

Guidance Targeting Harassment Outlines Local and Federal Responsibility

White House to Convene Conference on Bullying Early Next Year
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Contact:
Public Affairs, (202) 401-1576

Washington, D.C. — Today, the Department of Education issued guidance to support educators in combating bullying in schools by clarifying when student bullying may violate federal education anti-discrimination laws. The guidance issued today also makes clear that while current laws enforced by the department do not protect against harassment based on religion or sexual orientation, they do include protection against harassment of members of religious groups based on shared ethnic characteristics as well as gender and sexual harassment of gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, and transgender individuals.

The guidance, which comes in the form of a "Dear Colleague" letter sent to schools, colleges and universities, explains educators' legal obligations to protect students from student-on-student racial and national origin harassment, sexual and gender-based harassment, and disability harassment. The letter provides examples of harassment and illustrates how a school should respond in each case.

The White House and Department of Education also announced next steps to address bullying and harassment in schools. Early next year, the White House will host a conference to raise awareness and equip young people, parents, educators, coaches and other community leaders with tools to prevent bullying and harassment. This conference will build upon efforts led by the U.S. Department of Education and other federal agencies to spark a dialogue on the ways in which communities can come together to prevent bullying and harassment.

"We've got to dispel the myth that bullying is just a normal rite of passage, or an inevitable part of growing up. It's not," said President Obama. "We have an obligation to ensure that our schools are safe for all of our kids. Every single young person deserves the opportunity to learn and grow and achieve their potential, without having to worry about the constant threat of harassment."

"Bullying is a problem that shouldn't exist. No one should ever feel harassed or unsafe in a school simply because they act or think or dress differently than others," said U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan. "To every student who feels threatened or harassed—for whatever reason—please know that you are not alone. Please know that there are people who love you. And please know that we will protect you," Duncan continued.

"Students cannot learn if they feel threatened or harassed," said Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, Russlynn Ali. "We want to keep students safe and learning and today's guidance will help us do that."

Following the release of today's guidance, the Department plans to hold technical assistance workshops around the country in early 2011 to help educators better understand their obligations and the resources available to take prompt and effective steps that will end harassment and bullying in schools and on college campuses.

The guidance issued today is just one of several efforts in the Department of Education's comprehensive approach to end bullying. In 2009, the Department joined the Departments of Defense, Justice, Health and Human Services, Agriculture, and the Interior to form the Obama Administrations Inter-Agency Task Force on Bullying. In August of this year, the Obama administration hosted the first ever National Bullying Summit and launched both the *Stop Bullying Now Campaign* and www.bullyinginfo.org, a national database of effective anti-bullying programs.

For more information about OCR and the anti-discrimination statutes that it enforces, please visit <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/aboutocr.html>. To review the "Dear Colleague" letter, please visit: <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-201010.html>.

Deborah A. Temkin, M.A., M.S.
Research and Policy Coordinator, Bullying Prevention Initiatives
Office of Safe and Drug Free Schools
US Department of Education
(202)245-6418