The Connecticut Association of Schools

The Connecticut Association of Schools provides exemplary programs and services that promote excellence in the education of all children.

Testimony

Raised Bill No. SB 1138 An Act Concerning Strengthening School Bullying Laws

The Connecticut Association of Schools (CAS) represents over 1100 elementary and secondary schools in Connecticut in advocating for the best interests of schools, their students, faculty and administrators. CAS supports a wide range of activities from academics to athletics, as well as providing professional development for school leaders.

The Connecticut Association of Schools has long advocated for safe and respectful school climates and fully supports the efforts to eliminate bullying and cyber bullying. The Association has partnered with the State Department of Education and other state organizations to offer professional development support to our member schools to improve school teaching and learning environments.

Teachers and school leaders are engaged daily preventing, intervening in, and following through on incidents of meanness, teasing, harassment, and bullying involving members of their school communities. Each and every school community member, (student, faculty, staff, administrator and family) has the right to learn, work, interact and socialize in physically, emotionally and intellectually safe, respectful and positive school environments.

Schools, therefore, have the responsibility to create, maintain and nurture positive school climates. All school community members share a role and responsibility in creating nurturing environments that foster an increase in positive and meaningful relationships among adults, adults with students and students with their peers. Everyone should be looking to eliminate *meanness.* ***Any*** form of hurtful, unkind, mean-spirited, disrespectful interactions, (verbal, non-verbal or physical), including, but not limited to bullying and harassment, among any and all school community members, student and adult alike, diminishes the quality of the school climate and must not be tolerated. A

negative school climate undermines a successful learning and teaching climate and compromises students' ability to be successful.

Consequently, the Connecticut Association of Schools encourages modifications to this legislation that would require school districts to develop and implement policies and plans that will foster Safe, Positive School Climates. In addition to reporting incidents of bullying, schools and districts should report on their progress in maintaining positive school climates. Furthermore, each local and regional board of education shall direct the assessment of the quality of Safe, Positive School Climates in individual schools and subsequently develop and implement plans of action for school climate improvement.

We support the designation of someone specifically to have responsibility for school climate plans in each school, and would suggest that it be the principal or designee, rather than requiring the person be a school counselor or school psychologist. We further recommend that instead of requiring the creation of separate "safe school environment team" in all schools regardless of what each school already has in place, that it be incorporated into existing school organizational structures such as school improvement or school climate communities. The creation of such a team should be required in schools that having nothing similar in place.

Positive school climate is the ultimate remedy for *meanness*, bullying and harassment, and school communities are charged to focus on creating positive school climates as the means to support physical, emotional and intellectual trust and safety for every school community member. By so doing, the two fundamental goals of public schooling are honored: to protect children and to promote learning.

The Connecticut Association of Schools stands ready to assist the Legislature and the Department of Education in developing language in the legislation that will ensure Safe, Positive School Climates for all Connecticut schools.