

# New Anti-Bullying Statute in Massachusetts

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The recent news about sentencing in the tragic case of Phoebe Prince throws the problem of bullying in our nation's schools back in to the spotlight. Prince was 15 years old when she committed suicide in January of 2010 in South Hadley, MA following relentless bullying by her peers. Her death has elevated awareness of bullying and has spurred legislative changes around the country.

Massachusetts passed a new anti-bullying statute in May 2010 in direct response to the incident. [St.2010, c.92](#) titled Bullying in Schools contains several important provisions designed to protect students from bullying and harassment. The law specifically addresses cyber-bullying a new type of bullying in today's digital world. With Facebook, cell phones and other forms of electronic communication children who were once solely bullied while at school are now subject to a relentless wave of harassment following them when they leave school at the end of the day. The law also requires schools to create a plan to implement programs both to prevent bullying and provide successful intervention in consultation should incidents of bullying come to light.

Bullying is of particular concern to children with disabilities since they are already in a vulnerable state. According to a recent survey by the Massachusetts Advocates for Children, 90% of parents with autistic children reported that their child had been the target of bullying. In response to this concern, the Department of Special Education has issued a Technical Advisory with guidelines and resources concerning bullying and special needs children. The Advisory places particular emphasis on addressing bullying prevention in your child's IEP and ensuring that your child has a safe person to go to if they are being bullied. The IEP should have a section for educational professionals to comment on whether your child seems withdrawn or is not socializing appropriately because of bullying. This portion of the IEP should also provide tools for the child to use themselves when confronted with bullying.

Read the full Massachusetts Statute [here](#)

Read the Technical Advisory from the Department of Special Education [here](#)