about their policies [Fig. 1].



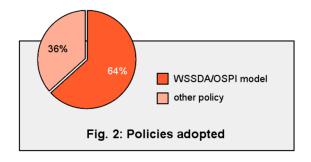
Nearly all districts that responded had adopted HIB policies or were in the process of adopting them. Of the districts that replied:

- 182 returned completed surveys
- 169 sent HIB policies and/or procedures
  - 162 sent HIB policies
  - 142 sent HIB procedures
- 30 sent reporting forms
- 28 sent other materials, including handbooks, HIB brochures, and training materials.



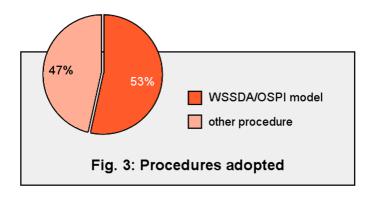
Many policies/procedures were modeled nearly verbatim after examples provided by the Washington State School Directors' Association [WSSDA] and the Office of Superintendent for Public Instruction [OSPI], or had a few negligible changes in language that did not affect the criteria being analyzed.

Of the districts that submitted policies/procedures, 108 (64%) adopted the model policy. This represents and 36% of all Washington districts [Fig. 2].



Nine out of ten districts are in compliance with the provision of the law that says they must explicitly ban bullying based on all eight forms of bias

- race
- color
- religion
- ancestry
- national origin
- gender
- sexual orientation, and
- mental or physical disability



Eighty-nine districts adopted the model procedure, representing 53% of the districts that submitted policies/procedures, and 30% of all state districts [Fig. 3].

Many district policies and procedures were still quite similar to the models but omitted a key provision included in the sample policy or procedure. A few held themselves to standards higher than those required by the new law and modeled by WSSDA/OSPI.

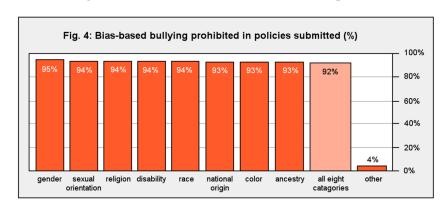
### Bias-based bullying

The *Anti-Bullying Act* requires districts to define Harassment, Intimidation, and Bullying (HIB) as "any intentional written, verbal, or physical act

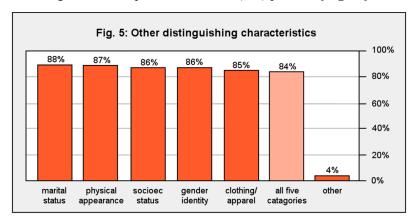
including but not limited to [those] motivated by any characteristic in RCW 9A.36.080(3), or other distinguishing characteristics, when the ...act (a) Physically harms a student or damages the student's property; or (b) Has the effect of substantially interfering with a student's education; or (c) Is so severe, persistent, or pervasive that it creates an intimidating or threatening educational environment; or (d) Has the effect of substantially disrupting the orderly operation of the school."

RCW 9A.36.080(3), the state's malicious harassment statute referred to in the paragraph above, lists eight characteristics as common motivators of bias-based acts: "race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, and mental or physical disability." In other words, districts must, according to the new law, tell students explicitly that they may not harass one another on these eight or any other bases.

Of the 169 districts that submitted policies/procedures, 156 (92%) are in compliance with that provision of the law, specifically banning acts of HIB based on all eight of these forms of bias. Some districts opted to list



additional categories along with the required eight. The other policies included some, but not all, of these protected categories. One hundred sixty policies (95%) prohibited HIB acts motivated by gender, and HIB acts motivated by religion, race, disability, or sexual orientation were specifically prohibited by 159 (94%) policies. HIB incidents motivated by color, ancestry, or national origin were prohibited in 158 (93%) of the policies submitted. "Other" protected categories were specified in seven (4%) policies [Fig. 4.]



## "Other distinguishing characteristics"

The Anti-Bullying Act also refers to "other distinguishing characteristics" that could motivate prohibited HIB behavior. The WSSDA/OSPI model explains that this term "can include but [is] not limited to physical appearance, clothing or other apparel, socioeconomic status, gender identity, and marital status." The policies of 149 districts, or 88% of those that submitted policies/procedures, include at least one of these five characteristics, while 142 (84%) listed all five examples included in the model. Marital status was mentioned in 148 (88%) policies, followed by physical appearance, which was included in 147 (87%) policies. Gender identity and socioeconomic status were each cited in 146 (86%) policies, while clothing/other apparel was mentioned in 144 (85%) policies [Fig. 5].

### Forms of prohibited HIB behaviors

Of the 169 districts that submitted policies, 157 (93%) described ways in which HIB might be exhibited. Rumors and jokes were each cited in 155 (92%) policies, slurs were listed in 154(91%), and threats, drawings, and cartoons were each included in 153 (91%) policies.

Demeaning comments were listed in 152 (90%) policies, while gestures, pranks, physical attacks, and "other written, oral, or physical actions" were each specifically mentioned in 151 (89%) policies. Other forms of bullying were included in twelve policies, acts such as hazing (six districts, or 4% of those responding), nicknames or name-calling (five districts, or 3% of those responding), graffiti, deliberate ostracism, electronic acts (such as email messages), stereotypes, epithets, photographs, touching, teasing, gossiping, taunts, extortion of money, and destruction of a student's property.

### **Sharing information about policies**

One hundred fifty-four policies or procedures committed districts to disseminating information about their policy/procedure. Survey respondents indicated who among their employees would be informed [Fig. 8].

## What's explicitly banned?

## In most districts:

- rumors
- jokes
- **■** slurs
- drawings
- demeaning comments
- gestures
- pranks
- physical attacks
- **■** threats

## And in a few districts, also:

- hazing
- nicknames/namecalling/stereotypes/ epithets
- graffiti/ photographs
- deliberate ostracism
- electronic acts (such as email messages)
- **■** touching
- teasing/gossiping/ taunts
- extortion of money
- destruction of a student's property

And 84% also ban harassment based on all five "other characteristics" from WSSDA/OSPI

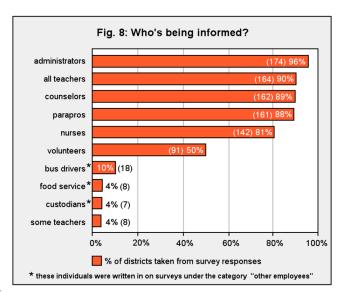
- physical appearance
- clothing or other apparel
- socioeconomic status
- gender identity and
- marital status

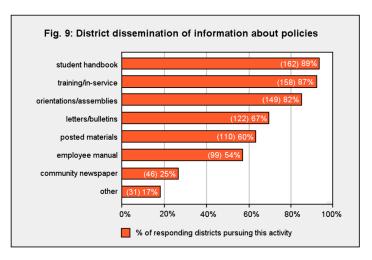
Of the policies/procedures provided, 142 (84%) documents pledge the district's commitment to educating their students about their HIB policy/

procedure. Districts stating that they had informed or planned to inform parents totaled 161 (88%), and those that had informed or intended to inform the community numbered 139 (76%).

One hundred thirty districts, or 77% of districts that submitted policies/procedures, specified *how* they would inform individuals about their policy [Fig. 9].

The WSSDA/OSPI model states that parents "shall be provided with copies of this policy and procedure," and notes that "a fixed component of all district orientation sessions for employees, students, and regular volunteers shall introduce the elements" of these policies. Besides





orientations and distributing copies of the regulations, some district policies/procedures stated that information would be shared through handbooks, parent/teacher conferences, and other means.

## **Complaints and subsequent investigations of HIB incidents**

Minimum standards for the investigation of alleged HIB incidents are laid out in 133 of the 169 policies/procedures submitted. Students are explicitly allowed to have a parent or another trusted adult present with them during an investigation by 120 of the policies/procedures.

Most district procedures describe both formal and informal processes for lodging HIB complaints. Many districts offer students the option of filing complaints anonymously. Ten districts have committed all of their schools to develop a process for receiving anonymous complaints, while 105 leave it to the discretion of building principals (as the WSSDA/OSPI model does) to

determine whether their school will guarantee an anonymous process.

One hundred sixteen of the districts require written responses from complaint officers within 30 days (the WSSDA/OSPI standard), while nine districts require that this be done within 20 or fewer days. Eighty-five require corrective action within an additional 30 days (again, WSSDA/OSPI's standard), while seven districts require a period of 20 or fewer additional days. A section regarding appropriate interventions or remedial actions to address complaints of HIB, including restoring a positive school climate, support for victims and others affected by the violation, counseling, correction, mediation, educational training, and discipline, was included in 152 of the policies/procedures sent.



Referral to law enforcement was mentioned in 155 of the policies/procedures, while knowingly reporting or supporting false allegations of HIBrelated misconduct, as well as retaliation against victims or

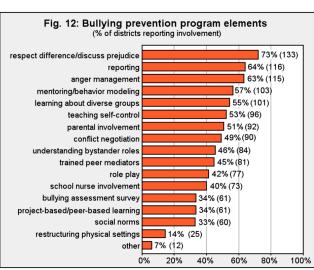
witnesses, were considered violations of policy by 159 districts. Fourteen districts explained the process by which complainants could appeal decisions regarding alleged HIB incidents.

## **Training**

Of the 182 districts that completed surveys, 88% have trained some or all of their employees or plan to do so, beyond merely informing staff about policies/procedures [Fig. 11]. A total of 106 respondents (58%) said that district staff had been trained regarding their HIB policy, *and* that more training for staff was scheduled for the 2003-4 school year. Of the responding districts, 42 (23%) said that some or all of their staff had received HIB training but that no future training was planned at this time, while 12 districts (6.5%) said that staff had not been trained but would be at some point in the future. Twenty-two districts (12%) did not provide information regarding past or future training.

# Bullying prevention programs

One hundred sixtyfive districts reported some type of planned or ongoing bullying prevention in their schools. From a list of program elements, responding



WSSDA/OSPI standard:
Compliance officer must respond in writing within 30 days

districts
set this as their
maximum;
9 districts
promise
speedier
investigation

WSSDA/OSPI standard:
Corrective measures must be taken within an additional 30 days

districts set this as their maximum; 7 districts promise speedier remediation Staff training is completed and/or planned in 88% of districts districts indicated which were part of their anti-bullying activities, either as part of the general curriculum or as a type of formal program [Fig. 12].

Most districts were able to indicate how many of their schools had these types of programs and activities in place. Of the 182 responding districts, 165 have begun or will be launching programs. Bullying prevention programs were reported at the elementary level by 160 districts, at the middle school level by 139 districts, at the high school level by 117 districts, and at other schools (mostly alternative education) by 37 districts.

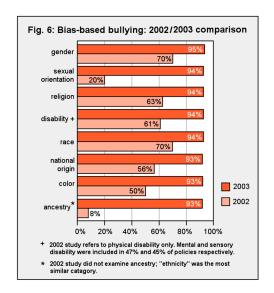
## Comparisons with the 2002 survey

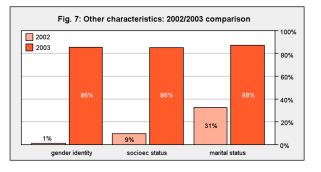
In the Safe Schools Coalition (SSC) study conducted last year, districts were requested to submit copies of any policies relating to bullying, harassment, and/or discrimination. Districts were asked for information in late April 2002, just after the *Anti-Bullying Act* was signed into law, but nearly a year and a half before the legislation was to take effect.

Of the 296 districts, 62% (182) responded. Forty-five respondents said they did not currently have a policy, while the others sent copies of these documents.

Nineteen indicated they would be using the WSSDA/OSPI sample bullying policy as a model for their district.

These graphs [Figs. 6, 7] compare the bias-based bullying and "other distinguishing characteristics" prohibited in the policies





submitted in 2002 and in 2003. These figures show a dramatic improvement in the comprehensiveness of district policies over the past year.

#### **Best Practices**

Several districts developed exceptionally clear and thoughtful policies or procedures, including Bainbridge Island, Edmonds, Everett, Federal Way, Lind, Marysville, Mead, Mercer Island, Monroe, Montesano, North Kitsap, Northport, Northshore, North Thurston, Oak Harbor, Olympia, Seattle, Vancouver, and Vashon Island School Districts.

Some districts also submitted additional information that demonstrated a solid commitment to preventing and minimizing bullying in their schools, including: Anacortes, Bainbridge Island, Dayton, Federal Way, Franklin Pierce, Hood Canal, McCleary, Mount Vernon, North Kitsap, Pomeroy, Spokane, Vashon Island, White Pass, and Yelm School Districts.

#### **Conclusions**

As far as can be determined from the information provided by superintendents and their staff, districts around Washington have recognized school-based bullying as an urgent problem in need of attention, and they are working hard to address it through systematic, inclusive, and thorough efforts. This study has found:

- The policies and procedures sent by responding districts are, by and large, comprehensive. It is exciting to report that responding districts are taking a firm stance against bias-motivated bullying; one hundred fifty-six, or 92% of submitted policies, explicitly prohibit all eight categories included in the *Anti-Bullying Act's* definition of harassment, intimidation, and bullying (race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, and mental or physical disability).
- Districts have made good use of the model WSSDA/OSPI policy and procedure. Altogether, 68% of responding districts adopted the model policy, the model procedure, or both. Several have held themselves to even higher standards by providing anonymous reporting opportunities for every student district-wide, for example, or by making a commitment to resolve incidents in fewer than 60 days.
- Most responding districts have done a reasonably thorough job in spreading the word about their policies/procedures to students, parents, employees, and the larger community, or have made plans to do so. One hundred fifty-four policies or procedures (91%) include a pledge to disseminate the new rules to at least some stakeholders, while 142 (84%) of the policies or procedures provided commit those istricts to educating students about their HIB regulations. Eighty-eight percent of responding districts have trained some or all of their employees or plan to do so.
- The anti-HIB activities reported by the responding districts are encouraging, and we thank those that took the time to submit information during a busy time of year. However, it is worrisome that nearly one-third of all districts provided no answers to our questions. Does this mean that the nonresponders are out of compliance with the new law and not yet addressing their HIB problems, or do their anti-HIB activities parallel those of the responding districts? We don't know. Things look promising for Washington's schools if the efforts of the 69% that responded are representative of all districts. If, however, the others did not respond because they were struggling with getting ready to comply, much work remains to be done

The long version of this report and examples of best practices from around the state may also be viewed online at:

www.safeschoolscoalition.org/bullyreport





Designed by Karen K. Reed and printed by the Washington Education Association Nine out of ten districts are engaged in bullying prevention education with students.

## **Bullying Report in Brief**

www.safeschoolscoalition.org/bullyreport

