

The Problem With *Politicized Bullying Policies*

School boards and state legislatures across the land are under extreme pressure to add “gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender” categories into their bullying and nondiscrimination policies. Let’s discuss why this is a bad idea...

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You may have been hearing a lot lately about how efforts to legalize same-sex marriage will directly impact public school classrooms. But there’s another campaign occurring at this very moment that is largely flying under the radar—and yet it could have as much or greater impact on our public schools: This is the well-orchestrated movement by sexual advocacy groups to mandate “anti-discrimination” or “anti-bullying” policies that spell out special protections for homosexual-related categories. Most commonly, these categories are “sexual orientation,” “gender identity,” and/or “gender expression.”

You might be wondering, so what’s the big deal? So what if these categories are included in school bullying and/or nondiscrimination policies? Well, I’d like to give you several reasons why you should care about this trend—and be concerned about it.

Why You Should Care

In today’s culture, with unprecedented access to the Web and social networking tools, there is no question that bullying can be far-reaching and especially cruel—and too many times has tragic outcomes. That is why Focus on the Family believes that bullying should be recognized as a serious problem and should be strongly addressed. Every child—including those who identify as gay and lesbian—should be protected from harm because they are human beings created by the living God, and as such, have innate dignity and worth.

We believe a good way for schools to address this issue is with a strong prohibition against any form of bullying—*for any reason, against any child.*

The data back up this approach: Statistics have shown that approximately 30 percent of American children report being bullied or having been bullied themselves.¹ In fact, when you look at the more objective data sources, physical appearance—or the general concept of appearing different than one’s peers—is usually the most common reason reported for why victims are targeted.² This can involve a whole slew of issues, such as one’s weight, a girl who is developing faster than others, a child who wears glasses, or a boy who acts more effeminate than his peers, etc, etc. Statistics indicate that race, ethnicity issues, and even opposite-sex harassment account for a large percentage of bullying issues.³

The fact is, there are many different groups of children who are at high risk of being bullied. Students who struggle with obesity, for instance, are 65 percent more likely to be bullied⁴; children with disabilities as much as 85 percent⁵ more likely. That’s why, when you look at the big picture involving all kids who are at high risk of being bullied, they are all equally important. So we should be sending the message that a bully’s actions are always wrong for any reason regardless of why they target the victim. ***Continued on the Following Page***

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So an effective policy should be designed to address the widespread nature of the problem; it should not be a policy that mirrors, or is designed to appease, a narrow political agenda. But unfortunately, in too many schools and legislatures across the land, just the opposite is occurring—homosexual advocacy groups have introduced materials and policies that go way beyond the realm of safety prevention into political advocacy, adult identity politics, and even indoctrination.

The Real Goal

Why are so many homosexual advocacy groups pushing so hard for school policies that list out special protections for “sexual orientation” and “gender identity”? They say it’s all about protecting kids. But behind the scenes, there is much more involved; they are using these policies to accomplish other goals, including:

- 1. Obtaining the leverage they need to push homosexual advocacy messages into public schools—** through such avenues as mandatory diversity trainings, homosexual-themed curricula for children as young as elementary age and schoolwide assemblies and/or celebrations on homosexual and transgender issues.
- 2. A tool that lets them evade parental rights.**
- 3. A way to circumvent religious freedom protections and states’ traditional marriage laws.**

We have documented how so-called nondiscrimination or anti-bullying policies are being used to accomplish these objectives in different parts of the country. Here are a few examples:

Alameda, California: On the same day that the state’s highest court upheld Proposition 8—an amendment defining marriage as only between a man and a woman—the Alameda school board pushed through a curriculum that promoted homosexuality and gay marriage to elementary kids. Parents who objected discovered they could not opt their kids out of this teaching—even if it conflicted with their families’ most deeply held religious convictions or they just didn’t think their children were psychologically prepared to handle the topics. So how did the school board justify promotion of same-sex marriage to 6, 7 and 8 year olds?

Pay close attention to this: Alameda education officials adopted the curriculum in the name of fighting bullying. They justified their actions by citing state and local “student safety” and “nondiscrimination” policies that include protection for “sexual orientation.” *“These laws and policies mandate public schools prevent discrimination and harassment based on legally protected categories. The laws and policies explicitly state that we must protect gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender students and staff.”* [italics added]⁶

While everyone can agree that every single child—including those who identify as gay and lesbian—should be protected from harm, the problem is that school officials used these laws and policies to go far beyond that objective. Basically, the school officials interpreted legally mandated “protection” to mean forced homosexuality teaching for all.

The parents tried to make their voices heard by filing a lawsuit asking for the right to opt out their kids. To make their case, the parents cited a provision in the California education code granting parents the right to opt kids out of school health instruction if it conflicted with families’ religious beliefs. ***Continued on the Following Page***

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But the judge determined the bullying lessons didn't qualify as health instruction—and therefore the opt-out provision didn't apply. The judge also specified that “any opt out right” is “outweighed by the policies against discrimination and harassment of students from LGBT [lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender] families.”⁷

Translation: laws promoting homosexuality automatically trump parental rights and religious freedoms.

Homosexual advocacy groups publicly lauded this decision. For instance, a film company called Groundspark—which uses a film called *That's a Family!* to promote homosexual relationships to elementary kids— issued a press release celebrating the loss of parental rights in Alameda. “Our film, *That's a Family!*, used widely throughout the country ... is part of the curriculum that's been under debate,” bragged the release.⁸

Parents should take note: What happened in Alameda was not an accident. Advocacy groups realize that many state education codes only specifically make allowances for parents to opt their kids out of teaching in sex education or health classes. So when homosexuality instruction is no longer specifically labeled as one of those categories and is moved into more general subjects like “tolerance,” “family diversity,” or “anti-bullying” lessons, parents are at high risk of losing their rights.

Massachusetts: You may be familiar with the *Parker v. Hurley* case involving Massachusetts parents Robb and Robin Wirthlin, who were told they couldn't prevent their first-grade child from receiving so-called diversity lessons about same-sex couples. While you may have heard about the role legalized gay marriage played in taking away the Wirthlins' parental rights—what you may not know is that the federal judge who issued the ruling also relied in large part on the state's nondiscrimination laws that included homosexual categories.

The first few paragraphs of the decision, for instance, explain the judge's determination that Massachusetts nondiscrimination law “requires that public school curricula encourage respect” for things like “sexual orientation.” In fact, continued the judge, these laws “encourage instruction for pre-kindergarten through fifth-grade students concerning different types of people and families.” As a result, the judge determined that Massachusetts teachers had a right to teach kids lessons about things like homosexuality and same-sex relationships without their parents' consent.⁹

Iowa: Iowa is another state that passed a homosexual-themed bullying law. As a result, local government education agencies began providing a training course for public school teachers called “How to Make My Classroom Safe for LGBT students.” The syllabi have included things like screenings of the movie *Brokeback Mountain*, as well as training on how to use books like *And Tango Makes Three*, which promotes same-sex relationships to elementary kids. Once again, the “Rationale” given in the syllabi cited state nondiscrimination laws with the usual two categories, “sexual orientation” and “gender identity.”¹⁰

New Jersey: Even though New Jersey already had strong anti-bullying provisions, in 2008, then-Gov. Jon Corzine signed a law setting up a Commission on Bullying in Schools. Throughout 2009, public hearings were held by the Commission. Homosexual activists groups—including the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network— showed up at every single one of them, asking for things like “mandatory school trainings, student workshops, curriculum inclusion, and related initiatives.”¹¹

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On Dec. 16, 2009, the Commission dutifully came out with its report parroting most of these demands, and in 2011 Gov. Chris Christie signed into law the “Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights.” Among other things, the law requires the requested training highlighting homosexual topics and mandates that schools celebrate a “Week of Respect.” Now it’s up to parents to watch how this will impact state classrooms.

Success Story From Minnesota—Parents Can Succeed!

On a positive note, concerned parents and citizens succeeded in defeating a proposed statewide, homosexual-themed bullying law in Minnesota. Gov. Tim Pawlenty came under heavy pressure from homosexual advocacy groups to sign a law called the “Safe Schools for All Act,” which would have required schools to create anti-bullying policies enumerating the usual “sexual orientation” and “gender identity” categories.

But the [Minnesota Family Council](#) pointed out that the bill was unnecessary because the state already had laws that sufficiently dealt with bullying and just needed to be enforced. The family council also exposed how activists would use the bill as leverage to push homosexuality-themed curricula in schools. They didn’t have to go far for examples—the largest homosexual activist group in the nation, the Human Rights Campaign, had recently piloted a curriculum called *Welcoming Schools* for elementary-age kids in some Minnesota schools (and elsewhere in the nation).

The Human Rights Campaign claimed this curriculum was all about teaching “diversity” and preventing “name calling.” But lesson plans packaged within the pilot curriculum—such as the “Family Diversity Photo Puzzle”—revealed that it was more about indoctrination. For instance, the “Diversity Photo Puzzle,” designed for kids in the first through third grades, gave children puzzle pieces depicting photographs of people.

In the exercise, children are told to arrange the photos into seven families. But lo and behold, after they begin the assignment, they find themselves forced to “create some families with adults of the same gender” and to “make decisions about whether to label the adults as two mothers,” explains the lesson. It’s difficult to find a more blatant example of indoctrination than that.¹²

When parents in Minnesota found out about this exercise, they not only asked for it to be removed from piloted curricula—but they also worked to defeat the so-called “Safe Schools” law so that it could not be used to push more indoctrination tools like this into classrooms. Their concerns were not hypothetical: In a document entitled “A Look at Laws & Policies That Support Welcoming Schools,” the Human Rights Campaign has singled out states that have “Safe School Laws” and “Policies Against Harassment and Bullying” as places that may be more open to its curriculum.¹³

For more information about how parents around the country have successfully defended their families’ rights, read [“Under the Banner of Tolerance.”](#)

How to Respond

Considering that the federal government has [listed](#) the Human Rights Campaign’s *Welcoming Schools* program as a resource—and [awarded a five-year grant to GLSEN](#) to target 20 school districts nationwide—it’s more important than ever before for parents to remain vigilant and be aware of what’s happening in their children’s schools. *Continued on the Following Page*

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So how can you protect your schools?

- 1) ***Be Proactive.*** Act now. Don't wait until inappropriate material gets into classrooms, or your child's hands, to do something about it—because once bad policies and curricula get in, it's very hard to get them out. It's not impossible, but it is very difficult.

The most effective thing you can do right now is proactively educate school officials and elected officials in your area about these issues. One way to do that is to use time-saving Internet tools like TrueTolerance.org. Focus on the Family has created this Web site especially for concerned parents and citizens to allow them to quickly communicate with their school officials using some of the best data available. Here are some tools the site offers:

- **Examples from concerning classroom activities** promoted by groups like GLSEN and Planned Parenthood. You can print these out and give them to your school officials or use the site's "[Take Action](#)" section to email a direct link to your school officials.
- **A model anti-bullying policy developed by the Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF).** The policy was carefully researched and crafted by attorneys at ADF, one of the nation's largest legal alliances defending parents and students—and can be provided to educators as an example of a positive alternative when parents are concerned about bad policies being promoted. It is comprehensive in prohibiting all forms of bullying without advancing a sexual agenda.
- **A model parental rights policy** that strengthens parents' rights to guide their children's education. The policy comes with a cover letter from legal experts at ADF (who explain the need for bolstering parental rights) and offer school officials free input if they have questions regarding these policies. You can use the "[Take Action](#)" portion of the Web site to send your school officials a direct link to this important resource.

- 2) ***Promote the Right Solution.*** We need to recognize that bullying and peer abuse is wrong and should be stopped and prevented. But this can and should be done without politicizing the classrooms and introducing controversial, sexual topics to children.

The emphasis should be on the wrong *actions* of the bullies, not on their *perceived thoughts* or *perceived motivations* or excuses. We don't want bad government policies to turn our school officials into politicized, thought-crimes police. Therefore, the appropriate response is to implement strong and objective policies that prohibit bullying for any reason against any child—and that are applied fairly and equally across the board.

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3) ***Avoid Creating Special Categories for Protection.*** Policies that single out certain characteristics are counterproductive. Again, they put the focus on the wrong place—on the characteristics of the victim—rather than where the focus should be, on the wrong actions of the bullies. Plus, listing certain categories creates a system ripe for reverse discrimination, sending the message that certain characteristics are more worthy of protection than others. Instead of bringing more peace and unity, this can politicize the school environment and introduce divisiveness among different groups of students and parents.

Also, the more categories that are listed, the more schools increase their vulnerability to expensive lawsuits, especially when policies contain unclear or overly broad definitions.

Why not emphasize instead the things we have in common as Americans? We can unite around the teachings of our Founding Fathers—in particular, the principle that all men are created equal and that they are endowed with unalienable rights. And therefore, all people, no matter what their sexual identities are or what particular beliefs they hold, are entitled to the same basic rights as other citizens, including the right to life and pursuit of happiness.

4) ***Use the Statistics to Make Your Case.*** As explained at the beginning of this report, statistics clearly show that bullying is widespread among children for a wide variety of reasons. Thus, children are best served by a policy that gives equal protection to everyone and does not single out certain characteristics as being more worthy of protection than others.

We don't want to send children the message that they are only worthy of being protected because of how they identify or what social subgroup they belong to. A healthy and loving message is that students are worthy of being protected from harm because they are human beings—persons created by God—regardless of how they identify. See [“Fast Facts About Bullying”](#)

5) ***Counteract Deception with Facts.*** Use documented facts to expose deception. This paper—and [TrueTolerance.org](#)—give concrete examples of how policies can be misused in a way that undermines parental rights and families' values and religious freedoms. Use these factual examples to expose problems, by providing documentation to your school officials and concerned citizens in your community.

Why We Should Respond

Think for a moment about the fact that a majority of the nation's school-aged children—about 90 percent—attend government-funded schools. Clearly, the messages those children receive about sexuality and values will play a large part in shaping the next generation. So make no mistake about it: The hearts and minds of our nation's children are at stake in this current cultural clash in values.

We can also consider this issue from a spiritual and Biblical perspective. Take, for instance, the verses in the Bible that talk about our responsibility to protect the innocent. The Bible specifically talks about rescuing those who are being led away to harm or death. (Consider Proverbs 24:11 or the strong words Jesus had to say about those who lead children astray in Matthew 18:6).

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There are also crucial emotional and physical factors to take into account. For instance, according to a study published in the scientific journal *Pediatrics*, about 25 percent of 12-year-olds are unsure about their sexuality. As they get older, that uncertainty diminishes. But what this tells us is that the middle and high school years are a very vulnerable time period for a significant portion of youth, who are still developing emotionally and physically. So it seems irresponsible—and possibly even emotionally damaging—for schools to open their doors to adult messages that may prematurely push youth into embracing a sexual identity.¹⁴

The bottom line, from both a spiritual and physical perspective, is that we simply cannot afford to turn a blind eye to what some 55 million children are experiencing in taxpayer-funded schools today.

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2 Information available online as of 2013 from the Child Trends Data Bank on bullying:

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3 “Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2012,” Table 10:2. 2013 report from the U.S. Departments of Education and Justice: Accessible at: <http://nces.ed.gov/programs/crimeindicators/crimeindicators2012/key.asp>; Grieco, Paula. “Teen Sexual Harassment: What you can do about it...” *The Christian Science Monitor*. July 11, 2013. Accessible at: <http://www.csmonitor.com/The-Culture/Family/Modern-Parenthood/2013/0711/Teen-sexual-harassment-What-you-can-do-about-it-in-your-daughter-s-school>; Bacchus, Danya. “Sexual Harassment Prevalent in Schools.” *NBC San Diego* news report. Nov. 8, 2011. Accessible at: <http://www.nbcsandiego.com/news/local/sexual-harrassment-survey-san-diego-teens-133450548.html>; News Release. “Chancellor Klein Releases Findings From First Audit of Bias-Related Bullying and Harassment Incidents in Schools.” Jan. 15, 2010. New York City Department of Education. Accessible at: <http://schools.nyc.gov/Offices/mediarelations/NewsandSpeeches/2009-2010/RFAOORS0809.htm>;

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