

Washington State Board of Education: Require schools to allow youth to participate in antibullying policy making

To:

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Eli Ulmer, SBE Eastern WA Student Representative

Mara Childs, SBE Western WA Student Representative

My name is Kajmere Houchins and I am a 14 year old 8th grader at Illahee Middle School in Kent, WA. I am also part of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing program, a 3 time cancer survivor, a Special Education student, community volunteer and activist for social justice.

I am writing you and your colleges regarding my petition on Change.org with the hope that you will push through requirements for all Washington public school to allow students to be an active part of anti -bullying policy making procedures. In addition to students being an intricate part of the planning and policy making process I am asking that you allow students to organize groups with the intention of advocating for student rights in regards to bullying. These groups will open a dialogue between students themselves as well as a direct communication between teachers and students.

There is no better way to gain insight then from the students themselves. We are leaders and we have a voice. We deserve to be safe and we understand things about growing up in these times that adults don't. Being able to communicate those ideas freely and create a community in schools where the issues surrounding bullying and its effects are openly discussed is necessary to keep kids engaged and wanting to be part of the educational process.

Thank you for your time and attention and I hope to be able to speak with you personally in the future! Pass it on!

Some bullying in school used to be seen as a right of passage for kids in school. Middle schoolers especially. However over the last 5-10 years, bullying in and out of school has gotten

way out of hand and led to increasing violence among students, higher rates of students dropping out of school completely and even suicides of children as young as 9 years old.

As a cancer survivor, a special ed student, a student who is about 5 inches shorter than other my age and someone who has missed a lot of school, I have found myself to be on the wrong end of bullying. whether it was kids or even adults making fun of me because I had no hair, the fact that I still write phonetically or don't read out loud very well or by leaning on my shoulder and telling me I'm the size of a hobbit (thank you Lord of the Rings). Lucky for me, I have been surrounded by family that has taught me how to stick up for myself, share my struggles openly and how to stand up for those around me. However, not all kids my age have that support or even the back bone if they did. What we as students are left with is adults who think they know what we go through as kids and teens. They make policies that affect us but often times aren't adept or willing to properly enforce them and we are still left fending for our selves in a world that had dramatically changed since they were kids.

Unfortunately, we live in a dangerous world where kids don't bring Swiss Army knives to school for show-and-Tell, they bring AK-47 hell bent on wiping out as many kids as they can as part of revenge killings. And revenge for what?... bullying! This is why we as kids and teenagers need to be part of the conversation. We need to have our voices heard. We need adults to stop talking at us and start talking with us about how school administrators can help us stay safe as well as how we can help our selves by creating a community of empathetic leaders.

It is absolutely imperative that the needs of kids and teens in schools in Washington State and beyond are represented during these crucial conversations. As much as administrators, adults who are educated, adults who spend time with kids on a daily basis and some who are even parents them selves, what to believe that they have first hand knowledge of the issues kids and teens face, the disgusting words that are hurled at us, the way we are made to feel as if we don't exist or never should have existed, the simple truth is that they don't.

I have a story of my own to share and I know that other students in my school and other schools every where all have stories of their own as well. Sharing can come in many forms; speaking to the student body directly, writing in a school newsletter, role playing, curriculum etc. It is in these stories, the truths of our lives that we can find ways in which we are all more alike rather than more different. Allowing students to create groups within the confines of a school will allow kids like me and my friends to come together, share the issues we are having in a safe environment, and open a dialogue between students and teachers with the hope that by creating a community where bullying is not only unacceptable but openly discussed, as students, the next generation of leaders we will become less apathetic and more empathetic. We are leaders, we are strong, courageous and we deserve to be part of the conversation that may one day save our lives. Bullying has life long effects on all of us, conscious or unconscious and limiting the negative effects is paramount. Let us be heard!