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IDRA eNews

Texas Legislature Must Address Identity-based Bullying in Texas Schools

One in four students in this country experience bullying related to their race, national origin, religion, disability, gender or sexual orientation. Teachers want to help but feel unequipped and afraid to address identity-based bullying and harassment due to misinformation about Texas' classroom censorship laws that limit discussions of such topics as race and gender in schools.

Today, IDRA is releasing a new issue brief, **Identity-based Bullying in Texas Schools – Policy Recommendations**, that describes how widespread this problem is across the state,

how it increases risk for mental health challenges and exacerbates existing traumas, and steps Texas can take to strengthen policies prohibiting and preventing identity-based bullying.

“While Texas has made significant progress in addressing bullying in schools, schools do not have a clear framework for conducting and documenting bullying investigations,” said Paige Duggins-Clay, J.D., IDRA chief legal analyst. “And TEA does not collect data on bullying targeting students based on their protected status.”



Identity-based Bullying in Texas Schools Policy Recommendations

By Paige Duggins-Clay, J.D., and Makiah Lyons

To develop safe and healthy school environments, schools must be able to respond to bullying and harassment appropriately and take deliberate action to prevent it. This includes incidences where the bullying taking place is based on or related to a student's identity, such as their race, ethnicity, national origin, sex, gender, religion or disability status.

Students across Texas have been increasingly reporting alarming examples of identity-based bullying in schools – fueled in part by misinformation spread as a result of recent efforts to attack and undermine diversity, equity and inclusion efforts in education.

- For example, Black students in Lubbock have been called the “N-word” on a near-daily basis, frequently referred to as “porch monkeys,” forced to listen to other students making “monkey sounds” at them in class and told to “go pick cotton.” Students in one Lubbock middle school were subjected to the sounds of cracking whips as they walked through the halls. Another Black student, out of breath while working out during football practice, was taunted by other students jeering, “He can’t breathe like George Floyd!” (IDRA, 2022)
- In Mission, students sent a 13-year-old Black girl racist comments and photos, including photographing her face onto the image of Emmett. This mutilated body and onto a graphic image of a KKK torch, circulating the content on social media (IDRA, 2022).
- In San Antonio, a mother reported that her son, who is black and has special needs, was

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IDRA's issue brief gives examples of the bullying students are experiencing. In one school, a Jewish student reported repeatedly experiencing bullying about his facial features and "gas chambers" at school, which was so severe that he contemplated suicide and forced him out of the school system.

In another school, Black students have been called the "N-word" on a near-daily basis, frequently referred to as "porch monkeys," forced to listen to other students making "monkey sounds" at them in class and told to "go pick cotton."

Last week, families, advocates and policymakers joined IDRA in a news conference and a legislative hearing to speak for House Bill 4625, which would strengthen Texas laws prohibiting and preventing identity-based bullying and harassment in schools.



"My experience in Texas has been horrific," testified Tracy Kemp, a parent. "Our tax dollars go to fund that school. And my child doesn't want to go there in fear that she would be bullied and harassed."

"It's not fair that I have to go through this," testified high school student, Trinity Hawkins. "It hinders you from trying to learn. I just don't feel safe at my own school."

House Bill 4625 by Rep. Ron Reynolds, chair of the Texas Legislative Black Caucus, and SB 2185, by Sen. José Menéndez, chair of the Texas Senate Hispanic Caucus, will strengthen Texas laws relating to prevention and response to racial and other forms of identity-based bullying by establishing the following provisions.

[See a factsheet on the Texas bills.](#)

[Read IDRA's testimony for HB 4625 by Paige Duggins-Clay, J.D.](#)



Watch the news conference for HB 4625 held by IDRA, Texas Legislative Black Caucus and Senate Hispanic Caucus.



Watch key moments in the HB 4625 hearing featuring advocates, parents and students describing identity-based bullying in their schools.

For more information, please contact Paige Duggins-Clay, J.D., at paige.duggins-clay@idra.org.

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