



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on March 17, 2011

## Government “Anti-Bullying” Overreach Hits Facebook

As if public school teachers do not have enough on their plate, the Department of Education is now demanding that school teachers and principals monitor Facebook behavior. According to The Daily Caller, officials at the Department of Education “are threatening school principals with lawsuits if they fail to monitor and curb students’ lunchtime chat and evening Facebook time for expressing ideas and words that are deemed by Washington special-interest groups to be harassment of some students.”



*The Blaze* explains:

According to the report, the DOE issued new guidelines in a ‘Dear Colleague’ letter in October, which the site sums up as saying ‘federal officials have reinterpreted the civil-rights laws that require school principals to curb physical bullying, as well as racist and sexist speech, that take place within school boundaries.

The letter, which holds principles and schools liable for “harassment” both on and off school grounds, reads:

Harassing conduct may take many forms, including verbal acts and name-calling; graphic and written statements, which may include use of cell phones or the Internet...It does not have to include intent to harm, be directed at a specific target, or involve repeated incidents [but] creates a hostile environment...[which can] limit a student’s ability to participate in or benefit from the services, activities, or opportunities offered by a school.

The letter adds that Facebook is “thrilled” to assist. Facebook has developed new features to assist in this effort. The Daily Caller writes:

Facebook is developing new features that will make it harder for principals to miss episodes of online ‘harassment,’ and so will increase the likelihood of *government* action against the teenage users of Facebook and other social-media. (Emphasis added.)

In a statement issued by Facebook on March 11, it explains:

We’re adding a unique feature, developed with safety experts, that lets people also report content to someone in their support system (like a parent or teacher) who may be able to address the issue more directly. It is our hope that features like this will help not only remove the offensive content but also help people get to the root of the problem.

If the school determines that “harassment” has taken place, school officials may require students and their families to undergo mandatory training. The letter explains, “The school may need to provide training or other interventions not only for perpetrators, but also for the larger school community, to ensure that all students, their families, and school staff can recognize harassment if it recurs and know how to respond...[and] provide additional services to the student who was harassed in order to address



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the effects of the harassment.”

*The Daily Caller* [contends](#) that the DOE’s policy is “far-reaching”, and bemoans the “muted opposition” to the policy.

The National School Board Association has announced its formal opposition to the policy, but declined to comment.

The *West Virginia Gazette* [noted](#) in February that the schools’ extension of anti-bullying policies to school busses and stops, text messages, online postings, and other electronic communications reveals stark government overreach:

“Opponents call the bill an overreach by government. They say off-campus bullying is best left to parents to handle.”

Likewise, Robert Holland, senior fellow for education policy at The Heartland Institute, [asserts](#) that there is no necessity for federal meddling in local disciplinary issues.

“The U.S. Department of Education-the least popular of all federal agencies according to a recent Pew poll-should not intervene,” said Holland. “Well-trained classroom teachers, working in cooperation with parents, should discipline students who engage in bullying or other misbehavior. Local school boards should spell out disciplinary policies clearly. If a school fails to maintain sound discipline, parents should be free to choose a better school for their children.”

Furthermore, Holland contends that the Department of Education is the last agency from whom any parent or student should seek assistance:

Since its founding as a political payoff from Jimmy Carter to the National Education Association, this lavishly funded Cabinet-level department has failed to solve any problem it has addressed, an example being the minority achievement gap, and indeed has often made it harder for schools to succeed.

Ironically, Holland refers to the DOE’s overreach in this matter is “federal bullying.”

Instead of the regularly scheduled school bullying summits, Holland contends, “We ought to be holding summits on dismantling this bureaucratic monstrosity and returning power to the people, as opposed to pursuing yet another politically driven agenda.”



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