Addressing Bullying and Harassment in Schools

Our Values:
Children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) have a right to a safe and supportive environment at school in order to maximize their academic and social learning.

Why Preventing and Addressing Bullying and Harassment is Important:
• Bullying and harassment can result in serious emotional (short- and long-term) negative consequences for a child. This can include escalating violence as well as severe depression and withdrawal.
• Children can’t get the most out of their education, if they don’t feel safe at school.

Background:
• Current statutes (Minnesota Statutes § 121A.0695 and § 121A.03) are not strong enough to prevent ongoing instances of bullying and harassment in our public schools. These two laws simply state a school must have a written policy for bullying and harassment, and they require schools to post the policy and discuss it with students and school staff.
• Children and teens with developmental disabilities, such as ASD, have been found to be bullied twice the level as their classmates without disabilities. [1]
• Children with ASD are at a higher risk due to social skill and communication challenges. [2]
• One study found that adolescents with ASD were four times more likely to be bullied than their peers without disabilities; up to 75% of children with Asperger syndrome were bullied in this same study. [2]
• Technology has provided avenues for “cyber bullying.”
  --42% of kids have been bullied while online
  --35% of kids have been threatened online.
  --58% of kids admit someone has said something mean on hurtful to them online [3].

What Legislators Can Do:
• Pass strong anti-bullying and anti-harassment legislation that includes:
  --Clear definitions of bullying, harassment, and intimidation.
  --Clear guidelines on how to address cyber bullying.
  --Training for staff, parents, and students.
  --Formal complaint process at the school district and state level.
  --Data collection and reporting on an annual basis to determine effectiveness and assist schools in making improvements where needed and keep parents informed of bullying prevention efforts.

References: