

APPENDIX



Testimony of Aaron Eyler, Principal of Matawan Regional High School
Before the Joint Committee on the Public Schools
May 5, 2023

Good morning Chairwoman Jasey, Chairman Cryan and members of the Joint Committee on the Public Schools. It is a privilege to speak to you today, representing my students, my school, and my profession.

As a school principal and father, I cannot state strongly enough my concern with addressing bullying in our schools, not only for my own children, but for every student who walks through the doors. Since September 2021, I have witnessed a dramatic rise in bullying incidents, behavioral issues leading to discipline, and mental health referrals. My colleagues in education report similar experiences.

What We Are Experiencing In Schools

What we are experiencing is similar to what we are seeing throughout the rest of society – difficulty interacting with others, less resilience, fewer tools to cope, and elevated levels of aggression. During their time at home, our students missed critical developmental opportunities with their peers and the chance to learn conflict resolution skills. Our students have more anxiety and, unfortunately, the mental health services we can provide in school face limitations with regards to available funding, but even more alarming, the number of trained professionals available to provide these services. I currently have a partnership with the YMCA to offer mental health counseling services to students. Due to a shortage of clinicians, the program is only able to service 7 students while another 8 are on a waiting list. The result is not just an inability to provide reactive services to those who demonstrate a need, but also, proactive services that ensure students are being placed in a position to make good decisions.

Cyber-bullying

The most significant area of increased bullying behavior is cyber-bullying, and it is far-and-away the most difficult to stop. Cyber-bullying often occurs outside school hours, crosses district lines, can be malicious with permanent scarring effects, and is often anonymous and undetectable, even when school officials are informed it is taking place. Our HIB Specialists have had to develop streamlined communications systems to work together on cyber-bullying issues that cross district lines, and this is occurring more and more frequently. Our efforts to work with the police often come up empty as the police have no more leverage than schools in forcing social media companies to share information on who set up the anonymous account that maliciously bullied a student, and in many cases, groups of students.

Even before the pandemic, our students were comfortable with, and adept at, technology. In school, we utilize technology every day as a learning tool. It is impossible to turn back the clock, but the misuse of this tool to bully others must be addressed. Our students have become comfortable living behind a wall of anonymity where their words and actions may hurt another and they are not held accountable. This past weekend alone, I was sent three screen shots of social media posts that were aggressive toward a student. I immediately had to investigate this matter to protect that student and notify the parents. As I stand here, we are still actively searching to identify the individual(s)

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who are responsible- this all while not knowing whether or not the offenders attend my school or even reside within our district, county, or state.

Unfortunately, all too often, we spend valuable school hours on a wild goose chase attempting to track down an anonymous account after learning of a post which often "times out" and disappears. We are only successful in tracking down the cyber-bully a fraction of the time and that is only when we get lucky, or someone tells us who the author is.

We have even gone so far as to shut down our school's "Bring Your Own Device" Wi-Fi network to force students to use school-issued computers to slow their access to social media during the school day. This doesn't solve the problem by any means.

Parents are critical to our success on this issue. An overwhelming majority of parents are proactive and supportive, but the message from the state must be that every parent must police their child's online behavior. The law has been changed to reflect this fact, but parents need to embrace their role in this area. Schools can develop and implement policies, but we cannot force parents to honor them.

The Changing Intensity of Bullying Behavior

Another observation I would like to share with this committee is the changing intensity of the bullying behavior we are seeing. There have been more acts of physical aggression in bullying behavior than I have witnessed in the past, and this should be of great concern to all of us. We are also seeing more incidents with a single student engaging in repeated incidents of bullying. Why is this? These are students who were already struggling socially, and the pandemic amplified their struggle. Developmental milestones were not reached, social skills were not developed, and schools must now work hard to address it; however, limited staff overall, and mental health staff in particular, makes this a truly Herculean task. The key takeaway is this: all students, whether acting as the bully or the victim, need access to critical mental health services so that we are taking care of every single student in the State of New Jersey.

What do schools do to address bullying behavior? Counseling, student interventions, discipline, conflict resolution sessions when appropriate, restorative justice activities, schedule modifications and more are options we consider depending upon the circumstances of each case and the needs of the students involved. If an incident involves a potential crime such as assault, law enforcement is notified, and parents of the victim make difficult decisions about pursuing criminal charges.

Oftentimes, the investigation results in the behavior being, at least temporarily, halted with appropriate discipline and interventions, but a harsh truth remains: In my role as Principal, one of the most difficult points to explain to parents is that we can use every intervention in the book to address the behavior, but in the end, no one can guarantee that the behavior will stop except the bully him or herself. This is often why Principals hear from frustrated parents and students that, "The school isn't doing anything about it" or "You don't care enough to stop it." Trust me. Principals care tremendously about ending bullying, but that is one superpower that we haven't been granted.

Conclusion

I would like to close by sharing with the Committee my hope for the future on this issue. Our school community takes the issue of bullying, and frankly, any disrespectful behavior, within our school very seriously. We have a code of conduct that governs the behaviors in our school whether a student's misconduct is legally HIB or a breach of that code of conduct warranting discipline. This is a critical point to understand.

Prepandemic, we engaged in a schoolwide project that earned us the designation as a "No Place for Hate" school. It was the engagement of students and staff together in a common, positive school climate project that set the tone for a mutually respectful school building. These efforts matter. Setting a mutually respectful tone matters. But as I would argue with all large-scale issues, no school or district can "school wide project" their way to a bully-free environment especially when, many times, the conditions for these behaviors are outside the reach of the schoolhouse gates.

I also want the Committee to understand that NJ has a strong statute in place and strong procedures to implement it. School principals train their staff every year on the procedures, the definition of HIB, methods for identifying bullying behavior, and reporting requirements. Parents are also notified of the bullying policy, procedures, and reporting options annually. We investigate EVERY allegation, whether it is anonymous, online, or delivered to me in person. We want to be certain we are helping EVERY student. When a bullying allegation is made in this state, every principal must fast-track this investigation under legally-mandated timelines. Anti-bullying specialists interview witnesses and conclude their report within 10 days, sometimes interviewing more than 15 witnesses. This means, in my case, that my specialist is losing valuable time to perform her job as a Student Assistance Coordinator in a period of high-risk behaviors among our students.

My recommendation is to focus on the provision of school-based mental health services to assist us in providing the counseling and deeper mental health services our students need and deserve.

An exploration of the cyber-bullying issue and pressures the state can place on social media companies is another area that warrants exploration. I know the Legislature is well aware of the staffing crisis in our schools, but the staffing crisis in the mental health profession is of equal concern and we appreciate your assistance in this area as well.

Although no one has a magic pill to solve the current behavioral issues we are seeing in our schools, we believe that educators, parents, mental health professionals and the support of the State Legislature can make a difference for our students.

I absolutely love my job. Every day I go to work knowing that families are entrusting me to oversee the care of 1,132 children. Overseeing bullying investigations has become a huge piece of that responsibility, and I'll continue to do everything I can to protect and help my students. More often than I'd like to think about, I'll be speaking with a group about the work we need to do to address bullying. Undoubtedly, there will be someone who will remark to me that "bullying is a fact of life and it isn't going away." My response to them is simple: neither am I.

Thank you for your consideration.



NJPSAFE

LEGAL ONE

NJPSA TESTIMONY BEFORE THE JOINT COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SCHOOLS REGARDING NEW JERSEY'S ANTI-BULLYING BILL OF RIGHTS

May 5, 2023

**David Nash, Esq.
Director of Legal Education and National Outreach
Foundation for Educational Administration**

Thank you, Chairwoman Jasey, Chairman Cryan and members of the Joint Committee on the Public Schools. My name is David Nash, and I am the Director of Legal Education and National Outreach for the Foundation for Educational Administration, which is the sister organization and professional development arm of the New Jersey Principals and Supervisors Association. In my role, I oversee LEGAL ONE, which provides professional development for school leaders, educators, parents, and other key stakeholders on critical and emerging school law issues.

Since the passage of the Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights in 2011, we have provided more training related to the issue of bullying prevention than any other topic. In fact, we have conducted more than 400 training sessions on this topic alone, including in-person and virtual workshops and webinars, with more than 10,000 participants representing a majority of New Jersey school districts. In addition, more than 15,000 individuals, including current and aspiring school leaders and educators, have completed one or more of our self-paced courses addressing this topic.

KEY THEMES THAT HAVE EMERGED OVER THE PAST DECADE

During these trainings, we have had the opportunity to work closely with those on the front lines in the effort to provide a safe and supportive learning environment for all students. Over time, certain consistent themes have emerged during these trainings that I believe can be helpful to you as you consider ways to strengthen New Jersey's safety net for all students and reduce the prevalence of harassment, intimidation and bullying in our schools.

These themes include:

- A unifying commitment from all stakeholders, including parents, students, school leaders, counselors, educators, and school board members, to keep our children safe;
- Frustration among some parents and students that New Jersey's very specific legal definition of harassment, intimidation, and bullying does not always coincide with the

common understanding of the word “bullying,” which requires specific elements such as a motivating characteristic, substantial disruption, and a showing of specific harm;

- A misguided sense that if behavior does not meet New Jersey’s HIB definition, that it is not being taken seriously by school officials, when in fact school officials take other issues such as code of conduct violations and student conflict just as seriously;
- A misperception among some that schools are not doing anything to address HIB incidents when in fact school officials are constantly investigating and responding to confirmed HIB allegations, but are unable to share the specifics of those responses due to state and federal confidentiality laws;
- A misunderstanding about the many complex factors that impact student mental health and wellbeing, and may lead to suicidal ideation, that go well beyond a direct cause and effect linked to bullying;
- A lack of understanding of the respective roles of law enforcement and school officials in bullying matters that may spill over into potential criminal behaviors.
- A concern among school leaders and educators about the “hidden costs” that are imposed given the significant time and resources that go into HIB investigations, and the inability of staff involved in those investigations to address other critical responsibilities, a concern which is further exacerbated by the staffing shortages facing our schools; and
- The lack of effective pre-service education for aspiring school leaders and educators on a wide range of topics, including bullying prevention, conducting effective student investigations, threat assessment, and addressing student mental health needs.

EMERGING CHALLENGES

In addition, as you just heard from Principal Aaron Eyer, recent trends have created even greater challenges for school leaders and other stakeholders working to keep our students safe. These include:

- A significant increase in mental health needs for students, which is a national phenomenon and is borne out in the latest data from the CDC [Youth Risk Behavior Survey](#), coupled with a lack of access to critical and ongoing mental health services for students and families beyond what can be provided in our schools;
- An erosion of social skills for students related in large part to the impact of the COVID pandemic;
- An ever-increasing sophistication among our students about how to use social media and electronic communications in increasingly harmful ways, and to shield or disguise their identity in the process, and
- A toxic national conversation on issues such as race, gender identity, and immigration-status that has sent confusing signals to students that often undermine the work of schools to address issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion and set a positive, mutually respectful school environment.

RECENT REVISIONS TO STATE LAW

With the signing of a revised bullying law in January of 2022, important new provisions were put into place that are now in their first year of implementation. These changes include:

- New prevention and accountability tools for our courts, our schools and parents of victims to use in response to incidents of cyberbullying that meet New Jersey's definition of the crime of cyber-harassment;
- Standardized statewide reporting forms that will make reporting suspected HIB incidents more uniform across the state;
- Heightened scrutiny and due process rights surrounding decisions to make preliminary determinations related to alleged HIB incidents;
- New requirements related to tracking HIB incidents in student records and implementing Student Intervention Plans for students who commit three or more incidents of HIB; and
- The creation of a new School Climate Coordinator position at the state level to provide ongoing resources and support for parents and school officials related to bullying prevention and school climate.

NEXT STEPS

While there is no simple fix to overcome these challenges, there are important steps that can be taken by policymakers, such as:

- Ensuring effective implementation of New Jersey's 4S initiative, so that we are removing the significant obstacles that are faced in trying to connect students and families with both emergent and ongoing mental health supports;
- Implementing key recommendations and exploring further incentives and supports to help ease the shortages that school districts are facing in critical personnel areas;
- Insisting that institutions of higher education do more to prepare aspiring school leaders and educators on key issues such as bullying prevention, conducting investigations, and supporting student mental health;
- Exploring legislative means to hold social media companies accountable for working with school officials to remove harmful content, including efforts to urge Congress to act at the federal level;
- Providing funding to support the ongoing professional learning needs of school districts to equip staff to address all of the challenges we have discussed; and
- Monitoring the impact of recent revisions to the Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights and considering the recommendations from the Anti-Bullying Task Force that has recently been appointed and will complete its work later this year

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss this critical issue and for your ongoing efforts to ensure a safe and supportive learning environment for all students.



Testimony Joint Committee on Public Schools

SPAN's mission is to empower and support families, and inform and involve professionals interested in the healthy development and education of children and youth. Our foremost commitment is to children and families with the greatest need, due to disability or special health/mental health needs; poverty; discrimination based on race/ethnicity, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, language, immigrant or homeless status; involvement in the child welfare of juvenile justice systems; geographic location; or other special circumstances.

Thank you for the opportunity share with the committee what we are hearing from students and families and their experience with harassment, intimidation and bullying.

First what we are seeing on our **Technical Assistance Warmline:**

HIB calls are up 57% over last year (March 22 to March 23)

Of these calls students who were victims of bullying and subsequently disciplined increased by 90%

This is one clear indicator of when bullying and zero tolerance cross paths.

The number of calls that involved concerns regarding the identification (or lack there of) of HIB by the school district and subsequent reporting of HIB increased by 63%.

There also seemed to be a disproportionate increase in reporting from suburban and rural counties.

Family Stories:

We received quite a few family experiences with HIB and their request to share with this committee. The following is a brief summary of those. It might be a consideration to provide an opportunity for the JCPS

To have a hearing where families and students might share their experiences with the HIB law and its implementation.

A 14 year old with an Autism Spectrum Disorder and intellectual disability was found guilty following an HIB investigation. Unfortunately the Mother who speaks Mandarin had no understanding of the documentation sent home, no interpreter was made available for meeting. It happened in a bathroom where the Mom still does not understand how he was there and unsupervised. It took intervention of the Developmental Nurse Practitioner to remind the school the student did not have the intellectual, self-help skills and/or fine motor skills to have complied with this.

A guardian reported that student was being bullied by group of students on bus and in school. After multiple reports to administration including letters the school had still not intervened. The Aunt reported when student call from bus that she heard kids calling her nephew horrible names and saying he should kill himself with chants of "die, die" The student responded by hitting one

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of the students and promptly being suspended for 10 days as well as being suspended from all activities and ceremonies. The guardian once again attempted to file an HIB complaint and was told since her son was suspended for hitting another student, that cancels out any HIB.

Due to constant bullying my children have not attended a full school day since November. I have to drive them to their afternoon program because it wasn't safe to ride the bus. They are currently sitting out all of their 8th grade events due to safety concerns.

As a co-leader of my district's SEPAG (Special Education Parent Advisory Group) we have received input from parents this year regarding bullying of their child with a disability; including students using verbal slurs towards other students. Parents are filing HIB and then they are dismissed for not meeting the criteria to be considered an HIB. Parents are angry and frustrated because the bullying continues.

I introduce you to ****, her children are now home-schooled due to intense bullying and physical harm caused to her children. She along with other parents would like to share their stories with you.

My son was bullied in school because of his Tourette Syndrome. When he had physical or vocal tics teachers called him disrespectful and students called him names and threatened him. My son was traumatized. Neither his voice nor mine was being heard.

Bullying incident on school bus including physical violence to a student with disabilities. Reported to principal; no HIB reports – told it was not a case for them... He now has to get a ride to and from school every day because he does not feel safe and apparently cameras do not work on bus.

C has ADHD and POR class, A couple of GE boys have been calling him names autistic, stupid and tells him no one likes him and that he is worthless. He is now struggling with mental health issues, anxiety. C said he feels sick when he goes to school. He no longer wants to go to school and he has subsequently missed a lot of school. VP now says he will fail his classes and be kept back probably. School has not provided any options, modifications to IEP or once again HIB report.

My child was diagnosed with macrocephaly and dolichocephaly as a result of a rare genetic condition. This results in his head shape being atypical. He is also diagnosed with Autism. We moved from Canada to New Jersey in time for him to start first grade.

From the moment he stepped into school his head (size and shape) was the target of mean-spirited classmates. Over the years he has been assaulted, videotaped by students and threatened with it, followed home and threatened with death. The worst probably started right around when Area 51 raid got popular in social media. He used to get tiny alien erasers thrown at him, children screamed go home alien to him. He was afraid to attend school or ride the bus. As a result, he developed school refusal. We spent almost a full year in private therapy so he would attempt school again.

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All but one of these incidents were not considered "bullying" and so were not documented as such. Over and over it was claimed his head was like his hair color and not a protected class. I pointed out that his head shape is a direct result of his disability.

Out of desperation to help my child I set out to better understand his rights and my rights as his mom within the Special Education System. It was during this search I found SPAN. I completed their SPAN Resource Parent training followed by their Special Education Volunteer Advocate training. Both taught me more in 3 months about Special Education system and HIB process than 8 years of Child Study Team meetings.

These excerpts are just the tip of the ice berg. We are simply failing on a lot of fronts with harassment, intimidation and bullying. Definitely resulting in trauma, school attendance and sometimes we would argue the ramifications are much costlier, even deadly.

The following are some suggestions, certainly not an exhaustive list but worth exploring. We do need to do something and we are thankful for this step that the JCPS is taking.

Our first suggestion is a better understanding of the requirements of the HIB statute and where it might need to be tweaked including more oversight from the department. The law itself does not change the reality of what is happening in real time.

It is clear from discussions around the states with parents, caregivers and students as well as educators that clarity around the requirements of HIB policy are needed. Many requests for HIB investigation are turned away with out explanation or with questionable rational. How do we deal with the institutional betrayal many families feel when looking for help? Some examples are student not being identified as a protected class, 2 students both of a protected class, also questioning the reliability of student with a disability as a reliable witness, complaint just dismissed out of hand. Plain language defining the scope of definitions of HIB readily available to the school community.

We need additional training into the rights of students and families as well as a fact sheet with clear definitions and protocol for HIB complaints. This must include the right to and process for disagreement with the school district of a finding or refusal to investigate. How and when can a school board hearing be held? What does a "no identified nature" really mean?

Additionally, we need to provide both education, interventions and supports for both the victim and the person accused of HIB. We do not always explain clearly or prepare students for all of the expectations of the school community. We also need to include restorative justice, peer mediation as well as peer support.

Better data collection. Would also be very interested in home school survey to see how many students were in that situation due to bullying.

Social Media needs to be addressed. Being bullied was tough enough when you had to deal with it through the school day. As a result of social media bullying follows the young person home 24/7. Training again for parents as well as interventions or supports for students dealing with this is critical. Additionally, education for students into both the benefit as well as the harm

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of social media. We believe that learning how to be a good citizen of the social or virtual world is needed.

Lastly, we cannot legislate but could consider a public information campaign. The impact of HIB, and an avenue for empathy is important. We would also suggest that a reminder to the adults in their world that we have not been providing a very good example to our youth. Bullying on line and public interactions of bad behavior are not restricted to our young folks. We need to have the courage to point that out and be more thoughtful in our behavior. Good role models matter.

I have included some statistics as well as links to articles of interest. We are certainly available for any question or assistance we can lend.

- One out of every five (20.2%) students report being bullied. (*National Center for Educational Statistics, 2019*)
- A higher percentage of male students report being physically bullied (6% vs. 4%), a higher percentage of female than of male students reported being the subjects of rumors (18% vs. 9%) and being excluded from activities on purpose (7% vs. 4%). (*National Center Center for Educational Statistics, 2019*)
- 41% of students who reported being bullied at school indicated that they think the bullying would happen again. (*National Center for Educational Statistics, 2019*)
- Of those students who reported being bullied, 13% were made fun of, called names, or insulted; 13% were the subject of rumors; 5% were pushed, shoved, tripped, or spit on; and 5% were excluded from activities on purpose. (*National Center for Educational Statistics, 2019*)
- A slightly higher portion of female than of male students report being bullied at school (24% vs. 17%). (*National Center for Educational Statistics, 2019*)
- Bullied students reported that bullying occurred in the following places: the hallway or stairwell at school (43%), inside the classroom (42%), in the cafeteria (27%), outside on school grounds (22%), online or by text (15%), in the bathroom or locker room (12%), and on the school bus (8%). (*National Center for Educational Statistics, 2019*)
- 46% of bullied students report notifying an adult at school about the incident. (*National Center for Educational Statistics, 2019*)
- School-based bullying prevention programs decrease bullying by up to 25%. (*McCallion & Feder, 2013*)
- The reasons for being bullied reported most often by students include physical appearance, race/ethnicity, gender, disability, religion, sexual orientation. (*National Center for Educational Statistics, 2019*)
- The federal government began collecting data on school bullying in 2005, when the prevalence of bullying was around 28 percent. (*U.S. Department of Education, 2015*)

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- Rates of bullying vary across studies (from 9% to 98%). A meta-analysis of 80 studies analyzing bullying involvement rates (for both bullying others and being bullied) for 12-18 year old students reported a mean prevalence rate of 35% for traditional bullying involvement and 15% for cyberbullying involvement. **(Modecki, Minchin, Harbaugh, Guerra, & Runions, 2014)**
- One in five (20.9%) tweens (9 to 12 years old) has been cyberbullied, cyberbullied others, or seen cyberbullying. **(Patchin & Hinduja, 2020)**
- 49.8% of tweens (9 to 12 years old) said they experienced bullying at school and 14.5% of tweens shared they experienced bullying online. **(Patchin & Hinduja, 2020)**

Additional resources/links:

[Getting to the truth about NJ's bullying problem | NJ Spotlight News](#)

[Racist Bullying of Black Students Rising Online and in Person - Capital B \(capitalbnews.org\)](#)

[Are N.J. school administrators legally at fault for bullying tragedies? 2 lawyers say, 'yes.' | Opinion - nj.com](#)

[Fast Facts: Bullying \(719\) \(ed.gov\)](#)

[Analysis of State Bullying Laws and Policies -- December 2011 \(PDF\) \(ed.gov\)](#)

[Fast Fact: Preventing Bullying |Violence Prevention|Injury Center|CDC](#)

[The Relationship between bullying and suicide : what we know ad what it means for schools \(cdc.gov\)](#)

[Surgeon General Issues New Advisory About Effects Social Media Use Has on Youth Mental Health | HHS.gov](#)

Respectfully Submitted,

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In the hopes to be more inclusive and to have an open mind/life, we need to be introduced to the concept that there are people different from us. We must have an understanding that different kinds of people have been here for years and even centuries and that this is not a new topic. It needs to be taught in history, health, english, and so many other classes. We cannot consider our school to be an inclusive school for **all people** if we do not have a curriculum that reflects that. To get to the point of acceptance, we need to retrain our brains, relearn history, listen and use everyday inclusive language. The more we use inclusive language, the more we learn that these things are okay. The more that we learn about LGBTQIA+ identities and the history of marginalized people, the more we learn and the more we can differentiate right from wrong in history. We will then be able to learn how to change our actions to become more inclusive and more accepting instead of tolerant. We are currently taught tolerance instead of acceptance. Instead of being told, "you have to deal with it" or "you have to allow things that are different from you", we should be taught to like what is different and also respect what is different.

District Goals to keep in mind:

- Foster a positive social and emotional environment where students feel encouraged to have academic and personal success.
- Identify strategies and supports to remediate learning loss for students due to the pandemic.
- Provide the necessary supports to address and assist students and staff with mental health, overall wellness and emotional needs. Continue to focus on social-emotional learning for students.
- Continue to **address inherent bias and racism**, focusing on equity and inclusion to provide **all students** with the opportunities and knowledge to make reflective decisions.

Below is an outline of ideas that we can add to our curriculum/policy to make it more inclusive to represent all people.

Topics:		
Changing Language	(Suggestions)	Evidence of:
Pronouns in <i>(Aspen)</i>	See if we can add a pronoun section in <i>(Aspen)</i> . That way students do not need to come out to their teachers every year in order to have the correct pronouns used.	
Ask for pronouns and preferred name	At the beginning of the school year/semester teachers should have students fill out a notecard/google form and ask: "What is your name in aspen?" "What name would you like to be called?" "Can I use this name when emailing home?" "What are your pronouns?" "Can I use these pronouns in class?" "Can I use these pronouns when emailing home? If not, what should I use?"	
When addressing a class...	Try to avoid terms such as: "Ladies and gentlemen" "Boys and girls" Instead, use gender neutral terms such as: "Students" "Friends" "People" "Everyone"	
Physical Education Classes:	(Suggestions)	Evidence of:
Avoid Binary language	Try not to play games with "boys against girls"/"girls against boys". There are people who do not identify with either label or do not feel comfortable competing in that sort of setting.	
Health classes:	(Suggestions)	Evidence of:
Mental Health	When talking about mental health be sure to mention the statistics of those in the marginalized communities. Those in minority communities are more likely to have higher rates of death caused by mental health issues. <u>LGBTQIA+ mental health statistics</u>	

	<p><u>Racial/Ethnicity mental health</u></p> <p>Overall emphasize the importance of mental health in general. The above statistics should inform us of the culture we as a school should be creating. One of kindness and acceptance.</p>	
Dysmorphia vs. Dysphoria	In freshman health class, we talk about body dysmorphia. This would be a great opportunity to talk about gender dysphoria and transgender mental health.	
Embracing identity	Talk about embracing your own identity (regardless of who you are)	
Teen Pep/Sex Ed	Include that not everyone is sexually attracted to other people. (Explain Asexual). TALK ABOUT CONSENT AND EXPLAIN IT = MANDATORY. Talk about sexual harassment versus sexual assault and how neither is ok, and again, stress the importance of consent. Be careful when saying "man can get a woman pregnant", try "cisgender men can get cisgender women pregnant".	
Relationships	Once again, talk about consent. Consent can be saying no to kissing/hugging/holding hands/etc and the other person respects it. Explain that there are more relationships than just cisgender male and cisgender female. Also, affirm that it is okay to be attracted to who you are attracted to and that it's okay to not be attracted to anyone (Aromantic).	
Policy 2422 number 17	Although this is supposed to be in the curriculum for health, this is not expanded or touched upon. "History of LGBT persons requires instruction on the political, economic, and social contributions" (#17 of policy 2422)	
History Classes:	<i>(Suggestions)</i>	Evidence of:
<p>Black history should not just be in February</p> <p><u>Amistad Bill (A1301) & Amistad Commission</u></p>	<p>Black history should not only be taught during February. It should be all year round, and the primary focus should not be on slavery but its butterfly effect on the development of the United States. Slavery is a part of white history and how white people mistreated other human beings. We can talk about inventors, authors, civil rights, advocates, and so much more. We should also talk about more people than Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King Jr. The focus on MLK and Rosa Parks suggests that civil rights and the movement are in the past.</p> <p>Also there was a young woman named Claudette Colvin who refused to give up her seat on the same bus system nine months prior to what Rosa Parks did. Maybe inform the students of her. While Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King Jr. are important figures of our history, there is so much more to black history than the contributions these big names had during the civil rights movement. Black history is American history and it should be treated and approached that way.</p>	

<p>Black History</p>	<p>Recognize that racism very much exists and is extremely prevalent currently. Celebrate black excellence.</p>	
<p>Policy 2260 number 5 Asian History, Black History, Native American History</p>	<p>“Ensuring that African American history, as well as the history of other cultures, is infused into the curriculum as taught as part of the history of the United States”</p>	
<p>Asian History <u>NJ legislature</u> Update: https://pub.njleg.state.nj.us/Bills/2020/PL21/416.PDF</p>	<p>Incorporate more Asian history in our lessons. The Asian American history that we do get is from the Japanese internment camps. This again, is a part of white history, and is not correctly portrayed as something that white Americans and the government did wrong. Asians are often erased from history or characterized as people infringing on American society. Also talk about how major wars like Vietnam or Korea caused a lot of displacement for Asia.</p> <p>(2022) S4021: Requires school districts to provide instruction on history and contributions of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders as part of implementation of New Jersey Student Learning Standards in Social Studies.</p> <p><i>(As of 01/18/22, Gov. Murphy signed the Asian American History Curriculum for K-12 into law!)</i></p>	
<p>New Jersey Native American History</p>	<p>Something we can discuss is that the Leni Lenape were in New Jersey, but then at one point they were not. Another thing we can discuss, and also is not commonly known, is that the first Native American Reservation was in New Jersey.</p> <p>One of the most significant Paleo-Indian sites in the Northeast is only about 10 miles from the High School and artifacts are housed in the Lebanon Township Museum. (See below in resources/workshops for information)</p>	
<p>Native American History</p>	<p>Land was stolen from the Native Americans and that is not talked about enough. This is their land that we are on. Teachers can talk about how the state does not give official recognition to the tribes in New Jersey and so they are denied federal benefits. We can also learn about the truth of Thanksgiving. Thanksgiving was not a festive time.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Thousands of English colonists moved onto Native land - Europeans brought over a deadly disease to Native Americans - New England Confederation of Colonies declared war in 1675 - The leader of the Native Americans was beheaded and placed on a spike 	

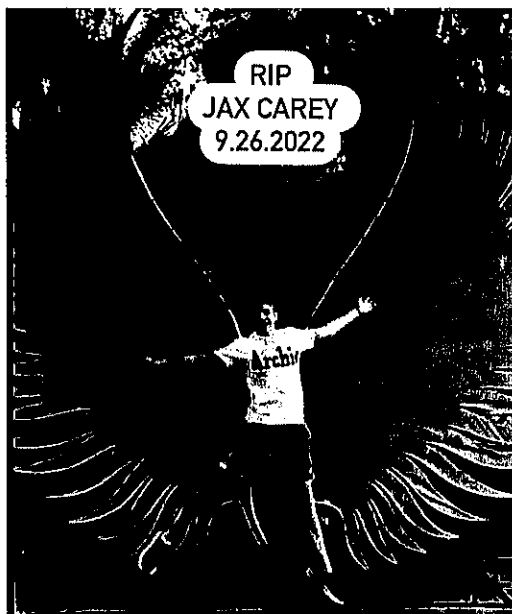
<p>LGBTQIA+ History <u>NJ Standard</u></p>	<p>There is so much to be included and not enough, to practically nothing, is included. In the topics that are already in the curriculum, like the Roaring 20s lesson in Modern American History, the teacher should be teaching that lesson instead of the students. The teacher can command more attention and respect rather than the students. When the students have presented anything related to LGBTQIA+ the other students are on their phones, sleeping, or looking out the window. The only way we learn about LGBTQIA+ people or history besides the Roaring 20s lesson is if the teacher goes out of their way to talk about it, which they do not. There is so much history representing this community and the contributions they have made that needs to be in the history curriculum.</p>	<p>*NewsELA?</p>
<p>Religion</p>	<p>Talk about different types of religions (Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, Christianity, Catholicism, etc) and how the background and culture affects the way we live now, or how that group lives based on the values in the religion</p>	
<p>History's connection to the present</p>	<p>History is often treated as something in the distant past and how it doesn't have an impact on us today. We should be able to connect the throughline from the Gilded Age to The Depression to our involvement in WWII to the Cold War.</p>	
<p>English Classes:</p>	<p><i>(Suggestions)</i></p>	<p>Evidence of:</p>
<p>Explore more curriculum options: Choose diverse books/authors/ ideas</p>	<p>Have more choices of books that contain minority main characters/minority authors/different types of societal views (utopian/dystopian) that fit in the curriculum.</p>	
<p>Highlighting sexism and its roots</p>	<p>In older texts like mythology, women's roles are talked about in a lesser way than men. Can take the opportunity to explain sexism and how it goes all the way back to ancient Greek and Roman time.</p>	
<p>Talk about pronouns</p>	<p>Talk about pronouns. Most people have them. Explain how singular they/them pronouns are grammatically correct.</p>	
<p>Transgender Students:</p>	<p><i>(Suggestions)</i></p>	<p>Evidence of:</p>
<p><u>Policy 5756</u> Discrepancies: 1. Students are not told that they can use the correct bathroom 2. There is no gender-</p>	<p>Use of facilities: "The school district should allow a transgender student to use a restroom or locker room based on the student's gender identity" Transgender students are not told that we can use the bathroom or locker room of our identity. We are encouraged to use the gender-neutral bathroom or the nurse's bathroom. When students come out</p>	

<p>neutral locker room</p>	<p>as transgender to anyone in the school, especially guidance counselors, they should be told that they can use</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Correct bathroom of their gender (or neutral bathroom) - Correct locker room of their gender (or neutral locker room)** - Correct sports team of their gender <p>**There is no gender-neutral locker room for gender nonconforming students or students who feel uncomfortable using gender-segregated bathrooms. (Be PROactive, NOT Reactive!)</p>	
<p>Resources/ workshops:</p>	<p>(Suggestions)</p>	
<p><u>Dr. Nathalie Edmond</u></p>	<p>Dr. Edmond has the qualifications of a PsyD, RYT-500, and is a licensed clinical psychologist who specializes in multiculturalism and intersectional feminism. She would be of great help to teachers who would like training in order to incorporate inclusive topics into lessons and is qualified to teach diverse subject matters.</p>	
<p>Workshops</p>	<p>Experts come in who center students' voices in learning. Workshop/seminar/training for teachers recognizing bullying/discrimination. These could help open eyes to what goes on inside the school that teachers are not aware of.</p>	
<p>Native American History</p>	<p>The Lebanon Township Museum is the only museum outside of the Smithsonian to possess a Plenge Paleo-Indian site and staff that has extensively researched the history of Carlisle Indian Residential School students who were sent to local farms to live and work.</p> <p>Museum curator Gina Sampaio is available to speak with teachers on the significance of the Plenge Paleo-Indian artifacts and the impact of the Carlisle Indian Residential Schools on the individual students as well as our community. Museum staff welcomes opportunities to collaborate with local schools via field trips, extra-credit assignments and live or virtual presentations. They would be happy to connect educators to resources at the State level for writing land acknowledgements and communicating with New Jersey tribal members.</p>	
<p>Policies/acts to back up curriculum changes</p>		<p>Evidence of:</p>
<p><u>Diversity and Inclusion Act</u></p>	<p>(2021) P.L. 2021.032; A4454: Highlight and promote diversity, including economic diversity, equity, inclusion, tolerance, and belonging in connection with gender and sexual orientation, race and ethnicity, disabilities and religious tolerance; <u>examine the impact that unconscious bias and economic disparities have at both</u></p>	

	an individual level and on society as a whole; and encourage safe, welcoming, and inclusive environments for all students regardless of race or ethnicity, sexual and gender identities, mental and physical disabilities, and religious beliefs.	
<u>NJQSAC</u>	All schools in NJ are required to be QSAC compliant; compliance specifically requires inclusion of Holocaust (p 23), Amistad (p 23), LGBTQ (p 62).	
<u>Policy 5756</u>	Use of facilities for transgender students	
<u>Policy 2422</u> number 17	In regards to health class: "History of LGBT persons requires instruction on the political, economic, and social contributions" (#17 of policy 2422)	
<u>Policy 2260</u> number 5	"Ensuring that African American history, as well as the history of other cultures, is infused into the curriculum as taught as part of the history of the United States"	
<u>Culturally responsive teaching</u>	(2020) S2834: Make meaningful connections between what students learn in school and their cultures, languages and experiences	
<u>Asian American and Pacific Islander</u>	(2022) S4021: Requires school districts to provide instruction on history and contributions of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders as part of implementation of New Jersey Student Learning Standards in Social Studies.	

In honor of Jaxson Carey, who compiled, organized, and edited this document and was a fierce student advocate with a heart full of unconditional love.

December 1, 2005 - September 26, 2022



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Jan Oosting

Testimony Draft for May 5, 2023

Dear Members and Guests of the Joint Committee on the Public Schools of the State of New Jersey,

Thank you for having me today. My name is Dr. Jan Oosting, my pronouns are she/her, I'm a Registered Nurse and a Nursing professor, and mom of three New Jersey teenagers in middle and high school. I would like to address this issue from two directions - that of a health care perspective and that of a focus on LGBTQ+ youth. As we all know, bullying is a vexing problem in schools across the country. However, the impact on LGBTQ+ youth and those perceived as LGBTQ+, statistically, is particularly severe [according to CDC 2021, (bullied on school property (32%) and cyberbullied (26.6%) in the past year vs straight peers (17.1% and 14.1%, respectively). The study also showed that more LGBTQ+ students (13.5%) than straight students (7.5%) reported not going to school because of safety concerns. Students who identified as "not sure" of their sexual orientation also reported being bullied on school property (26.9%), being cyberbullied (19.4%), and not going to school because of safety concerns (15.5%)]. This type of bullying, both in person and in the online environment, can lead to negative health outcomes, including depression, anxiety, and even suicide.

It is essential that we take additional steps to protect our vulnerable LGBTQ+ youth from bullying in our schools. First and foremost, we must recognize that LGBTQ+ youth have the right to a safe and supportive learning environment. This means that all students, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity, should be able to attend school without fear of being bullied or harassed.

In the state of New Jersey, we know that even with established clear policies and procedures to address bullying in schools, there is still much work to be done.

Specifically, I have been invited here today to discuss my perspectives on bullying of LGBTQ+ youth from a healthcare perspective. As a nurse and now a nursing professor who has worked in both healthcare and education settings, I have seen firsthand the importance of protecting the health of students who identify as LGBTQ+.

The impact of bullying on the health of LGBTQ+ students cannot be overstated. One of the most significant consequences of bullying is the increased risk of mental health problems, including depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation. According to the Trevor Project's 2022 survey, 46% of LGBTQ+ youth had suicidal ideations in the past year, with fully one FIFTH of transgender and nonbinary youth attempting suicide in the past year. LGBTQ+ students who are bullied are more likely to experience symptoms of these conditions, and they may struggle with them well into adulthood.

It is not the sexual orientation or gender identity of LGBTQ+ youth that makes them inherently prone to suicide risk, but rather the mistreatment and stigmatization they face in society that places them at a higher risk. Unfortunately for these very vulnerable students, bullying can come from many directions - not only from other students but also from educators, leaders, civic and government leaders at a larger societal level, and even from their own parents and family members.

Bullying can also have a negative impact on physical health. For example, students who are bullied may experience chronic stress, which can lead to a range of physical health problems, including headaches, stomach problems, and high blood pressure. Additionally, bullying can

lead to a decrease in physical activity and an increase in substance abuse and higher risk sexual behaviors, both of which can have long-term health consequences.

In order to address the impact of bullying on the health of LGBTQ+ students, we must take proactive steps to prevent bullying from occurring in the first place. This includes the continued implementation and enforcement of policies that prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, as well as providing resources and support for LGBTQ+ students who are experiencing bullying. It also means working to create a safe and inclusive environment where all students feel valued and respected. The Trevor Project in 2022 reported that LGBTQ youth who found their school to be LGBTQ-affirming reported lower rates of attempting suicide.

It is essential that funding be directed so that schools can provide LGBTQ+ students with access to comprehensive healthcare services to the extent to which they are able. 60% of LGBTQ youth who wanted mental health care in the past year were not able to get it, according to a 2022 Trevor Project study. This includes both physical and mental health services that are culturally competent and affirming of their identities. Many LGBTQ+ students face barriers to accessing healthcare, including discrimination even within their families. By providing LGBTQ+ students with access to some basic healthcare services at school, we can help remove these barriers and ensure that they receive the care they need to stay healthy. All school nurses and other healthcare staff should be educated in the health care needs of LGBTQ+ students, and should also be aware of the potential of targeted bullying of LGBTQ+ students, so that they can assess for victimization when students visit them in their offices.

Schools should prioritize providing sex education that is inclusive of LGBTQ+ individuals. Many LGBTQ+ students do not receive adequate information about sexual health and relationships,

which can put them at greater risk for sexual harassment bullying up to and including assault, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), higher risk sexual behaviors, and unintended pregnancies. By providing comprehensive sex education that is inclusive of all students and speaks clearly to sexual violence and prevention/victimization, we can help reduce these risks and promote healthier outcomes.

Resources must be directed so that schools should work to create a safe and supportive environment for LGBTQ+ students by providing LGBTQ+ students with access to resources and support. This includes LGBTQ+ student groups, counseling services, and mentorship programs that can help provide the support and guidance that LGBTQ+ students may need to thrive.

Furthermore, we must ensure that LGBTQ+ youth are directed by trusted school personnel to access resources and support OUTSIDE of school. Many LGBTQ+ youth may not have supportive families or friends. Despite the potential for harassment and discrimination, many LGBTQ+ youth actually report feeling MORE comfortable with their identities at school than at home due to poor parental and familial relationships/ Therefore, we must provide LGBTQ+ youth with access to community resources, such as LGBTQ+ centers, hotlines, and counseling services, via school support services that they can independently access.

Now that I've covered all of these concerning statistics, because we typically come at this topic from a place of crisis management or "after the fact" discussion - as opposed to addressing it from a perspective of what POSITIVE reinforcement we could prioritize, where do our LGBTQ+ youth find joy and strength?

According to the Trevor Project, here are the sources of joy listed by youth in their 2022 survey:

"Therapy & medication	Learning I'm not alone and	LGBTQ clubs on campus
Gender-affirming clothing	there are more people like	Athletics & Exercise
Family & parental support	me	Going to college
The LGBTQ community	Protective laws/victories	Drag shows
Accepting & affirming	for LGBTQ rights	Dance
friends	Supportive teachers	Living as their authentic
Hope & excitement for the	Having a safe space to	self
future	express gender, gender	Escapism/fantasy/fandom
Happy LGBTQ elders &	identity, and sexuality	Gender-affirming
married couples	All gender restrooms	hormones
Online communities &	Queer role models	Financial stability
support	Pets/Animals	LGBTQ celebrities,
Learning about LGBTQ	Taking care of younger	influencers &
history	siblings	representation in media
Faith & spirituality	Art, art expression, art	Self-love & acceptance
Music (BTS, Lil Nas X, etc)	therapy/crafting/drawing	Cooking"
Partners/falling in love	Video games/gamer	
Cishet allies	community	

The impact of bullying on the health of LGBTQ+ students is a serious issue that requires our attention and action. By taking proactive steps to prevent bullying and create a safe and supportive environment for all students, we can help ensure that LGBTQ+ students are able to not only thrive and succeed, but to find their strength and their joy. Protecting LGBTQ+ youth from bullying in schools is critical to their well-being and success. Their safety, success, and wellness will support them to grow to be the creative, dynamic, successful adults that we know that they are more than capable of becoming. We must take proactive steps to protect, promote,

and enforce policies and procedures that address bullying, promote health and well-being, create a supportive school culture, and provide resources and support for LGBTQ+ youth. Let us work together to ensure that all students, regardless of their sexuality or gender identity, feel safe and supported in our schools.

Thank you for your attention to this important issue.

Sincerely,

Jan Oosting, PHD, RN-BC

Owner, Rainbow Health Consulting

Assistant Professor, City University of New York