

RESEARCH SUMMARY

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Understanding the Role of State Departments of Education

Each state within the U.S. has different [bullying prevention laws and policies](#). In order to comply with these policies and, more importantly, create healthy school climates that promote positive relationships, it is important that educators, parents, students, and policymakers work together. Preventing bullying should be the focus of state efforts – using compelling evidence about what works to drive bullying prevention and intervention efforts.

Preventing Bullying through Science, Policy and Practice: Report Recommendations

There are many promising approaches to reducing bullying. The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine report, [Preventing Bullying through Science, Policy, and Practice](#), highlights the most up to date evidence on bullying prevention. The report recommends that State Departments of Education:

- Use a common definition of bullying, and to include cyberbullying in the definition;
- Collect local data on the prevalence of all forms of bullying, including electronic, verbal, relational, physical, and bias-based bullying;
- Lead the effort in collecting these data and sharing data at district, state, and federal levels; and
- Work with researchers to assess anti-bullying laws and the impact on other forms of youth violence such as harassment, fighting, dating violence, and carrying weapons.



State enforcement of anti-bullying laws and policies will help create positive school climates. Best practices in bullying prevention and intervention indicates that teachers, administrators, parents, and students should all receive training in bullying prevention and in their state laws and policies. Accordingly, individual state laws and policies inform and drive the development of district and school-level laws and policies.

Using Laws and Policies Effectively to Prevent Bullying

Anti-bullying laws and policies have a positive effect on reducing bullying and protecting students. It is essential for school administrators, teachers, parents, and students to be aware of anti-bullying policies, including what applies and what does not.

There are some important things to keep in mind when implementing anti-bullying policies:

- School attorneys and school boards should work together to communicate the scope and function of anti-bullying laws and policies.
- State Departments of Education should lead their states bullying prevention initiatives.
- Zero tolerance policies (i.e., suspension and expulsion) are not successful at reducing bullying and, in fact, may have negative consequences.
- State Departments of Education should research and provide evidence-based alternative intervention strategies for bullying.
- One promising approach is the use of [restorative justice](#), where those who bully make amends for their behavior and are taught more prosocial (actions that promote inclusion) ways of interacting.

Furthermore, [Preventing Bullying through Science, Policy, and Practice](#) recommends that the U.S. Department of Education's Office on Civil Rights along with each state's Attorney General's office, and state Departments of Education work together with researchers to collect data on the development, efficacy, and implementation of anti-bullying laws and policies. The report also recommends convening researchers, legislative members, educators, and community members to review anti-bullying laws and policies and to research their impact. Finally, the report recommends providing state-level findings to state legislatures and the U.S. Congress, which will advance knowledge of evidence-based bullying prevention and intervention strategies.

Testing New and Innovative Prevention Strategies

To date, there is no coordinated effort across state Departments of Education to prevent, identify, and use evidence-based practices to respond to bullying. Therefore, state commissioners of education are encouraged to prioritize testing new and innovative bullying prevention strategies. A comprehensive compilation of resources and studies on bullying prevention can be found at [StopBullying.gov](#) and the Strengthen the Evidence Base for Maternal and Child Health Evidence Review on bullying conducted by the Women's and Children's Health Policy Center at Johns Hopkins University. Prioritization of bullying prevention and intervention and coordinated efforts across researchers, policymakers, and state Departments of Education are necessary to effectively prevent, intervene in, and ultimately reduce bullying behaviors.



Source and Research Limitations

The information discussed in this fact sheet is based on the comprehensive review of bullying research presented in the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine's report entitled [Preventing Bullying Through Science, Policy, and Practice](#).

This report includes the most up to date research on bullying, but it is important to note that this research has several important limitations. Most of the research is cross-sectional, which means it took place at one point in time. This type of research shows us what things are related to each other at that time, but cannot tell us which thing came first or if one of those things caused the other to occur.

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