

Frank J. Bolaños, Member

SUBJECT: TAKING A STAND AGAINST BULLYING

COMMITTEE: INNOVATION, EFFICIENCY & GOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS

Take-Two Interactive Software, Inc., the makers of the *Grand Theft Auto* games, which have been linked by law enforcement officials to numerous copycat acts of violence by teens, is set to release this year a Columbine simulation game called *Bully*. In this game, a teen can bludgeon his classmates and teachers with bats, fists, and slingshots, even engaging in "white on black" crime.

Miami-Dade Public Schools continues to take bullying prevention in our schools seriously. In our Code of Student Conduct, activity relating to bullying is outlined as Group II offenses and specific disciplinary actions are prescribed. The District currently restricts the downloading of unauthorized software. In our Network Security Standards, games are specifically prohibited unless there is a legitimate educational purpose. We have included professional development programs for employees and continue to restrict objectionable material from our computers that may inspire such bad behavior.

It is judicious for the School Board to send a clear message to parents, retailers, and the entire community regarding the potential harm this game may have on our children. The School Board, by approving this item, would also request that local and national retailers not sell this simulation game and ask parents not to buy it or let their children play it at home.

**ACTION PROPOSED BY
MR. FRANK J. BOLAÑOS:**

That The School Board of Miami-Dade County, Florida:

1. Direct the Superintendent and Staff to add the simulation game *Bully* to the list of prohibited software and restrict access from our school computers.
2. Approve a resolution 06-20 requesting, among other things, that the Board engage manufacturers of violent interactive videogames and request that they reduce all violence in video games directed towards minor children and that the Board request that manufacturer of the video game entitled *Bully* not release this video game to the public or that local retailers prohibit its sale to minors and inform parents on the potential harmful effects to children of playing interactive video games containing violence.

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**REVISED
REPLACEMENT
B-12**

**Resolution No. 06-20 of the
School Board of Miami-Dade County, Florida**

Whereas, the educational purposes of our schools are best accomplished in a climate of student behavior that is socially acceptable and conducive to the learning and teaching process; student behavior that disrupts this process or that infringes upon the rights of other individuals will not be tolerated, and

Whereas, the School Board of Miami-Dade County, Florida endorses a zero tolerance policy toward school related violent crime and has consistently promulgated policies that promote a safe learning environment for our students, including, but not limited to anti-bullying measures, and

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Whereas, the American Psychological Association, has determined that comprehensive analysis of violent interactive video game research suggests exposure to such games increases, among other things, aggressive behavior, aggressive thoughts, angry feelings, and decreases helpful behavior, and

Whereas, studies suggest that violent video games may be more harmful than violent television and movies because they are interactive, very engrossing and require the player to identify with the aggressor, and

Whereas, the FBI and the Secret Service found, in doing separate threat assessments after the worst school massacre in American history at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, that all of the then-recent school shooters were immersed in violent entertainment, including violent video games, and

Whereas, numerous acts of violence, have been linked to such video games as *Grand Theft Auto*, which is produced by Take-Two Interactive Software, Inc., including the worst school massacre since Columbine, by a Red Lake, Minnesota student who killed ten in March of 2005, and

Whereas, Take-Two, the maker of the *Grand Theft Auto* games has announced its intention to release in 2006 the video game entitled *Bully*, which allows students in a virtual school, whose slogan is "Dog Eat Dog," to engage in such acts of violence as bludgeoning their classmates, and teachers in schools, with bats, fists, slingshots, body slams, and even dunking their heads into toilets to "settle scores," and

Whereas, experts on the dynamics of bullying predict that games such as *Bully* may lead to more teen violence, in and outside of the school environment, because it has the potential to serve as a violence rehearsal simulator on which teens will prepare, either wittingly or unwittingly, for acts of violence in schools,

BE IT THEREFORE RESOLVED THAT

The School Board of Miami-Dade County, Florida, approve Resolution No. 06-20 in the interest of our students' safety and thereby raise awareness of the harmful effects of violent video game entertainment, and

That the School Board engage video game manufacturers that produce violent video games targeted towards minors, and request that they voluntarily reduce all violence in their video games, and that they use restraint in the development of video games that lead to increased aggressive behavior by students and minors, and

That the School Board request of the manufacturer of the video game presently known by the name of *Bully*, that the game not be released to the public, or if released, that the School Board request that local retailers prohibit its sale to minors, and

That the School Board make available to parents--through varied media--information on the potential harmful effects to children of playing interactive video games containing violence and provide effective educational resources that will enable parents to make informed choices with respect to video games played by their children.

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A copy of this resolution is placed in the permanent records of this Board.

THE SCHOOL BOARD OF MIAMI-DADE COUNTY, FLORIDA

Chair

ATTEST:

Secretary

Memo

To: Frank J. Bolaños, Member, DCPS Board

From: Eugene F. Provenzo, Jr., Professor, Department of Teaching and Learning,
School of Education, University of Miami

Date: March 15, 2006

Re: Bullying and Video Games

I am sorry that I cannot attend the Board Meeting and provide you with information concerning video games and violent behavior. I am out of town on our spring break. I would be happy to meet with you on my return to Miami. Your assistant Carlos Becerra and I talked on Friday, and I agreed to send along some remarks.

I have been researching video games and violence since the late 1980s. My book *Video Kids: Making Sense of Nintendo* (Harvard University Press, 1991) is widely considered the first academic book to look at race, violence and gender issues in video games. I have written numerous book chapters and articles on the subject since, and am currently finishing a second book on the subject (See my online vita at for further references: <http://www.education.miami.edu/ep/vita/>). A useful summary on the issue can be found in my 2000 testimony before the United States Senate (See: ED483017 - The Impact of Interactive Violence on Children. Hearing before the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, United States Senate. One Hundred Sixth Congress, Second Session (March 21, 2000) available online through the ERIC database: <http://eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/Home.portal>).

Concerning the game *Bully*, which is proposed for release by Rockstar Video Games (I can only comment from limited knowledge. I have seen screenshots of the game and I have heard the game described in its prerelease form by persons in the industry.): It seems to me that with what we know about video games as "teaching machines" having a game based on bullying is highly irresponsible. Simply argued, any video game is a teaching machine. Good players learn the "lesson" of the game, and the reproduce the desired behavior that is being taught by playing the game well. If we want to stop bullying in schools, why would we have children play a game (i.e use a training simulator) to teach them how to bully other children? The psychological research (See my Senate testimony and that of Craig Anderson for summaries) demonstrates clearly that aggressive behavior is promoted through violent screen-baed media such as television, films and video games. In the case of video games, the United States military makes extensive use of video games to train people for combat. The "first person shooter" games are essentially the same technology that is being used for the proposed *Bully* game from Rockstar.

Warning parents about this game, formally banning it from use in schools, etc. seems a highly prudent action on the part of the school board.



PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Bully

► STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION ► PUBLISHER ROCKSTAR GAMES ► DEVELOPER ROCKSTAR VINCOWNER ► RELEASE OCTOBER

ANOTHER BRICK IN THE WALL

Rockstar is known for following its muse wherever it may lead. In the last few years, the company has explored worlds as diverse as *Midnight Club's* illegal street racing circuits, the mind of a killer in *Manhunt*, the drug-fueled 1980s in *Vice City*, and the re-imagined plains of the Wild West in *Red Dead Revolver*. Now, the most controversial company in video games is preparing to take you back to school.

After releasing a vague announcement of the game prior to the show, Rockstar finally revealed its next major project, and the first title developed by Rockstar Vancouver, *Bully*. If you've tired of gunning down mobsters or eviscerating aliens, the game will offer you an environment that's been little explored in gaming history.

Bully's protagonist is Jimmy Hopkins, a ne'er-do-well 15-year-old who has been kicked out of a string of prestigious prep schools due to his delinquent behavior. At the outset of the game, his negligent mother, who is on her way to her fifth

honeymoon, drops Jimmy off at Bullworth Academy. Bullworth represents Jimmy's last chance to make a go of it, and gamers will soon find that negotiating the claque social structure of middle school is every bit as difficult as slaying orcs in the halls of Middle-earth.

While intriguing on paper, we were curious to see how a day in the life of Jimmy Hopkins would play out in *Bully*. Thankfully, we had the good fortune to see a brief demo of the game at E3, which lent some insight into the game's inner workings. We watched Jimmy wake up in a messy dorm room, late for class as usual. From there, he headed straight to the men's room to heed nature's call (for all the bathrooms we've toured in games, this is one of the few times we've actually seen the facilities used). We also saw the common room in the dorm, where students can purchase sodas, watch a working television, and even play darts. There, a prefect (older students who help enforce order) told us to get dressed for class, which was an opportunity

to show off the game's extensive apparel customization mode.

Walking around campus, we were awed by the sheer detail that's gone into creating Bullworth Academy. Various campus buildings and facilities like the gym and football field will all be put to use (of course, dodgeball is fully playable in the game), and roaming bands of jocks, nerds, and preppies, all who will fraternize with or antagonize Jimmy depending on their mood and social status.

Aside from exploring the huge playground that is Bullworth, you'll also be tasked to complete various missions. In the one example we saw, a rather unbragging science teacher was upset that a wealthy student had procured a prize Venus Flytrap plant identical to his own. Of course, there can be only one, so he forces Jimmy to dispose of it. After getting the code to the posh dorm Harrington Hall by administering a swifly to a preppie, he infiltrated the house and dispersed a beatdown of the posh boys with a cricket bat. Following a shootout with our

trusty slingshot, the plant was blown to bits with an expertly placed firecracker.

Although Rockstar is known for controversy, *Bully* is far different in tone than *Grand Theft Auto* or *Manhunt* (and will be Teen rated when it launches in October). Jimmy gets in his fair share of trouble, but there is no blood or graphic violence, and the overall tone is one of comic mischief.

It's clear that Rockstar intends this as a somewhat nostalgic tribute to school days, one that captures all the confusion and fun of that period in life. It's certainly a departure from the standard video game fare, and it's admirable to see a high profile company taking risks with unproven subject matter. Based on what we saw, it's too early to give *Bully* a passing grade, but Rockstar promises that the game will be every bit as epic and engrossing as the games that have made the company into an industry powerhouse.

It's a tantalizing gamble, and we're excited to see how *Bully* develops. Given Rockstar's stellar track record over the past few years, we expect great things. ■■■■



■ We witnessed a playable game of dodgeball during the demo, and this shot hints that other sports may be included in Bully



previews

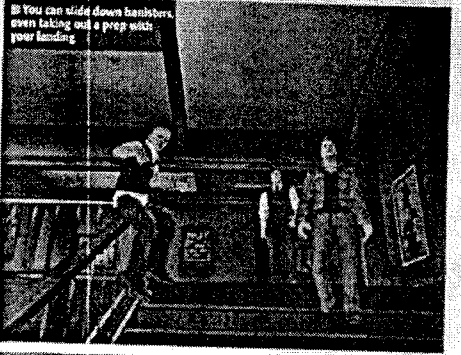
■ The campus is highly detailed, with countless rooms and buildings to explore



■ The Society: Mutilating Nerdz Since 1933



■ Violating the rules of hockey week? Is nothing secret?



■ You can slide down banisters, even taking out a prep with your landing



■ Although the game isn't as violent as many Bully-like games, Bully still has its share of fighting



■ The newly revealed 3D Bully is a more realistic and colorful