

Branstad, Reynolds anti-bullying conference results in new legislation to combat bullying

Written by Tim Albrecht
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(DES MOINES) – Gov. Terry E. Branstad’s and Lt. Gov. Kim Reynolds’ anti-bullying conference in Des Moines last November has resulted in new legislation to combat the bullying of Iowa students.

More than 1,200 Iowans attended the Nov. 27, 2012, Governor’s Bullying Prevention Summit, at Hy-Vee Hall in Des Moines to discuss how to better address bullying. The proposed bill helps schools better protect students from bullying by addressing the growing problem of cyber-bullying while respecting free-speech rights.

The legislation, [House Study Bill 196](#), was produced by the School Administrators of Iowa, which spearheaded the effort to update Iowa Code, and did so in consultation with the Iowa Department of Education. The legislation will be introduced by Rep. Ron Jorgensen, R-Sioux City, who chairs the House Education Committee.

Changes proposed to existing statute include the following:

1. Giving schools more authority to address cyber-bullying by (a) adding “social networking” to the definition of electronic communications and (b) stating that nothing stops a school from addressing bullying or harassment that occurs away from school or a school function, while providing additional protection to school employees who decide not to act on alleged bullying under those circumstances.

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2. Expanding the definition of traits or characteristics by adding “other distinguishing characteristic.”

3. Separating the definition of harassment and bullying. Harassment means conduct or an act based on an actual or perceived trait or characteristic of the student. Bullying is conduct or an act for “any reason other than any actual or perceived trait or characteristic of the student.” Sometimes kids are bullied for reasons that are not properly categorized as a trait or characteristic. Examples include relationship status, such as a boy threatening a classmate dating his former girlfriend, or a group of girls shunning a girl they’ve decided to pick on.

4. Requiring online posting of anti-bullying policies and complaint forms.

5. Protecting students’ First Amendment rights by stating that nothing in the legislation shall be construed to restrain or discipline speech that expresses political, religious or other protected categories of speech, which address legitimate matters of public concern.

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