

Louisiana Bullying Awareness and Treatment Task Force

House Resolution 208 Report

Prepared by: Task Force Members

Louisiana Department of Health and Louisiana Department of Education

Office of Behavioral Health

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Introduction

House Resolution 208 of the 2017 Regular Session created the Louisiana Bullying Awareness and Treatment Task Force. **HR 208** directs the Task Force to, at a minimum, make recommendations regarding all of the following:

- 1) Positive reforms to prevent bullying;
- 2) Counseling and other treatment services for youths who are victims of bullying as well as youths who are involved in bullying; and
- 3) Best practices for establishing a safe and healthy environment for all children to learn, grow and develop.

The legislation identified 20 different agencies, medical and behavioral health service provider associations and other relevant and interested parties to serve as members.

As required by **HR 208**, this report is submitted to the House Committee on Health and Welfare by the Louisiana Bullying Awareness and Treatment Task Force; charged with developing a comprehensive, coordinated plan to prevent bullying and address the mental health needs of youths who are victims of bullying as well as youths who are involved in bullying.

Creating safe, healthy, and supportive school environments with collaborative services is a necessary foundation for improving outcomes for all children. Bullying is aggressive behavior that is intentional and that involves an imbalance of power or strength. Bullying prevention requires positive action to establish the environment and resources that will stop bullying before it starts, and requires a focus both on preventing youth from engaging in bullying behavior, and helping those who may be targeted.

Addressing Bullying

It is imperative to intervene with youths involved in bullying to provide psychological supports and address concerns that place youths at risk for bullying or bullying victimization. Mental health professionals have important roles in helping to change the behavior of youths who bully others. Once youths are able to recognize problems with the bullying behavior, mental health professionals can help the youth set and work toward goals for change, track progress toward new behaviors, and feel pride about those changes. Cognitive-behavioral interventions, family systems interventions, and other treatment modalities to improve impulse control and structured social skills training may also be helpful.

More than adequate evidence exists for schools to implement practices that could significantly reduce bullying. Data are collected and reported to the Louisiana Department of Education but these data are not about prevention or implementation of evidence-based practices that

prevent bullying. Therefore, other data are needed to better understand if evidence-based practices are being implemented and, if not, why that is not occurring. The current perception is that educators are not adequately supported to acquire, implement and sustain these evidence-based practices as part of a school's culture that further underscores the need for additional data.

The lack of sustained, routine implementation of practices known to be effective is the root problem in preventing bullying.

Section 1 – Requirements of the Resolution

House Resolution 208 created the **Louisiana Bullying Awareness and Treatment Task Force** to develop a comprehensive, coordinated plan to prevent bullying and address the mental health needs of youths who are victims of bullying as well as youths who are involved in bullying, and to provide the needed guidance to carry out the goals the Task Force recommends.

The Task Force shall consider solutions and strategies that will incorporate but not be limited to all of the following:

- A comprehensive statewide effort to fully identify and address problem areas.
- A change in the environment to effectively combat bullying behaviors.
- A change in the norms for behavior from students, educators, parents, and others to successfully address the problem.

With respect to youths who bully, the Task Force shall consider mental health treatment solutions which will accomplish but shall not be limited to the following:

- Help the youth who bullies fully acknowledge the behavior.
- Emphasize that the youth had other options, no matter what the provocation, and that the youth is fully responsible for the decision made.
- Confront excuses by the youth that minimize the behavior or externalize the cause of the bullying behavior.
- Support parents and educators in holding these youths fully accountable for their actions and not suggesting or allowing rationalizations.
- Once the youth is able to recognize problems with the bullying behavior, help the youth set and work toward goals for change, including focusing on helping to discover the specific positive goals that the aggression is directed toward and finding other pathways to reach those goals, track progress toward new behaviors, and feel pride about those changes.
- Help adults in the youth's family and environment recognize and affirm the gradual progress the youth makes toward new nonaggressive behaviors

With respect to youths who are the victims of bullying, the Task Force shall consider mental health treatment solutions which will address issues including but not limited to all of the following:

- Social isolation
- Decreased academic performance
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Low self-esteem or lack of self-confidence
- Suicidal thoughts

In carrying out its purposes, the Task Force shall engage and solicit input, recommendations, and advice from at least one person in each of the following categories:

- A child attending a middle school or junior high school located in this state.
- A youth attending a high school located in this state.
- An individual pursuing an undergraduate course of study at a postsecondary institution located in this state.

The Task Force may provide each school district in the state with information regarding the policies adopted by the state pursuant to the recommendations of the Task Force. The Task Force may also provide each school district with guidelines for identifying youths who bully and youths who are victims of bullying.

The Task Force may develop a model form for use by schools to obtain parental consent for a youth to receive treatment services implemented pursuant to its recommendations.

Section 2 – Background of Previous Bullying Legislation

Since 2012, there has been an effort by the Louisiana Legislature, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE), the Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE), and Local Education Agencies (LEAs) to address bullying in Louisiana schools.

Act 861 of the 2012 Regular Legislative Session required the LDOE, in collaboration with BESE, to develop procedures and regulations with regard to the proper reporting and investigating of an incident of bullying. These procedures include, but are not limited to, adoption of BESE-approved forms for reporting and investigating incidents of alleged bullying, proper parental notification, and mandatory orientation provided to faculty/staff/ students/parents. It also provides parents/legal guardians the right to appeal when a timely and effective investigation has not been conducted.

Louisiana Revised Statute 17:416.13 addresses school code of conduct and requires the development of bullying policies and procedures by LEAs.

BESE Bulletin 741 requires each LEA to develop and adopt a policy that prohibits the bullying of a student by another student.

House Concurrent Resolution 91 of the 2013 Louisiana Legislature created the Bullying Prevention Task Force that was charged with evaluating current state bullying policies and best practices relative to the implementation of those policies and developing recommendations relative to the procedures and processes by which incidents of bullying are reported and investigated.

The Bullying Prevention Task Force submitted the following five recommendations to the House and Senate Education Committees:

- An increased focus on bullying outreach and prevention education for students and parents.
- Comprehensive training for all school employees in regular contact with children.
- Reporting and investigating procedures that allow for resolutions to incidents of bullying.
- Development of necessary and appropriate discipline procedures for bullying offenders.
- Provision of supports for victims of bullying.

HR 38 urged and requested the LDOE to study and evaluate the effectiveness of current state policy to address and prevent student bullying.

Personnel in Louisiana public schools are required to investigate reports of incidents of bullying behaviors, take appropriate actions to address the behaviors, and collect and report data through the Student Information System *Event Data* (Discipline) records. The *Event Data* (Discipline) record set consists of several records that provide information about an individual student's discipline 'events' during a school year. An event is defined as one or more offenses that may be committed by one offender or a group of offenders acting together at the same time and place. There are separate event codes for harassment, intimidation, bullying, and cyberbullying. Each reported incident includes the primary reason code, which is the defined as the most serious offense associated with the event [Student Information System (SIS) User Guide 2014-15 Version 1.0IS]. The LEA enters the information about the bullying incident in the SIS *Event Record*, which captures and stores the information about the incident, including student victim, perpetrator(s) data, date, time, event code, actions taken, etc.

Currently, there are no procedures to verify the accuracy of what is reported by LEAs. Data are accepted and reported without ascertaining its veracity.

Table 1 provides statewide data on all reported bullying incidents reported from 2011-12 through 2015-16 in SIS.*

Table 1

2011-2012	2012-2013		2013-2014		2014-2015		2015-2016	
Total Reported	Total Reported	% change 2011-12	Total Reported	% change 2012-13	Total Reported	% change 2013-14	Total Reported	% change 2014-15
3,728	2,449	-34.3%	1,709	-30.2%	1,085	-36.5%	1,231	13.5%

*Numbers include duplicative counts for students who have multiple offenses each year.

The LDOE began collecting data on bullying beginning in school year (SY) 2011-12. An analysis of the statewide data from 2011-12 through 2015-16 appears to indicate that the incidences of bullying in Louisiana’s public schools declined from 3,728 reported incidences in SY 2011-12 to 1,085 reported incidences in SY 2014-15. Although 68 of the 93 LEAs submitting data reported a decrease in bullying, there was an overall increase of 146 reported incidences for a total of 1,231 reported incidences in SY 2015-16. The data changes may not accurately reflect actual incidences of bullying and may be an artifact of under or over-reporting over time. As LEAs continue to train all school personnel in preventing and identifying incidences of bullying, changes in the number of reported incidences are expected. LEAs are also working to improve reporting and data collection as it relates to the number of incidences of bullying in the schools to ensure the integrity of the reported data.

The data of all reported statewide bullying incidents from 2011-12 through 2015-16 were further disaggregated by the following sub-classifications: (1) verbal aggression; (2) physical aggression; (3) emotional aggression; and (4) electronic aggression (aka cyberbullying).*

Table 2 provides a breakdown of the data by year and sub classifications reported from 2011-12 through 2015-16 in SIS*.

Table 2

	SY 2011-12	SY 2012-13	SY 2013-14	SY 2014-15	SY 2015-16	Total Reported Incidences
Verbal Aggression	2475	1789	1261	751	901	7177
Physical Aggression	1203	828	507	279	345	3162
Emotional Aggression	555	293	258	134	197	1437
Electronic Aggression	212	166	145	109	141	773

*Numbers include duplicative counts for students who have multiple offenses each year.

Data includes duplication between groups, such as verbal/emotional/physical aggression, that would be counted under each classification.

An analysis of the sub-classification data for each year and over the five-year reporting period indicates that the greatest number of bullying incidents reported involve verbal aggression which includes, but is not limited to, name calling, threats, taunts, and/or spreading false rumors. The fewest number of bullying incidents reported each year and over the five-year reporting period was electronic aggression or cyberbullying. It should be noted that a single incidence of bullying might be characterized by two or more of the aggression sub-classifications. For example, one event may be characterized by verbal threats, physical harm and exclusion from group activities. The incident would be reported in each of the three sub-classifications. As with the statewide data on incidences of bullying, the data may be impacted by under/over reporting by the LEAs. Continued training of school personnel and further refinement of policies and procedures for reporting bullying incidents would be expected to provide a more accurate representation of bullying in schools in Louisiana.

Findings and Conclusions from HR 38 Task Force:

1. The LDOE and the LEAs should continue to strengthen training for all school personnel to ensure all aspects of this Act are implemented with fidelity. The LEAs should develop and implement measures to determine the effectiveness of the training provided and modifications in the training should be made based on the review of the data.
2. The LDOE and the LEAs should work collaboratively to ensure consistent implementation of the state and local bullying policies and procedures. Areas to be addressed should include, but not be limited to, interpretation of the definition of bullying, specifically the use of the term, “patterns of behavior,” identification and reporting suspected incidences of bullying.
3. The LDOE and the LEAs should work collaboratively to identify potential barriers that are impacting the validity of the reported data and to develop strategies to address the barriers.
4. The LDOE should continue to work collaboratively with the LDH to provide information and materials to the LEAs and the public on suicide prevention, including information about warning signs and resources for interventions.
5. The LDOE should continue to work collaboratively with the LDH to support training for school personnel and other stakeholders in all aspects of Trauma Informed Care, including but not limited to the impact of trauma on students over their lifetime.

Section 3 – HR 208 Bullying Prevention Task Force Membership

The Task Force shall be composed of:

- The secretary of the Louisiana Department of Health or his designee.
- The secretary of the Department of Children and Family Services or his designee.
- The executive director of the Louisiana Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers or his designee.
- The president of the Louisiana Counseling Association or his designee.
- The president of the Louisiana Association for Behavioral Health or his designee.
- The president of the Louisiana School Counselor Association or his designee.
- The president of the Louisiana Association of Marriage and Family Therapy or his designee.
- The president of the Louisiana Psychological Association or his designee.
- The deputy secretary of the Department of Public Safety and Corrections, youth services, Office of Juvenile Justice or his designee.
- The president of the Louisiana Association of Child Welfare and Attendance Personnel or his designee.
- The state superintendent of education or his designee.

- An education practitioner who has experience addressing the issue of bullying, designated by the state superintendent of education.
- Four parents or other members of the public who have demonstrated a commitment to addressing the issue of bullying, designated pursuant to the provisions of this Resolution.
- Two elected members of the Louisiana House of Representatives appointed by the speaker of the House of Representatives.
- Two elected members of the Louisiana Senate appointed by the president of the Senate.

Currently, all required areas of representation have been met with the exception of one elected member of the Louisiana Senate and three parents recommended by the Louisiana Legislature. Ongoing attempts have been made to secure representation from these groups through personal contacts, emails and telephone calls to potential family representatives. These members will be added to the Task Force when identified.

Section 4 – Process

The Louisiana Bullying Awareness and Treatment Task Force met on September 27, 2017, October 26, 2017, December 5, 2017, and January 8, 2018. At the initial meeting, Co-Chairs Dr. Leslie Brougham Freeman, LDH, and Michael Comeaux, LDOE, outlined the goals and work of the Task Force that is charged with the development of a comprehensive, coordinated plan to address bullying and address the mental health needs of youths who are victims of bullying in Louisiana. An overview of Louisiana’s bullying laws, policies and procedures was provided. The Task Force members were led in a review and discussion of current bullying data provided by the Louisiana Department of Education. Subsequent meetings started with a review of the requirements of HR 208. In the second meeting, the Task Force members decided to break into two subgroups, Prevention Subgroup and Intervention Subgroup, to ensure all aspects of the required comprehensive plan were fully addressed. The results of the two workgroups were reviewed during the third meeting.

Members of the Task Force were responsible for the information contained in this report. The draft report was disseminated to all members and discussed at the January 8, 2018 meeting. Edits were made based on the discussion.

The Task Force will continue to meet to develop the comprehensive and coordinated plan as charged by **HR 208**.

Prevention Subgroup

The LDOE has made available free resources based on the best available evidence. Given the depth of the recommended training resources, it is impressive to see the extent to which more than adequate resources exist for schools to implement practices that could significantly reduce

bullying. So, it seems appropriate to ask, why is bullying perceived as a problem in our schools? Why do the available data and anecdotal information depict school environments where bullying is an ongoing and significant problem?

The LDOE includes an implementation checklist on their website but the checklist is not for implementation of practices. Rather the checklist is for implementation of **Act 861**. Essentially the checklist measures whether required policies and procedures have been established (as required by law) – not whether or not educators are actually doing evidence-based practices to prevent bullying.

More than adequate evidence exists for schools to implement practices that could significantly reduce bullying. Data are collected and reported to the LDOE but these data are not about prevention or implementation of evidence-based practices that prevent bullying. Therefore, other data are needed to better understand if evidence-based practices are being implemented and, if not, why that is not occurring. The current perception is that educators are not adequately supported to acquire, implement and sustain these evidence-based practices as part of a school's culture that further underscores the need for additional data.

There are some recommended best practices in bullying prevention. These include: 1) focus on the social response, 2) conduct community wide assessments of bullying, 3) seek out support for bullying prevention, 4) coordinate and integrate prevention efforts, 5) provide training in bullying prevention and response, 6) set policies and rules about bullying, 7) respond consistently and appropriately when bullying happens, 8) spend time talking with children and youth about bullying, and 9) continue efforts over time and renew community interests.

There may be little usefulness in compiling an expanded list of resources on evidence-based practices (beyond those currently accessible via the LDOE), making recommendations about who should be trained to prevent bullying, or examining data about the existence of bullying in Louisiana schools until deep discussions about the fundamental problem of the implementation of best practices is addressed at the state and local levels.

Intervention Subgroup

After extensive searching and review of literature, including several meta-analysis of interventions for bullying, the Task Force has concluded there are no evidence based therapeutic interventions that are effective in remediating the effects of bullying for either victims or perpetrators. Mental health therapy techniques have not been shown to be effective for any individual involved in bullying: the perpetrator of bullying, the victim of bullying or the bystanders. Restorative Justice is emerging as a promising practice, but the research on its effectiveness with bullying is currently being conducted and not yet available.

Available evidence shows the following interventions are not effective. These include: 1) conflict resolution and peer mediation interventions, 2) any kind of group therapy with victims and perpetrators, 3) zero tolerance for bullying policies, 4) over-simplifying the relationship

between bullying and suicide, 5) simple short term solutions, and 6) mis-direction in bullying prevention and response.

Section 5 – Conclusions

The Louisiana Bullying Awareness and Treatment Task Force was created by House Resolution 208 to develop a comprehensive, coordinated plan to address bullying and address the mental health needs of youths who are victims of bullying in Louisiana. A review of available data at the initial meeting of the Task Force indicated that incidents of bullying appear to be decreasing. However, the LDOE data showing a decline in the number of bullying incidents does not match public perception that incidents of bullying have been increasing over time.

The Task Force recognizes the discrepancy between perception and data; part of the recommendations are to conduct further study from multiple sources to get a more thorough understanding of the bullying situation in Louisiana. There are many factors that may affect the numbers such as under or over reporting, as well as differences in perspectives and understanding of the definition of bullying.

To develop a comprehensive plan, the Task Force divided into two subgroups: Prevention and Intervention. The Prevention subgroup identified that there are numerous bullying prevention resources available and the LDOE website links to many of these. The Task Force is concerned that just having information available for use may not translate into school systems utilizing those prevention resources effectively. Currently, no data is being collected on the status of the implementation of the evidence-based practices to prevent bullying; more information is needed to understand how they are being used.

The Intervention subgroup conducted an extensive literature review on evidence based therapeutic interventions but was unable to identify specific interventions to address bullying. The research has identified that mental health interventions utilized to treat bullying are ineffective. These include techniques such as group therapy, peer mediation or conflict resolution.

There is a need to further evaluate data, engage stakeholders, including school administrators, parents and students, and strategically consider how the Task Force can support schools in implementing best practices. Discussion should be centered on best practices and the challenges that are preventing the effective implementation of these prevention measures.

The Louisiana Bullying Awareness and Treatment Task Force will continue to meet to fulfill the requirements set forth by **HR 208** to develop a comprehensive, coordinated plan to address bullying and the mental health needs of the youth who are impacted by bullying.

Section 6 – Task Force Recommendations for 2018

1. The LDOE should support a targeted study of why implementation of preventing bullying is not effective in some LEAs. Information gathered from a pilot study should be used for a comprehensive study to assess the ability of our LEAs to effectively implement prevention strategies. The studies should include the following: methods of reporting; procedures of reporting and investigating incidents of bullying; types of materials and resources utilized in LEAs; and basic demographic information on LEA students.
2. LDOE needs to initiate supportive actions in collaboration with these LEAs to ensure the incidents significantly decrease. The information gleaned from a targeted pilot study is expected to help identify what actions would be supportive to the LEAs.
3. The **HR 38 Task Force** recommended study of the barriers to valid reporting of data. The HR 208 Task Force should provide input to the Task Force regarding the types of data that should be collected and reported by schools to better monitor the conditions in schools that prevent bullying from occurring.
4. The Task Force should review previous legislation on bullying and provide an update on the status of previous recommendations from **House Concurrent Resolution 91 of 2013** and **House Resolution 38 of 2016 of the Louisiana Legislature**.

Section 7 – Appendix

House Resolution 208 of the 2017 Regular Session
Louisiana Bullying Awareness and Treatment Task Force
Member/Designee List

	Agency	Member/Designee
1.	Louisiana Department of Health (Co-Chair)	Dr. Leslie Freeman
2.	Louisiana Department of Education (Co-Chair)	Michael Comeaux
3.	Department of Children and Family Services	Toni Buxton
4.	Louisiana Chapter – National Association of Social Workers	Dr. Bridgette Wade
5.	Louisiana Counseling Association	Royce Hooks
6.	Louisiana Association for Behavioral Health	Laura Tarantino
7.	Louisiana School Counselor Association	Royce Hooks
8.	Louisiana Association of Marriage and Family Therapy	Howie Brownell
9.	Louisiana Psychological Association	Dr. Alan Coulter
10.	Department of Public Safety and Corrections, Youth Services, Office of Juvenile Justice	Beth Touchet-Morgan
11.	Louisiana Association of Child Welfare and Attendance	Brad Prudhomme
12.	Louisiana Senate	Senator Beth Mizell
13.	Education Practitioner	Gwynn Shamlin
14.	Parent/Public Member - House of Representatives	Bishop Larry L. Brandon
15.	Louisiana House of Representatives	Representative Barbara M. Norton
16.	Louisiana House of Representatives	Representative Patricia Haynes Smith

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