

My name is Jim Colandrea and I am currently a social studies teacher at Guilford High School. I have advanced degrees in public policy and educational leadership and I am also a part-time police officer for the town of Clinton. I come before you as a concerned citizen and want to thank you for the opportunity to address you. Amidst the revolutions that are occurring in the Middle East, I feel privileged to speak before you concerning the topic of bullying, school climate, and culture.

As a former full-time police officer I understand the importance of having a viable criminal justice system. I rarely had any contact with 80% of my town's population. Knowledge of the laws was enough for their compliance with law. However I did have frequent interactions with approximately 20% of the population and for some individuals contact was on a reoccurring basis. These people unfortunately did not have access to the same support systems and the decisions that they made often times violated law. An arrest would be made, the case adjudicated, and the cycle would begin again. There is much research that speaks to group dynamics and its members' compliance to norms of

behavior. Many of you are quite familiar with the 80-20-1 rule. 80% comply, 20% resist but may comply eventually and then there are the 1-percenters. No matter what you do, they will not comply.

Similar to towns, schools are mini-communities and as such, the same trends in behavior occur. A review of many schools' discipline data will show that 80% of the students regularly follow the rules, 20% need more assistance, and 1% of students present the most challenging and difficult obstacles to overcome. When serious infractions occur, there is little debate on what to do. Weapons charges, acts of violence, and sale of narcotics often result in some form of removal from school services. But what about this phenomenon called bullying. It has been defined as "overt acts with the intent to ridicule, harass, humiliate, or intimidate another student." Acts that are overt have always been responded to, it is the covert acts that present such a challenge for administrators. Most bullying behaviors do not occur in the presence of adults. As a veteran teacher of 10 years, I have often felt that there was something unsettled amongst the class but could not directly point to any one cause for it. When I questioned students regarding my suspicions

they would answer with non-descriptive responses. To offset this perceived lack of cooperation by student victims, many schools have adopted a low threshold for action. Police need probable cause to make an arrest, school administrators need reasonable suspicion to search a student's belongings, but they only need to establish that bullying behavior has occurred MORE LIKELY THAN NOT, to assess disciplinary actions. I wonder if administrators are hesitant to use such a tool when an investigation of bullying behavior may result in disciplinary action. How will the new law impact this? And if they did act based on a situation, what outcome will occur? A student is removed, their education impaired, and most likely they return no better off than when they left only to repeat the same type of behavior.

I don't deny the responsibility to create a safe learning environment for all students nor do I deny the severe outcomes of bullying behavior that are left unchecked. We need only look to the many high profile suicides that resulted from alleged bullying behavior. In these cases there were systemic failures, students, teachers, school administrators and parents all bear some responsibility. So what is the

purpose behind the legislation that is under consideration? Is it to adopt no tolerance policies that would, in fact, make it easier for punishment and removal of an offender, or should school officials provide appropriate interventions that will mitigate such behavior from occurring in the first place? I support the bill's provisions to mandate training for all adults regarding the prevention of and response to bullying behavior however, I disagree with creating a "get tough position" regarding school bullying. There are tools already available in schools that should seamlessly be a part of a response to a student in need.

Recently the Connecticut General Assembly has passed legislation that forces schools to adopt school-wide research based interventions to improve academic performance. More and more research is showing the connection between affective and cognitive success. Schools are making tremendous progress adopting frameworks that are tiered. 80% of the students respond well to tier 1 services, 20% require additional services, and 1% presents the most challenging cases. Schools are just beginning to develop affective supports. Allow them the opportunity to fully infuse these frameworks into their school communities.

I feel that an additional mandate simply becomes another policy-island that focuses too much on negative student behaviors and not enough on the positive. Allow administrators more latitude in developing a school policy that responds to negative student behavior as suggested by the invitation by community members to participate.

Thank you for your attention.