

**Ellen Reilly, Davenport Community Schools
Senate Hearing Testimony on Bullying - June 8th, 2012 - Des Moines, IA**

Chairman Harkin, thank you for having me today. It is an honor and a privilege to be able to speak to you about the efforts of Davenport Community Schools to address bullying.

In 2008 as a result of the 2007 Iowa anti bullying legislation, Davenport Community Schools implemented the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program in all 30 of our schools. With over 35 years of research and successful implementation all over the world, Olweus is a whole-school program that has been proven to prevent or reduce bullying throughout the school setting. Dr. Dan Olweus developed the program and is often considered the “pioneer” in bullying research.

There are three main points I wish to address today;

- 1) Dealing with bullying is a complicated process;
- 2) Zero Tolerance is not effective; and,
- 3) To truly address bullying in schools, we must include proper training and ongoing support to teachers, administrators, and others who work with children.

1) Dealing with bullying from the individual all the way up to the system level is a complicated process; the implementation of a structured bullying prevention like Olweus can help address these challenges. The Olweus Anti Bullying Program is designed to improve peer relations and make schools safer, more positive places to learn. The Olweus Bully Prevention Program is not a curriculum. It is a whole-school, systems-change program at four different levels: schoolwide, classroom, individual, and community.

The goals of Olweus are to:

- reduce existing bullying problems among student
- prevent the development of new bullying problems
- achieve better peer relations at school

At the core of Olweus are four anti bullying rules:

- 1) We will not bully others.
- 2) We will help others who are being bullied.
- 3) We will include others who are easily left out.
- 4) When we know someone is being bullied we will tell an adult at home and an adult at school and expect them to do something about it.

Every Davenport Community Schools posts the bullying rules throughout the school and in every classroom. Each school also holds an annual assembly to review the rules and remind everyone of how Davenport Schools deals with bullying. Information goes home to parents, is presented at registration and conferences, and put in newsletters. Students are surveyed on school climate annually and the results are shared with students, staff, and parents. Survey information assists each building to set goals for the following year and improve supervision in areas where students report bullying is more likely to occur. Davenport Schools have seen an increase in the number of adults and students stopping bullying when they see it, an increase in students reporting bullying if it is happening to them or someone they know, and a decrease in the overall incidences of bullying. Davenport has also engaged the community in our bullying prevention efforts by training staff from Big Brothers/Big Sisters, Davenport Police Department, Parks and Rec, our local LGBT Support organization. Davenport also started the Be Bully Smart campaign, a community call to action with a simple message: “See it. Stop it. Report it”. Using

yard signs, posters, banners, and most importantly, a Facebook Page, Be Bully Smart brings awareness to the issue of bullying at a community level, providing resources on bullying and bullying prevention.

2) Zero tolerance is not effective;

Zero tolerance imposes automatic punishment for infractions of a stated rule, with the intention of eliminating undesirable conduct, with little evidence that supports the claimed effectiveness of such policies. It is often interpreted as bringing the maximum punishment for every transgression. The best approach to managing consequences in bullying situations is for someone who is well trained in anti-bullying best practices to address the situation by thoughtfully discussing the incident and issuing appropriate, progressive consequences that fit the circumstance and severity of the bullying. Consequences, especially in bullying situations, should teach, not destroy.

3) To truly address bullying in schools, we must provide proper training and ongoing support to teachers, administrators, and others who work with children. Accurate identification of bullying, proper investigation techniques and appropriate consequences are all critical in addressing bullying.

Not all mean behavior is bullying. Bullying, as identified by Dr. Dan Olweus, is intentional, aggressive behavior that involves an imbalance of power and is most often repeated over time. Bullying is peer abuse. School staff must be trained on how to properly investigate bullying situations. Davenport Schools' goal is to ensure students are safe if they have experienced bullying. This can include parent conferences, safety plans, changes to schedules, one-to-one supervision and other strategies that increase student safety. Additional training and counseling are also options to deal with students who have been bullied and who do the bullying. The reality is bullying will always exist. We can only be vigilant in our efforts to prevent bullying from happening and reduce the negative impact when it does occur.

I would like to say a few words about providing a stronger support system for our lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) youth in our schools today. We are educators. We have a responsibility to educate. As educators we must not fear openly talking about LGBT issues in our middle and high schools. Gay teen in our schools are often subjected to such intense bullying that they are unable to receive an adequate education. These youth leadership organizations have the same goals align with those of Olweus, but with a focus on the LGBT population. Their goals are:

- 1) to create safe environments in schools for students to support each other and learn about homophobia, transphobia, and other oppressions;
- 2) to educate the school community about homophobia, transphobia, gender identity, and other sexual orientation issues, and
- 3) fight discrimination, harassment, and violence in schools

It is my hope that not only in Iowa, but throughout the nation, every middle and high school would have an active, supported Gay Straight Alliance (GSA) in place.

Thank you