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Anti-Bullying Advocates Call on Policymakers to End Overly Harsh Punishment of Bullies

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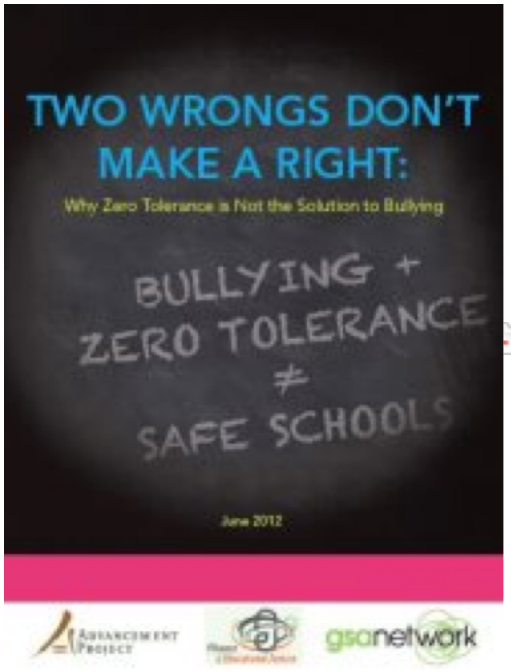
Gay Straight Alliance, Racial Justice, and Education Advocates Call for an End to Criminalization of Bullying;

Twitter Town Hall, #bullychat, at 7 pm EST on Tuesday, June 26

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) youth empowerment groups and racial justice advocates today issued a white paper calling for education policymakers to reconsider harsh disciplinary responses to bullying.



[1]In *Two Wrongs Don't Make a Right: Why Zero Tolerance is Not the Solution to Bullying*

[2], Advancement Project, the Alliance for Educational Justice, and Gay-Straight Alliance Network examine the surge of recent policy and legislative activity around bullying of LGBT and other youth, and find that policymakers and school officials have erroneously adopted zero-tolerance policies that rely on suspensions, expulsions, and arrests of alleged bullies. This punitive approach results in students being needlessly pushed out of school and placed onto a path into the criminal justice system coined the "school-to-prison pipeline."

"Efforts by policymakers to address bullying severely are well-intentioned, but misguided," said Judith Browne Dianis, Co-Director of Advancement Project, an organization with extensive experience in addressing the overuse of zero-tolerance school discipline. "Using harsh punishments to address student misconduct can have the same devastating effects on youth that bullying has. Administrators should find common sense solutions to deal that help them learn from their mistakes and prepare them to be healthy, responsible adults."

Harsh discipline practices and student-on-student bullying often affect students in the same ways, resulting in lower academic scores, truancy, psychological trauma, diminished self-worth and dropping out altogether. "Schools essentially become the bullies when they employ 'get tough' tactics to address bullying," said Shaquille Carbon, a student leader at Baltimore Algebra Project and a member of the Alliance for Educational Justice, a national alliance of youth organizing groups working for educational justice. " We can stop bullying without pushing more students out of school, " said Shaquille.

Moreover, zero tolerance disciplinary measures fail to address the root causes of bullying. So-called bullies are typically youth who are just learning to understand themselves and are often struggling with their own insecurities. Ray Ferronato, now an 11th grade youth leader with Gay-Straight Alliance Network, bullied an openly gay student while coming to terms with his own identity in middle school. He said, "Bullying shouldn't be criminalized. Schools need to intervene without putting anyone in danger and without oppressing any student regardless of what they may be going through." Carolyn Laub, Executive Director of GSA Network, supports Ray: "When schools respond to bullying with harsh disciplinary measures, they often hurt the very students they intend to protect."

The authors urge schools and policymakers to stop criminalizing youth misbehavior and instead make schools safe environments for all students through alternatives to harsh discipline, such as using a restorative justice approach, training teachers, administrators and security offices, and investing more in guidance counselors and school psychologists.

The report is available for download here [1].

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Advancement Project is an organization that works to eliminate the overuse of harsh discipline policies in schools. Alliance for Educational Justice is a national network of youth and intergenerational organizing groups working toward educational justice. Gay-Straight Alliance Network is a national youth leadership organization that empowers lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and allied youth to challenge discrimination and oppressions in school and create a safer environment for all students.

http://gsanetwork.org [3]

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