BULLYING AND HARASSMENT

OREGON ANTI-BULLYING LAW:

Oregon law requires each school district to adopt a policy prohibiting harassment, intimidation, and bullying and prohibiting cyber bullying. (ORS 339.351 – 339.364) Cyber bullying means the use of any electronic communication device to harass, intimidate, or bully. (ORS 339.351)

“Harassment, intimidation, or bullying” means any act that substantially interferes with a student’s educational benefits, opportunities, or performance, that takes place on or immediately adjacent to school grounds, at any school-sponsored activity, on school provided transportation or at any official school bus stop, and that has the effect of:

► Physically harming a student or damaging a student’s property;
► Knowingly placing a student in reasonable fear of physical harm to the student or damage to the student’s property; or
► Creating a hostile educational environment (ORS 339.351(2))

BEST PRACTICES:

► Adopt a strong, no-tolerance policy (OSBA has model policies available);
► Enforce the policy consistently;
► Take immediate action to STOP any bullying/harassment. **Districts cannot and should not ignore any type of bullying or harassment.

Bullying/harassment damages everyone. It can also financially devastate a district.

Recent verdicts of $4 million - $5.25 million in these types of cases. Juries and judges get very angry when school officials ignore or fail to stop this behavior. In one case, the plaintiff’s lawyer specifically emphasized that the jury needed to “teach the teachers.”

Quiz:

Calling a Sikh student a “curryhead”, cutting his hair, physically harassing
Photo-shopping sexually suggestive pictures of a student, posting them at school
Allowing students to hold a “Wangsta” day where white students dressed like rappers (baggy pants, bandanas)
Calling a student “sissy” “Queer”

In response to complaints, school officials responded with:

No action.
“what do you expect if you are gay?”
Placing the complainant into an independent study program away from other students.
District officials told a complaint that he “should be less flamboyant.”
Principal told complainant to “toughen up” and “there really isn’t anything we can do.”
School personnel told complainant “you should try to make people like you.”

* STOP * RED FLAG * DO NOT PASS GO *

Action is required!
What effect does bullying have on students and schools?

Today at school, Rosa saw a boy being bullied. Other kids were in a circle around him, calling him names. Rosa knew this was wrong, but she didn’t know what to do to help this boy. She worried that if she said anything, the other kids would start bullying her. After seeing this boy getting bullied, Rosa doesn’t feel safe at school anymore.

Bullying doesn’t involve only those doing the bullying and those being bullied. Bullying involves and affects the entire school community. The three main groups that are affected by bullying are the students who are bullied, the students who bully, and the witnesses or bystanders who see it happen, like Rosa.

The Impact on Bullied Students

Students who are bullied can develop physical symptoms such as headaches, stomach pains or sleeping problems. They may be afraid to go to school, go to the lavatory, or ride the school bus. They may lose interest in school, have trouble concentrating, or do poorly academically.

Bullied students typically lose confidence in themselves. They may experience depression, low self-esteem, and suicidal thoughts or they may lash out in violent ways—the most serious being school shootings.

The Impact on Students Who Bully

Students who bully do not fare much better. Research shows that these students are more likely to get into frequent fights, steal and vandalize property, drink alcohol and smoke, report poor grades, perceive a negative climate at school, and carry a weapon.

It’s important to note, however, that not all students who bully others have obvious behavior problems or are engaged in rule-breaking activities. Some of them are highly skilled socially and good at ingratiating themselves with their teachers and other adults. For this reason it is often difficult for adults to discover, or even imagine that these students engage in bullying behavior.

The Impact of Bullying on Bystanders

Students who witness bullying may also be affected. They may feel guilty for not helping, or fearful that they will be the next target. Or they may be drawn into the bullying themselves and feel bad about it afterwards. All of this may gradually change the group or classroom attitudes and norms in a harsher, less empathetic direction.

The Impact on the School

When bullying continues and a school does not take action, the entire school climate is affected. The environment can become one of fear and disrespect, hampering the ability to learn. Students may feel insecure and tend not to like school. When students don’t see the adults at school acting to prevent or intervene in bullying situations, they may feel that teachers and other school staff have little control over the students and don’t care what happens to them.

The effects of bullying are so devastating and profound that over the last few years the majority of states have adopted laws against bullying. There have also been civil suits brought against schools and school systems over bullying incidents, some with damages in the millions of dollars.

Bullying is a serious issue that impacts the school experience of all children involved. This is why it must be taken seriously and effective measures to prevent it must be put in place.

Other resources:
www.osba.org (Model Policies)
www.ed.gov/ocr (U.S. Department of Education/Office for Civil Rights)
www.ibpaworld.org (International Bullying Prevention Association)
www.stopbullying.gov
oregonagainstbullys.blogspot.com
www.ode.state.or.us