

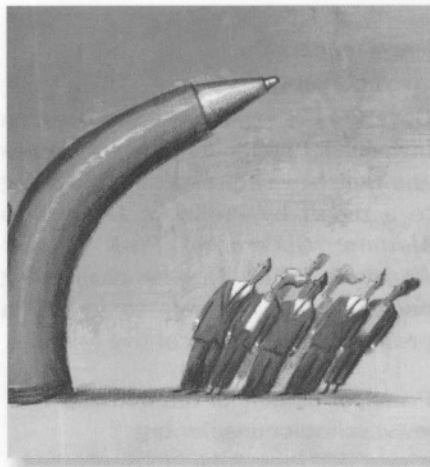
# ADVISER

What would you do if ...

## your board were considering an anti-bullying policy?

A school board was considering an anti-bullying policy. Members had listened to staff recommendations about why the policy was necessary and how it should be worded. The recommendation was that the policy should specifically include wording against the abuse of gay and lesbian students, as well as certain ethnic groups. A couple of board members didn't want the policy to be so specific. It might anger the community, they argued. Other board members wondered if the specific wording opened them up to lawsuits if other groups weren't included. What should the board do?

■ Set a general policy. The purpose of policy is to set the broad guidelines for the way the school system should conduct its business; once the board starts including specific wording for one group, or components, others will want specific wording for their own issues. The responsibility of the school system is to take that policy and enact a set of regulations or procedures. The board could run into problems by specifically including any wording that singles out a person, group, or component.



Kitty Blumsack  
Director of Board Development  
Maryland Association of  
Boards of Education

■ In Virginia we always advise: Have Policy. Know Policy. Use Policy. Policies are the law of a school board and state what is expected in a big picture view. If you would include one specific group, you would have to include all groups, which surely sets the board up for an unintended omission. It is better to keep the policy broad enough to cover all possibilities.

That said, it would still be wise for staff and legal counsel to research the issue to find similar policies that have stood the test of time. Then the board should receive that information at a school board meeting so all stakeholders are educated prior to a vote by the board.

Barbara Coyle  
Deputy Executive Director  
Virginia School Boards Association

■ Language that can help a situation like this should include: "such as, but not limited to;" but the board might be better off leaving the shopping list attached to the refrigerator door. When boards start listing examples of groups that could be the victims of bullying it begins to overlook the real issue, which is developing a school climate where all students feel safe enough to learn. I think that is what the board should consider in its policy deliberations. In any case, the policy committee (or the board as a whole) should run the policy by the board's legal counsel for further review.

Nicholas D. Caruso Jr.  
Senior Staff Associate for Field Service  
Connecticut Association of  
Boards of Education

**Advice for the asking:** If you are plagued with a prickly problem of school board service or school governance, throw it in the lap of ASBJ's cadre of consultants, known collectively as the Adviser. We'll change the names of persons and places. Then, we'll describe the problem and its suggested solution for our readers. Write: Adviser, *American School Board Journal*, 1680 Duke St., Alexandria, VA 22314. Or send us an e-mail at [adviser@asbj.com](mailto:adviser@asbj.com), marked "Adviser." The Adviser does not represent official policy of the National School Boards Association, nor should it be construed as legal advice.