

## *Back to School*

We've written about bullying before but now there's a law to pay attention to - -New Jersey's Anti-Bullying Law (ABL).

The new law, billed as the toughest in the nation, took effect September 1<sup>st</sup> and requires much of the school districts. School districts are required to:

1. Adopt policies prohibiting harassment, intimidation and bullying (HIB) of students on school property, at school-sponsored functions or on school buses
2. Include a statement of how the policy is to be publicized, procedures for reporting HIB, procedures for prompt investigation of HIB and a statement of the range of ways in which a school will respond to a HIB incident.

While the ABL requires schools to incorporate information regarding the school district HIB policy into a school's employee training program, the ABL does not require any specific training of HIB prevention programs except where funds are appropriated to do so and only "encourages" schools to implement HIB prevention and other anti-bullying initiatives.

*We would urge schools districts to commit to anti-bullying education programs for their teachers, staffs and parents.* There is a path to dealing with behaviors that target those who find it difficult to defend themselves from verbal, emotional and physical attacks.

It is important to educate the adults to focus on the *Bystanders* of such actions – those students who stand by and don't take the initiative to intervene by word or deed.

Allies are people who will step forward if they see a bullying situation. They will speak out and, hopefully, end a difficult situation. But for every *Ally*, there are many more *Bystanders*, those who silently watch and do nothing.

The work of the American Conference on Diversity focuses on educating teachers, counselors, administrators, students and parents and employees about all aspects of diversity and how valuing difference and becoming educated and empowered leads to powerful *Allies* and empowered people. In bullying situations, those people can move from *Bystanders* to *Allies*.

We believe that by focusing on the larger number of people who just happen to be in a place when bullying occurs, the *Bystanders*, we can create a culture where all of us can respect difference and support those who need a kind word, a helping hand, a smile or just our presence which says let's move on in a good way and treat each other as the valuable and special people each of us really is.

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