A New Endeavor to Work with Individual Schools

One by one, school districts across the state are adopting more inclusive anti-bullying policies. The momentum we’ve seen in districts moving forward on complying with the 2009 Oregon Safe Schools Act is impressive. But how do we know these district policies are translating into individual schools that are safer and healthier? The truth is: we don’t know. This is why the Oregon Safe Schools and Communities Coalition and Q Center have ambitiously begun the Safe Schools Certification Project.

With the goal of working directly with schools to help them become, and remain, safe places, the Safe Schools Certification Project looks beyond whether entire districts are formally in compliance with the law and instead digs into the spirit of the Safe Schools Act—why it was established in the first place.

We know districts adopt policies that don’t always trickle down into individual schools, but to truly have safer schools, these policies must be thoughtfully implemented within each school in a district. Every school has unique needs in promoting the safety of students and of the adults who work each day to help young people succeed. We will be working with schools across Oregon to make sure they are doing more than just complying with the law and will assist them to establish cultures of respect for each person who walks through their doors.

To be certified as a safe place, schools will go through an 18-24 month process that examines data, asks students for opinions, and engages everyone - students, parents, teachers, custodians, cafeteria workers, administrators, bus drivers - in building a safe and respectful place. No two schools are the same and so there is no one solution.

We look forward to working directly with schools as they further establish lasting safety in their learning communities.

Lesbian, gay & bisexual (LGB) youth in Oregon report twice as much bullying as straight youth

SOURCE: 2013 Oregon Healthy Teens Survey

Students Reporting Bullying in Last 30 Days by Body Weight & Usual Grades

SOURCE: 2013 Oregon Healthy Teens Survey
It is an amazing honor to be the first special education teacher to be Oregon’s Teacher of the Year. Fate has allowed me to be a voice for so many at-risk youth and I have taken that role very seriously. As a gay man, I know first-hand what kind of bullying our gay youth are putting up with. As a Special Ed teacher I have seen my students teased and picked on in ways that would break your heart.

One of the first groups I contacted when I was given my award was Oregon Safe Schools & Communities Coalition. I have attended 170 events since then. At every one of those events I have carried the 2013 State of the Safe Schools Report in my briefcase and I have shared the suicide rates for gay teens with almost every audience I’ve met. I believe OSSCC is saving the lives of our youth and I give them my full support.

Brett Bigham
2014 Oregon State Teacher of the Year
2015 Nat’l Education Association’s Educator of Excellence

As parents, many of us are well aware that some groups of kids are at particular risk of being bullied, including LGBT youth and children with disabilities. Many of us have also heard about the links between bullying and suicide risk. We might think that our own children aren’t at risk, or that if anything happened, surely our child would tell us right away. But the truth is that as many as 30 percent of kids may be bullied at school, and many children don’t tell their parents right away or at all—after all, children don’t want to be seen as “tattle tales,” or they may be too embarrassed to discuss the situation.

This reality means that as parents, we can’t just assume that our children and families will be safe regardless of the nature or quality of school policies and practices relating to bullying. Instead, we need to partner with organizations like the Safe Schools Coalition to ensure that our schools become truly safe places for all kids. Specific anti-bullying programming ensures that students are educated about positive behavior, so that bullying is stopped before it starts. And strong anti-bullying policies give our kids a variety of avenues for getting swift and effective help if bullying does occur.

Banu Ramachandran
Mother; Chair, Safe Schools Committee of OGALLA: The LGBT Bar Association of Oregon

To put it simply, kids cannot learn if they do not feel safe. Feeling safe is associated with the students’ perception of being safe, not just the environment truly being safe. School climate and culture, referring to the vibe or tone of a school (climate) and the resulting behavior (culture) of students and school staff in the environment, are of paramount importance to safe schools and student success. As was found in research sponsored by the United States Department of Education, understanding and positively influencing school climate, and thus, creating positive school culture, is critical for reducing misbehavior, promoting equity, and increasing academic achievement.

The Oregon Healthy Teens (OHT) survey emphasizes that students’ perception of safety in their school environment is associated with many beliefs and perceptions; the extent of substance abuse on school grounds and amongst the student population, the number of suspensions and expulsions from school, and the quality of relationships promoted both between school staff and students and among students and their peers. The perception of students on the OHT survey reveals that teenagers believe a greater percentage of students are drinking and using drugs than they actually are. The higher the number of exclusions from school also impresses upon students that their school is a dangerous and unsafe place. These perceptions ill-effect school climate, school culture, and ultimately negatively impacts academic achievement, school adjustment, and success.

Effective managing of classrooms to reduce misbehavior is directly linked to student engagement, increased academic success, and the closing of the achievement gap. To truly provide an equitable education, positive discipline practices attending to the whole student, the students’ parents and culture, family structures, and unique values, must be inextricably merged with the use of best academic curricula and instructional practices. Lasting solutions must attend to climate, culture, and the social-emotional needs of students.

There are multiple factors influencing the perception and reality of safe schools, more than can be easily listed here. Certainly, students must feel safe if they are going to learn and be successful. There are many variables impacting safe schools, and the attainment and maintenance of a positive school climate and culture are essential to the process. It is imperative that safe schools are promoted and students are treated positively and with dignity, while schools employ methodologies that promote positive relationships. Some of these methodologies include the research-based Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports, as well as the promising practices for schools, including Collaborative Problem Solving and Restorative Justice Practices that focus on building relationships and self-regulation, and focus on restoring and repairing relationships when needed.

by Michael K. Mahoney, M.S., NCSP
former Oregon Safe & Healthy Schools Coordinator
### Gold Star Districts (+64% from last year)

Adel School District  
Amity School District  
Annex School District  
Athena Weston School District  
Baker School District  
Beaverton School District  
Blachly School District  
Black Butte School District  
Brookings-Harbor School District  
Burnt River School District  
Camas Valley School District  
Canby School District  
Cascade School District  
Centennial School District  
Central School District  
Central Curry School District  
Central Point School District  
Clatskanie School District  
Colton School District  
Coos Bay School District  
Corbett School District  
Corvallis School District  
Cove School District  
Crow-Applegate-Lorane School  
Culver School District  
David Douglas School District  
Days Creek School District  
Elgin School District  
Enterprise School District  
Estacada School District  
Falls City School District  
Fern Ridge School District  
Gladstone School District  
Glendale School District  
Glide School District  
Grants Pass School District  
Greater Albany School District  
Harney County 3 School District  
Harriscburg School District  
Helix School District  
Hermiston School District  
Hillsboro School District  
Hood River School District  
Imbler School District  
Ione School District  
Jefferson School District  
John Day/Grant School District  
Junction City School District  
Klamath Falls City Schools  
Knappa School District  
LaGrande School District  
Lake County School District  
Lake Oswego School District  
Lebanon Community School Dist.  
Long Creek School District  
Lowell School District  
Mapleton School District  
McKenzie School District  
Mitchell School District  
Monroe School District  
Monument School District  
Morrow School District  
Mt. Angel School District  
Neah-Kah-Nie School District  
North Clackamas School District  
North Douglas School District  
Oakland School District  
Oakridge School District  
Ontario School District  
Oregon City School District  
Paisley School District  
Parkrose School District  
Pendleton School District  
Perrydale School District  
Phoenix-Talent School District  
Pine Eagle School District  
Plush School District  
Port Orford-Langlois School Dist.  
Portland Public Schools  
Powers School District  
Prairie City School District  
Prospect School District  
Redmond School District  
Reedsport School District  
Riverdale School District  
Roseburg School District  
Salem-Keizer School District  
Scappoose School District  
Seaside School District  
Sheridan School District  
Sherman School District  
Silver Falls School District  
Siouxlaw School District  
South Wasco School District  
St Helens School District  
Stanfield School District  
Sutherlin School District  
Sweet Home School District  
Three Rivers School District  
Tigard-Tualatin School District  
Tillamook School District  
Troy School District  
Umatilla School District  
Union School District  
Vernonia School District  
Wallowa School District  
Warrenton-Hammond Sch. Dist.  
Winston-Dillard School District  
Woodburn School District  
Yamhill-Carlton School District

### Silver Star Districts (-27%)

Ashwood School District  
Banks School District  
Bend-LaPine School District  
Bethel School District  
Butte Falls School District  
Central Linn School District  
Creswell School District  
Dallas School District  
Dayton School District  
Dayville School District  
Drewsey School District  
Eagle Point School District  
Echo School District  
Elkton School District  
Eugene School District  
Forest Grove School District  
Gervais School District  
Gresham-Barlow School District  
Huntington School District  
Jefferson County School District  
Jefferson School District  
Jordan Valley School District  
Klamath Falls City School Dist.  
Lincoln County School District  
Marcola School District  
McMinnville School District  
Milton Freewater School District  
Molalla River School District  
Myrtle Point School District  
Nestucca Valley School District  
Newberg School District  
North Lake School District  
North Marion School District  
North Powder School District  
North Wasco County School Dist.  
Pleasant Hill School District  
Santiam Canyon School District  
Sherwood School District  
Sisters School District  
South Lane School District  
Springfield School District  
St. Paul School District  
Vale School District  
West Linn-Wilsonville School Dist.  
Yoncalla School District

### Bronze Star Districts (-40%)

Adrian School District  
Alsea School District  
Arlington School District  
Ashland School District  
Astoria School District  
Bandon School District  
Condor School District  
Coquille School District  
Crane School District  
Crook County School District  
Dayton School District  
Dufur School District  
Fossil School District  
Gaston School District  
Harney County 4 (Crane Elementary) School District  
Harper School District  
Jewell School District  
Joseph School District  
Medford School District  
North Bend School District  
North Marion School District  
North Santiam School District  
Nyssa School District  
Oregon Trail School District  
Philomath School District  
Pilot Rock School District  
Pinehurst School District  
Rainier School District  
Riddle School District  
Rogue River School District  
Scio School District  
South Umpqua School District  
Willamina School District  
North Bend School District  
North Marion School District  
North Santiam School District  
Nyssa School District  
Oregon Trail School District  
Philomath School District  
Pilot Rock School District  
Pinehurst School District  
Rainier School District  
Riddle School District  
Rogue River School District  
Scio School District  
South Umpqua School District  
Willamina School District  
North Bend School District  
North Marion School District  
North Santiam School District  
Nyssa School District  
Oregon Trail School District  
Philomath School District  
Pilot Rock School District  
Pinehurst School District  
Rainier School District  
Riddle School District  
Rogue River School District  
Scio School District  
South Umpqua School District  
Willamina School District

### Absent

Arock School District  
Diamond School District  
Double O School District  
Frenchglen School District  
Juntura School District  
Malheur County (McDermitt) School District (no students)  
Pine Creek School District  
South Harney School District  
Spray School District  
SunBex School District  
Ukiah School District

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SCHOOL DISTRICT POLICY ADOPTION
RESEARCH AND RANKINGS

In 2009, the Safe Schools for All Youth Coalition convened by Basic Rights Oregon led the effort to pass the Oregon Safe Schools Act – a critical piece of legislation to address bullying, harassment and violence in schools. In 2012, Senate Bill 1555 was passed, further amending the statute to require anti-bullying trainings and mandatory reporting of bullying incidents by school employees. As a follow-up to this legislation, OSSCC, in partnership with OGALLA: The LGBT Bar Association of Oregon, published the first safe schools policy adoption report.

In 2012, OSSCC and OGALLA also worked with the Oregon School Boards Association (OSBA) to revise the model safe school policy that is recommended to school districts for adoption. The new model policy includes “gender identity” in the list of protected classes. Based on recommendations from the Multnomah Youth Commission, OSSCC promised to conduct a follow-up study.

In 2013, the Oregon Public Health Division (OPHD) invited OSSCC, Q Center, and OGALLA to conduct the follow-up research together with support from a grant from Public Health Law Research. We collected school district policy information from nearly every district in Oregon. OGALLA reviewed the policies that were collected, and OGALLA and OPHD analyzed the results. The evaluation criteria included the list of the requirements outlined in the current statute. Up-to-date school district policies that list “gender identity,” as recommended in the revised safe school model policy, were eligible to receive a “Gold Star.”

Over the past year, the Oregon Health Authority’s Public Health Division, OSSCC, Q Center, and OGALLA once again embarked on research together, continuing the process of collecting, analyzing, and ranking of all Oregon school districts’ compliance with the Safe Schools Act. Building on 2013’s results and through outreach via letter, online searches, phone calls, and email correspondence, we collected school district policy information from nearly every district in Oregon. The Oregon Department of Ed. and the OSBA provided guidance throughout our efforts to collect policies. OGALLA reviewed and scored the collected policies, followed by analysis by OGALLA and OPHD. The evaluation criteria again included the requirements outlined in the current statute but were also broadened to include provisions for mandatory employee reporting on issues of bullying. Up-to-date school district policies that express reference to ‘gender identity’ and ‘gender expression’ are eligible to receive a “Gold Star.”

The Oregon School Boards Association’s ongoing Small Schools Initiative has worked intensively with smaller districts. This added support and advice is reflected in a marked increase in the number of small districts that were ranked as Silver and Gold--Exciting progress.

District Ranking Definition

GOLD Star
(n=110, 56% of all districts in Oregon)
• Governance documents regarding harassment, intimidation, bullying, dating violence, and cyberbullying are substantially compliant* with current Oregon statutes and expressly reference gender identity and gender expression as protected classes.

SILVER Star
(n=44, 22% of all districts in Oregon)
• Governance documents regarding harassment, intimidation, bullying, dating violence, and cyberbullying are substantially compliant* with current Oregon statutes.

BRONZE Star
(n=33, 17% of all districts in Oregon)
• Governance documents regarding harassment, intimidation, bullying, dating violence, and cyberbullying need updating and/or modification to achieve substantial compliance with current Oregon statutes.

ABSENT/Not coded districts
(n=11, 5% of all districts in Oregon)
• Governance documents regarding harassment, intimidation, bullying, dating violence, and cyberbullying were not available on the website and district did not provide a copy at our request.

*For purposes of this report, “substantially compliant” harassment, intimidation, bullying, and cyberbullying governance documents contain at least 80% of the statutorily required elements, including four key elements required by the Safe Schools Act and passage of Senate Bill 1555: (1) acknowledgment that interfering with the psychological well-being of a student creates a hostile educational environment; (2) a statement that bullying may be based on, but not limited to, the protected class status of a person; (3) a requirement that school employees report acts of bullying; and (4) a statement as to how the anti-bullying policy is to be publicized within the district, including, at a minimum, a statement that it will be made annually available in a handbook and readily available at each school or district office and website.
HOW DOES OREGON LAW DEFINE BULLYING, HARASSMENT AND INTIMIDATION?

Any act that:
- Substantially interferes with a student’s educational benefits, opportunities or performance;
- Takes place on or immediately adjacent to school grounds, at any school-sponsored activity, on school-provided transportation or at any official school bus stop;
- Has the effect of:
  - Physically harming a student or damaging a student’s property; or
  - Knowingly placing a student in reasonable fear of physical harm to the student or damage to the student’s property; or
  - Creating a hostile educational environment, including interfering with the psychological well-being of a student; and
  - May be based on, but not be limited to, the protected class status of a person.

May be based on, but not limited to, the protected class status of a person.

“Cyberbullying” means the use of any electronic communication device to harass, intimidate or bully.

ORS 339.351

Recommendations

Even the best school district policies do not ensure that all students will be safe in schools. It takes school boards, staff, students, administrators and families working together to create and support a respectful learning environment where students are safe and can focus on learning. Here are some strategies to support this kind of climate:

- School districts need to collect data (qualitative and quantitative) to track harassment and identify trends. This includes a provision for school districts to report annually on the number of reported bullying incidents, and any responsive actions taken.

- School districts need to ensure that every adult working with students (teachers, cafeteria workers, bus drivers, support staff, etc.) receives training so that rules are consistently enforced.

- Students need to speak up when they witness harassment and have an easily-accessible reporting mechanism to document the event, including a procedure for maintaining written records of all incidents of bullying and their resolution.

- Victims, perpetrators, and other involved persons need a procedure for counseling and other health-service referrals, as appropriate.

- Teachers, family members, and friends can help all students find a safe niche inside and outside of school.

Adapted from both: The US Dept of Education’s “Analysis of State Bullying Laws and Policies,” and the Safe Schools Coalition’s “Bullying: What You Can Do About It.”

It is difficult for students to be successful in school if they are depressed, tired, being bullied, abused, stressed, sick, hungry, or using alcohol or other drugs. Keeping students healthy involves engaging families, school administrators, teachers, students, and communities to help create a learning environment that promotes students’ physical, social, and emotional well-being. Young people need the support of caring adults to help them navigate their expanding roles, relationships, and responsibilities.

SOURCE: 2013 Oregon Healthy Teens
The OSSCC seeks a large and diverse coalition membership in order to build the kind of statewide visibility and support needed to achieve its mission. OSSCC members represent a broad cross-section of public and private organizations in Oregon. Membership is open to any organization, school district, agency, faith community, business, or individual that supports the mission of the Coalition. Your support is needed to continue doing this work. Please consider joining our coalition and getting involved.

Meetings held monthly in Portland. Write info@oregonsafeschools.org for details!