SCHOOL CORPORATION REPORTING OF BULLYING INCIDENTS

Survey Results
Introduction
In accordance with HEA 1356 (2018), the Indiana Department of Education (IDOE) conducted a survey of school corporations concerning their obligation to report incidents of bullying under IC 20-34-6-1(8). The survey was open June 1 – August 10, 2018.

IDOE received 155 survey responses. Of those responses, 141 were from school corporations, representing 48.7 percent of the school corporations in the state and 93 percent of all respondents. In addition to the school corporation responses, IDOE received 11 responses from other entities, including eight charter schools, one state school, one turnaround school, and the Department of Correction. Three respondents did not name their school corporation or school name. The language of HB 1356 stated IDOE should survey school corporations specifically, but the results were not filtered by school or corporation type.

Bullying Survey Responses
Figure 1: When asked about situations preventing a school corporation from reporting bullying incidents, nearly three-quarters responded they incurred difficulty reporting behaviors that might not necessarily fall under the bullying label. One in five reported that the legislative definition of bullying is vague. Of those offering “other” reasons, four indicated challenges with parents and community members not having a strong understanding of the definition of bullying, two reported that paperwork was overly burdensome, and one reported that most incidents do not escalate to the level of bullying. Just under half of school corporations reported they felt their reports were accurate.

Figure 1: What situations may prevent a school corporation from accurately reporting bullying incidents to the Department of Education (DOE)?
Figure 2: Corporations also were asked what resources could assist them in more accurately or efficiently reporting bullying incidents to IDOE. Nearly 70 percent indicated that training for parents and students on what constitutes the definition of bullying would be helpful. Just under 40 percent requested additional training resources from IDOE, and just over one-quarter requested additional staff training. “Other” responses included direct resources to schools such as funding and mentoring programs. One respondent mentioned anonymous reporting to the School Resource Officer.

**Figure 2: What resources would assist school corporations to accurately and/or efficiently report bullying incidents to IDOE?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resource</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parent/student training on what constitutes bullying</td>
<td>69.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional training resources from IDOE</td>
<td>39.4%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Additional staff training</td>
<td>25.8%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Improved data reporting processes offered by IDOE</td>
<td>22.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No additional resources are needed</td>
<td>17.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anonymous reporting mechanisms</td>
<td>12.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Finally, respondents were asked what recommendations they have for improving the accuracy and efficiency of reporting bullying incidents. 89 respondents (57 percent) left this question blank, and another 16 indicated that they could not think of anything (some of these respondents indicated that they already felt their reporting was accurate). Of the 50 respondents that provided recommendations, 26 (52 percent of those responding) requested additional training. Training requests ranged from training for parents and students on what constitutes the definition of bullying and how to accurately identify bullying incidents; training for the community and the media on the definition of bullying; training for administrators and staff; and training on data reporting. For example, we received the following comments from respondents, related to training requests and understanding the definition of bullying:

- Though we provide training for staff and students, we often find most of the reports we investigate are unsubstantiated because they are peer conflict.
- The definition of bullying is not understood in the same manner by parents as it is by school officials. Individual, isolated incidents in many cases do not meet the definition of bullying and therefore are not often reported. Parents may feel that this constitutes bullying, when in fact the behavior may not meet the definition.
- Increased parent/student training on what truly constitutes the definition of Bullying. Many do not understand the State's definition or simply are not aware that there is one. Many parents also equate their school experiences with their students which causes many problems. IDOE has done a great job of getting the information to the schools but the public needs to be the next focus.
Just under one quarter of those responding to the question requested more clarity on the legislative definition. In particular, they requested more specific language and less subjectivity in the definition. Comments about clarifying the definition of the term “bullying” included:

- Clear definition of "bullying" incidents as defined by the state legislature or IDOE.
- We have a definition that has been provided. Reporting bullying is not a "black and white" clear cut decision or definition. There are typically multiple factors involved with a report such as this.
- Clearly define when actions meet the bullying threshold.

Five respondents requested improvements to reporting, including exploring automated reporting, ensuring that reporting requirements are consistently implemented, and that paperwork be simplified.

Four respondents (8 percent) made specific recommendations for other school corporations, including creating an anonymous hotline, tracking incidents on a regular basis, emphasizing the importance of reporting bullying, and creating mentoring programs. Finally, three respondents made other recommendations, including requiring more in-depth investigation of incidents; providing more funding, and creating ad hoc incident review at the state level.

In summary, recommendations to improve the accuracy or efficiency of a school corporation’s reporting of bullying incidents fall into the following categories.

- Additional training (parents, students, media, community, staff) – 52 percent
- Clarify definition (more specificity and consistency, less subjectivity) – 24 percent
- Improve reporting (simplify, automate, improve consistency) – 10 percent

**Recommendations – IDOE Next Steps**

Review of the survey results revealed that only 49 percent of respondents reported their school corporation bullying reports were accurate. However, IDOE strives for accuracy in all reporting. To that end, IDOE shares the following goals and considerations.

- **Goal:** Improve the accuracy of bullying events reported on the Discipline Report (DOE-ES).
- **Under Department Consideration:**
  - Review the DOE-ES report format and reporting requirements with local education agencies (LEA) to better identify when and how bullying incidents are reported.

The desire for training on issues surrounding bullying was also evident in the survey responses and comments. IDOE offers the following goals and recommendations.

- **Goal:** Provide training to school corporations to improve the accuracy of bullying reports.
- **Under Department Consideration:**
  - IDOE will identify LEA designees charged with reporting bullying on the DOE-ES report and provide additional training through webinars and guidance documents.
  - Utilize the Indiana School Safety Specialist Academy to provide training on the DOE-ES in a manner they deem appropriate, for example, as a session in the Advanced Training or as a Regional Training opportunity.
• **Goal:** Provide training to school corporations to improve their understanding of what constitutes bullying and what differentiates it from other discipline issues such as peer conflict.

• **Under Department Consideration:**
  
  o IDOE will continue to develop, curate, and disseminate quality resources, webinars and guidance documents to provide all LEA staff with a deeper understanding of what constitutes bullying and what differentiates it from other discipline issues.
  
  o Continue to utilize the Indiana School Safety Specialist Academy to provide training on recognizing bullying behaviors, differentiating bullying from other discipline issues, and resolving bullying incidents in a manner that maintains a safe and secure environment for all students. This training may be offered in the way the School Safety Specialist Academy sees fit, such as Basic, Advanced, or Regional Training, webinar, etc.

• **Goal:** Improve parent and community understanding of bullying incidents.

• **Under Department Consideration:**
  
  o IDOE will continue to develop, curate, and disseminate quality parent/community resources for LEAs to share as needed. These resources will assist LEAs in helping parents and communities gain a deeper understanding of what constitutes bullying and what differentiates it from other discipline issues.
  
  o Encourage school corporations to provide training and resources on bullying through their parent teacher organization or another manner they deem appropriate.

All students deserve a safe and secure environment in which to learn, free of bullying and other behaviors that may impede the educational process. The Indiana Department of Education continues to align services and resources to assist LEAs and best serve their students, staff, and communities.