

# SAFE AND CIVIL IOWA SCHOOLS: NO ROOM FOR BULLYING

By Connie B. Fanselow  
ASK Resource Center



We all remember the saying, “sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never hurt me” from our own school days, and we all learned pretty quickly that it really wasn’t true. Words can hurt deeply and emotional injuries can have serious and long-lasting consequences, especially for children. Bullying and harassment is not only harmful to the social and emotional development of children, it gets in the way of learning.

Ensuring the physical safety and emotional security of children in school is a critical concern shared by parents and educators. Recognizing that concern, in 2007 the Iowa Legislature passed a new state law to help prevent and address bullying in schools. The law has been in effect for almost a full school year now, yet many parents are not aware of its provisions, how anti-bullying policies are being implemented in their local school districts, or what they can do to support the effort.

The new Iowa law declared a statewide policy against harassment and bullying and called upon schools to adopt their own anti-bullying policies that meet the statewide standard.

“The state of Iowa is committed to providing all students with a safe and civil school environment in which all members of the school community are treated with dignity and respect. . . . [I]t is the policy of the state of Iowa that school employees, volunteers, and students in Iowa schools shall not engage in harassing or bullying behavior.”

~ Iowa Code Section 280.28(1)

Under the new law, *each school district in Iowa* was required to adopt its own policy to address harassment and bullying by September 1, 2007. While schools had anti-bullying policies prior to the new law, they must now be consistent with the state standards. If you have not seen your school’s anti-bullying policy, you may want to request a copy. School district anti-bullying policies must be made available to parents and the general public.

Each school district's policy must include:



1. **A statement declaring harassment and bullying to be against state and school district policy.**
2. **No bullying:** A statement that school employees, volunteers, and students shall not engage in harassing and bullying behavior in school, on school property, or at any school function or school-sponsored activity.
3. **No retaliation:** A statement that school employees, volunteers, and students shall not engage in reprisal, retaliation, or false accusation against a person who has been targeted by bullying, a witness, or any one who has reliable information about an act of bullying.
4. **A definition of bullying** consistent with the following:

**Any electronic, written, verbal, or physical act or conduct** toward a student which is based on any *actual or perceived trait or characteristic* of the student and which creates one of the following conditions:

- Places the student in reasonable fear of harm to themselves or their property
- Has a substantially detrimental effect on the student's physical or mental health
- Has the effect of substantially interfering with a student's academic performance
- Has the effect of substantially interfering with the student's ability to participate in or benefit from school services, activities, or privileges

Iowa's anti-bullying law specifically lists the following **"traits or characteristics"**:

- age
- color
- creed
- national origin
- race
- religion
- marital status
- sex
- sexual orientation
- gender identity
- physical attributes
- physical or mental ability or disability
- ancestry
- political party preference
- political belief
- socioeconomic status
- familial status

In addition, the law clearly states that this list is not meant to be exclusive. Traits or characteristics other than those specifically listed are also covered by the anti-bullying policy.

Each school district's policy must also include:

- 5. How the School Will Respond:** A description of the type of behavior expected from school employees, volunteers, parents or guardians, and students relative to prevention measures, reporting, and investigation of harassment or bullying.
- 6. The Consequences for Violations:** A description of the consequences for someone who violates the anti-harassment and anti-bullying policy.
- 7. How to Report Acts of Bullying:** A procedure for reporting an act of harassment or bullying, including the job title of the school official responsible for ensuring that the policy is implemented, and the person or persons responsible for receiving reports of harassment or bullying.
- 8. The Procedure for Investigating Reports:** A procedure for the prompt investigation of complaints that identifies either the school superintendent or a person designated by the superintendent as the individual responsible for conducting the investigation. The investigators will consider all the circumstances present in determining whether the conduct constitutes bullying.
- 9. How the Anti-Bullying Policy Will Be Made Public:** A statement of the manner in which the policy will be publicized and made available to parents and others in the community.

Parents can help support the efforts to implement effective anti-bullying strategies in school by becoming familiar with school policies, by talking to their children about appropriate behavior and about understanding and accepting differences in people, by supporting programs and activities that strengthen the development of good character among all students, and by reporting any concerns they have about their child's safety and security in school. It takes everyone's efforts to keep our schools and communities free of "sticks and stones" and all those troublesome "words" that we know can be the most hurtful injuries of all.

**TEN THINGS PARENTS & EDUCATORS CAN DO  
TO PREVENT BULLYING**

1. Monitor your own behavior.
2. Treat children and other adults with respect and kindness.
3. Demonstrate tolerance and fairness to everyone.
4. Talk about differences and help children learn to appreciate and respect diversity.
5. Talk to children about the consequences of their actions.
6. Make sure all children know the rules of behavior and what is expected of them.
7. Talk about the difference between “tattling” and telling an adult about bullying.
8. Model, encourage, and acknowledge acts of kindness in the home, in the classroom, and during school and community activities.
9. Talk to children about what to do if they feel bullied or unsafe.
10. Make sure children know you are there to keep them safe.

**ASK Resource Center**

321 East Sixth Street  
Des Moines, IA 50309-1903

Phone: (515) 243-1713      Toll Free: (800) 450-8667

Fax: (515) 243-1902      Email: [info@askresource.org](mailto:info@askresource.org)

Website: [www.askresource.org](http://www.askresource.org)



*Developed and distributed by ASK Resource Center under a federal grant from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs. The contents of this document do not necessarily represent the policy or endorsement of the U.S. Department of Education.*