

Rhode Island Champions Safe Schools Through Anti-Bullying Mandate

Problem Overview:

Bullying of a student creates a climate of fear and disrespect that can seriously impair the student's health and negatively affect learning. According to results from the state 2011 Youth Risk Behavior Survey, about 1 in 5 (19.1%) Rhode Island high school students report being bullied on school property; 15% report cyber-bullying (including e-mail, chat rooms, instant messaging, Web sites, or texting). In addition, compared to their non-bullied peers, high school students who were bullied —

- Had significantly higher health risks related to violence and injury; mental health; tobacco, alcohol, and other drug use; sex; and weight.
- Were more likely to be female; white, non-minority; or lesbian, gay, or bisexual.

Youth suicides related to bullying in school have raised awareness at local, state, and national levels about the critical need for increased education, stronger policies, and consistent action to bolster anti-bullying efforts.



Program/Activity Description:

Three key RI agencies and organizations—Youth Pride, Inc., the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE)/RIDE Board of Regents, and the RI Senate Commission on Cyber-bullying—united their efforts to make schools safer places for all youth in their state.

- In November 2010 the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE), with buy-in from its Board of Regents and legislators, held a statewide lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender/questioning (LGBTQ) anti-bullying forum. Through collaboration with a local NBC News affiliate, the event received extensive media coverage. More than 250 DVD copies of the forum, which included personal “Voices from the Field” videos from students and teachers, were disseminated to all school districts and charter schools in the state.
- Through their joint, intensive planning efforts for the forum, the key leaders created additional momentum in December 2010 to support anti-bullying efforts—resulting in the RIDE Board of Regents’ strengthening anti-discrimination language and revising its school anti-bullying policy to include gender identity/expression.
- Further building on this movement to bolster anti-bullying policies in the state, RIDE worked with the RI Senate Commission on Cyber-bullying to help develop key legislation: the Safe Schools Act, which was passed in July 2011.

Program/Activity Results:

The Safe Schools Act directed RIDE to establish a unified statewide policy that includes

- prohibitions against bullying, cyber-bullying, and retaliation;
- procedures for students, staff, parents, guardians, and others to report bullying;
- procedures for responding to, and investigating reports of, bullying; and
- a range of disciplinary actions that may be taken against a perpetrator of bullying.

As a result of the Safe Schools Act, all RI school districts, charter schools, career and technical schools, approved private day or residential schools, and collaborative schools were required to adopt the Statewide Bullying Policy by June 2012.

To help school staff implement the state policy, RIDE’s Coordinated School Health Web site, **thrive**—sponsored by RIDE in partnership with the RI Department of Health, with funding provided by the CDC’s Division of Adolescent and School Health—provides schools with tools and resources, such as the Guide to Preventing Bullying, Teen Dating Violence and Sexual Violence (updated June 2012). Rhode Island’s cumulative achievements, accomplished through collective, but singularly focused efforts, set it apart as a standard-bearer in the national call to action against bullying—especially LGBTQ bullying.