

Bill would require local schools to report bullying of students with disabilities to federal government

By Alex Brown and [Chris Moody](#) - The Daily Caller 7:19 AM 03/17/2011



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While the Department of Education [continues its crackdown](#) on mean-spirited taunting on Facebook, some members of Congress are joining the fight in Washington's War on Bullying with a new bill aimed directly at kids who target students with disabilities.

Rep. Jackie Speier, California Democrat, will introduce a bill that would require schools to report incidents of bullying against children diagnosed with conditions like Down syndrome and Aspergers to the federal [government](#). It would also mandate that any federal dollars that promote anti-bullying programs focus partially on that group.

"There is [currently] no requirement that as part of the anti-bullying curriculum, that there be made specific reference to children with special needs. That's particularly dumb," Speier said during a briefing on school bullying on Capitol Hill Wednesday. "What I want to do is create an environment where there is zero tolerance. I think that starts first with education and awareness. Then, when behavior is egregious, then people have to be called out on that."

Speier's initiative is part of a larger, national campaign to get the federal government, local officials and [school districts](#) to discourage incidents of name calling and taunting on school campuses and online.

President Obama even launched an anti-bullying initiative from the White House last year.

"We've got to dispel this myth that bullying is just a normal rite of passage," Obama said in October.

"We here in Congress have a responsibility to act as well," Speier said Wednesday.

But highlighting one group could put local [schools](#) working to curb the practice in a tough place, warned Neal McCluskey, associate director of the Center for Educational Freedom at the libertarian Cato Institute.

According to McCluskey, singling out specific groups for special consideration could occur at the expense of other victims not on a list of protected students.

“The federal government does have legitimate role to play in ensuring that schools do not allow systematic discrimination to occur in schools and certainly perpetrated by schools,” McCluskey said. “The problem starts when the federal government identifies specific groups that are somehow going to be more protected or identified for protection to the exclusion of other groups. So the person who’s just a ‘nerd’ doesn’t get the same level of protection because ‘nerds’ are not identified as a specific group in federal legislation.”

For weeks this year, anti-bullying advocates have lobbied at the U.S. Capitol, teaming up with parents and children to push Congress to address the issue. On Wednesday, the group AbilityPath.org, an online network of families with children who have mental and physical disabilities, sponsored the [forum](#) where Speier announced her intention to introduce the bill.

Washington Republican Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers, who has a child of her own with Down syndrome, joined Speier, along with “Glee” actress Lauren Potter, who has become a national celebrity spokesman for the group.

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