



Addressing Harassment and Discrimination in our Schools: Ten Things Every PARENT OR GUARDIAN Should Know

- **Harassment, exclusion, and unequal opportunities because of race, religion, and national origin are common throughout Maine schools.** Our report documents the similar experiences of students across the state. These experiences have a real psychological and educational impact on students, and should not be ignored.
- **Most Maine schools are not doing enough to address these problems.** Our report shows that there are a number of key issues and challenges in Maine. First, there is a general lack of awareness among educators of discrimination in their schools. Second, even when they do recognize the problem, staff have limited resources to address it and often don't know where to begin.
- **There are people who can help in your school.** Empathetic social workers, teachers, and administrators can be strong advocates for students. Don't hesitate to request meetings, student records, or demand a fair process wherever applicable.
- **Parental involvement is crucial to make change in schools.** Teachers and principals who speak up about incidents they witness are sometimes accused of stirring up controversy or being too political, which can make them reluctant to take action. Parent support makes it easier for teachers and principals to speak up.
- **As a parent or guardian, you have the right to advocate for your student.** If you have questions about your child's experience at school, you have a right to meet with teachers and/or the principal. Nobody should make you feel like you are bothering them when you are simply asking that your student receive all the education and services they deserve. Whenever you have a meeting or a call with a school official, make sure to document what was said and what (if anything) the school agreed to do. If you do not speak English, you can ask the school to provide an interpreter for those conversations.

- **You don't have to meet with administrators alone.** You can bring a friend or relative with you to help you advocate for your student. Having someone with you in the meeting may make you feel more comfortable, and it will also help you remember all that was said and done in the meeting.
- **Every school is required to have a clear policy for preventing harassment and bullying.** They must also have a procedure for students and parents to file complaints. You have a right to see these policies and procedures if you ask for them.
- **There are other ways to advocate for your child if talking to teachers and the principal doesn't work.** You can also file a complaint with the school board or the Maine Human Rights Commission. Information about how to do that is online: www.aclumaine.org/webelonghere
- **Outreach to school boards can be especially important.** The school board is supposed to seek public input in policy and decision-making, and many school boards allow for public comment during meetings. Alternatively, many school boards encourage communications like emails or telephone calls for feedback about policy. School board meetings are open to the public, and the time and agenda of meetings must be posted online. If you decide to speak at a school board meeting, don't be afraid. Try to prepare ahead of time by practicing what you will say.
- **It takes an entire community to make change.** There are many organizations who are advocating for the rights of parents and students, including the ACLU of Maine. You can see a list online: www.aclumaine.org/webelonghere. Don't hesitate to reach out.

For more information, go to www.aclumaine.org/webelonghere.