



NATIONAL
DROPOUT
PREVENTION
CENTER/NETWORK

NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 25 NUMBER 4

CYBERBULLYING

CAN YOU REMEMBER THE SCHOOLYARD JINGLE “STICKS AND STONES MAY BREAK MY BONES, BUT NAMES WILL NEVER HURT ME?” BULLYING AND CYBERBULLYING STORIES ARE PROVING THAT THIS OLD ADAGE OBVIOUSLY IS NOT TRUE. A CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL 2016 FACT SHEET INDICATES THAT 20% OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS REPORT BEING BULLIED WITHIN THE LAST 12 MONTHS AND 15% REPORT BEING CYBERBULLIED. FURTHER, THE SAFE SCHOOL INITIATIVE REPORT INDICATES THAT 87% OF SCHOOL SHOOTERS WERE EITHER BEING BULLIED OR HAD BEEN BULLIED.

Not every student resorts to violence, of course, but bullying has impactful negative consequences nonetheless. In fact, one in 10 students who drop out of school reports being bullied. What, then, can we do to eliminate bullying and cyberbullying and thus help create physically and emotionally safe learning environments for students?

Cyberbullying has become a major challenge in schools. It affects females more frequently than males. Cyberbullying can begin as early as elementary school, reaches a high point in middle school and remains a problem in high school. Following are strategies schools, parents, students, and bystanders can use to address cyberbullying.

School Strategies

- Create a culture that does not tolerate bullying.
- Teach staff how to address bullying.
- Bring in law enforcement officials to deliver staff workshops.
- Identify bully “hotspots” in the school by conducting a school bullying audit.
- Reduce the time students spend unsupervised.
- Create a “third ear” position of a faculty- and student-trusted individual to hear reports of student bullying.
- Inform students that bullying is subject to discipline.
- Respond quickly to bullying incidents.

Parent Strategies

- Open a line of communication with your child.

- Come to a mutually agreed upon course of action with your child regarding Internet use and bullying responsibility.
- Know how to identify bullying’s “warning signs.”
- Teach your child how to and how not to respond to bullies.
- Be aware of your child’s friends.
- Monitor your child’s Web site access.
- Move your child’s computer to a common area if your child abuses the Internet.

Student Strategies

- If you are being bullied, seek immediate help from a trusted adult.
- Do not respond; block the sender.
- Express disapproval of bullying behavior by not joining the laughter, teasing, or spreading rumors or gossip.
- Protect your own privacy. Do not send pictures of yourself on the Internet. Think about the consequences.
- Don’t respond to or forward cyberbullying messages.
- Keep evidence of cyberbullying. Record the dates, times, and descriptions of what the cyberbully says.
- Contact Web sites or Internet service companies to ask that the harmful messages be removed.

Bystander Strategies

- Note what you see and hear and report your observations.
- Never encourage or indirectly contribute to bullying.



- Never forward hurtful messages or laugh at inappropriate jokes.
- Come to the aid of anyone who is bullied.

This edition of the *National Dropout Prevention Center/Network Newsletter* focuses on cyberbullying. Cyberbullying is not limited to school settings as traditional bullying often is. Because students are more and more interconnected, some with social media accounts in early elementary school and most with cell phones capable of text messaging, cyberbullying reaches far beyond the school yard and lunchroom into students’ home environments, offering no escape from its all-too-often devastating effects. It can, of course, impact school settings and is certainly related to risk factors and dropping out of school.

Findings from current research, the need for additional continued research, and a successful program to address cyberbullying are presented along with additional resources available for addressing cyberbullying. One common thread prevails: Though cyberbullying may have underlying characteristics we typically associate with traditional bullying, it far exceeds traditional bullying in both consequences and reach.

—Franklin Schargel
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2015 Crystal Star Award of Excellence in Dropout Recovery, Intervention, and Prevention

The National Dropout Prevention Network's Crystal Star Award of Excellence in Dropout Recovery, Intervention and Prevention identifies and brings national attention to outstanding individuals and programs that have made significant contributions to the advancement of our mission to reduce school dropout and increase graduation rates nationwide. This year, NDPN presented awards to an outstanding group of recipients who have each brought national attention to the issue of dropout prevention, intervention, and recovery at the national, state, and local levels.

In particular, the interventions of these leaders and their abiding commitment to education have served to help keep children and youth in school through graduation and, in some instances, have provided schools and districts throughout the country with effective research-based strategies that can be replicated. We are pleased to present this year's Crystal Star Award of Excellence recipients.



The *National Dropout Prevention Center/Network Newsletter* is published quarterly by the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network. Your comments are always welcome.

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R. Keith Matheny (second from left), Austin, TX, creator of Austin Independent School District's MAPS program (Methods for Academic and Personal Success); teacher trainer and national conference speaker—Recipient of Individual Crystal Star Award of Excellence in Dropout Recovery, Intervention, and Prevention



Dr. Joseph Hendershott, Ashland, OH, co-founder of Hope 4 The Wounded Education Seminars, LLC, Director of Field Experiences for Ashland University; author and national conference speaker—Recipient of Individual Crystal Star Award of Excellence in Dropout Recovery, Intervention, and Prevention



Program Recipient Crystal Star Award of Excellence in Dropout Recovery, Intervention, and Prevention—Owasso Ram Academy, Owasso, OK. Accepted by Dr. Johanna Woodard.



Program Recipient Crystal Star Award of Excellence in Dropout Recovery, Intervention, and Prevention—Vicksburg Chamber of Commerce The Leader In Me Program, Vicksburg, MS. Accepted by Mr. Bryan Pratt and Mr. Chad Sealy, Vicksburg-Warren School District; and Ms. Jane Flowers, Vicksburg-Warren County Chamber of Commerce



Program Recipient Crystal Star Award of Excellence in Dropout Recovery, Intervention, and Prevention—The Hope Center for Kids, Omaha, NE, In Honor of Ty and Terri Schenzel. Accepted by Ms. Alyssa Smith, The Hope Center, and Ms. Julie Darr, The Schenzel Family.

Dr. Shanan Chappell, Research Assistant Professor and Associate Director for Quantitative Analytics at The Center for Educational Partnerships at Old Dominion University. Principal Investigator or Co-Principal Investigator on nearly \$30 million in funded educational research activities; NDPC/N Research Fellow; co-author of A Meta-Analysis of Dropout Prevention Outcomes and Strategies (available on the NDPC/N Web site)—Recipient of Crystal Star Award of Excellence for Distinguished Leadership and Service.



Edgenuity, Inc., Joins NDPN as Innovation Partner



■ Edgenuity, Inc., has joined the NDPN's Innovation Partner program, a school service partnership committed to reducing the nation's dropout rate and helping ensure that students graduate from high school. Headquartered in Scottsdale, AZ, the corporation develops cutting edge software applications and other educational tools to enhance the total educational experience.

"The NDPN is excited to welcome our newest partner. Edgenuity brings a complementary perspective for addressing dropout issues to our Innovations Partners program through engaging and blended learning education solutions designed to enhance students' successes, empower teachers, and enable schools and districts to meet their academic goals," noted Dr. Sandy Addis, Director of NDPC/N.

Edgenuity joins a dynamic and growing partnership program that includes AdvancePath Academics, WIN Learning, BrightBytes, ViziTech USA, and Catapult Learning. The NDPN continues to welcome partners whose resources significantly enhance our mission of dropout prevention, intervention, and recovery.

2016 Governor and Mrs. Richard W. Riley Award for Excellence Presented to Rev. James F. Davis III

■ Rev. James F. Davis III of Ware Shoals, SC, received the Riley Award for Excellence in Dropout Prevention at NDPC/N's 2016 At-Risk Youth National FORUM in Myrtle Beach, SC. This award is presented annually to an outstanding individual who has made significant contributions to the advancement of dropout prevention initiatives in the state. A 1977 graduate of South Carolina State University and a former Lieutenant in the U.S. Army, Rev. Davis also worked as an addictions counselor for the Greenville County Commission on Alcohol and Drug Abuse for 11 years. He currently serves as the pastor of Dunn Creek Baptist Church in Ware Shoals, SC, and as a school bus driver and substitute teacher for Ware Shoals School District 51.

He became passionately involved in dropout prevention in 2013. He prioritized school success and high school graduation in his church's youth ministry and involved school and community leaders in youth events. Under his leadership, Dunn Creek Baptist Church has hosted numerous youth events that communicate the stay-in-school message and support school success. His passion, however, extends beyond his church. He also leads a group of church and community members who regularly attend local school board meetings and offer support and assistance to school system leadership. He was selected in recognition of his aggressive and creative leadership in dropout prevention initiatives in the Ware Shoals community. His work reinforces the importance of schools and communities working together to improve life outcomes for students.

Solutions to the Dropout Crisis . . . On the Road!

■ *Solutions to the Dropout Crisis*, NDPC/N's popular professional development webcast, is undergoing a refreshing format change made possible by the generosity of K12, Inc., a technology-based education company and leading provider of proprietary curriculum and online school programs for students.

Webcast participants will notice a new set, program format changes, and on-location filming. The NDPC/N extends sincere appreciation to K12 for providing the resources to take *Solutions* on the road!

Solutions is available for viewing free at 3:30 p.m. ET the second Tuesday of each month at www.dropoutprevention.org/webcast. Archived sessions are always available.

Save the Date!

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2016 NATIONAL DROPOUT PREVENTION NETWORK CONFERENCE
CALL FOR PROPOSALS NOW OPEN!
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Featuring ERIC THOMAS
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NDPS Certification Program Recognizes Nine Completers

■ The NDPN recognizes nine new graduates of its National Dropout Prevention Specialist (NDPS) certification program. Those awarded certificates are:

- Seith M. Bedard, Director, Simon Youth Foundation's Peabody Learning Academy
- Randal Ellison, Coordinator of Student Discipline and Educational Opportunities, Illinois School District U-46
- Dr. Tamera L. Foley, Executive Director of Teaching and Learning, Clayton County Public Schools (GA)
- Dr. Emily Freeland, Regional Support Coordinator, Alabama State Department of Education
- Sonja Bens Harrison, Director, Administrative Services, McKinney ISD (TX)
- Marina Leonidas, Truancy Court Specialist, Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools (NC)
- Dr. C. Wayne Lovell, Superintendent, Mountain Education Charter High School (GA)
- Dr. Patrick O'Connor, Associate Professor, Kent State School of Teaching, Learning and Curriculum Studies
- LeAnn Stewart, Vice President of Curriculum and Instruction, AdvancePath Academics

The NDPS certification program verifies participant knowledge and expertise in at-risk youth issues and strategies for increasing graduation rates. The program is open to all professionals who work with or on behalf of students, including educators, counselors, school administrators, at-risk youth workers, and board of education members.

Preventing Bullying and Dropout Through Connecting With Students

by E. J. Hernandez

Bullying has been identified as a national concern and is widespread in school settings (Nansel et al., 2001). Cyberbullying is an emerging transformation of traditional bullying in which people use new communication technologies, such as the Internet, social media, and texting, to harass and cause emotional harm to their victims (Suicide Prevention Resource Center, 2011). These technologies enable bullies to extend the reach of their harassment, making the abuse more difficult to escape even after the school day is done. The problem has become that bullying behaviors now occur on a medium that extends beyond the school yard, halls, classrooms, and immediate control of schools, yet is directly impacting students everyday.

The Internet has become an opportune medium for cyberbullying as most bullying occurs when adults are not immediately present and with the absence of supervision (Nansel et al., 2001). The average teenager has multiple online devices, sends 50 text messages a day, and spends time online every day at any point in time, including during school hours (Lenhart, Ling, Campbell, & Purcell, 2010). With these changes, bullying behaviors now have a new platform on which to thrive. On average, about 26% of students have reported being a victim of cyberbullying at some time, and 16% have admitted to cyberbullying at some point in their lifetime (Cyberbullying Research Center, 2016).

While cyberbullying has emerged as a growing trend and problem, both forms of bullying are closely related and traditional bullying is still more common (Lenhart, 2007; Smith et al., 2008; Wang, Nansel, & Iannotti, 2011). The same students who are bullied at school are bullied online, and those who bully at school, bully online (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009; Kowalski & Limber, 2013; Ybarra, Diener-West, & Leaf, 2007). Best practices are also similar—using a whole-school approach, a focus on positive and safe school culture, education, and training involving all stakeholders (Nye, 2014; Hernandez, 2014). The effects and outcomes of bullying victimization are also similar with incidents leading to higher absenteeism, higher rates of depression and suicide, and lower student engagement (Bauman, Toomey, & Walker, 2013;

Cornell, Gregory, Huang, & Fan, 2013; Klomek, Marrocco, Kleinman, Schonfeld, & Gould, 2007; Mills, Guerin, Lynch, Daly, & Fitzpatrick, 2004). This information tells us that while cyberbullying looks and feels very different, the deeper roots of prevention and intervention remain similar, if not the same.

Bullying has been found to be linked to student dropout (Gastic, 2008). The effects of bullying and the early warning signs of student dropout are similar: academic failure, disciplinary problems, at-risk behaviors, social and psychological issues, poor attendance, and student disengagement. Student disengagement is a contributing factor to student dropout (Gastic, 2008; Klein, Cornell, & Konold, 2012). Student engagement is the primary variable in understanding the long process of student dropout.

The problems of bullying and dropout are distinctly different, but they share a similar construct: student engagement. In essence, it refers to a student's relationship or connection to school. Student engagement has repeatedly demonstrated to be a robust predictor of student achievement and behavior in schools and is linked to important student outcomes (Appleton, Christenson, & Furlong, 2008; Shernoff & Schmidt, 2008). The disengagement of students to school is found in both students involved in bullying as well as students at risk of dropping out of school.

The National Dropout Prevention Center has identified 15 effective strategies that have been shown to have positive impacts on student dropout. This research was recently extended, identifying the most effective strategies to be that of family engagement, behavioral interventions, and literacy development (Chappell, O'Connor, Withington, & Stegeline, 2015). Student engagement is a common thread of all the strategies identified. Understanding that student engagement is a common factor of both the effects of bully victimization and student dropout is a key indicator that if focused on specifically could positively impact how schools address and respond to both bullying and student dropout. A specific focus on student engagement can prevent bullying, including cyberbullying, and simultaneously can cultivate a culture

to continue preventing bullying and keep students connected to and in school.

—E. J. Hernandez, EdD
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California State University, Los Angeles

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(Continued on Page 5)

What Do We Really Know About Cyberbullying?

by Justin W. Patchin and Sameer Hinduja

Cyberbullying has been on the radar of most educators since the beginning of the 21st century. And researchers have been exploring the issue for at least as long. So what do we know after more than 15 years of research? First of all, estimates of the number of teens who have experienced cyberbullying are all over the map. For example, one published paper in a peer-reviewed academic journal found that 72% of students have been cyberbullied while another published study puts the number at less than 5%. The numbers are similarly varied when it comes to the number of students who have cyberbullied others. So how many teens have been involved? Over the last several years, we have taken care to track all of the published, peer-reviewed articles that we can find that explore cyberbullying.

As of the summer of 2015, there had been at least 134 articles on the topic of cyberbullying published in peer-reviewed journals across a wide variety of academic disciplines. Although there are additional articles being published quite regularly and it is likely that we have missed some published works, this review represents the most comprehensive summary of available research findings at the time of its writing. Among the 122 papers that included cyberbullying victimization rates, figures ranged from less than 1% up to 92% with an average of 21%. Most of studies estimate that anywhere from 6% to 30% of teens have experienced some form of cyberbullying.

These findings are consistent with our own research over that same period. Between 2004 and 2015, we have conducted 11 unique surveys involving over 15,000 middle and high school students. The percent of youth who responded to our surveys who have experienced cyberbullying at some point

in their lifetime ranged from 18.8% to 40.6% in our studies, with an average of 26.3%. Our most recent study based on data collected in February of 2015 found that about 34% of middle school students had been the target of cyberbullying

at some point in their lifetime (about 15% experienced it within the previous 30 days).

Moreover, the number of youth who admit to cyberbullying others at some point in their lives is a bit lower, though quite comparable. Among 88 papers published in peer-reviewed journals that included cyberbullying offending rates, 1% to 60.4% of teens reported cyberbullying others (average of 14.3%). Across all of our studies, the rates ranged from about 11% to as high as 20% (average 16.2%).

A couple of other broad generalizations can be made about cyberbullying, based on the available literature:

- Adolescent girls are just as likely (if not more likely) as boys to experience cyberbullying (as a victim and offender).
- Cyberbullying is related to low self-esteem, suicidal ideation, anger, frustration, and a variety of other emotional and psychological problems.
- Cyberbullying is related to other issues in the “real world” including school problems, antisocial behavior, substance use, and delinquency.



- Traditional bullying is still more common than cyberbullying.
- Traditional bullying and cyberbullying are closely related: Those who are bullied at school are bullied online and those who bully at school bully online.

Of course more research is necessary. We do not have any good longitudinal research on cyberbullying. We also do not have any good evaluations of programs that specifically target online safety or cyberbullying. Researchers around the world are working to fill these gaps, and in time we will hopefully know more about the nature, extent, and consequences of cyberbullying among youth.

For more information about this, or any of our other cyberbullying resources for educators, parents, or others who work with youth, visit www.cyberbullying.org.

—Justin W. Patchin, PhD

University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire
Co-Director, The Cyberbullying Research Center

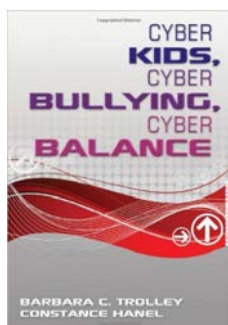
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BOOK REVIEW



Cyber Kids, Cyber Bullying, Cyber Balance. (2010).
Barbara C. Trolley and Constance Hanel.
Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin, 166 pages
[ISBN: 978-1-4129-7292-5 (pbk.)]

The average number of text messages sent or received every day by 13-17-year-old cell phone owners is 30. Ninety-two percent of 13-17-year-olds report being online daily. Eighty-seven percent of youth have witnessed cyberbullying. Twenty-seven percent of youth have witnessed cruel behavior online. Only 9% of parents are aware that their children have witnessed cruel behavior online. Eighty-six percent of principals say that students using mobile devices to help with school work is important. Fifty percent said "very important." Seventy-four percent of teens rely on their parents and other adults for information about protecting themselves online. These data, from various sources, are referenced at www.growingwireless.com/get-the-facts/quick-facts. The clear message is that young people have ample access to online means of communication, witness and experience cyberbullying, and look to adults for protection.

Do the youth you know have access to online communication tools? If they do, then they are potential witnesses or targets or perpetrators of cyberbullying. Barbara Trolley and Constance Hanel, both with expertise and experience as either school counselors or trainers of school counselors, have written a practical and comprehensive book on the use and misuse of technology. Each page of *Cyber Kids, Cyber Bullying, Cyber Balance* is full of resources, ranging from (a) examples and definitions of types of cyberbullying, to (b) web links to assessments for use in gauging levels of cyberbullying, to (c) systems of reporting and reacting to reports of cyberbullying, to (d) discussion of first amendment rights, to (e) skill-building exercises for youth, to (f) multiple checklists and charts you can use to customize a cyberbullying prevention, assessment, and intervention plan for your school or youth-serving organization.

The chapters in Trolley and Hanel's book do a great job of covering a complicated issue, presenting both the benefits and dangers of technology use, and advocating a healthy cyber balance. Trolley and Hanel address some of the "reasons" behind cyberbullying and address the fact that sometimes the hurtfulness of the bullying is unintentional (e.g., youth may not see the fine line crossed when a practical joke has a harmful impact). The materials in *Cyber Kids, Cyber Bullying, Cyber Balance* are practical and customizable to various contexts and situations. The listings of research-based resources are extensive. This book presents ample materials for an excellent workshop on planning for education around and prevention of cyberbullying incidents in any school or youth group. It has something for anyone (parents, youth workers, teachers, principals, counselors) working with youth in today's super cyber tech world.

-Cairen Withington
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RESOURCES

Cyberbullying Research Center—a comprehensive resource for parents, educators, law enforcement officers, counselors, and others who work with youth and features statistics, research, testimonials, and access to workshops and best practices
<http://cyberbullying.org/>

StopBullying.gov—a Web site managed by the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services providing information from various agencies on what bullying is, what cyberbullying is, who is at risk, and preventing and responding to bullying
www.stopbullying.gov/cyberbullying/index.html

U.S. Department of Education—a searchable site of legislation, collected data, and research on key educational issues in American schools
<http://www.ed.gov/category/keyword/bullying/>

Nobullying.com—lists cyberbullying Web sites and utilizes an online forum aimed at educating, advising, counselling and helping to stop bullying, in particular, cyberbullying
<http://nobullying.com/cyberbullying-websites/>

National School Climate Center (NSCC)—NSCC helps schools integrate crucial social and emotional learning with academic instruction to enhance student performance, prevent dropouts, reduce physical violence, bullying, and develop healthy and positively engaged adults.
<http://www.schoolclimate.org/prevention/>

EVENTS

May 25-26, 2016 Atlantic City, NJ
School Climate and Anti-Bullying Conference, hosted by The Ceceilyn Miller Institute for Leadership & Diversity in America
<http://antibullyingconference.com/atlantic-city-2016/>

June 23-24, 2016 Peachtree City, GA
6th Annual Anti-Bullying Summit, hosted by Auburn University at the Wyndham Hotel and Conference Center
<http://www.auburn.edu/outreach/opce/antibullying/>

June 26-29, 2016 Kissimmee, FL
2016 Reaching the Wounded Student Conference, A Trauma-Informed Approach to Helping Youth Beyond At Risk.
<http://dropoutprevention.org/conferences/>

The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program

by Jane Riese and Jan Ubanski

In the United States, 15% of 3rd-12th grade students report that they had been bullied two to three times a month or more.¹ Often these students are bullied in multiple ways including through cyberbullying. As with traditional forms of bullying, cyberbullying involves intentional, repeated aggression and an imbalance of power. Whether done in person or through technology, bullying can have serious negative consequences for the youth involved and can impact school attendance.

An effective way for schools to decrease problems associated with bullying behavior is to implement an evidence-based program to develop a positive climate that reduces the likelihood of all types of bullying. The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (OBPP) incorporates what researchers and practitioners have identified as best practices in bullying prevention and intervention.² Housed at Clemson University's Institute of Family & Neighborhood Life, the OBPP has been implemented in more than a dozen countries around the world, and in thousands of schools in the United States. Because OBPP is a framework, its core components and supportive materials have been adapted for use in any setting that children and youth attend on a regular basis, such as afterschool programs, camps, and sports leagues.

The OBPP is a comprehensive program that involves the entire school community through schoolwide interventions, classroom activities, and individual interventions. The program components are:

School Level:

- Establish a Bullying Prevention Coordinating Committee.
- Conduct committee and staff trainings.
- Administer the Olweus Bullying Questionnaire.
- Hold staff discussion group meetings.
- Introduce the school rules against bullying.
- Review and refine the school's supervisory system.
- Hold a school kick-off event to launch the program.
- Involve parents.



As part of their OBPP staff training, teachers in Chesterfield County School District, Chesterfield, SC, participate in the Bullying Circle exercise to learn about the different roles involved in bullying situations and to illustrate how the program shifts behavioral norms and attitudes.

Classroom Level:

- Post and enforce schoolwide rules against bullying.
- Hold regular class meetings.
- Hold meetings with students' parents.

Individual Level:

- Supervise students' activities.
- Intervene on the spot when bullying occurs.
- Hold separate meetings with students involved in bullying.
- Hold meetings with parents of involved students.
- Develop individual intervention plans for involved students.

Community Level

- Involve community members on the Bullying Prevention Coordinating Committee.
- Develop partnerships with community members to support the program.
- Help spread antibullying messages in the community.

A Certified Trainer/Consultant supports the school-based leadership team throughout planning and implementation to ensure the success and sustainability of the program. The consultant conducts committee training, helps troubleshoot challenge areas, and provides ongoing assistance in the implementation of program components.

Program materials provide schools with everything needed to implement the

program with fidelity. Resources include the Olweus Bullying Questionnaire, schoolwide and teacher implementation guides with videos, and resources to support class meetings. *Class Meetings That Matter: A Year's Worth of Resources for Grades K-5, 6-8, and 9-12* and *Cyber Bullying: A Prevention Curriculum for Grades 3-5 and 6-12* provide meeting topics and teach students how to use electronic resources in positive ways.

The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program is backed by 35 years of research and has proven to reduce bullying, improve classroom social climate, and reduce related antisocial behaviors. To learn more about the program visit www.clemson.edu/olweus.

Endnotes

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VIEWPOINT

Cyberbullying has been a growing concern in schools, and the learning curve for how to effectively address it has been steep for educators and parents navigating this fairly new and rapidly changing online landscape. The National School Climate Center (NSCC) has been closely connected to this issue through our work in schools nationwide, and we know—from our efforts and findings within the field—that the best way to address cyberbullying is through more comprehensive, proactive efforts like school climate improvement and restorative practices (RP) that prioritize youth engagement. In 2014, NSCC co-drafted an Amicus Brief to respond to potential cyberbullying legislation in NY. The brief argued that criminalizing students is a failed method for addressing the problem of cyberbullying, and recommended more effective alternatives like those noted above. Ultimately, the law did not pass, but much work still needs to be done to support schools creating environments that

promote appropriate behavior and social responsibility.

To that end, NSCC began tracking social media perceptions of students, staff, and parents in 2013. What we've found in preliminary analyses show some important distinctions in how students and adults perceive this issue in schools. Overall, students have a more positive perception of social media than staff and parents do, and the majority of students feel safe from harassment online. Most students report using social media in ways that support one another (i.e., kindness campaigns), though adults tend to underreport this practice while overreporting the instances of harassment online.

Significantly, we've found that as students move up in grade, they are less likely to seek help from adults when being harassed on social media, but staff rate this area higher regardless of grade level. Hence, as the likelihood of negative online behavior increases in middle and high school, students are missing the meaningful connection with key adult figures

in schools that could help resolve those challenges before they escalate. We know that positive relationships are essential to keeping students in school and that getting to the root cause of any type of bullying requires an environment where students feel engaged, supported, and safe.

By fortifying engagement with students and adults, a positive school climate makes cyberbullying less likely to occur. In tandem with an RP approach, schools are equipped with the tools needed to promote stronger relationships, more positive behaviors, and truly engaged youth who can thrive in school—and beyond. NSCC has seen youth lead incredible bully prevention efforts when adequately supported and encouraged to do so. The onus is on all of us to make that level of engagement a priority in our schools and to empower youth to be partners in the solution to cyberbullying long term.

—Darlene Faster
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