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Governor
Deval Patrick

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GOVERNOR PATRICK SIGNS LANDMARK ANTI-BULLYING LEGISLATION

Comprehensive bill strengthens efforts to keep Massachusetts students, schools safe

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BOSTON - Monday, May 3, 2010 - Governor Deval Patrick today signed anti-bullying legislation he strongly advocated for to strengthen efforts in schools to keep Massachusetts students safe. Passed by the Legislature last week, the comprehensive measure employs new strategies for adults, new supports for students and better communications among state agencies to prevent, report and effectively address issues related to bullying.

"As Governor and as a parent, I feel very strongly that no child should feel threatened or unsafe in our schools," said Governor Patrick. "Today, with this new law, we are giving our teachers, parents and kids the tools and protections they need so that every

student has a chance to reach their full potential. I am proud to sign this bill and thank the Legislature for delivering on this critical priority."

"Students should have the ability to arrive at school ready to learn without distractions that prevent them from studying and participating in class," said Lieutenant Governor Timothy Murray. "It is encouraging to know that through this new law the Governor signed today, my two daughters and all children in the Commonwealth will be further protected in our schools as well as in the community and online."

The Governor signed the bill at a State House ceremony attended by members of the Governor's Youth Council, legislative and education leaders and advocates from the fields of education, public safety, health and human services and law enforcement. Specifically, the new law increases efforts to educate students about bullying including regulations on student handbooks and classroom instruction; institutes new rules and expectations for reporting incidents of bullying; provides new opportunities for training for all adults in schools on how to identify, prevent and manage incidents of bullying; and enhances efforts across state and local education, health and law enforcement agencies to build more collaboration to ensure the new efforts are effective.

"For our children to thrive, it is imperative that we provide them with a safe and secure learning environment," said Senate President Therese Murray. "Our goal with this legislation is to aid our schools in providing that environment, and give both students and parents peace of mind."

"This law will protect our children from bullying both during the school day and after school hours," said House Speaker Robert A. DeLeo. "No child need know the terror of a bully."

"This bill represents our strong belief that every school in the Commonwealth must be a place where children can feel safe and the threat of abuse, harassment, and bullying is not tolerated. This problem is not new, but in recent years the intensity of bullying and technological advances has heightened the problem to the point where it can affect every aspect of a child's life. This bill gives school administrators, parents and students the tools and skills they need to ensure a safe learning environment in and out of our schools," said Senator Robert O'Leary, Senate Chair of the Joint Committee on Education.

"Having spent many hours drafting this legislation, I am pleased it is now law, even as I decry the kinds of bullying behavior that makes it necessary. It is now up to parents and school leaders to ensure that the homes in which children are raised and the schools in which they are educated reinforce the message that bullying is wholly unacceptable," said Representative Marty Walz, House Chair of the Joint Committee on Education.

"Over the past few months, I've heard so many heartbreaking stories from constituents - both parents and children - who have strong concerns about bullying in our schools. This bill is a strong step towards ensuring that every child, in every school in the Commonwealth, feels safe coming to school, and that our schools have the tools they need to create a safe school climate and put a stop to bullying," said Senator Jamie Eldridge.

"Students and parents have a right to expect that schools will be a safe place, and this legislation provides a strong framework to address bullying when it occurs and to prevent bullying in every school across the Commonwealth. In fact, the mandated reporting requirements, anti-bullying curricula at all grade levels, and cyber-bullying components make this the most comprehensive and one of the strictest bills in the nation," said Representative John Scibak.

The law includes new reporting requirements for all school staff to fully and swiftly detail any instance of bullying or retaliation to the appropriate school official. Additionally, the measure directs the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) to establish statewide academic standards that include instruction in bullying prevention and requires schools statewide to provide age-appropriate instruction on bullying prevention.

Both public and private schools are now required to develop detailed bullying prevention, intervention and notification plans and to publish those plans in student handbooks. There is also a requirement that each school district will begin to provide targeted professional development to build the skills of all staff members in schools (including teachers, administrators, custodians, athletic coaches, bus drivers and others) to prevent, identify and respond appropriately to bullying incidents. ESE must provide school districts with a no-cost method for fulfilling this requirement.

Finally, the law extends beyond the classroom to include incidents that occur in the community and online bringing a new focus on so-called cyber-bullying and extending rules and penalties to apply to electronic and other communications.

In addition to the new rules, supports, opportunities and expectations established by the law, there is also a provision designating the fourth Wednesday in January as "No Name Calling Day" to increase public awareness of the devastating effects of verbal bullying, to encourage students to use positive dialogue and pledge not to use hurtful names on this designated day, and to promote tolerance and respect for differences across the Commonwealth.

"Now that the comprehensive anti-bullying legislation is law, it is imperative that we work together to bring all the stakeholders - parents, teachers, administration, legislators and especially students - to the table so that we will eliminate bullying from every corner of the Commonwealth," said Jose Rodrigues, Treasurer of Governor's Statewide Youth Council.

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