



**House Public Education Committee
HB 224: Bullying in Public Schools
March 1, 2011**

Texans Care for Children is a statewide nonpartisan, nonprofit advocacy organization dedicated exclusively to the children of Texas. We look to our broad base of community-based experts—our partners and 220 members throughout the state who together represent thousands of Texas children—to inform our work and help us in developing our legislative agenda. We also co-convene various stakeholder groups which bring together a wide range of organizations, families, and advocates around our areas of focus, which are: family economic security; infant, child and maternal health; children's mental health; child welfare; and juvenile justice and at-risk youth.

Texans Care supports bullying prevention and intervention solutions that work to keep all students safe and able to succeed in school. Best practices in bullying prevention and intervention include strategies that focus on a school's social climate, establish and enforce school rules and policies related to bullying, make explicit the expectations for student behavior, intervene consistently and appropriately in bullying situations, provide staff training, and coordinate prevention activities.ⁱ

Texans Care strongly supports several of the provisions in HB 224 as filed, including:

- Required annual training in effective bullying prevention and intervention for all administrators, teachers and staff.
- Training for students and parents on preventing, identifying, responding to and reporting on bullying incidents.
- Development of school policies to provide appropriate assistance to both victims of bullying and students who engage in bullying behavior.
- Annual district reporting requirements to the Texas Education Agency on the number, rate and types of incidents of bullying.

We are concerned about HB 224's provision to allow school boards to remove a student who engages in bullying behavior from a classroom or campus, believing this will lead to students being pushed out of their natural school environment instead of receiving appropriate interventions to prevent further bullying behavior from occurring or becoming worse. Removing a student will not solve the problem; it just transfers it to a new location. Students who were bullies are four times as likely to engage in criminal behavior at the age of 24 years, with 60% of former bullies having at least one conviction and 35% to 40% having three or more convictions.ⁱⁱ An accountability mechanism is needed to ensure school districts comply with their bullying policies and that before a student's removal from a classroom or campus, a graduated continuum of effective interventions to help students change inappropriate behaviors have been employed.

A school-wide positive behavioral interventions and supports (SW-PBIS) approach would assist schools in identifying and implementing effective interventions that help students change aggressive behavior. SW-PBIS provides a framework for the use of research-informed instructional principles and

practices to teach and reinforce behavioral expectations using a three-tiered model. This framework provides a natural pathway for schools to provide more intensive or targeted interventions to students who do not respond to primary prevention strategies. The implementation of SW-PBIS would better enable schools to effectively respond to bullying incidents, helping the student change problem behavior instead of pushing the student out of the class or campus.

Endorsed by the U.S. Department of Education and supported by national education and behavioral experts, SW-PBIS stands to minimize problem behavior for all children, including bullying, and to assist schools in achieving academic gains. SW-PBIS has been shown to:

- Decrease in the number of suspensions, expulsions and out of school placements due to behavior problems
- Increase student achievement and appropriate behavior
- Increase sense of safety for students, teachers, and parents
- Foster a school environment that is safer and more conducive to learning
- Reduce dropout rates and increase graduation rates

HB 1340 by Representative Walle would encourage and assist school districts in implementing SW-PBIS by developing a state plan that identifies and aligns state policies and existing resources to support local level implementation of SW-PBIS. The bill would not require schools to implement SW-PBIS. However, schools that choose to use this recommended approach would benefit from having a state plan to serve as a framework for schools to adopt, implement and sustain a continuum of research-based interventions to achieve positive behavioral and academic outcomes for all students.

Thank you for your time and commitment. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me or the staff of Texans Care for Children at 512.473.2274.

Respectfully,

Josette Saxton
Policy Associate
Texans Care for Children
jsaxton@txchildren.org

ⁱ U.S. Dept. of Health Resources and Services Administration, U.S. Dept. of Education. *Best Practices in Bullying Prevention and Intervention*. http://www.stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov/HHS_PSA/pdfs/SBN_Tip_23.pdf

ⁱⁱ Bullying Behaviors Among US Youth Prevalence and Association With Psychosocial Adjustment. *Journal of American Medical Association*. , April 25, 2001—Vol 285, No. 16