



# Northwest Professional Educators

Report to the House Education Committee  
Substitute HB 1444, The "Bully Bill"  
January 26, 2002

Honorable Chairman Quall, Rep. Talcott, and House Education Committee Members:

Northwest Professional Educators is a nonprofit, non-partisan professional educators' organization focused on what is best for the students of Washington State and the profession of education. We hold bullying, harassment, and intimidation to be harmful to student welfare and believe we must provide as safe and healthy a learning environment as possible.

**After surveying our membership, however, Northwest Professional Educators is taking the position to oppose SHB 1444. We do not believe that this bill will minimize the targeted behaviors, and may, in fact, institute additional problems.**

**Ninety percent of our respondents indicated that current laws and policies are adequate for handling the problem of bullying *if enforced*, without the additional law, regulations, committees and policies mandated by the bill. Seven percent support the bill, and three percent believe something else is needed.**

Our members made a number of comments and suggestions to address the bill and the problem of bullying. These comments, while not necessarily reflecting the position or beliefs of NWPE staff or general membership, do reflect *real educators' concerns* regarding the bill. Comments tended to fall into three primary areas of concern:

- **The law is not needed and will not be effective.**

This law is not needed as a broad range of laws, policies, and strategies dealing with harassment and bullying are already available. Currently, school staff members respond to harassment and bullying with a wide range of effective consequences including in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, and expulsion. State laws are already in place to cover those instances in which bullying becomes criminal behavior. Assault charges can be filed with local police. The simple fact that the bill references RCW 9A.36.080(3) shows that the law already addresses these problems. Though well-intentioned, this government attempt to "do something" about bullying is wasteful and unnecessary. The bill imposes a mandatory, uniform way of dealing with students that contradicts the Committee's stated trust in educators' intentions and abilities to facilitate civil and respectful learning environments (as well as the intent of HB 2577 supporting *local* community values).

- **This is a politically loaded bill that threatens the free speech rights of students and educators due to "subjective perceptions."**

The bill is perceived as a back handed way to promote a political agenda for sexual minorities. Social engineering, especially the politically correct kind, should be left out of the school atmosphere. The right of families to teach social issues, as acknowledged in HB 2577, should far exceed any special interest group's rights or even the "state" to indoctrinate their views. Legislators should not mandate that schools give special rights or limit the free speech of others. This is not the purpose of education.

- **The bill will siphon staff time and financial resources from teaching responsibilities further frustrating attempts to achieve high academic standards.**

There are already too many demands placed on educators who are sometimes asked to be daycare providers, parents in some cases, WASL test administrators, and virtually everything else on top of "teacher." Adding policeman, judge, and jury to the list handicaps teachers from fulfilling their primary responsibility -- teaching. Teachers become demoralized and students become frustrated as they are crushed by the weight of the system's demands and distractions from the school's primary purpose, namely, education.

Some members of Northwest Professional Educators gave strategies that they thought would be more effective than this bill:

- Each school district should have the freedom to adopt its own anti-harassment/bullying policy with strict enforcement as many already have. A part of the "policy" should include a "retribution" clause, where retaliation for "reporting" is not tolerated (essentially instituting a "no contact order" at school). This has been *very* effective in numerous schools as long as students report bullying and harassment.
- Perhaps schools should survey students from time to time to see if anyone is being physically intimidated.
- Schools should dedicate the funds for a full time administrator who works solely with discipline issues.
- A more proactive and effective way to deal with the problem of bullying and harassment, without the concomitant risks posed by SHB 1444, would be the passage of the bipartisan HB 2577 which respects educators' and local communities' desire to provide the "foundation of character" upon which "academic success rests." HB 2577 respects that "parents are the first and primary moral educators of children" and that schools have a role in "reinforcing the character traits and values deemed important by parents and the local community."

Northwest Professional Educators, a new but growing organization, is a member of the Coalition of Independent Education Associations (CIEA). CIEA is comprised of nonunion independent professional associations in seventeen states representing 250,000 classroom teachers. A number of those states have surveyed their members about this issue and the overwhelming majority agrees with our position.

Please note that this survey is the only survey of public educators in our state regarding this bill. While other *organizations* in Washington may be supporting the bill, they have *not* surveyed their membership to determine what real, working educators think. We appreciate, therefore, that you will regard the position of Northwest Professional Educators with the utmost consideration.

While it may be unpopular to be against an anti-bullying bill, this does not dissuade us from advocating for what we believe is best for our students and our profession. We believe that strict enforcement of current laws, regulations, and disciplinary actions will decrease bullying, harassment, and intimidation without the potential harms posed by SHB 1444.

Respectfully yours,  
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