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GUEST OPINION: Gay students are often major victims of bullying

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In recent months, the American public was stunned by a string of suicides of gay teens and college students. As the story unfolded, we learned that many of these young men were victims of malicious bullying by classmates and peers. In some cases, the pattern of bullying was known by school administrators but no action was taken to protect the at-risk students.

Many public figures and members of the gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and questioning (GLBTQ) community responded with the **"It Gets Better"** campaign, which featured short videos describing how the teenage years can be tough, but things will improve. Additionally, several states and school districts have implemented anti-bullying policies and programs.

Within the country, New England scores very high marks. **The Bully Police USA** watchdog organization scores Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New Hampshire and Vermont with A's and Connecticut with B's for the strength of their anti-bullying mandates for public schools.

Despite the media attention and public sentiment, there are still several states with little or no policies. Those scoring with a D or worse: Hawaii, North Dakota, South Dakota and Michigan.

Fall River is doing its part in the anti-violence movement. This Saturday, at Kuss Middle School, the third annual **Peace by Piece Summit** will take place.

The Fall River community has recognized the issues surrounding bullying within the GLBTQ community, and one of the workshops will be dedicated to discussing this. There will also be many other workshops such as cyberbullying, cyberviolence, domestic violence, and gang violence.

For more information about the anti-violence movement and the Peace by Piece Summit, visit www.MyFallRiver.org.

There are some very good resources available to both parents and teens struggling with issues of bullying, and or acceptance within their communities. **The Trevor Project** is the leading national organization focused on crisis and suicide prevention efforts among GLBTQ youth.

They are determined to provide life-saving and life-affirming resources including a nationwide, 24/7 crisis intervention lifeline and online community. The Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Youth Support Project and **OutHealth!** trains youth speakers and conducts cyberbullying workshops for educators.

If you or anyone you know is the victim of bullying, call the Trevor Project hotline at 866-488-7386.

Emmanuel Avellanet works with the TADA Youth Group at the BOLD Coalition. The Mission of BOLD is to prevent and reduce alcohol and drug abuse among youth and creating a healthy community for the youth of Greater Fall River.

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