

School Sexual Harassment Report Released By AAUW

POTSDAM - The American Association of University Women has released *Crossing the Line: Sexual Harassment at School*, the most comprehensive, nationally representative research conducted in the past 10 years on sexual harassment in middle and high schools.

Sexual harassment pervades the lives of students in grades 7-12. Nearly half of those surveyed reported that they had been harassed in the 2010-11 school year. Of that number, a majority (87 percent) said that being harassed had a negative effect on them.

Among the responses, one-third said they did not want to go to school as a result of the harassment. Another third said they felt sick to their stomachs.

The prevalence of sexual harassment in middle and high school comes as a surprise to many, in part because it is rarely reported. Only about 9 percent of harassed students told a teacher, guidance counselor, or other adult at school about being sexually harassed.

"The AAUW report *Crossing the Line: Sexual Harassment at School* is a call to action to students, parents, teachers, and all of us who are concerned about the next generation," said AAUW Executive Director Linda D. Hallman, CAE. "Many students feel sexual harassment is normal behavior, and often victims of

sexual harassment victimize other children. It's a vicious cycle that exacts an enduring emotional toll on students."

Included in the report are promising practices for how teachers, parents and community groups in particular can help change the school climate.

"The good news is that the more we know about sexual harassment at school, the better we can combat it," said AAUW Director of Research and co-author Catherine Hill. "This report is nationally representative and provides fresh insight into this problem."

Creating, publicizing and enforcing sexual harassment policies and adhering to the requirements of Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 are other ways schools can bring attention to the issue and chip away at the problem.

"Our report clearly shows that, in many instances, we are failing to provide the safe environment necessary for our children to succeed," said Lisa Maatz, AAUW director of public policy and government relations. "Children and their families are too often left to fend for themselves when kids are harassed. Congress needs to strengthen federal protection for all students, regardless of race, color, national origin, sex, disability, perceived gender identity or religion."

The co-author of the report, Holly Kearl, the Managing Director of the AAUW Legal Advocacy Fund, will be in

Watertown in early March, 2012 to provide harassment training at Jefferson County College. In addition, she will be the keynote speaker at the AAUW-NYS District 7 spring conference on *The Bully Culture* on March 3 at JCC.

Kearl will not only report on the facts of the new AAUW report, but will assist as AAUW works with its community partners to create solutions to the twin problems of bullying and harassment.

The conference is designed to foster working partnerships among a broad range of community providers to understand the many forms bullying can take and to showcase community-based programs that work to address the issue. For more information, watch the website of AAUW District 7 at www.northcountryaaauw.org/.

AAUW, with its nationwide network of more than 100,000 members, more than 1,000 branches conducting programs in communities across the country, and 500 college and university partners, has been a leading advocate for equity and education for women and girls since 1881.

For more information about AAUW in St. Lawrence County, contact President Becky Gerber at 268-9957, gerber1@potdam.edu or Public Policy Chair Kathleen Stein at 386-3812, kstein1@twcny.rr.com, or visit the branch website, www.northnet.org/stlawrenceaaauw/index.html.