



Executive Chair – Introduced

Cyberbullying Position
By Woodruff

Contact: Cody Woodruff, Executive Chair | Carlisle, IA | codywoodruff@hotmail.com

Position Statement:

SIYAC supports legislation pertaining to cyberbullying (HISB 39 and SSB 1044)

Position

It is the position of the State of Iowa Youth Advisory Council that legislation be created that adds the definition of cyberbullying to the current law on bullying and harassment (Iowa Code 280.28), along with enabling schools to train their faculty on how to combat and prevent cyberbullying, and protecting those who come forward to address the problem.

Rationale

The Iowa Department of Education defines bullying as “any electronic, written, verbal, or physical act or conduct toward a student which is based on any actual or perceived trait or characteristic of the student, and which creates an objectively hostile school environment”. As technology evolves, so does bullying. The rise of social media has created a new form of bullying: cyberbullying. In 2007, the Iowa General Assembly took a monumental step forward in protecting students by passing a law pertaining to bullying and harassment in schools. It is time to take another step and protect students from online bullying and harassment.

Cyberbullying is a growing issue across the nation and state, and students are taking their lives because of it. According to a study by Yale University, victims of bullying are two to nine times more likely to consider suicide than those who haven’t been bullied.¹ Roughly 25.8% of students nationwide have reported being cyberbullied, and roughly 16.8% of students in Iowa have reported being electronically bullied in 2011.² Young women are over two times more likely to be bullied online than young men, and over half of LGBT students have experienced cyberbullying.

A University of Northern Iowa study states, “Unfortunately, bullying has not become easier to deal with, but worse, due to the fact that bullying has moved online, it has become more ambiguous and more difficult to deal with. **At this time, there is no mention of cyberbullying specifically in Iowa laws that address bullying.**”³ Additionally, the Congressional Research Center reports that 15 other states have included “cyberbullying” in their harassment and bullying laws, including New Jersey, Arkansas, Maryland, and Massachusetts.

Recommended Action

Due to cyberbullying, students across the country cannot focus on their education and their lives are in danger. According to the Center for Disease Control, “We know that bullying behavior and suicide-related behavior are closely related. This means youth who report any involvement with bullying behavior are more likely to report high levels of suicide-related behavior than youth who do not report any involvement with bullying behavior.” SIYAC strongly encourages that Iowa’s General Assembly passes a piece of legislation that addresses the serious problem of cyberbullying with the full weight of our state laws behind it. Along with adding the definition of “cyberbullying” to the law, the bill should allow schools to address cyberbullying with policies created by the schools, and train teachers on how best to respond. We urge you to support all of these benefits: the definition of electronic harassment is expanded to include social media and other electronic communications, teachers are required to complete approved training to obtain or renew their license, school personnel are required to give prompt notification to parents or guardians of students involved in bullying incidents, and schools are given the authority to address bullying incidents that occurred off of school grounds, such as those in cyberspace, if they affect the school environment.

We hope and urge you to consider this position and pass a piece of legislation that helps combat cyberbullying. This is an issue we’ve worked on for many years, and it’s time that the youth of Iowa are heard.