

## Addressing Bullying and Harassment in Schools

### Our Values:

Children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) have a right to a safe and supportive environment at school in order to maximize their academic and social learning.

### Why Preventing and Addressing Bullying and Harassment is Important:

- Bullying and harassment can result in serious emotional (short- and long-term) negative consequences for a child. This can include escalating violence as well as severe depression and withdrawal.
- Children can't get the most out of their education, if they don't feel safe at school.

### Background:

- Current statutes (Minnesota Statutes § 121A.0695 and § 121A.03) are not strong enough to prevent ongoing instances of bullying and harassment in our public schools. These two laws simply state a school must have a written policy for bullying and harassment, and they require schools to post the policy and discuss it with students and school staff.
- Children and teens with developmental disabilities, such as ASD, have been found to be bullied twice the level as their classmates without disabilities. [1]
- Children with ASD are at a higher risk due to social skill and communication challenges. [2]
- One study found that adolescents with ASD were four times more likely to be bullied than their peers without disabilities; up to 75% of children with Asperger syndrome were bullied in this same study. [2]
- Technology has provided avenues for "cyber bullying."
  - 42% of kids have been bullied while online
  - 35% of kids haven't been threatened online.
  - 58% of kids admit someone has said something mean or hurtful to them online [3].

### What Legislators Can Do:

- Pass strong anti-bullying and anti-harassment legislation that includes:
  - Clear definitions of bullying, harassment, and intimidation.
  - Clear guidelines on how to address cyber bullying.
  - Training for staff, parents, and students.
  - Formal complaint process at the school district and state level.
  - Data collection and reporting on an annual basis to determine effectiveness and assist schools in making improvements where needed and keep parents informed of bullying prevention efforts.

### References:

- [1] Twyman, Kimberly M.D. et al, "Special Needs Children Left out More, Bullied More," Medical University of South Carolina May 2009.
- [2] Van Roekel, Eeske et al, "Bullying Among Adolescents with Autism Spectrum Disorders: Prevalence and Perception," Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 2010 January; 40(1): 63-73. 2010.
- [3] Based on a study done by i-SAFE, [www.isafe.org](http://www.isafe.org), 2004.