



Commonwealth of Kentucky

Office of the Governor

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Governor's Task Force Takes on Bullying

Gov. Beshear appoints group to examine bullying in schools, advise policies

FRANKFORT, Ky. (Sept. 11, 2014) – For thousands of Kentucky students, going to school can mean bracing for a run-in with a bully. More than one in four Kentucky students aged 12 to 18 reported being bullied at school in 2011, and the Kentucky Department of Education recorded 15,520 incidents of bullying in Kentucky during the 2012-13 school year. That's one reported bullying incident every four minutes of every school day.

In response to these alarming trends, Gov. Steve Beshear today announced the creation of the Kentucky Youth Bullying Prevention Task Force – a 22-member panel, including students – which will study bullying in schools and recommend practices and policies to help foster safer, harassment-free school environments.

“No child should be so discouraged by bullies that he or she avoids school or withdraws from friends or activities,” Gov. Beshear said. “Yet recent research suggests that getting bullied is a common experience. This task force will work on ways to empower students and to implement practices that root out intimidation and harassment.”

Education Commissioner Terry Holliday and Cabinet for Health and Family Services Secretary Audrey Tayse Haynes sent the Governor a letter last month outlining the impacts of bullying on young Kentuckians and urged him to create the task force.

The Youth Bullying Prevention Task Force will analyze existing laws and policies; interview school professionals, bullying victims and other experts; and collect training and resource

materials. The group will submit its findings, including recommendations for policy initiatives and school practices, in a report to the Governor by Nov. 15, 2015.

Morgan Guess, an 11-year-old from Paducah, endured repeated physical and verbal attacks from a classmate three years ago. As a result, Morgan developed stomach spasms and panic attacks. A doctor prescribed antidepressants and recommended Morgan change schools to get away from her tormentor. The situation has been resolved, and Morgan will now serve as the student representative on the Governor's task force.

"When I was bullied, I made a choice to be a part of the solution instead of blaming others," she said. "My parents helped me understand that one person can do something that can make a difference. Now I want kids in my town and my state to know that they have a voice. Together we can do something that will help us stop the cruelty and violence. I am so grateful that Governor Beshear is showing that Kentucky is a leader in this battle against bullying."

Education Commissioner Terry Holliday said, "Acts of bullying don't just affect the victim – One bully in a classroom or neighborhood creates an atmosphere of tension, making it difficult to concentrate, much less learn effectively. We owe it to our students, our teachers and our community to seek ways to eliminate these aggressive acts and foster good learning environments."

Research suggests that one out of every 10 high school dropouts cites bullying as the main reason for leaving school, and bullying is a significant contributing factor in many teen suicides and suicide attempts.

"Bullies don't always inflict physical harm; the psychological damage can be corrosive, especially over time," said Audrey Tayse Haynes, Secretary of the Cabinet for Health and Family Services. "Suicide is the second leading cause of death for young Kentuckians. I hope this task force can find ways to reduce incidents of bullying and give children tools to respond responsibly and effectively."

Task Force members include:

- **Commissioner Terry Holliday**
- **Secretary Audrey Tayse Haynes**
- **Morgan Guess**, of Paducah; 11-year-old student at Lone Oak Middle School who experienced bullying at her school; has since worked with students and social media to promote kindness and discourage bullying
- **Susan Guess**, of Paducah; marketing director for Paducah Bank and mother to Morgan Guess
- **Mark Simendinger**, of Edgewood; general manager of Kentucky Speedway in Sparta.
- **Rachel Willoughby**, of Prestonsburg; director, Mountain Regional Prevention Center at Mountain Comprehensive Care Center
- **Dr. Nancy Cunningham**, of Louisville; licensed counseling psychologist and professor emeritus in the Department of Education and Counseling Psychology, Counseling and College Student Personnel at the University of Louisville

- **Ben Reno-Weber**, of Louisville; CEO, Kentucky YMCA
- **Dr. Vestena Robbins**, of Richmond; policy adviser for the Kentucky Department for Behavioral Health, Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities; adjunct faculty member in the Department of Educational Leadership Studies at UK
- **Dr. Thomas Aberli**, of Louisville; principal, Atherton High School
- **Jon Akers**, of Georgetown; executive director for the Kentucky Center for School Safety
- **Bo Matthews**, of Glasgow; superintendent, Barren County Schools
- **Carl Frazier**, of Lexington; attorney at Stoll Keenon Ogden
- **Craig Browning**, of Smiths Grove; regional president, U.S. Bank
- **Dr. Patty Cook-Craig**, of Richmond; associate professor and chair of the MSW Community and Social Development Concentration at the University of Kentucky College of Social Work
- **Juanita Collier Spangler**, of Whitesburg; sixth-grade language arts teacher at Whitesburg Middle School
- **Major Robert Carter III**, of Madisonville; Madisonville Police Department
- **Dr. Kelly Davis**, of Bowling Green; director of Exceptional Children for the Green River Region Educational Cooperative
- **Sen. Mike Wilson**, of Bowling Green
- **Sen. Dorsey Ridley**, of Henderson
- **Rep. Derrick Graham**, of Frankfort
- **Rep. Regina Bunch**, of Williamsburg

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