

BULLYING IN SCHOOLS: ESTABLISHING A SUPPORTIVE CLIMATE

by

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ABSTRACT

This project was completed to be used in a rural middle school in West Michigan, grades five to eight. The project was guided by three central questions. The first question this project answers is “What specific strategies have been identified in the research on bullying as effective in helping to create a climate where individual students and teachers are less likely to feel fear or intimidation?” The second of these questions is “What specific strategies have been implemented as part of the Heroes and Sidekicks program for the purpose of helping to create a climate where individual students and teachers are less likely to feel fear or intimidation?” The last question is “In light of the research and what is currently being done, what recommendations might be made for improving the Heroes and Sidekicks program?”

Keywords: bully, bullying, bystanders, prevention/intervention programs, school climate, victim/target

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
The Problem.....	1
One Schools Efforts to Address the Problem.....	1
Heroes and Sidekicks.....	2
Significance of the Project.....	4
Key Terms.....	5
Chapter 2: LITERATURE REVIEW	7
Chapter 3: Heroes and Sidekicks program One School's Efforts.....	17
Chapter 4: Programs that Work!	19
Chapter 5: Recommendations.....	32
REFERENCES.....	
APPENDICES	
A. Behavior intervention referral.....	Appendix A
B. New behavioral plan.....	Appendix B
C. Olweus bullying questionnaire.....	Appendix C
D. Bully referral form.....	Appendix D

Chapter 1

Description of the Problem

Bullying has always existed, and as a consequence many people regard it as a natural part of life. Despite decades of research and recommendations, bullying is still a clear and present problem in schools. Unfortunately, local communities have been negatively impacted by the effects of bullying and school violence. Instance of suicides, violent attacks and murders that have been linked to bullying have made school staff, students, parents and community members deeply distraught. Peer bullying can go unnoticed by adults, and may be a significant contributor to school violence and negative school climate (Allen, 2010).

The importance of recognizing and reducing school bullying is not new to many educators and researchers. According to Peterson and Skiba (2002), “A student is being bullied or victimized when exposed, repeatedly over time, to intentional injury or discomfort inflicted by one or more students. It implies an imbalance of power or strength in which others victimize one child” (as cited in Corrigan, 2004, pp.2-3). The reluctance of students to seek help for bullying issues is a serious problem in public schools.

One School’s Efforts

An increase in bullying related incidences has been noted by administrators of a rural middle school in West Michigan over the past few years. In an effort to address this problem, they recently instituted a program designed to raise student awareness towards

bullying. They gave this program the name Heroes and Sidekicks. The goal for the program was to create a positive school climate where students might be more likely to seek support while promoting leadership among students, staff and community, in the hopes of addressing the problem.

Heroes were high school student volunteers, in the senior class, who had a desire to make their school a better place for all students. They were hand selected by teachers, staff and administrators to participate in the program. They also demonstrated excellent citizenship skills and earned above average grades.

Sidekicks were middle-school aged students who were identified by teachers and administrators as having the kinds of academic, social, and emotional needs that might make them likely targets of bullying. Those who were determined to most likely benefit from having a positive role model in their lives were recommended for the program. All students involved in the program were required to have the permission of their parents.

One of the main objectives of the program was to establish positive relationships between the Heroes and the Sidekicks. Therefore, Heroes were required to meet weekly with their Sidekicks at sometime during the school day to engage in any number of activities. These included some one-on-one time in the gym; tutoring or reading with them; working on a school project; or other approved ideas and activities.

Provided the parent of the Sidekick had granted permission, Heroes were also able to access Skyward (an Internet grading system) to check on the Side-kick's grades and missing assignments, and follow up, if necessary. Parents could also choose to allow their child to attend non-school sponsored activities with their Hero after school or on weekends.

Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this project was to examine and gain a broader scope and deeper understanding of the concept of “bullying” as it relates to this particular middle school setting, and to explore the effectiveness of the Heroes and Sidekicks program in addressing this issue. Specifically, the goal of this project was to review current research that has been conducted on topic of bullying in schools, consider recommendations that have been suggested to address the problem, and evaluate the Heroes and Sidekicks program in light of that research.

Rationale behind the Project

School climate has been shown to be a factor that can influence a student’s decision about whether or not to seek support. Eliot noted (2010) that “students who perceived their teachers and other school staff to be supportive were more likely to endorse positive attitudes toward seeking help for bullying and threats of violence” (p. 533). Therefore, the Heroes and Sidekicks program was designed to incorporate specific strategies that have been shown to help create an environment that students perceive as supportive. When educators coach students on what to say, and how to intervene when they observe an instance of bullying, motivation to seek help can occur.

The vast number of educators and students who “table” their concerns about bullying is troubling. It is imperative to investigate students’ awareness regarding bullying and ascertain the incidence of bullying at early ages. It is also important to identify high-risk children, or those who have tendencies to be bullied, because researchers have discovered a positive relationship between having been bullied in school and subsequently being bullied in the adult workplace (Smith, Singer, Hoel, & Cooper,

2003, from Chapell, 2006). Failure to acknowledge the situation is distressing to everyone involved. Students have a right to feel safe and be heard in school. When public school teachers and staff are trained, and engaged in utilizing the resources that are available to them, progress towards new and innovative approaches to resolving bullying issues will be more likely to happen.

Significance of the Project

The overwhelming effects of bullying have been well documented over the years. Batsche and Knoff (1994); Eron and Huesman (1984); Lochman (1992); Olweus (1994); Farrington (1991) and others have described many of the cruel and unfortunate costs for both victims and bullies. For instance, victims of bullying suffer from a loss of self-esteem lasting long into their adult lives, while bullies in school often encounter problems with the law in their adulthood. These effects have led Farrington (1991) to conclude that society is the ultimate victim of bullying because bullies in school are very likely to bully their spouses and children years later, a phenomenon which perpetuates the cycle of domestic violence and creates new generations of aggressive children.

And this may only be just the tip of the iceberg! Hazler (1992) and Remboldt (1994) argue that statistics concerning bullying in schools may actually underestimate the problem because many adults (including educators) consider most verbal bullying tactics as normal and harmless. Further complicating the problem, Charach, Pepler, and Ziegler (1995) have reported that most teachers and parents are often not even aware of children's involvement in bullying. With increasing public concern about school safety, the definition of violence has been broadened to include bullying by adding "any

conditions or acts that create a climate in which individual students and teachers feel fear or intimidation” (Batsche and Knoff, 1994, p. 165).

The Heroes and Sidekicks program was envisioned as a way to address bullying issues by helping to create a climate where individual students and teachers are less likely to feel fear or intimidation. This project sought to identify those specific strategies that have been useful in helping to achieve that goal and to also identify strategies that might help to improve the effectiveness of the overall program.

Guiding Questions

Question 1: What specific strategies have been identified in the research on bullying as effective in helping to create a climate where individual students and teachers are less likely to feel fear or intimidation?

Question 2: What specific strategies have been implemented as part of the Heroes and Side-kicks program for the purpose of helping to create a climate where individual students and teachers are less likely to feel fear or intimidation?

Question 3: In light of the research and what is currently being done, what recommendations might be made for improving the Heroes and Sidekicks program?

Key Terms

Bully: a person who uses strength or power to harm or intimidate those who are weaker (Olweus, 1993).

Bullying: an unwanted, aggressive behavior among school aged children that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. The behavior is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time (Farrington 1993; Olweus, 1993; Smith & Sharp, 1994).

Bystanders: those who watch bullying happen or hear about it (Cowie, 2010).

Prevention/Intervention programs: goals and strategies schools implement to educate students awareness of bullying to help children develop support networks (Cowie, 2010).

School climate: the quality and character of school life. School climate is based on patterns of students, parents, and school personnel's experience of school life and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures (Espelage, D.L., & Swearer, S.M., 2004).

Victim: includes girls and boys of all ages, sizes, and backgrounds. But some children are more likely than others to be victimized because they appear small, weak, insecure, sensitive, or "different" from their peers (Batsche, G.H., 1994).

Chapter 2

Introduction

What specific strategies have been identified in the research on bullying as effective in helping to create a climate where individual students and teachers are less likely to feel fear or intimidation?

A review of the research literature reveals the extent to which student hostility towards other students is an important problem in the school setting. Bullying can begin as early as preschool, and it happens in any state, county, or district. It affects all ages of students. According to the 2011 National Education Association's Nationwide Study of Bullying, 43 percent of school staff surveyed reported that bullying was a moderate or major problem at their elementary or secondary school (Bradshaw et al., 2011). Students who are bullied have a harder time focusing in class, which negatively impacts their ability to succeed. Researchers believe this preoccupation is due to fears of being bullied again in the future (Boulton, Trueman, & Murray, 2008). Teachers in the public schools must not dismiss fear but ultimately embrace it and learn to educate their students to overcome fear, and feel confident to expressing their anxiety to others. When teachers are trained in how to intervene in bullying situations and involved in helping to educate their students about how to intervene, respond and report, situations can more easily be resolved.

Until bullying was associated with the broader problem of school violence, researchers and educators paid little attention to the problem. Growing recognition of the

negative effects of hurtful teasing and bullying is evidenced by numerous recent publications aimed at parents, educators, and clinicians (Middleton-Moz & Zawadski, 2002; Pollack & Shuster, 2001; Simmons, 2002; Wiseman, 2002). Regardless of increased awareness, students who are at-risk frequently remain undetected. Educators often fail to identify related issues and do not recognize patterns of persistent bullying.

Intervention

A Systems-Wide Approach.

Since bullying takes place within schools (K-12) as a “social system” (one in which students are mandated to attend), interventions need to focus not just on individuals, but also on the system (Holt & Keyes, 2004). A System-wide approach to bullying is needed to provide a safe environment for students, teachers and staff. The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (Olweus, et al., 1999) is widely studied and used to increase positive involvement by adults in the school system. Increased awareness of bullying and increased monitoring and supervision of students limit unacceptable behavior (Boyle, 2005).

A comprehensive program founded by Olweus (1994) calls for interventions at different levels. One of these levels is school-wide intervention where strategies are implemented in an anti-bullying policy, a survey of bullying problems at each school, school wide assemblies, increased supervision, and teacher in-services training. This level would be classroom interventions where strategies include establishing classroom rules against bullying, holding regular class meetings to discuss bullying at school, and scheduling meetings with all parents. Individual interventions would consist of having individual discussions with each student identified as either a bully or a target.

Common methods used by bullies include, among others, physical, verbal (teasing), indirect (excluding people), and electronic (cyber) abuse. No matter what form bullying may take, there is always damage. According to Rigby (2004), “It is agreed that bullying involves aggressive behavior” (p. 228). Generally, bullying is conceived as any form of aggression in which there is an imbalance of power between aggressor and victim and, moreover, the aggressive acts are deliberate and repeated (Farrington 1993; Olweus, 1993; Smith & Sharp, 1994).

It can be difficult to differentiate between a bullying incident and teasing. How educators and students perceive bullying incidents can depend on the type of interaction, the location, the response of bystanders, whether those interacting are friends, the frequency of such interaction, and its impact on the victim. Sometimes the victim claims he is having fun because he is scared to complain about the bullying. Therefore, it is crucial that the perspectives of all those involved be examined.

Before teachers can prevent or intervene in a bullying situation, they have to be able to recognize it. Holt and Keys (2004) report that many teachers do not possess the knowledge or skills to recognize bullying behaviors among their students. They found that “a greater proportion of studies have found that teachers report lower prevalence rates of bullying than students do” (p. 122), which likely indicates that students are aware of bullying to a much greater extent than teachers.

Supportive Environment

There are many theoretical perspectives on the causes of bullying behavior. These theories range from seeing the behavior as an individual difference that resides within the child to seeing bullying behavior as a cultural problem (Rigby, 2004). When students

have individual differences, a school counselor, principal or teacher usually steps in to resolve the problem. Sometimes, the educator involved responds in a wrong or not right manner simply because they do not know what to do. When cultural differences become a bullying issue, educators, because of lack of knowledge, sometimes treat the students involved wrongly.

Those who espouse the individual difference theory believe that children who bully tend to be physically stronger than other children, have general aggressive tendencies, and are low in empathy (Rigby, 2004; Sutton & Keogh, 2000). Therefore, the intervention that would be implemented from this theoretical framework is to work directly with the students who bully to try to modify or lessen these tendencies (Ellison, 2009).

Not only does the classroom benefit from effective bullying prevention and intervention programs, but the students, parents, school environment, and the community benefit as well (U.S. Department of Education, 1998). Newman-Carlson and Horne (2004) found that less bullying was reported when teachers were trained to recognize and prevent bullying, to intervene, and to assist victims. Therefore, Ellison (2009) argues that the focus of anti-bullying intervention programs should be to work directly with the bully and individual who is being bullied. Furthermore, victim can often benefit from interventions designed to increase their self-esteem (Kaiser & Rasminsky, 2003; Rigby, 2002). The programs can be an effective means of providing victims with skills they can use to protect. In addition, victims are able to protect themselves and others from future bullying. If schools implement these programs, victims may notice an increase in their overall accomplishments and self esteem. Rigby (2011) notes “there are some reasonable

expectations that particular intervention methods are likely to be more effective when steps are taken by a school to provide certain instructions to all students and/or involve them in activities that can lead to the development of particular skills and attitudes” p. 280.

Ellison (2009) also claims that most schools have developed safe schools frameworks that focus on addressing issues of bullying in schools, and claims that researchers such as Swearer et al. (2009) have reported important considerations of anti-bullying policy development. He outlines ten best practices to include in bullying policy, namely changing the school climate, training staff, assessing bullying behaviors, including staff, parents and students in anti-bullying action, creating safe school teams, establishing clear rules and consequences, increasing supervision, providing individual support, including classroom time for social-emotional learning, and finally, monitoring and continuing anti-bullying efforts (p. 4). Classroom management, school climate, and peer support all contribute to students’ safety.

According to Everston and Harris (1999), “the meaning of the term classroom management has gone from simply describing discipline practices and behavioral interventions to serving as a more holistic descriptor of teachers’ actions in orchestrating supportive learning environments and building community” (p. 60). When students are part of a positive learning environment, valuable learning takes place. Brophy (1999) agreed to those responses as he stated “the most successful teachers approach management as a process of establishing and maintaining effective learning environments” (p. 44). When learning environments are well planned out by the teacher, then students will be more successful in the classroom. Lastly, Larrivee (2005) noted

“classroom management is a critical ingredient in the three-way mix of effective teaching strategies, which include meaningful content, powerful teaching strategies, and an organizational structure to support productive learning” (p. vi). Teachers who develop and use strategies often are successful at “establishing rules and procedures, organizing, monitoring and pacing classroom events, and reacting to misbehavior” (Borko & Putnam, 1995, p. 41), and, when conducted in a well thought-out way, it “looks seamless, even invisible” (Randolph & Everson, 1995, p. 17). Although classroom management is noted as a complex set of abilities, the overall impression a student has of classroom climate stems from discipline (Allen, 2010, p. 2).

The relationship between the sense of belonging students feel in school, and bullying behavior has also been examined (Glew et al., 2005; You, Furlong, Felix, Sharkey, & Tanigawa, 2008). Studies reveal that a student’s sense of school support can reduce the threat of negative outcomes, such as peer aggression, exposure to violence (Brookmeyer, Fanti, & Henrich, 2006), and substance abuse (Wang, Matthew, Bellamy, & James, 2005). Students with lower levels of school connectedness, belonging in school, were more likely to be involved in bullying and peer victimization (Glew et al., 2005; Skues, Cunningham, & Pokharel, 2005; You et al., 2004; Young, 2004). Therefore, students who feel disconnected to their school are more likely to engage in misbehaviors in school, such as bullying and peer aggression.

Students who feel a sense of belonging are more likely to seek support from teachers and other students, and are therefore less likely to feel fear or intimidation. According to Tortura, Green, Karver, and Gesten (2009) “student perceptions of their environment account for differences in the associations between their emotionality and

peer relationships, suggesting the need to utilize students as primary informants of their experiences at home and school and in providing recommendations for necessary structures and supports to assist their functioning”(p. 599).

Furthermore, Camodeca and Goossens (2005) emphasize the importance of including student perspectives and suggestions in promoting and enhancing student engagement may not seek the necessary support needed. Research reveals that a small number of programs and intervention methods at school do not include student perspectives and suggestions.

The social and emotional environment created in the school can serve to aid or prevent bullying (Espelage & Swearer, 2004). Cowie and Smith (2010) found that “One method that can play a critical part in this is *peer support*, an approach originally grounded in counseling” (Introduction section, para. 4). Fundamentally, Cowie and Jennifer (2005) defined these types of support groups as ways in which students are taught to help guide classmates seeking social and emotional support. While having to meet with a counselor is one way to intervene, not all students in need benefit from such services. Its real importance is that “it could point to a new understanding of morality and be the harbinger of a different kind of culture” (Kitwood, 1990, p. 221). Many schools make available a school psychologist, social worker or school coordinator to support students for whom services have been designated. Support plans for middle school students often involve peer mentors, who may offer support to students having difficulties. They may provide tutoring, visit for a period of time in the classroom or spend time during lunch with the student in need (Andres, 2007; Cowie & Wallace, 2000; Smith & Watson, 2004). Peer support does not solely mean one person supporting

another, but rather a group of people who respect and trust each other. When students are engaged in peer support, their willingness to explore past hurts as well as present needs and desires will surface.

Reporting and Documenting

It is important for schools to create effective ways of reporting bullying. California's Department of Education's Schools Environment policy, notes that schools can identify an existing event, one that is repeated annually, and redesign it in ways that highlight the anti-bullying message. Student handbooks, planners, and calendars can be designed to include an anti-bullying message and tips on how to ask for help for oneself or others. All requirements, policies, and grievance procedures that must be communicated to parents may be detailed in the handbook. And it is also important to have a climate where students feel comfortable reporting bullying occurrences. Bullying may be underreported due to pupil fears of further reprisal by their peers or by authority (Roberge, 2011).

The Michigan State Board of Education's Model Anti-Bullying policy, suggests that "in order to have the maximum impact, it is critical to provide a minimum of annual training for school employees and volunteers who have significant contact with pupils on school policies and procedures regarding bullying and harassment. Training will provide school employees with a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities and the necessary skills to fulfill them" (p. 3).

Totura et al. (2005) suggest, "intervention programs should be designed and evaluated across diverse groups of students to better understand their universal effectiveness" (p. 600). When celebrating differences among unique family dynamics, the

feeling of fear or intimidation by students and teachers will lessen. All students come from unique and diverse backgrounds. Bullying interventions ought to be effective in helping to create a climate where individual students and teachers are less likely to feel fear, or intimidation. All students should be engaged in a positive school climate where intervention programs are practiced and regularly evaluated.

Prevention

According to Malley (2011), students engaged in bullying may not be positively involved with the school community. He has noted that “Bullies also face challenges; they can be less likely to do well in school and more likely to continue this behavior as adults” (para 2). Students who bully struggle with their emotions; acting out in a negative way may be their way of seeking help. Therefore, not only do we need to document the negative actions of those who bully, we must seek to understand their motivation. Furthermore, in his video, “Standing up against bullying”, he has observed “Setting goals in training our educators and our administrator to be aware and respond actively and effectively in our schools is crucial, because even with policies adults sometimes don’t know how to respond.”

An analysis of this review of the literature has revealed four primary themes. In summary, the following strategies have been identified in the research on bullying in helping to create a climate where individual students and teachers are less likely to feel fear or intimidation: (1) A systems-wide approach where teachers, students and parents know how to recognize and respond to bullying, (2) promoting and enhancing student engagement to build self-esteem, (3) providing a supportive learning environment and

climate where bullying is reported and not tolerated, (4) establishing an effective system for documenting and tracking bullying incidences.

Chapter 3

One School's Efforts

What specific strategies have been implemented as part of the Heroes and Sidekicks program for the purpose of helping to create a climate where individual students and teachers are less likely to feel fear or intimidation?

Town

The school at the center of this project is located in a rural town in Michigan serving 1,381 students. The population of the town is estimated at 4,600. The average household income is \$45,000. The population of the county is approximately 43,300. The county's unemployment rate is 9.1%, and the median age of residents is 33.6 years.

School/Students

The district includes five schools, two elementary schools, one middle school, one high school, and one alternative school. Of the 1,381 students in the five schools, 461 were in grades K-4, 448 in grades 5-8, 424 in the high school, and the remaining 45 in alternative education. There are approximately 76 teachers in the school system, making for a student to teacher ratio of 18 to 1.

According to the literature on bullying reviewed for this project and presented in Chapter Two, anti-bullying programs are most effective when they address four primary themes: 1) taking a systems-wide approach where teachers, students and parents know

how to recognize and respond to bullying; 2) promoting and enhancing student engagement to build self-esteem; 3) providing a supportive learning environment and climate where bullying is reported and not tolerated; and, 4) establishing an effective system for documenting and tracking bullying incidences. The degree to which these recommended themes have been addressed by the Heroes and Sidekicks Program is discussed in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4

Programs that Work!

In light of the research and what is currently being done, what recommendations might be made for improving the Heroes and Sidekicks program?

Research reveals when educators are provided with ongoing professional development and become actively involved in helping to address bullying issues, students are more likely to adopt positive attitudes about seeking help for bullying. When schools adopt a comprehensive systems-wide approach, promote positive student engagement, ensure a positive school climate, and regularly evaluate their processes for reporting, documenting and tracking issues, students and teachers are less likely to feel fear or intimidation.

After having reviewed steps currently in place at the school to address the four primary themes, recommendations for future strategies which might be implemented are explored.

Heroes and Sidekicks Program

In December 2011, the middle school invited Craig Conrad to present a motivational program as part of the “Unstoppable You” series. Unstoppable You sponsors powerful, life-changing presentations aimed at connecting with the audience on a deeply emotional level and inspiring students, staff, administrators, and parents to

achieve excellence. Conrad is a nationally known television host, author, lecturer, and former teacher famed for his weekly Friday Stories and his life-changing presentations. His 26-year teaching career has earned him six nominations for Who's Who in Best Teachers in America; the recipient of the Governor's Award for Excellence in Education from Colorado Governor, Roy Romer; and the first ever national Tradition of Excellence Award. Conrad has been featured on ABC World News and NBC Nightly News programs, as well as on CBS's The Early Show (C. Conrad, personal communication, December 12, 2011).

After the presentation was over, three twelfth-grade students were motivated by the speaker's message and decided to seek support. On their own, these students initiated the creation of a program called "Heroes and Sidekicks," based on a movie they had seen that used the terms.

The seniors spoke with both the high school and middle school principals about their idea. Their idea was to pair up one Hero to one Sidekick, an older student with a younger student, establishing a one-on-one relationship for the purpose of providing guidance for the younger students who may need help. The three seniors sought out fellow seniors who agreed to serve as mentors. Including themselves, they started with 13 Heroes, five boys and eight girls. With help from classroom teachers, the principal sought out thirteen middle school students for whom the thirteen heroes would serve as mentors. The ratio of boys to girls was met (one girl Hero paired with one girl Side-kick, and one boy Hero paired with one boy Sidekick). The students planted the seed, and a program was launched by the administration on December 5, 2011.

According to the literature on bullying reviewed for this project and presented in Chapter Two, anti-bullying programs are most effective when they address four primary themes: 1) taking a systems-wide approach where teachers, students and parents know how to recognize and respond to bullying; 2) promoting and enhancing student engagement to build self-esteem; 3) providing a supportive learning environment and climate where bullying is reported and not tolerated; and, 4) establishing an effective system for documenting and tracking bullying incidences. The degree to which these recommended themes have been addressed by the Heroes and Sidekicks Program is discussed below.

A Systems-Wide Approach

Holt and Keys (2004) report that many teachers do not possess the knowledge or skills to recognize bullying behaviors among their students. They found that “a greater proportion of studies have found that teachers report lower prevalence rates of bullying than students do” which likely indicates that students are aware of bullying to a much greater extent than teachers (p 122).

A rural school in south Michigan, school officials has implemented a unique program to promote involvement in bullying prevention for students, families and community members. “The Respect Effect...Pass It On!” program was developed in part by their county Bullying Prevention Grant. To meet the goal of lowering the incidence rate of bullying and peer intimidation occurring in their schools, prevention staff prepared and presented bullying prevention curricula to Kindergarten through ninth grade students and provided preschool teachers with materials and resources.

Several schools in Missouri have found that anti-bullying programs need to be established and discussed regularly at school. A district needs to adopt a no tolerance bullying policy and refer to the policy often throughout the anti-bullying program (Copeland, 2009).

To keep the student awareness level to the optimum, the further development of a systems-wide approach that consists of not only documenting incidences of bullying but ultimately, discussing, reflecting, and evaluating the cases which are often occurring is recommended. Furthermore, these issues should be addressed with all teachers, and provide opportunities throughout the year for teachers to raise awareness for bullying. The Michigan State Board of Education's Model Anti-Bullying policy, suggests that "in order to have the maximum impact, it is critical to provide a minimum of annual training for school employees and volunteers who have significant contact with pupils on school policies and procedures regarding bullying and harassment. Training will provide school employees with a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities and the necessary skills to fulfill them" (p.3). It is recommended for schools to include proactive strategies for defining teaching, and supporting appropriate student behaviors to create positive school climate. Most importantly, the school staff as a whole should attend and actively participate and consistently reflect on what is working and what needs to be improved. Research has told us that interventions need to focus not just on individuals, but on the entire system as a whole.

The middle school has had success with its new program. Since the program was implemented, the school has seen a reduction in the number of bullying incidences reported. The Heroes and Sidekicks program has helped to raise student awareness and

increase their willingness to seek support for bullying issues. Raising awareness imparts a positive impression on school climate. Students who took part in making posters, acting in skits, and sharing their concerns about bullying with adults contributed to the positive school climate. Significant decreases in adults' observations of bullying in the cafeteria and on the playground were noted.

The school has implemented a systems-wide approach for recognizing and intervening in behavioral problems. The school uses the Responsible Thinking Intervention (RTI) approach when faced with a behavioral problem. Charles, C.M. (nd) states that The Responsible Thinking Program (RTP) is based on Perceptual Control Theory (PCT), developed by William T. Powers, which holds that our behavior is best understood in terms of how we control our perceptions. The teacher asks the student three questions, prompting them to reflect on their choices. Once they have replied appropriately, the student is given a warning. If an incident happens again with the same student, the issue is documented on a behavioral intervention referral form (Appendix A) and the student is sent to the RTC (Responsible Thinking Center) room to figure out what strategies they can use to improve their behavior. The student goes back to the classroom and negotiates their new behavioral plan with the teacher (See Appendix B).

The Heroes and Sidekicks program that was initiated by the students has drawn student awareness to the need to seek support for bullying. Anti-bullying programs in schools are on the rise and schools must now fulfill anti-bullying requirements and timelines. Chapter 92 of the Act of 2010, "An Act Relative to Bullying in Schools," spells out obligations for school districts to fulfill. Policies, handbooks, curricula, and postings on school websites, and requirements for students with special education needs,

all are mandated. When responsibilities of teachers, administrators, and staff are met in a consistent and positive manner, the bullied child's burden should be lessened.

Student Engagement

To foster student engagement, a school district in southern Michigan got involved with PRIDE of their county, performances were conducted at the high school assemblies with focus topics of bullying, and Arbor Circle, a large social service organization, presented material to educate staff and students as to how peer intimidation and bullying leads to psychological pain.

It is hard for children to talk about something painful, but they will come around eventually (Copeland, 2009). In the state of Missouri, schools encouraged Parent Teacher Organization meetings to help remind families and educators to keep their eyes open for possible bullying incidents at school. They encourage enrolling students in a martial art class in order to gain back some of the confidence that has been taken away by a bully. The goal is not to injure the bully, but to encourage the development of confidence in the student's own ability to defend themselves (Olweus, 1993).

Students who have disputes require guidance from their teachers. Cowie & Smith (2011) claim that students who work with a trained teacher may find a mutually acceptable way of resolving their problems (p. 278). To better connect with students, teachers, administrators and staff need to create strong interpersonal relationships. The use of technology should be used to build rapport and engage with student work. Traditional face to face rapport building of course still plays a very important role in the classroom. Teachers need interact with other students in order to raise the level of student engagement and to reach out to all students. Student engagement should be taken as a

strategic process of growth and learning by allowing a more collaborative form of learning that is less teacher focused and more student focused. Teachers can do this by publishing monthly classroom newsletters, promoting the use of a Facebook page made only for students and parents, and by making positive phone calls or Text messaging. Support plans for middle school students often involve peer mentors, who may offer support to students having difficulties. They may provide tutoring, visit for a period of time in the classroom or spend time during lunch with the student in need (Andres, 2007; Cowie & Wallace, 2000; Smith & Watson, 2004). Peer support does not solely mean one person supporting another, but rather a group of people who respect and trust each other. When students are engaged in peer support, their willingness to explore past hurts as well as present needs and desires will surface.

Mann-Erickson and Martinez (2007) report that students are engaged and involved in their school when the school:

1. Promotes the importance of good school attendance and knows the value of a high school diploma
2. Provides family-school community events
3. Offers programs to support children and parents
4. Gives incentives
5. Creates student-generated classroom rules
6. Facilitates positive student-teacher connections
7. Provides professional development for educators
8. Evaluates school policies and best practices (evidence-based and research-based)

The school has had some involvement with student engagement and involvement in seven distinct ways: 1. Skyward has been implemented as an effective tool to help track student attendance. Schools with clear expectations of students, families and school staff-roles may help reduce excused and unexcused absences. Skyward gives students, parents and teachers easy access to student's attendance. 2. The school was able to partner with Ice Mountain who supplied water to the participants during an after school event. 3. A program that offers support to families with children is the Early Success program, housed out of the Intermediate School District. It helps families regardless of income and provides parent handouts to their child's age and appropriate developmental domains. 4. As a reward, a lunch-time meeting is organized for the Hero and their Sidekick. 5. The students created a list of classroom rules to follow, and created bullying posters that were hung in the school hallways. Each student signed off on the bullying accountable contract and pledged not to bully. 6. Some students choose to sign up for a one-on-one with their teacher during lunch time. The teacher used the time to get to know the student and offer them support and praise. 7. Teachers attend a specified number of Professional Development hours. Some of the hours spent during Professional Development days were aimed at ways to prevent and intervene in bullying issues. The teachers, school counselor and principal evaluate school policies and have researched best practices (evidence based and researched based).

Currently, the school attempts to engage students by positively impacting students' relations with peers through the Heroes and Sidekick program. The program has engaged students by putting the learner in charge of learning. The Heroes used the knowledge and skills they have learned and applied that to supporting their Sidekick academically and

socially. Heroes checked on student work and attendance through the use of Skyward (Internet grading system) and brought possible missing assignments to their Sidekicks attention. The Heroes also helped their Sidekicks understand and complete their assignments. Socially, the Heroes supported their Sidekicks by interacting with them during class, lunch, and after school activities.

Climate

A school district south of the participating school, were part of a county-wide awareness campaign. The campaign was conducted through the use of brochures, flyers, posters and the attendance of community festivals, sports events, and school carnivals.

The school district encouraged children, adults, and all team sport players to participate in their annual Stomp-Out-Bullying program. All forms of bullying were addressed, recognized and acknowledged. After the fact, the karate school gave a celebration free of charge. Friends were encouraged and received a one month free membership to the karate school. Pizza was provided by a local pizza place. They had different events such as a self-defense class, poster making and Bully Bingo. Bullied students find a strong circle of friends when talking about the different forms of bullying they have encountered.

A review of the literature in chapter two revealed that classroom management involved actions in orchestrating supportive learning environments and building communities. Students at the school were part of a supportive environment where they were able to create posters, play out skits, and express themselves in creative ways for reporting bullying incidences. For example, the school bullying committee worked with several students after school on bullying posters. One of the many posters created stated,

“Your ripples will affect the people around you.” The students generated their ideas and concerns, about bullying issues with their teachers and classmates. They created posters and displayed their work throughout the school.

Mentoring programs, when carefully designed and well run, provided positive influences for younger people who may have needed a little extra attention or who did not have a good support system available to them. Students involved in the Heroes and Sidekick program displayed positive attitudes for helping others.

Brookmeyer (2006) reveal that a student’s sense of school support can reduce the threat of negative outcomes, such as peer aggression, exposure to violence. School assemblies are a great way to bring the school together as one and is often a way to bring in an outside motivational speaker to communicate an important message such as school bullying. Unfortunately, many speakers hired outside of the school district are often costly, costing the district several thousands of dollars, as was the case with Conrad. While researching bullying awareness, finding valuable resources at no or very little cost is attainable.

Districts may want to look into their own teachers and staff, who are local educational experts, and utilize their talents to teach bullying awareness to their colleagues and students. The cost for the district may be only a small stipend to the person presenting, or possibly free of charge.

Also, seeking other professionals in the district or nearby districts could help cut down cost. A first-rate professional on bullying awareness has been to this district and spoke to the students on Career Day, free of charge. Sensei Jerry Bomay, martial arts trainer, teaches Jiu-Jitsu and travels to nearby schools and beyond to speak about bullying

awareness. He claims that, “not only does Jiu-Jitsu help victims but it also has an important role in teaching Bullies the consequences of their actions while bringing the two groups together” (personal communication, April 22, 2013). His expertise about the subject of bullying could benefit students, teachers and the community. The cost may be a small stipend.

Documenting and Tracking

The Arbor Circle assisted with coordinating student committees in all middle and high schools in, southern Michigan, to train students in a referral process for identifying peers who are struggling. A more controlled study into the current legislation concerning bullying would be of assistance to further research (Copland, 2009).

The Heroes visiting their Sidekicks met with the middle school principal and classroom teacher to discuss any questions or concerns they may have had. The principal and classroom teachers collected documented forms and turned them into the guidance counselor. A consistent structure and time-frame for evaluating has yet to be established.

When a student, staff member or teacher witnesses a bullying incident, the teacher documents all necessary information on a bullying referral form (See Appendix C) and the teachers discuss the incidences with their grade level team. The grade level team leader submits all bullying referrals to the school counselor. The counselor meets with the individual who was written up for bullying and notifies their parents or legal guardian. After three bullying referrals, the student will receive a three-day suspension. Research from the literature tells us when teachers are trained in how to intervene in a bullying situation and when there is a system in place to help educate their students; situations can more easily be resolved.

The current Heroes and Sidekicks program could be possibly lacking support from some of the teachers while Heroes visit their Sidekicks during class time. Sidekicks may get distracted during class when their Heroes are sitting beside them and it may interfere with the lesson being taught. The Heroes should not get in the way of their Sidekick's education but ultimately serve as a roles model for them. In some instances, the teacher may want to encourage the Hero to visit their Side-kick during an exploratory class or other time that fits the classroom schedule in a positive learning climate where individual students and teachers are less likely to feel fear or intimidation.

Totura et al. (2005) suggest, "Intervention programs should be designed and evaluated across diverse groups of students to better understand their universal effectiveness" (p. 600). When celebrating differences among unique family dynamics, the feeling of fear or intimidation by students and teachers will lessen.

The Heroes visiting their assigned Sidekicks may want to meet with the principal or teacher on a weekly or biweekly basis to discuss any questions or concerns they may have. Whenever possible, the Heroes should be educated on appropriate bullying awareness tactics, self-esteem issues, or any other type of instruction they could apply to their mentoring responsibilities.

Teachers may want to meet on a on a regular basis to assess the appropriate forms and surveys that the students filled out. Pretest and post-tests should be reviewed and documented for further inquiry, and may be used as a primary evaluation method. It is important to make sure the pretests conditions are similar to those of the post-test. If online is used the first time, use online the second. If paper and pencil is used the first time, use paper and pencil the second time. Otherwise, any changes detected may be due

to differences in how the survey was administered rather than changes in participants' attitudes.

Chapter 5

Recommendations

In conclusion, school climate is vitally important with respect to bullying. Students who seem sad or withdrawn should not go unnoticed. Teachers and staff should make certain that all students receive the attention they deserve. Being a target for ones peers is unacceptable. Students deserve to learn in a positive and safe environment where behaviors are normalized and true learning can occur. Anti-bullying programs, once implemented, need to be consistent and taught on a routine basis so that students can fully benefit from the services. Any results of progress, or lack of progress, need to be addressed with faculty and family for evaluation and reflection.

When schools gain a broader scope and deeper understanding of the concept of “bullying” as related to this particular middle-school setting, exploring the effectiveness of various programs is fundamental and ought to be ongoing. The goal for the Heroes and Sidekicks program was to create a positive school climate where students might be more likely to seek support while promoting leadership among students, staff and community in hopes of addressing the problem. When responsibilities of teachers, administrators, and staff are met in a consistent and positive manner, the bullied child’s burden should be lessened.

Bullying is one of the most difficult issues students face today. Based on decades of research, Olweus Bullying Prevention Program is recommended to this school in dealing with individual problems, but also for creating a more positive environment. Anti-bullying programs are most effective when they address four primary themes: 1) taking a systems-wide approach where teachers, students and parents know how to recognize and respond to bullying; 2) promoting and enhancing student engagement to build self-esteem; 3) providing a supportive learning environment and climate where bullying is reported and not tolerated; and, 4) establishing an effective system for documenting and tracking bullying incidences. The recommendations are discussed below.

Systems-Wide Approach

The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program is recommended to this school, and should be supported with a district-wide approach. The school should continue to provide family-school community events, offering programs to support children and parents. With continued education, professional development days, teachers and administrators can create student-generated classroom rules, facilitate positive student-teacher connections, and provide specific professional development days for educators that address bullying issues in school.

Student Engagement

The program offers training for adults who interact with students and includes methods for reaching out to parents and the greater community as well. It is suggested that this particular prevention program is not a quick fix, but rather a long-term, system-wide approach that claims to lead to positive change, providing students with confidence and ability to support one another.

School Climate

In an effort to improve or add to what may be lacking in the Heroes and Sidekick program, the following suggestions may benefit administrators and educators while addressing school climate. By taking part in a bullying questionnaire, students could provide information about different forms of bullying they have encountered. Increased awareness of bullying and increased monitoring and supervision of students limit unacceptable behavior (Boyle, 2005). As part of the *Olweus Bullying Questionnaire*, students could take part in a survey, asking if they had been bullied in any of the following eight ways:

1. Verbal bullying, including derogatory comments and bad names
2. Bullying through social exclusion or isolation
3. Physical bullying, such as hitting, kicking, shoving, and spitting
4. Bullying through lies and false rumors
5. Having money or other things taken or damaged by students who bully
6. Being threatened or being forced to do things by students who bully
7. Racial bullying
8. Cyber bullying (via cell phone or Internet)

Documenting and Tracking

The Bullying Prevention Program's school-wide and teacher guide provides step-by-step instructions on using the Olweus program. It is recommended that staff learn how to implement the program and who needs to be involved every step of the way, from trainings, staff discussion groups, introducing the program to students and partnering with parents, to evaluating the program's overall success. Once the Olweus Bullying Program is implemented, the Heroes and

Sidekicks program should raise student awareness and increase their willingness to seek support for bullying issues. Ultimately, the program will bring a broader scope and deeper understanding of the concept of “bullying”, as it relates to this schools particular middle school setting. After being implemented, the effectiveness of the Heroes and Sidekicks program will promote encouraging results for everyone involved.

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APPENDIX A

Behavioral Intervention Referral

Behavioral Intervention Referral Form

Student _____ Teacher _____ --

Time/Block _____ Date _____

Negotiating time(s) _____

Describe the first disruption (be Specific)

BIP questions asked? Yes _____ NO _____

Describe the next disruption (be specific)

Automatic Referral: Gross Misconduct or Safety (describe)

Appendix B
New Behavioral Plan

**BEHAVIORAL INTERVENTION
Student Plan**

Name _____
Teacher _____
Block _____
Date _____

1. Describe EXACTLY what happened?
2. Does your description match what the person in charge said?
Yes or NO If NO When you negotiate how will you
resolve the difference?
3. What was the first question that the person asked you?
4. Were you following the rules?
5. What rule were you supposed to be following?
6. What is the purpose of this rule?
7. I chose to break this rule because I wanted:
8. At the time you broke the rule, did that keep other students
From doing things they were trying to do?
9. Did you keep the person in charge from doing something?
10. How many times have you written a plan for not following the rules?

CRITICAL THINKING PLAN:

1. Next time you are in this situation, a better choice would be: (write your plan, 3 strategies)

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

2. What might make it difficult to follow your plan?

3. If you are serious about following this plan what should we see you doing?

4. Can anyone help you with your plan?

5. How will you make up work you missed while in BIP?

Student Signature

BIP Coordinator

Teacher Date

5 & 6 3 & 6 Phone call
, 9 intervention & phone call
12-1 day, 15-3 day, 18 Bd Hrg

Parent (when necessary)

7 & 8 3 & 6 phone call, 9 intvt & phone
call 11- 1 day, 13- 3 day, 15 - Bd
Hrg

APPENDIX C

Bullying Referral Form

Bullying Incident Referral

Date_____

Victim_____

Bully_____

Description of Incident or
Observation_____

Action Taken_____

Submitted By_____