



86TH LEGISLATIVE SESSION

TEXAS PTA LEGISLATIVE PRIORITY

CYBERBULLYING

Support policies to strengthen anti-cyberbullying laws.

BACKGROUND

- This session, Texas PTA will monitor bullying/cyberbullying legislation, supporting bills that clarify the new law without weakening its features that protect victims and empower law enforcement and school leaders.
- Last session, Texas PTA advocated for strengthening Texas' bullying law to incorporate cyberbullying. The new law makes changes to public school law.
- Schools:
 - Have the authority to address cyberbullying that occurs off-campus
 - Must notify bullying victim's parents of bullying incident within three business days after the incident is reported and notify parents of the aggressor within a reasonable amount of time
 - Must create procedures for students for anonymous reporting of incidents
 - May expel students who engage in very serious bullying, including bullying that encourages a student to commit suicide, incites violence against another student, or involves releasing indecent photos of another student
 - Have strong protections from civil or criminal liabilities when reporting criminal bullying to law enforcement officials
 - Must provide mental health education
 - Must expand the role of school counselors to include mediating conflicts among students
- Civil Code was amended to make it easier to obtain an injunction from a court to prevent continual cyberbullying.
 - Victims are able to have a court issue an injunction against the cyberbully and the cyberbully's parents, requiring parents to take action to stop their child from cyberbullying.
 - The Texas Supreme Court's office is designing easy-to-use forms available to the general public to allow parents to obtain an injunction against ongoing cyberbullying of their children without the need for hiring a lawyer.

- Criminal Code was amended to modernize definitions in the harassment provisions of Texas criminal laws to better include the ways cyberbullies attack victims through smartphones and social media.
 - Cyber-harassment against a child that includes suicide baiting or the violation of an injunction against cyberbullying is now a more serious criminal offense than before, up to a Class A Misdemeanor.