

SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE

STATEMENT TO

SENATE, No. 253

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DATED: OCTOBER 1, 2026

The Senate Education Committee reports favorably Senate Bill No. 253.

This bill amends the definition of “harassment, intimidation, or bullying” in the Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act to encompass acts of harassment, intimidation, or bullying against all students, not just students in protected classes.

As currently defined, “harassment, intimidation, or bullying” is required to be reasonably perceived as being motivated by an actual or perceived characteristic. The definition sets forth examples of characteristics, which include race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, mental, physical or sensory disability, or other distinguishing characteristic. This bill eliminates the requirement that the conduct is motivated by these actual or perceived characteristics from the definition.

Under current law, the Commissioner of Education is required to update the model policy on harassment, intimidation, or bullying as the commissioner deems necessary and school districts are required to annually update their policies. This bill requires the commissioner to update the model policy, and the school districts to update their policies, upon any revision of the Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act.

The bill removes the requirement that a school district ensure that its training on harassment, intimidation, or bullying include instruction on preventing bullying on the basis of protected categories since these categories are eliminated by the bill.

Finally, the bill requires that as part of the information provided by the superintendent of schools twice a year to the board of education regarding acts of violence, vandalism, and bullying which occurred during the previous reporting period, the superintendent is to provide the board with information on the number of reports of harassment, intimidation, or bullying, disaggregated by race, gender, sexual orientation, eligibility for free or reduced-price lunch under the National School Lunch Program, special education designation, and English language learner designation. Similarly, the bill requires the information that is to be reported to the Department of Education include this disaggregated data.

This bill was pre-filed for introduction in the 2026-2027 session pending technical review. As reported, the bill includes the changes required by technical review, which has been performed.