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James Alan Fox on criminal behavior and the justice system

BULLYING

Slogans not enough to combat bullying

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If you haven't been paying attention to the academic calendar, you may not be aware that today is "No Name Calling Day" in elementary and secondary schools statewide. And, as a way for students to pledge repudiation of the insidious practice of bullying, they are being asked to wear black to indicate their willingness to "Black Out Bullying."

When declaring January 25th as a day to raise awareness, Governor Deval Patrick noted:

?In my role as Governor and as a father of two daughters, I firmly believe that every child should come to school knowing that they are safe and free from bullying. No Name Calling Day will remind us of the type of vigilance we should exhibit every day to ensure our students are free from the dangers and distractions of bullying.?

Promises are cheap and easy, as is wearing some piece of black attire. The question is whether this will have any real effect on bullying, short-term or long-term, when, literally, push comes to shove. Or, is it little more than cosmetic?

Although student pledges and school assemblies are important gestures and well-intentioned, much more than symbolism and a day of free of teasing is needed to eradicate a problem that has existed for generations -- for as long as there have been schools and youngsters attending them.

Even if minimally effective, strategies like declaring a statewide "No Name Calling Day" are fine so long as they are not treated a simple substitute for the difficult work needed to reduce bullying. It is critical that students, faculty and administrators to give much more than lip service to stopping harassment of weaker students and ending intolerance for those who are different. Actually, the solution lies well beyond the classrooms and the school grounds.

Bullying is rampant throughout society -- inside schools and out, among students and those who are well past their school days. Not only do we tolerate bullying and nastiness, we often admire those who are dominant over others. We vote for political candidates who attack their rivals during a debate, and dismiss those who don't appear sufficiently strong and tough. We cheer athletes, not just for winning, but for taunting their beaten opponents as pitiful losers. We allow bullies in the workplace to dictate over their subordinates who are just too afraid to resist.

Only when adults show greater respect for one another can they more effectively teach the kids respect by example. Making sure your son or daughter wears black to school today just isn't enough.