

Why Idaho Needs Stronger Anti-Bullying Laws to Keep Kids Safe

Lawmakers surely agree, all students have the right to be safe and free from harassment and fear at school.

Every parent deserves the right to have their child educated in a safe and welcoming environment.

According to several national studies, youth struggling with issues of sexual orientation or gender identity are between three and four times as likely to attempt suicide as their heterosexual peers.

Over the past five years, Idaho has had between the third and the eleventh highest suicide rate in the nation with 187 young people completing suicide across the state between 2005 and 2009.

In the last half of 2010, at least twelve students nationally - ranging in age from 13 to 10 – have committed suicide following the harassment at school based on their actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity.

A 2009 National School Climate Survey of 7,261 students between the ages of 13 & 21 found that among gay, lesbian, bisexual & transgender students:

- 61% felt unsafe at school because of their sexual orientation

- Students often missed school because they felt unsafe

- 84.6% reported being verbally harassed

- 40.1% reported being physically harassed

- 18.8% reported being physically assaulted at school in the past year because of their sexual orientation

- 12.5% reported being physically assaulted at school in the past year because of their gender expression

The same study found that students attending schools with an anti-bullying policy that included protections based on sexual orientation and/or gender identity or expression heard fewer homophobic remarks, experienced lower levels of victimization related to their sexual orientation and were more likely to report staff intervened when homophobic remarks were made.

These students were also more likely to report incidents of harassment and assault to school staff than students at schools with a general policy or no policy.

Seventeen states have anti-bullying policies specifically protecting students on the basis of sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

Naming such categories allows schools to notify students and parents that such bullying is indeed prohibited. Without specific categories, in-service training is not guaranteed to include specific information to help teachers address this and other targeted forms of bullying.

Schools are liable and legally required to protect all students from discrimination and harassment.

Idaho Safe Schools & Fair Employment Working Group: a large and informal group of people from across Idaho who care. · Find us in Idaho Falls, Twin Falls, Pocatello, Moscow, Caldwell, Nampa, Salmon and beyond.