

Motion 3

The government should map out policies to
combat bullying in schools

Child Councilors:

Chan Chik Xing, Jason
Chan Hei Man, Terries
Chan Yeuk Mei, Emily
Cheng Ho Yin, Godfrey
Chi, Marcus
Chu Wai Chuen, Wendy
Ho Ngar Man, Carmen
Lee Ka Ki, Kammy
Leung Po Wing
Li Suet Ping, Grace
Lo Sin Ying, Shirley
Mak Chi Kit
Mak Hin Yeung, Hesperus
Ng Ho Lam, Vincent
Tang Tsz Chung, Vincent
To Kit Yan, Sally
Tong Lai Ying, Ivy
Vong, Beverley
Yau Man Fu, Macro
Yuk Wing Ki, Stephanie

22 May 2004

(A translated version provided by the Centre for Translation in association with the
Translation Programme, Hong Kong Baptist University)

I. Preamble

The recent spate of bullying in schools has caused a huge outcry among the public. Various sectors in society have shown deep concern about this problem.

School bullying is defined as repeated commitment of psychologically and physically hurtful acts amongst school children, including acts such as physical assault, verbal abuse, blackmailing and mockery.

We are putting forward this proposal to urge the government to take the problem of school bullying seriously and confront the issue head-on. Our proposal is divided into three parts: (1) an overview of the current situation of school bullying; (2) analysis of the situation; and (3) solutions to the problem.

II. Current Situation

The first case of school bullying which stirred up so much attention happened in December 2003, a Form 5 De La Salle Secondary School student was assaulted by more than ten students for five times within ten days. Shortly after that, a student of CMA Secondary School in Sham Shui Po was also attacked by a group of schoolmates. The victim, hit by a desk, had blood running down the corner of his mouth. Both cases had been videotaped and uploaded to the internet. Police later arrested the students involved in the assault, causing widespread concern in society.

According to statistics provided by the Education and Manpower Bureau, there were about 1,600 cases of school bullying throughout the territory reported last year. The Bureau admitted that some teachers have overlooked the problem; hence the figures may not represent the full picture. This shows that the problem of school bullying has not been taken seriously for a long time.

In early February 2004, legislative councilor Chan Kam-lam's office interviewed 1,264 students from Form 3 to Form 5 and 487 secondary school teachers. The result showed that school bullying is common and most victims do not have the right attitude or knowledge to deal with the problem.

From November 2000 till April 2001, Dr. Dennis Wong sent our questionnaires to Form 3 and 4 students in 24 secondary schools, and 3,297 questionnaires were completed. The report stated that amongst school bullying acts, verbal abuse was the most common, followed by isolation of schoolmates, physical abuse and extortion.

In late April of this year, we sent out questionnaires and also conducted an online survey of the views of secondary school teachers and students on school bullying. 14 secondary schools participated in this survey, 1,000 questionnaires were given out and about 900 were completed and returned to us. See Appendix 1 for details.

Majority of the schools surveyed generally have a good reputation for school discipline, yet half of the participants had witnessed incidents of school bullying, confirming that school bullying is indeed a very serious problem.

III. Analysis of the Problem

Bullying in schools can be analyzed from five angles, namely family, culture of society and media influence, school, student, and government.

Family

Family violence sows the seeds of bullying behaviour in children. Parents who seldom communicate with their children would do great damage to the weak parent-child relationship. Their children, feeling uncared for and unloved, may develop bullying behaviour as a means of attention seeking. Some indulgent parents spoil their children, who would become domineering, callous, and may even turn into a bully.

Culture of society and media influence

Influenced by the trends in society, young people sometimes show little regard for social order. Sensational media reports on violence and crimes and scenes of violence and bullying in movies and TV programmes also have a bad influence on young people, misleading them into believing that problems can be solved by violence.

School

Education in Hong Kong emphasizes only academic results. Some students who are academically weak may seek attention in a negative way. Moreover, the problem of bullying in schools is made worse by a number of indirect factors. For example, there is a lack of communication between teachers and students; teachers are weak in counselling and support techniques; and incidents of bullying in schools are not handled properly, because teachers ignore such incidents, or because they are partial to some students.

Student

Bullies often wish to boost their self-esteem or get something done by asserting their authority. They are weak in expressing themselves and usually have poor social skills, and they seek attention by bullying others. Other reasons for such behaviour may be that they sense hostility in other people's behaviours towards them, they do not realise the seriousness of bullying, or they choose to solve problems through violence.

As for the victims, they are usually timid and unable to defend or stand up for themselves. There are the bystanders, too. They get involved in acts of bullying often because they are afraid of being the next target themselves.

Government

Guidelines provided by the Education and Manpower Bureau on combating bullying are inadequate. There is also insufficient support for those on the front-line, including teachers. For example, there is little training for them to handle such cases.

IV. Solutions

1. Education for various parties

(i) The students

According to our survey, more than 90% of the interviewees support incorporating moral education into the school curriculum. Education plays an important role in combating bullying. We believe that moral education should be incorporated into the formal curriculum to equip students with skills in relating to others, to instil in them correct ethical and moral values, to help students foster ways to manage emotions, and to promote the message that violence never solve anything.

(ii) The bullies

Appropriate disciplinary action should be taken against bullies in schools, and they should also be given counselling to help them find out why they bully others, why they are disciplined, and the true purpose of such disciplinary action. Schools should also give guidance to students on the correct ways to cope with negative emotions and to avoid directing their anger and frustration at others by bullying.

(iii) The victims

Schools should impress upon students the correct attitude to bullying: when they are bullied, they should report the incident, even if they do not go to their teachers, they should confide in people they can trust so that there will be someone to share their anxiety and give them help. Suffering in silence will only lead to more cases of bullying.

(iv) The bystanders

The bystanders are not directly involved in bullying incidents, but they can help to combat bullying. They should be taught to take action against bullying and the correct attitude of responding to bullying when they witness such acts. They should help the victims solve their problems and not pretend that nothing serious has happened.

(v) The teachers

According to our survey, more than 70% of the interviewees agree that teachers should develop the skills to tackle bullying. Teachers lack the professional training to handle bullying in schools or even to admit that it exists, and hence they are unable to take effective and prompt measures against these incidents when they occur. We suggest that additional professional guidance should be incorporated into teacher training to help them address the problem promptly and properly. Besides, child psychology should be made a compulsory subject so that teachers will understand the negative impact of school violence on children. In addition to theories on this subject, teachers should also exchange their practical experience.

(vi) The parents

According to our survey, over 80% of the interviewees agreed that parents should learn to communicate with their children. As we all know, parents' care and love affect how their

children behave and address bullying issues. If parents communicate more with their children, their children will be able to face incidents of bullying in school positively, and the impact on them could be reduced. Parent should also instil in their children the correct attitude to bullying and teach them how to address the issue properly. When their children become victims of bullying, they should take appropriate actions. Only then would a recurrence of bullying in schools be stopped.

(vii) The social workers

According to our survey, over 60% of the interviewees agreed that social workers should receive training in handling bullying. The government should therefore encourage social workers to further their studies in order to advance their knowledge in this area. As a preventive measure, social workers attached to schools should always keep a close eye on school campuses so that when they notice signs of bullying, they can stop it immediately. They should also take the initiative to talk to students who had been disciplined for bullying in order to understand their needs and counsell them accordingly.

2. Introducing anti-bullying policy

More than 70% of the interviewees believe that the introduction of anti-bullying policy will help combat bullying in schools. We have studied the methods adopted by the governments of five places to combat bullying in schools, i.e. New Zealand, the U.S., Australia, Scotland and England. These governments are all deeply concerned about the problem of bullying in schools, and most of them already have a clear anti-bullying policy. The definition of “bullying”, objectives of the policy, procedures for implementation, records of bullying incidents, follow-up actions and support etc. are all clearly spelt out. Particular emphasis is put on the implementation, monitoring and review of the policy. The governments will also promote and educate the public on anti-bullying on a regular basis. When bullying actually occurs, the school will talk to everyone involved in the incident, conduct a thorough investigation, and make a detailed report to facilitate follow-up actions in future. A nationwide mechanism for reporting bullying incidents has been set up in Scotland while schools in the U.S. and Australia have introduced laws and regulations to prevent such incidents from taking place in school.

Below is a table showing the targets of anti-bullying policy of the five governments:

	Australia	Scotland	England	New Zealand	U.S.
Teachers	*	*	*	*	*
Victims	*	*	*	*	*
Bullies	*	*	*	*	*
Parents			*	*	*
General Public			*		

On the whole, the anti-bullying policy in England is the most comprehensive, in terms of the range of its targets. It should also be noted that almost all governments target their policy

at both the bullies and the victims.

3. Establishing concern groups in schools

Almost 70% of the interviewees support the establishment of concern groups in schools. We believe that only through the cooperation of students, parents and schools can the problem of bullying be effectively solved. Therefore, we suggest establishing concern groups in schools to encourage the schools to respond to the issue in an active way. According to child psychologists, bullies are usually those who are uncared for. To help them develop healthily, we need to care about them and give them guidance. However, parents today are always busy at work; they only have time and energy to help their children with their homework and little else.

We believe that concern groups in schools are effective in solving the problem of bullying. A study by Dr James C. Dobson, distinguished American child psychologist, shows that peer support among children of more or less the same age can help remove communication barrier. We suggest that concern groups should be set up voluntarily by senior students in schools. Regular meetings should be held after class for peer counseling between senior students and the bullies to help the latter sort out their problems.

When there is bullying in schools, these concern groups can play its role. Senior students can act as peer mentors and provide counseling, mediation and assistance for the students involved.

4. Setting up a reporting mechanism

In the survey conducted by our group, nearly 50% of the interviewees believe that setting up a reporting mechanism would be effective in helping the government combat school bullying. The government should establish a reporting mechanism in which the schools are responsible for reporting. The records and data could then be studied with the view to developing more effective preventive policies on school bullying.

With this mechanism, schools will report cases of bullying to the government department in charge, and the department will then use the data to map out policies to combat bullying.

5. Police officer attachment programme

The reporting mechanism will also facilitate the implementation of the police officer attachment programme. By studying the records of bullying cases reported, the relevant government department can identify the schools that need attention and send police officers to those schools to address the disciplinary problems.

6. Implementing small class education

Small class education allows more time for teachers to look after students with emotional problems. This will help improve the situation of bullying in schools and a more harmonious relationship can be fostered among students. We sincerely hope that the government will initiate plans to study the feasibility and effectiveness of small class teaching.

V. Conclusion

With this motion, we aim to draw the attention of the government and the public to the impact of bullying in schools so that effective and concrete actions will be taken to combat the problem.

However, promoting discussion on the issue is just part of our aim. We hope, above all else, to heighten people's awareness of the urgency of the problem of bullying in schools to ensure that concerted efforts will be made to eradicate the problem and thus prevent it from developing into a potential hazard to society.

References

Sing Tao Daily. (2003/12/23)

Oriental Daily. (2004/2/16)

Ming Pao. (2004/2/16)

“Bullies in our Schools”, a survey conducted by Democratic Alliance for Betterment of Hong Kong (DAB) LegCo Member Chan Kam Lam, in affiliation with Ngau Tau Kok Kai Fong Welfare Association. (2004/2)

Legislative Council Paper “Bullying and Violence in Schools” [CB(2)1287/03-04(01)]. (2004/2/16)

Report on the Survey on School Bullying Cases in the Southern District (2000/12/1)

Dr Wong Dennis Sing-wing, *School Bullying and Responding Tactics: A Life Education Approach*. Arcadia Press Ltd. (2003/1)