



In Iowa's Interest: Exploring Bullying Prevention Policies

by Senator Tom Harkin

All children deserve equitable access to a free, public education. Yet, each day, countless students across the country and right here in Iowa are denied that access because they are bullied. In some cases, the bullying does not end after they leave school, but instead, continues via social media or on the web.

This is a growing problem that we must not ignore.

Studies have shown that students are often bullied because they seem 'different' than their peers. Some 85 percent of LGBT students and 85 percent of students with disabilities (including 94 percent of children with Asperger's Syndrome) are bullied, compared to approximately 20 percent of all students.

Victims of bullying have also demonstrated impairment on mental health, concentration, and academic outcomes. Of course, far too many cases end in tragedy. Northwest Iowa has been particularly hard-hit: Primghar high school student Kenneth Weishuhn took his own life after terrible bullying on social networks and at school and Alex Libby, who was featured in the movie *Bully*, was forced to move after bullying became unbearable.

Communities have got to come together if we want to put an end to bullying. That starts with a conversation about what is going on in our schools and how policies on all levels can protect kids. No one – certainly not our children – should face bullying and harassment simply for being who they are.

One way to do this is by exploring bullying prevention policies at the local, state, and federal level. That is the goal of a hearing I will convene of the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee, which I chair, in Des Moines on Friday, June 8th. The hearing will bring together local students and their teachers as well as federal officials who will discuss this problem more broadly. During the hearing I will also discuss legislation I have cosponsored that will help protect children so they are able to attend school and learn, free from bullying and harassment. The event is open to the public and I encourage area residents to attend.

Together, we can start a conversation; shine the light on this problem, and change the dynamic in schools.

For more information about my efforts to combat bullying in schools, please visit my website at harkin.senate.gov, visit my Facebook or Twitter pages, or call any of my offices in Washington, D.C. or across Iowa.