

March 6, 2008

To Whom It May Concern:

I am the mother of an eleven year-old sixth grade boy at West Middle School in Greenwood Village, Colorado. I am going to tell you what he has been experiencing, what I have experienced since we reported the incidences to the school, and about the 8th grader that was beaten less than six months ago after being tortured for two years at the same school. Then, I'm going to remind you of what has been happening in our country regarding school shootings and try to explain to you why I believe our entire governmental system is failing my son in addition to all of our children as defined by the U.S. Supreme Court and the United Nations.

I have two goals that I hope to achieve with this letter. First, and foremost, I want to protect my son from any further terrorism. I want some help to undo what has been done. Second, and nearly as important as the first, I want to protect the future of our country by changing the policy (including, specifically, defining funding for implementation and maintenance of the policy changes) regarding anti-bullying.

I believe that not only my eleven year-old son, but we, as a People, have been failed by West Middle School, Cherry Creek School District, the U.S. Department of Education, as well as the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

Here is my story.

My son has been suffering from being bullied for several years. Over the course of these years, since I myself had never been bullied, I considered that he may be provoking incidents or dealing with a rite-of-passage. I no longer think that.

Almost a year ago, I began sending my son to group therapy. The sessions included children that have been dealing with similar issues, with a frequent group topic of being bullied. My son was taught tools in dealing with bullies in "appropriate" ways. About a month ago, he came home from one of the sessions distraught. After much discussion, he and I came to the conclusion that the tools provided to him were no longer enough. We agreed that I would contact the school. The school told me that my son needed to come to the office to make a written statement. I was concerned about retribution, but my son's response, "I

don't care if they figure out who it was <that reported them>, I just want them to stop."

When I called the office the day after he reported the incidents, the secretary confirmed for me that he had named three names, that they'd had issues with these children before (with other kids), and that the Dean was reviewing my son's statement and would call me back the following day.

Two days after his report, my son told me that one of the children he named tried to "slam my head into my locker while I was trying to open it." Despite the facts that he had named this child as a bully two days earlier and the office acknowledged there had been pre-existing problems with this child, the child was able to terrorize my son again. Further, on this day, I received no phone call from the Dean.

Eight days after the original report, I finally received a voice mail from the Dean asking me to continue encouraging my son "to report these incidents... It's the only way we can address these situations." The Dean went on to say that he was emailing my son's teachers that day to notify them of his report and "to keep an eye out."

The day after I received this message, I found out that there had been several local news articles released three days earlier regarding an eighth grade boy who had been beaten. His harassment began two years earlier by being called a Nazi while in school simply because he was a German National. The news articles said that, after the beating which happened at a bus stop, he had to call his father because he could not walk. Add to that the fact that the victim was a student at West Middle School...

When I first got the voice mail from the Dean, I was flabbergasted not only at the response time, but also at the response itself. Now, I realized that there was even more reason to be concerned – there was a recent news release that there was a boy that had been victimized at the same school; yet, no one saw anything for two years? Where were all the teachers and administrators for all this time? Why weren't they acting promptly on my son's statement?

This poor boy was understandably so afraid that he couldn't bring himself to come forward. I can't help but think about all the other children that watched it for two years only to have them watch it lead to a beating. Thankfully, my son finally came forward - most children don't, and this eighth grade boy was a classic example.

By this point, I realized that parent/teacher conferences were coming up in another week. In summary, at the conference, I explained what my son had been through and how I felt that the adults in the school should have been aware of what was happening – particularly when he named names, they'd already had issues with these three children, recent news article, etc. I made it clear that I was disturbed by the lack of action on behalf of my son. Before I was escorted to the Assistant Principal and the Dean, I only had an opportunity to talk to one teacher. The teacher said she never saw an email about my son's report – that can only indicate one of three things: the email was never sent, important emails are not being read, or there are issues with the school's email server. Regardless, the school failed in their communication attempts regarding my son's safety.

It has been seven days since I spoke with the Assistant Principal and the Dean, and I have still not heard back from them.

Sadly, studies show that 90% of 4th through 8th graders are victims of terrorism via bullying. Several articles outline that observers of these acts are equally as affected emotionally and psychologically as the victim. Even more studies show that victims of terrorism, specifically bullying, have both short and long term affects. In fact, since the Columbine shooting in 1999, there has been a significant increase in the number of school shootings, and, in more instances than not, the perpetrator of the shootings was a victim of bullying.

I had, up until this point, already done a lot of research on the subjects of bullying, school district policies, etc. Below is a summary of what I found including, as I mentioned earlier, a Supreme Court decision that places responsibility on the government for preventing bullying, a form of terrorism.

Current policies mandate that the school, school district, and even Department of Education take action *when* a child reports incidents of terrorism. None of the policies require the school, school district, or Department of Education to act until the child notifies them of what's been happening. Despite the age of on-call or on-staff security guards and in-school closed circuit cameras, the school system does not currently even attempt to stop the torment until the child comes forward.

The U.S. Supreme Court deemed public schools to be *in loco parentis* in the 1995 decision in **Vernonia School District v. Acton**, 515 U.S. 646, 115 S. Ct. 2386, 132 L. Ed. 2d 564. In this decision, the Supreme Court decided that children in schools are not protected by Fourth Amendment rights because the school (on behalf of the state) is acting as

the child's parent. I contend that this decision thereby makes the school, and the state, responsible for protecting my child against acts of terrorism just as I would, as his parent.

To help define parental responsibility, note that in 1989, the U.N. General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). The CRC explains that the family unit must help their children prepare to live "in the spirit of peace, dignity, tolerance, freedom, equality and solidarity."

Additionally, the mission for U.S. Department of Homeland Security states, "... We will prevent and deter terrorist attacks and protect against and respond to threats and hazards to the nation..."

Lastly, the preamble of the United States Constitution says that the government will promote the general welfare of the people.

By definition, bullying is terrorism. How can allowing terrorism to take place in our schools promote the general welfare? Why do we pay taxes to fight terrorism internationally when it is occurring right here in our schools? How is allowing bullying, a form of terrorism, in our schools prepare our children to live in the spirit of peace, freedom, and solidarity?

It is because of all of this that I believe our government is responsible for protecting our children from being bullied in school.

I can only hope that my statement helps you to recognize that our current policies are wrong. In my son's case, even following the policy failed him. We cannot afford another school shooting – we must take action against the root cause. That means putting an end to peer-induced tyranny in our schools, and it is up to us to ensure the government provides us with this protection.

I don't want my son to be that eighth grade boy who is beaten after two years of name calling; nor, do I want my son to be the bullied kid that snaps as a young adult.

I believe that it can only be assumed that West Middle School, Cherry Creek School District, the U.S. Department of Education, and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security are failing not only my son, but all of us, in their responsibility for ensuring the safety of our children.

Sincerely,

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Definitions

In loco parentis

Defined: To assume the duties and responsibilities of a parent. From Latin, meaning “in place of a parent.”

(*The New Dictionary of Cultural Literacy, Third Edition. 2002*)

All definitions below are from:

Dictionary.com Unabridged (v 1.1). Retrieved March 02, 2008, from Dictionary.com website: <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/welfare>

Welfare:

1. the good fortune, health, happiness, prosperity, etc., of a person, group, or organization; well-being

Bully:

2. a blustering, quarrelsome, overbearing person who habitually badgers and intimidates smaller or weaker people.
6. to act the bully toward; intimidate; domineer. Synonyms: cow, browbeat, coerce; terrorize, tyrannize

Tyrannize:

To treat tyrannically; oppress

Tyrannical:

1. unjustly cruel, harsh, or severe; arbitrary or oppressive; despotic

Terrorize:

2. To coerce by intimidation or fee. See Synonyms at frighten

Frighten:

1. to make afraid or fearful; throw into a fright; terrify; scare. Synonyms: 1. shock, startle, dismay, intimidate. FRIGHTEN, ALARM, SCARE, TERRIFY, TERRORIZE, APPALL all mean to arouse fear in people or animals. To FRIGHTEN is to shock with sudden, startling, but usually short-lived fear, esp. that arising from the apprehension of physical harm: *to frighten someone by a sudden noise*. To ALARM is to arouse the feelings through the realization of some imminent or unexpected danger: *to alarm someone by a scream*. To SCARE is to frighten, often without the presence of real danger: *Horror movies really scare me*. To TERRIFY is to strike with violent, overwhelming, or paralyzing fear: *to terrify a city by lawless acts*. To TERRORIZE is to terrify in a general, continued, systematic manner, either wantonly or in order to gain control: *His marauding armies terrorized the countryside*. To APPALL is to overcome or confound by dread, dismay, shock, or horror: *The suffering caused by the earthquake appalled him*.