



# **BULLYING AND HARASSMENT COMPLIANCE REPORT**

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## Introduction

The Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE) agrees with the General Assembly that “a safe and civil environment is necessary for students to learn and achieve high academic standards.”<sup>1</sup> The TDOE recognizes the negative effects that bullying and harassment have on students, their educational achievement, and their overall growth. Bullying and harassment have no part in our schools, and the TDOE is dedicated to responsibly and effectively addressing bullying and harassment in Tennessee public schools.

Based on the information available to the TDOE, each local education agency (LEA)<sup>2</sup> in Tennessee satisfied the requirements of the state bullying and harassment laws (TCA §49-6-4501 through §49-6-4506) and submitted bullying compliance information to the TDOE on its compliance report form.<sup>3</sup> The bullying compliance information for each LEA is included in the Appendix.

## Total Number of Bullying Cases Reported Statewide

According to the data submitted to the department, 9,172 cases of bullying were reported to LEAs during the 2015-16 school year. Approximately 59% of those cases – 5,414 – were confirmed as bullying after an investigation.

| 2015-16 Tennessee Bullying Cases                                   |       |              |
|--|-------|--------------|
| Total number of bullying cases reported in the 2015-16 school year | 9,172 |              |
| Total number of cases indicating bullying occurred                 | 5,414 | 59%          |
| Total number of cases involving race, color, or national origin    | 257   | 2.8%         |
| Total number of cases involving sex or gender-based discrimination | 750   | 8.2%         |
| Total number of cases involving disability                         | 121   | 1.3%         |
| Total number of cases involving the use of electronic technology   | 747   | 8.1%         |
| Total number of cases still pending                                | 22    | Less than 1% |

## Discussion

While every child must learn how to interact with others and deal with difficult situations, they do not have to tolerate being bullied or harassed. Bullying is a specific type of

<sup>1</sup> Tennessee Code Annotated (TCA) §49-6-4501.

<sup>2</sup> Reference to LEAs includes all Tennessee school districts and the state special schools (Alvin C. York Agricultural Institute, Tennessee School for the Blind, Tennessee School for the Deaf, and West Tennessee School for the Deaf)

<sup>3</sup> Prior to the passage of the state bullying laws, the TDOE annually collected civil rights compliance information from LEAs, in order to comply with federal civil rights laws. To facilitate the submission of all compliance information, the TDOE merged the compliance information into one document – the Civil Rights and Bullying Compliance Report. LEA specific information is included as an appendix to this document.

harassment. In its true form, bullying is peer abuse. Although several definitions of bullying exist, three critical elements generally are:

- Aggressive behavior;
- A pattern of behavior repeated over time; and
- An (actual or perceived) imbalance of power or strength.

Addressing bullying is important to all students involved. Bullying can threaten students' physical and emotional safety at school and can negatively impact their ability to learn. Students who avoid school because of bullying will suffer academically as well as socially.

As noted in prior years, many students, parents, teachers, and administrators struggle with distinguishing peer conflict from bullying and other types of peer abuse. While the total number of bullying cases has decreased another 4.5% since the 2014-15 school year, the gap between reported cases and confirmed cases of bullying (also seen in individual LEAs) has increased. For the 2013-14 school year, there was a difference of 3,201 between cases of reported bullying versus cases where bullying was actually found. For the 2014-15 school year, that number rose to 3,533 and for the 2015-2016 school year that number climbed to 3,758. This proves that the term "bullying" is still very much a hot issue in education. This could be contributed to people using the term "bully" in one way or another – yet completely out of context. Again, this reveals the need for additional community education on what bullying is and is not. Continued education and training will aid

students, staff, administrators, and community members to accurately identify behavior as bullying, harassment, intimidation, or cyber-bullying versus simple peer-to-peer conflict, or childish behavior.

**TDOE Bullying and Civil Rights Trainings**

2015-16 School Year

- August 18, 2015 – Jackson
- August 25, 2015 – Morristown
- September 1, 2015 – Nashville
- April 7, 2016 – Knoxville
- April 11, 2016 – Nashville
- April 12, 2016 – Jackson

2016-17 School Year

- September 19, 2016 – Nashville
- September 21, 2016 – Morristown
- September 23, 2016 – Jackson

To help educate school staff and administrators about bullying, harassment, intimidation, cyber-bullying, and applicable state and federal laws, the TDOE's Office of Safe and Supportive Schools organizes biannual "Bullying Policy to Practice" trainings. The TDOE's

Office of Civil Rights partnered with Rodger Dinwiddie<sup>4</sup> of STARS in Nashville, to provide these trainings. The Office of Safe and Supportive schools held six trainings during the 2015-16 school year, has already held three thus far this school year, and intends to host three additional trainings later in the spring.

While this year again marks another decrease in both the overall number of bullying cases reported and actual bullying cases confirmed, there was a slight increase in the percentage of cases that involved sex or gender based discrimination. The percentage of sex or gender based cases rose from 7% for the 2014-15 school year to 8.2% for the 2015-16 school year. We also saw a slight increase in the percentage of cases involving cyberbullying, even though the total number of overall cyber-bullying cases decreased. The percentage of cyber-bullying cases rose from 7.8% in 2014-2015 school year to 8.1% in the 2015-2016 school year. Cyber-bullying is bullying that undertaken through the use of electronic devices.<sup>5</sup> “Electronic devices’ include, but are not limited to, telephones, cellular phones or other wireless telecommunication devices, personal digital assistants (PDAs), computers, electronic mail, instant messaging, text messaging, and web sites[.]”<sup>6</sup>

The use of technology is necessary in today’s educational environments. The increase of social media and technology has changed the way educators teach, how students learn, and the way teachers and students communicate. Therefore, schools and LEAS must balance the inclusion of technology in schools and maintaining a safe environment for students to use technology. As found by our General Assembly, “[t]he use of telephones, cellular phones or other wireless telecommunication devices, personal digital assistants (PDAs), computers, electronic mail, instant messaging, text messaging, and web sites by students in a manner that is safe and secure is essential to a safe and civil learning environment and is necessary for students to successfully use technology.” Accordingly, schools, LEAs, and parents must be vigilant and explore safe ways for students to use technology. Attention must be paid to what children are doing online, rules must be set regarding the use of technology, and school policies regarding the use of technology must be effectively communicated to students and parents.

As always, the TDOE remains committed to assisting LEAS in their implementation of initiatives and polices to prevent and address bullying, harassment, intimidation, and cyber-

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<sup>4</sup> Mr. Rodger Dinwiddie is a Certified National Lead Trainer for the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program, a Blueprint Violence Prevention program recognized by the U.S. Department of Justice’s Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. Mr. Dinwiddie is also the long-time Chief Executive Officer of STARS Nashville. “STARS exists to serve schools and communities by providing prevention, intervention, and treatment services addressing bullying, substance abuse, violence, and social and emotional barriers to success.” For more information, visit <http://starsnashville.org>.

<sup>5</sup> Tenn. Code Ann. §49-6-4502(a)(1)

<sup>6</sup> Tenn. Code Ann. §49-6-4502(a)(2)

bullying. For the third year in a row, the number of bullying, harassment, intimidation, and cyber-bullying cases have decreased thanks to the efforts of schools, LEAs, community partners, and TDOE employees. The TDOE anticipates and remains hopeful that bullying, harassment, intimidation, and cyber-bullying cases will continue to decline in the years ahead. The TDOE trusts that the state anti-bullying and harassment laws, this report, and the attached compliance information will continue to help eliminate bullying, harassment, intimidation, and cyber-bullying in Tennessee public schools. The TDOE renews its commitment to improving in this area, in addition to many others, during the upcoming school years.