

BULLY *from A1*

higher in Oregon. It's stayed nearly the same over the last six years. The state has made

efforts to curb bullying. The Oregon Safe Schools Act of 2009 gave definitions for bullying, and in 2012, the Act was strengthened to include more reporting mea-

asures for districts. The OSSCC rated districts for years on their bullying policies, with a "gold star" rating the goal of every district. The ratings, gold, sil-

ver and bronze star, measured compliance with state law and whether school policy included specific language for staff training and/or gender identity-based bullying and harassment.

Eventually, so many schools came into compliance with the law that the organization no longer felt it necessary to rate them, according to Joy Wallace, co-chair of the OSSCC board. South Lane School District (SLSD) achieved a "silver star" rating in 2012 and maintained that through 2014, which was the final year districts were graded; NDS was recognized as a "gold star district" beginning in 2013. However, despite the abundance of gold star districts, bullying rates have stayed almost constant.

But what exactly is bullying? ORS 339.351 defines bullying and harassment as any action that "substantially interferes with a student's educational benefits, opportunities, or performance"—while taking place in school or at school-sponsored activities and locations, including bus stops — resulting in physical harm or property damage, instilling fear of that harm or damage, or "creat[es] a hostile educational environment, including interfering with the psychological well-being of a student." It may or may not be based on protected classes like race and

gender.

At Bohemia Elementary School, they have a slightly different definition:

"We define bullying as something that is targeted harassment over time," said Principal Heather Bridgens. "It can be physical or verbal abuse. It can be intimidating. It doesn't have to be something that can be seen or heard...It's something that happens more than one time."

"The key difference [between simply being disrespectful or unkind and bullying] is that it is targeted and happens more than one time."

School districts are required by ORS 339.356 to have a policy on bullying and harassment as well as reporting procedures for students and faculty, but there is no statewide set of procedures or policies enforced among schools.

That makes comparative data collection difficult. In fact, Oregon doesn't collect data on bullying incidents unless it involves removing a student from school, according to Lisa Bateman, a Social Emotional Learning Specialist with the Oregon Department of Education. In addition, changes in staff training and different definitions of bullying have made comparing data from year to year murky at best.

"When we record behavior as bullying or disrespect, something we recorded as bullying

before we might more accurately record as disrespect now," Bridgens said.

It's not always easy to figure out why kids bully each other, either.

"There's a number of reasons [why kids bully]," said Dr. Linda Schmidt, a child psychiatrist with the Oregon Health and Science University. "The first thing that comes to my mind is low self-esteem ... Not always, but oftentimes they will have parents who are bullies. That behavior was modeled for them."

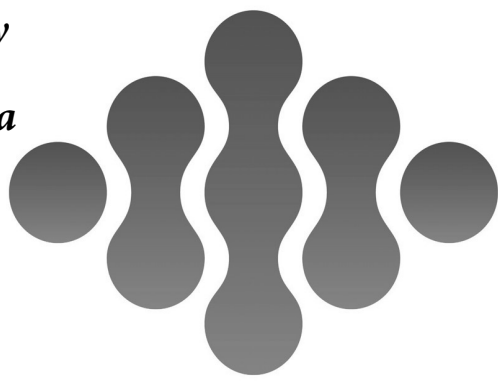
Schmidt also said bullies might pick on others because they're trying to look cool, to gain social status or gain a sense of power. Some, she said, lash out because they were bullied themselves.

SLSD is making efforts to track and prevent bullying through a more unified data collection system, a district-wide standardized report, and programs in the schools to stop it before it starts.

(Editor's Note: Next week, *The Sentinel* will provide a comprehensive report on a recent sports-related hazing incident that occurred last month at Cottage Grove High School, as well as Part II of this story exploring how SLSD is addressing the issue of bullying — and how those efforts are part of a long-term goal of creating a foundation of anti-bullying education from an early age.)

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