Students Who Are Repeatedly Bullied Will Often Resort to Violence

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The nation received a shocking wake-up call about bullying when investigators revealed that the Columbine killers and other school shooters had been repeatedly bullied by classmates. On a typical school day today three out of 10 American youngsters are involved in bullying as perpetrators, victims or bystanders, and an estimated 160,000 children skip school for fear of being harassed. Bullied students are more prone to suicide, depression and poor school performance; bullies have a far higher likelihood of committing crimes as adults. At least 16 states have passed laws requiring schools to provide anti-bullying programs, but many states and school districts have been slow to act. Their reluctance may stem in part from opposition by conservative Christians, who argue that anti-bullying legislation and programs aimed at reducing sexually oriented teasing promote homosexuality and impinge on Christian students’ freedom of speech.

Schools Often Dismiss the Seriousness of Bullying

For many educators—and anguished parents—it took the horror of Columbine to awaken the nation to the seriousness—and pervasiveness—of bullying.

After Columbine High School students Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris massacred 12 students and a teacher and then
killed themselves at their school in the affluent Denver suburb of Littleton in 1999, parents told investigators that bullying had been rampant at Columbine.

Shari Schnurr, the mother of a student injured at Columbine, told the Governor’s Columbine Review Commission she had discussed bullying at the school with her daughter, who was a peer counselor. “There was just across-the-board intolerance [of others],” Schnurr said.

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Several witnesses, including the aunt of slain Columbine student Isaiah Shoels, testified that Principal Frank DeAngelis had discounted their concerns about bullying. Several parents also testified that students and others were unwilling to come forward with their stories for fear of retaliation.

In fact, bullying was also cited as a factor in subsequent school killings, according to a U.S Secret Service study. Concern about bullying has prompted at least 16 states to adopt legislation recommending or requiring schools to institute programs to help kids unlearn bullying behavior. . . .

Bullying in high school has a different name, says Ralph Cantor, the Safe and Drug Free Schools Coordinator for the Office of Education in Alameda County, Calif. “It’s called harassment,” particularly when it has sexual overtones, he says, and a “hate crime” if it involves bullying based on sexual orientation. . . .

Jaana Juvonen, a psychologist at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) who studies school culture, says bullying “may be particularly problematic in American schools.” According to student surveys, she says, U.S. schools rank roughly on a par with those in the Czech Republic as among the least friendly in the Western world.