



## The School Violence Prevention Act: H.B. 548 / S.B. 526

Bullying and harassment are major problems in North Carolina schools, creating an unsafe environment for students, teachers and staff, and leading to more serious incidents of violence, increased dropout and lower graduation rates. This act seeks to address all forms of school violence and help make all North Carolina schools safe for all children.

### Why is addressing bullying and harassment in our schools such an important issue?

- Children who are bullied are more likely to feel anxious, insecure, have low self esteem and experience depression<sup>1</sup>. Over 10% of victims have skipped school specifically to avoid being bullied<sup>1</sup>, over 160,000 per year in the U.S.<sup>2</sup>
- Children who bully are more likely to develop conduct disorders, more likely to bring a weapon to school, and less likely to succeed academically<sup>2</sup>. Over 60% of children who bully were found to have at least one criminal conviction by the age of 24<sup>1</sup>.
- Bullying and harassment has deadly effects. Victims of bullying and harassment are far more likely than non-bullied peers to attempt or commit suicide<sup>1</sup>. Additionally, the U.S. Secret Service National Threat Assessment Center found that in over 75% of fatal school shootings, bullying and harassment of the perpetrators was found to be a major contributing factor<sup>4</sup>.

### What does The School Violence Prevention Act do?

The School Violence Prevention Act is a bi-partisan effort to eliminate bullying and harassment in North Carolina's schools by requiring all schools to adopt policies that clearly define and prohibit bullying and harassment, and to create a clear system of reporting and responding to incidents.

The bill enumerates specific categories to identify and protect those children statistically shown to be most vulnerable to bullying and harassment. Currently, there is no statewide definition of what constitutes bullying and harassment, leaving teachers, administrators and staff with little guidance and leading to unequal protection for our students across the state's classrooms, schools and districts.

Prevent School Violence is a coalition of the state's leading education, child welfare and advocacy organizations, including:

The North Carolina PTA

The NC Association of Educators (NCAE)

NC Advocates for Justice

The Mental Health Association in NC

The Covenant with North Carolina's Children

The NC Pediatric Society  
Equality NC

The North Carolina Council of Churches

The National Association of Social Workers (NC)

The Arc of North Carolina

The NC Justice Center

Parents and Teachers Against Violence in Education NC

The Association of School Social Workers NC

Action for Children NC

The ACLU of NC

Prevent Child Abuse NC

North Carolina NOW

The Alliance for Disability Advocates

The NC Psychoanalytic Foundation

The NC Coalition Against Domestic Violence

EI Pueblo NC

NC Women United

The Autism Society NC

Young Democrats of NC

North Carolinians Against Gun Violence

## Frequently asked questions:

**Q:** Why is enumerating specific categories necessary? Why isn't a general no-bullying policy effective enough to protect all students?

**A:** This bill protects ALL students from bullying, and its inclusion of enumerated categories provides clear direction to teachers, administrators, and students about the scope of the policy. Teachers want clear policies that will give them the backing they need to address problems in the classroom.

Enumeration gives teachers and administrators the guidance and framework needed for consistent and fair implementation of policies. According to the Supreme Court, "Enumeration is the essential device used to make the duty not to discriminate concrete and to provide guidance for those who must comply."<sup>1</sup>

Crucially, research has shown that students in North Carolina who attend schools where anti-bullying and harassment policies enumerate specific categories are far more likely to report feeling safe in school, being less likely to be bullied, that reports of bullying incidents are more likely to be taken seriously and handled appropriately, and one-third less likely to skip a class because they felt uncomfortable or unsafe. Students in these schools also report that others are less often harassed in their school because of their physical appearance or real or perceived sexual orientation<sup>3</sup>.

72% of those polled in a statewide survey expressed support for an enumerated policy to protect children from bullying that includes sexual orientation, including 84% of Democrats, 72% of independents, and 58% of Republicans polled<sup>5</sup>.

**Q:** Doesn't the bill grant special rights or protections to certain groups?

**A:** The School Violence Prevention Act seeks to protect all students, teachers and staff from violence in schools, and DOES NOT create new protected classes in the law and does not assign special rights, special protection or preferred status to any groups or types of students. The bill includes specific language to guarantee these points.

The bill treats all victims of bullying and harassment equally, and includes a list of real or perceived characteristics independent research has shown to make students and school staff more likely to be victimized. Local school districts can add to this list of categories and will decide what procedures and remedies are best suited for their communities to address incidents when they occur.

The 23 North Carolina school districts that have inclusive enumerated anti-bullying policies in place (including real or perceived sexual orientation):

Alexander County  
Asheville City  
Buncombe County  
Charlotte–Mecklenburg  
Chapel Hill–Carrboro  
Chatham County  
Edgecombe County  
Guilford County\*  
Hickory City  
Iredell–Statesville\*  
Lexington City\*  
Orange County  
Onslow County  
Perquimans County\*  
Pitt County  
Robeson County  
Stokes County\*  
Surry County\*  
Thomasville City  
Vance County\*  
Wilkes County\*  
Yadkin County  
Yancey County

*\*The enumerated anti-bullying policies in these school districts also include gender identity*

1. Bullying: Are schools doing enough to stop the problem? (2005). *CQ Researcher*, 15(5), 104-124.

2. Clarke, E. A. & Kiselica, M.S. (1997). A systematic counseling approach to the problem of bullying. *Elementary School Guidance & Counseling*, 31(4), 310-326.

3. Harris Interactive & GLSEN. (2005). *From teasing to torment: School climate in America, a survey of students and teachers*. New York: GLSEN.

4. U.S. Secret Service National Threat Assessment Center. (2000). *Safe schools initiative: An interim report on the prevention of targeted violence in schools*

5. Public Policy Polling (16 July, 2008), *North Carolinians support sexual orientation provision*, [Press Release].