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For immediate release

Schools Should Prioritize Prevention, Education and Support Over Exclusionary Discipline in Cases of Identity-Based Bullying and Harassment

IDRA Statement by Morgan Craven, J.D., IDRA National Director of Policy, Advocacy and Community Engagement

(Lubbock, Texas • January 13, 2023) For far too long, students in Texas schools have experienced various forms of racial discrimination, and many educators have felt unprepared to respond to school-based bullying, harassment and discrimination.

The Texas Legislature's passage of its classroom censorship law in 2021 did not help. Predictably, the law created fear, confusion and uncertainty around how to talk about race and racism, identity-based harassment and systemic discrimination.



IDRA joined students, families and the Lubbock NAACP in [complaints filed](#) to the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights to challenge racially discriminatory practices in the two west Texas school districts, Lubbock-Cooper ISD and Slaton ISD.

Last week, both districts issued resolutions asserting their commitment to end racism and discrimination. Unfortunately, some statements focused on the use of exclusionary discipline for harassing behaviors instead of research-based strategies to prevent and effectively address such behaviors.

Racial and other forms of identity-based bullying and harassment are unacceptable and should never be tolerated. IDRA urges all school districts to adopt proven policies and practices rather than resort to ineffective exclusionary discipline.

We know that building the schools young people need requires a multi-pronged approach, including eliminating harmful discipline practices. IDRA has worked in partnership with school districts across the U.S. South to take on issues of harassment and discrimination. Research and our experience clearly show that schools must:

- address the underlying causes of bullying behaviors and community cultures that allow bullying to occur;
- foster inclusive and welcoming classrooms that are free of discrimination; and
- invest in research-based school climate programs, community-school partnerships and instructional practices.

Exclusionary discipline and school policing compromise the safety and rights of individual students and create hostile school environments. These practices undermine important efforts to create welcoming and supportive schools. And they wholly ignore the underlying issues that lead to bullying behaviors, including individual student challenges and trauma, school and community cultures, and school leaders who fail to effectively prevent and intervene in these harmful behaviors.

Schools must end their reliance on suspensions, alternative school placements, police and court intervention, and other discipline strategies that research shows are ineffective and harmful. These approaches can negatively impact the academic and social success of all students. And such actions are disproportionately used against Black students, other students of color, young people with disabilities and LGBTQ+ youth.

When schools use discriminatory discipline practices, they add to the challenging school environments that many young people already face. Students across the country sadly share the common experience of being bullied or harassed by their peers – and sometimes by adults – in their schools based on their race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, gender, gender expression or other personal characteristics. And many feel frustrated when their complaints to school leaders are ignored.

As the students and families in the Lubbock-area districts have shared, sometimes identity-based bullying and harassment and schools' inappropriate disciplinary responses are linked.

Exclusionary discipline is not the answer to bullying, harassment or discrimination, whether that discipline is applied against the young person engaging in the bullying or the young



Families whose children have experienced racial harassment and discriminatory school responses announced yesterday an initiative. Parents Against Racism, they are launching to support other families in the Lubbock area and beyond.



IDRA's Chief Legal Analyst, Paige Duggins-Clay, J.D., speaks at the press conference held by NAACP Lubbock. She led research, community support, and strategy in collaboration with co-complainants and legal counsel, Ellwanger Law.

person experiencing the bullying.

While efforts should certainly be taken to ensure the immediate safety of students and adults in schools, relying on harmful exclusionary and punitive tactics as a response to bullying and harassment does not solve the issues that lead to those behaviors.

Nor do these tactics increase school safety, demonstrate effective conflict resolution, or teach anything meaningful to students. Rather they destabilize school communities and may prevent the use of real interventions and supports for students and adults in a school community.

Schools violate the law when they fail to implement meaningful prevention and intervention strategies to stop discriminatory behaviors. State leaders and schools must adopt and follow policies that provide comprehensive training on how to prevent, intervene in, investigate, and respond to identity-based bullying and harassment. IDRA's free technical assistance toolkit, *Interrupting Bullying and Harassment in Schools* (<https://idra.news/webInterrupt>), provides resources to school leaders and policymakers, including research on effective and ineffective strategies.

Other proactive strategies that schools should use to build safe, welcoming and supportive environments for all students include the following.

- **Invest in research-based programs** that foster positive school climates, emphasize relationship-building, and hold students and adults accountable for harmful behaviors in an effective and age-appropriate way. Such programs include [restorative practices](#) and positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS). These programs and frameworks should be implemented with fidelity, monitored with thorough and frequent data collection, and adjusted where appropriate to meet community needs.
- **Implement comprehensive school policies** that include educator training on [culturally-sustaining educational practices](#), which enables teachers to create classroom environments where all aspects of students' identities are affirmed, respected and celebrated. IDRA's [School Resource Hub – We All Belong](#) provides lesson plans for teaching about race, culture and history in responsible, engaging ways.
- **Build deep and authentic connections** between families, community-based advocates and organizations and schools. Strategies like IDRA's [Family Leadership in Education model](#) enable all members of a school community to participate in education a meaningful way.

We know educators and the communities of Lubbock-Cooper and Slaton ISDs care about their students and are dedicated to providing them the best education possible. Educators need support and capacity building to thrive in safe and culturally-sustaining schools that serve all students.

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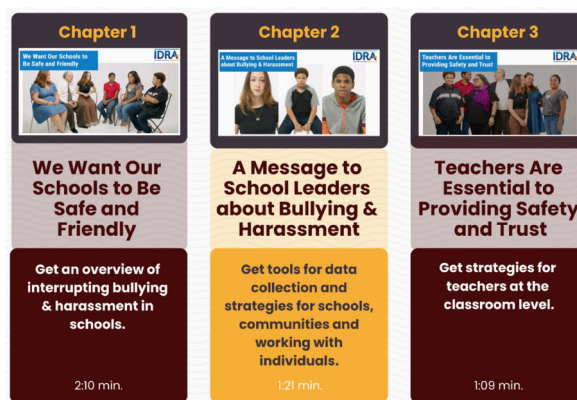
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School & Community Tools

Interrupting Bullying & Harassment in Schools – Online Technical Assistance Toolkit

Bullying and harassment are two forms of relational violence that can hinder the establishment of safe spaces in schools and undermine students' abilities to learn.

The IDRA **Interrupting Bullying & Harassment in Schools** online toolkit is designed to give educators and school leaders tools that they need to prevent bullying and harassment by fostering a positive school climate.



[See Free Toolkit](#)



The **Southern Education Equity Network** is a forum for concerned parents and caregivers, students, community members, and organizational and coalition friends who advocate for public education and student success across the U.S. South.



See our **We All Belong - School Resource Hub** to get over 100 free original and curated **lesson plans** for culturally sustaining instruction and healthy classroom conversations about this nation's past and present. The lessons cover multiple grades and subjects.

Visit our SEEN
Website

Visit School
Resource Hub

Lessons for Teaching About Race & Culture

Get our latest four-part lesson plan series to facilitate thoughtful high school classroom discussions, reflection and empathy building.

Free on IDRA's School Resource Hub <https://idraseen.org/hub>

Our latest four-part lesson plan series facilitates thoughtful high school classroom discussions of real-world issues and solutions.

Visit SEEN Website

IDRA Classnotes Podcast #230

AIM Framework for Teaching Intercultural Skills

Featuring
**Dr. Marlon James &
Dr. Kelly Ferguson**
Equality and Equity Group, LLC

<https://idra.news/Pod230>

Hear how teachers of all grades and content areas can integrate intercultural skill-building into the standards they are focusing on.

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