

Teachers Fall Victim to Cyberbullying

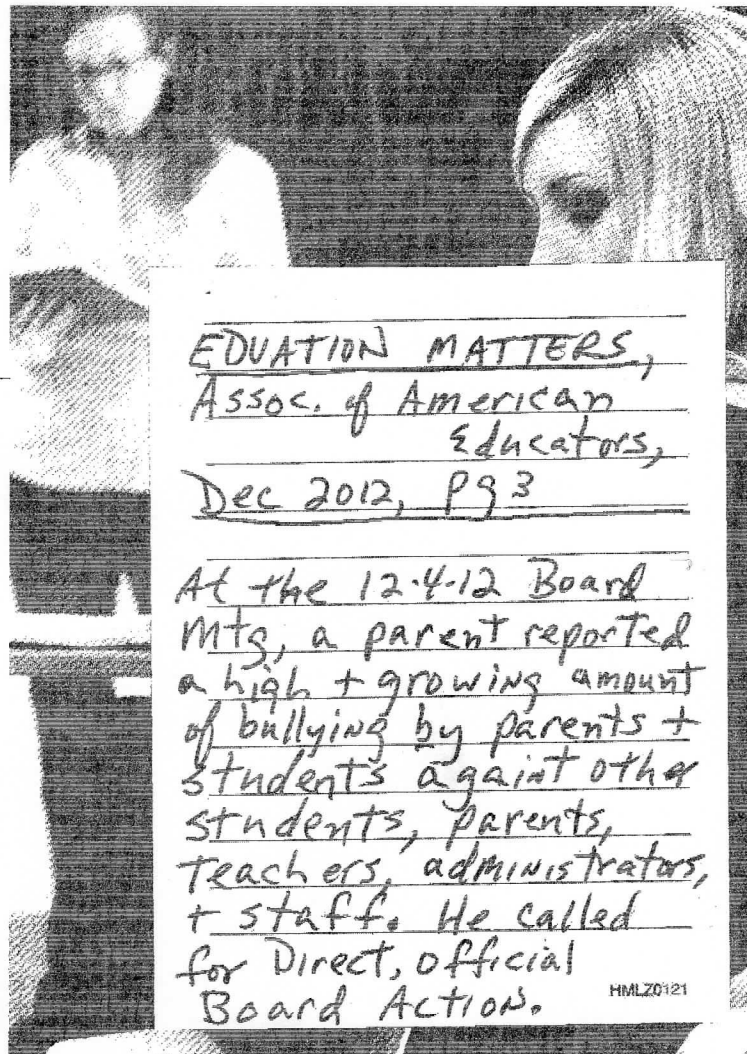
Cyberbullying, or the use of the Internet and related technologies to harm other people, has become a very real threat to American students. Unable to simply “unplug” at the end of the day, students from across the country are experiencing relentless and often anonymous teasing and threats via social networking websites and blogs. While coverage has overwhelmingly focused on student victims, teachers are now beginning to feel the adverse effects of cyberbullying. In North Carolina, a law aimed at protecting teachers has sparked conversation about online educator harassment.

According to a Norton online survey of 2,279 teachers in 24 countries, one in six educators has reported cyberbullying. In some instances, students have attempted to provoke school employees to near breakdown via false claims and threats. Teacher rating websites and personal social networking have created forums for students to voice their opinions about teachers, often with little accountability. With technology moving at a breakneck pace, schools and districts are often unable to keep their disciplinary policies current.

The new North Carolina law stays ahead of the curve, warning kids to watch what they say about school officials on the Internet. As per the law’s language, cyberbullying with the “intent to intimidate or torment a school employee” is now a criminal misdemeanor. Under the law, students could face fines of up to \$1,000, transfer to another school, and jail time if found guilty.

By holding students responsible for their actions online, supporters of the law hope to curb harassment of school employees, including teachers and administrators, on the

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At the 12-4-12 Board
Mtg, a parent reported
a high + growing amount
of bullying by parents +
students against other
students, parents,
teachers, administrators,
+ staff. He called
for Direct, official
Board Action.

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Internet. “We have to pull society back into a realization that what you say and what you do, you are held accountable for them,” said Ms. Judy Kidd, president of the Classroom Teachers Association of North Carolina. “When someone goes over and beyond what is free speech,” said Ms. Kidd, “then you get held accountable.”

Ms. Kidd told reporters that without the law in place, teachers were experiencing several threats. “We had students who were lying about teachers, then they were publishing things that were untrue,” argued Ms. Kidd, a high-school teacher. “There was nothing there to have any recourse, yet the teacher was the one who was suffering.”

While online bullying has become prevalent, critics of the new law warn that the terms “torment” and “intimidate” aren’t clear-cut and could curb free speech rights. The North Carolina American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) suggests legislators define the kind of online conduct that would put “a reasonable person in fear of some kind of bodily injury.” ■