

OP-ED:

## **Bullying Prevention Must be Everyone's Concern**

By State Superintendent of Schools Lillian M. Lowery

Maryland has a long-standing commitment to providing the very best public education to the children of our State. The Maryland State Board of Education, in its policy making role, has clearly stated that all students have a right to an educational environment free from all forms of harassment. A serious threat to that safe environment is the presence of bullying in our communities and schools.

Bullying is a form of violence that affects everyone. Students and case histories have shown that not only are the victim and bully affected, but those who see or hear bullying also suffer negative consequences. Many witnesses fear that they will become the next victim and fail to get involved. These bystanders often suffer the same negative emotional effects as the bullies and victims. We now know that bullying is not just a rite of passage—it has long term and serious results. Bullying can lead to low self-esteem, depression, isolation, and alienation in both the bully and the victim long after the incidents have ended. In addition, many victims of bullying do not want to come to school, leading to disengagement from the classroom and all that is offered by public education.

October is National Bullying Prevention Month. The Maryland State Department of Education will be holding its third annual State Conference on the Prevention of Bullying and Harassment with representatives from all local school systems to fine tune our joint efforts to prevent and intervene in bullying in our schools. Local school systems this month also will be putting a focus on their programs and resources on this issue. Much work has been done, but a scan of the headlines each month lets us know we need everyone's assistance in this effort.

I am taking this opportunity to ask parents to talk to their children about bullying. Please make it clear that bullying is wrong. If you suspect that your child is a victim of bullying, report it to the principal of your child's school. Fill out the Bullying and Harassment Form that is available at your child's school—it also is available on your local school system's website. If you suspect your child is bullying other children, calmly make it clear that this is not acceptable behavior. Discuss with your son or daughter the harmful effects of bullying and how there are positives ways to interact with peers. Watch how your child relates to other children and reward him or her when appropriate interactions are displayed. If your child sees bullying in the school, on the school bus, or reads something on social media, encourage your child to report it to a teacher or administrator.

Cyberbullying is growing rapidly among children of all ages. To help curb this type of behavior, monitor your child's use of the Internet, social media, and cell phones. Additionally, if you believe your child has been a victim or the perpetrator, you and your child should talk as soon as possible to your school's counselor, school psychologist, social worker, or other mental health professional to learn about supports available to minimize the negative effects of bullying.

Finally, get involved with your school's efforts to create positive environments that are healthy for all students.

For more information about bullying, its effects, and resources to combat bullying, visit [MarylandPublicSchools.org](http://MarylandPublicSchools.org) or your school system's website. Working together we can make a difference and provide the educational environment for your child that is positive and productive. We need classrooms where children can learn and thrive. Our children will thank us for it.