

Bullying, Harassment, and Children from Immigrant Families

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- Two related aspects to the problem:
 - Language Issues
 - Culture/National Origin Issues
- Legally, non-ELLs (English Language Learners) bullying ELLs based on their language or national origin is considered harassment.
- Most research has been on “generic” bullying where issues of “difference” were not examined.
- NEEAC conducted an Equity Climate Survey of students and staff in a medium-sized Massachusetts school district. Two questions:
 - Physical bullying: I worry about someone hitting, kicking, or punching me even when I haven’t done anything to her or him.
 - 28% of middle school ELLs responded ALWAYS, OFTEN, or SOMETIMES, compared to 13% of non-ELLs.
 - Verbal bullying: Students make fun of others who have accents.
 - 49% of middle school ELLs responded ALWAYS, OFTEN, or SOMETIMES, compared to 21% of non-ELLs.
- Cultural/religious differences: such as ways of dressing, wearing hijab, family expectations around gender relationships, food, etc.
- Climate of anti-immigrant attitudes leads to disturbing taunts like “Hey, kid, where’s your green card?”
- What is different for ELLs in their bullying experience?
 - Language differences: they may not understand what is being said or have acquired fluency to respond
 - Negotiating two cultural worlds, between school/peers and community/family
 - Vulnerability and bullying experiences may lead to inappropriate behavior, even acting as bullies themselves
 - May fear authority figures, not file complaint/seek help
 - Feeling isolated and vulnerable, don’t know anyone to turn to
- What can adults do?
 - In schools, teachers with ELL students can discuss concerns about bullying with students; bring concerns to administrators.
 - In communities, help immigrant parents understand our laws and school policies, how to report and to whom.
 - In government, strengthen anti-bullying laws and make public statements supporting children from immigrant families.