

New research captures 18 years of US anti-bullying legislation

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Between 1999 and 2017, every state has passed a law addressing bullying, and 90% of those states amended or updated their laws,

according to research that analyzes the most comprehensive legal data on anti-bullying laws to date.

The data were created by researchers from the Center for Public Health Law Research (CPHLR) at Temple University Beasley School of Law using [policy](#) surveillance. An [analysis](#) released in *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse* examines those data.

The data were collected as part of a larger project led by Marizen Ramirez, Ph.D., Professor of Environmental & Occupational Health and Associate Dean for Diversity, Equity & Inclusion at University of California, Irvine, and Mark Hatzenbuehler, Ph.D., Professor of Psychology at Harvard University, captures 122 specific anti-bullying policy areas.

"Bullying is the most common form of violence among youth, and cyberbullying—a relatively new form of bullying that occurs in cyberspace—has been increasing in recent years," said Ramirez.

"Policies play a role in prevention, and this dataset, which captures 18 years of anti-bullying legislation, provides insight into what is covered under state anti-bullying laws. By tracking policy changes and improvements over time, we can ultimately determine what works and doesn't work in reducing bullying and its adverse effects on children. This type of information is exactly what schools and state departments of education need."

While all states now have anti-bullying laws, it took 15.5 years from the time the first state (Georgia) passed its anti-bullying law to total coverage in all 50 states and the District of Columbia (Kentucky was the last in 2014). Thirty-eight states passed their anti-bullying law between 1999 and 2009, and 12 states passed their laws in 2009 or later.

The data offer a more holistic picture of the landscape of legal efforts to prevent bullying and support those who have been bullied. As of 2017, there was considerable variation in the law:

- More than half of all states (30 states) did not enumerate the classes protected by the law (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender identity, weight, etc.), as of 2017.
- Among those states that do enumerate protected classes, gender identity was first included in 2002. Sexual orientation was first included as a protected class in New Jersey and Washington in 2002. By 2017, [gender identity](#) was included as a protected class in 16 states, and [sexual orientation](#) in 21 states.
- Cyberbullying was first included in legislation in 2005 in Colorado. By 2017, all but three states—Alaska, Kentucky and Wisconsin—included cyberbullying in their anti-bullying legislation.
- Twenty-eight states and the District of Columbia included policy training in their laws as of 2017, but only two of those states, Nevada and New Jersey, include a funding provision explicitly for policy training. Only 12 states as of 2017 had a funding provision at all that would financially support policy training and [prevention programs](#).

"Policies offer a blueprint for prevention strategies in schools, and our dataset can be used for future policy evaluation studies that would inform schools on what strategies are most effective in preventing bullying behaviors," the authors write in the analysis.

The data capture the landscape pre-COVID, and [current research](#) (as of 2021) is showing that the disruption of the pandemic is possibly related to a decline in face-to-face bullying. These data provide the blueprint for further tracking of these laws to fully understand the impacts of the pandemic on bullying rates.

"The extensive longitudinal research shows just how important policy can be as a lever for prevention," said Amy Cook, Senior Law and Policy Analyst at CPHLR. "Using policy surveillance to track these laws across such a long time period allowed us to see just how many policies were introduced over time. And proves why this research must be continued to see how more factors like advanced technology and internet culture continues to impact bullying in a post-COVID school environment."

More information: Marizen R. Ramirez et al, Building A Comprehensive, Longitudinal Dataset to Advance Research on the Efficacy of State-Level Anti-bullying Legislation: 1999 to 2017, *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse* (2023). [DOI: 10.1177/15248380231219256](https://doi.org/10.1177/15248380231219256)

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