

Bullying CQ background:

The nation received a shocking wake-up call about bullying when investigators revealed that the Columbine killers and other school shooters had been repeatedly bullied by classmates. On a typical school day today three out of 10 American youngsters are involved in bullying as perpetrators, victims or bystanders, and an estimated 160,000 children skip school for fear of being harassed. Bullied students are more prone to suicide, depression and poor school performance; bullies have a far higher likelihood of committing crimes as adults. At least 16 states have passed laws requiring schools to provide anti-bullying programs, but many states and school districts have been slow to act. Their reluctance may stem in part from opposition by conservative Christians, who argue that anti-bullying legislation and programs aimed at reducing sexually oriented teasing promote homosexuality and impinge on Christian students' freedom of speech.

Pro/Con Do anti-bullying programs promote homosexuality?

Pro

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From testimony before House Ways and Means Committee,
Maryland House of Delegates, Feb. 19, 2003.

Pro-homosexual activists contend that our schools have large numbers of students who are gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgendered (GLBT) and are frequent victims of verbal or physical harassment or even acts of violence. They argue, therefore, that victims of harassment or violence targeted for their real or perceived "sexual orientation" should be singled out for specific protection under school disciplinary codes.

Yet there is evidence that harassment of gay teens may neither be as frequent, as severe, nor as disproportionate, as some pro-homosexual rhetoric would suggest. The majority of gay teens (58 percent), according to a Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) survey, reported no incidents of "physical harassment" in the past year (only 15 percent claimed to have experienced this "frequently" or "often").

Pro-family groups such as the Family Research Council agree wholeheartedly that no student should ever be the victim of unprovoked violence (or taunting) — for their sexual orientation or for any other reason. We believe that

Con

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About 10 percent of Americans are gay and lesbian, and research shows that other than their sexual orientation there is little or nothing to differentiate them from the other 90 percent. What is more, the scientific consensus is that sexual orientation is a biologically based trait. That alone should be enough to sustain the claim to full human rights for gay and lesbian kids. Anti-bullying programs don't promote homosexuality. What they promote is basic respect for human rights.

Why pay special attention to the bullying of gay and lesbian kids? Research shows that gay and lesbian kids are disproportionately victimized by peers: five times more likely to miss school because they feel unsafe, four times as likely to be threatened with a weapon at school and three times as likely to be hurt so badly in a

such behavior should be prohibited by school disciplinary codes, and that those codes should be strictly enforced.

However, singling out "sexual orientation" for special protection cannot be justified on logical grounds, and it could have consequences not clear at first glance. Lumping "sexual orientation" together with "race, color, national origin, sex and disability" for special protection is illogical because the latter qualities are inborn (except for some disabilities), involuntary, immutable and innocuous — none of which is true of homosexuality, despite the claims of its advocates.

Evidence that homosexuality is inborn (that is, unalterably determined by genetics or biology) is ephemeral at best; while same-sex attractions may come unbidden, homosexual behavior and adoption of a "gay" identity are clearly voluntary; the existence of numerous "former homosexuals" proves that homosexuality is changeable; and the numerous pathologies associated with homosexuality demonstrate how harmful it is.

If all forms of harassment are wrong, then all forms of harassment — without distinction — should be banned. When harassment based on sexual orientation is explicitly banned, school staffs and students are inevitably trained that the reason such harassment is wrong is not because all harassment is wrong or because all people should be treated with respect, but because "there is nothing wrong with being gay or lesbian."

fight that they need medical treatment, according to a recent study.

The fact that adult bias and religious fundamentalism sustain and validate homophobic attacks is all the more reason to make efforts to deal with them as part of any community's initiative to protect children from harm at school. In fact, they should fall under the No Child Left Behind Act's provisions concerning the right to be protected in "persistently dangerous" schools: Studies of school shooters compiled by the FBI and Secret Service, among others, document that bullying (and particularly homophobic bullying) has been a contributing factor in severe school violence.

As our national consciousness of human rights issues evolves, we naturally include more and more people in our circle of caring. African-Americans were once outside the circle. Now no one but the most retrograde racist will tolerate overt racial discrimination in the form of verbal slurs, exclusionary policies and hateful assault aimed against children and youth.

Currently, gay and lesbian individuals are singled out for special negative treatment in American public life — such as being the target of state and national legislation and constitutional amendments to prevent them from exercising the basic human right of marriage (a right denied on racist grounds in the not-too-distant past when racially mixed marriages were prohibited).

Fifty years from now, we will experience the same regret for opposition to programs protecting gay and lesbian kids that all good-hearted people do now when they consider our racist past.