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## News for Immediate Release

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### **Auditor General DePasquale Completes Audit of Cumberland Valley School District, Urges Updates to State Anti-Bullying Law**

**HARRISBURG** – Auditor General Eugene DePasquale today said Pennsylvania’s anti-bullying law should be strengthened to ensure that schools districts are reporting all instances of bullying and called on the General Assembly to update the law to help make schools safer.

“Bullying is very harmful to students and can have lifelong implications,” DePasquale said.

“Strengthening our state law would give us more accurate data to help develop new solutions and make sure every child has the opportunity to learn in a safe environment.”

DePasquale developed his recommendation after completing an [audit](#) of the Cumberland Valley School District in Cumberland County, where some parents had complained last fall that the district was doing too little to address bullying among students. The audit included a review of the district’s bullying policy and reporting procedures.

“My team found the district is meeting the letter of the law in managing how it records and reports instances of bullying, but we also found the district has reported only two instances of bullying in the past five school years,” DePasquale said.

DePasquale said incidents that many students and parents would likely consider bullying are not reported by districts because of a narrow and subjective definition of bullying in state law. As a result, complaints involving bullying are often reported as “Student Code of Conduct” violations on a district’s annual Safe Schools report to the Pennsylvania Department of Education.

“Parents may not know about bullying taking place in their schools unless their children tell them about it,” DePasquale said. “It’s difficult – if not impossible – to make conclusions about the pervasiveness of bullying if school districts are underreporting it, as appears to be the case.”

DePasquale credited Cumberland Valley School District Superintendent Dr. David Christopher and his staff for cooperating with the audit team as well as for being responsive to concerns raised by district parents. Dr. Christopher is completing his first year with the district.

DePasquale noted that Cumberland Valley School District has taken a number of steps to address bullying in recent years, including:

- The district updated its bullying, harassment and anti-discrimination policies in 2018, at which time the former superintendent sent a district-wide letter reiterating that harassment and other forms of discrimination are not tolerated. The letter also invited students to join a “SPIRIT” council and asked parents to join a diversity committee, now called the Inclusion Advisory Committee.
- In 2019, it launched a Safe2Say program and provided related training to middle and high school students and staff as required by law. It also hired an outside vendor to provide additional trainings on diversity and inclusion.

- At the beginning of the current school year, the district distributed a school climate survey to students, parents and staff, for which the results were still pending at the end of audit fieldwork.
- Dr. Christopher sent a districtwide letter outlining the school climate and inclusionary efforts. He has also asked district parents to help by talking to their children about bullying and how to report it.
- In November 2019, the school board approved further updates to the district’s bullying/cyberbullying policy.

“Dr. Christopher has worked to address parents’ concerns and promote culture change in his district,” DePasquale said. “While not every parent may be completely satisfied, there is greater awareness of the need to provide all children with a safe learning environment – and how stopping bullying starts at home.”

DePasquale said his department will work with the Pennsylvania Department of Education to look at ways to improve the statutory definition of bullying and reporting guidance. In addition, auditors will alert PDE if future audits find districts where the reported number of incidents seems inordinately low.

“We need to make sure that the reported data about bullying matches the reality of what’s happening in our schools,” he added. “Every child deserves to be able to learn in peace.”

Review the [Cumberland Valley School District audit report](#) and learn more about the Department of the Auditor General online at [www.PaAuditor.gov](http://www.PaAuditor.gov).

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