A Systematic Approach to Reducing Bullying: School-Wide Anti-Bullying Programs

Bullying is currently viewed as one of the most serious public health problems in the United States school systems. This early form of aggressive, violent behavior comes in many forms (physical, relational, and cyberbullying), and although many schools have implemented anti-bullying policies, there are still many questions and concerns regarding how to appropriately address this pervasive problem within schools.

Bullying (Physical, Relational Aggression, Cyberbullying) Facts:

*Bullying* may be referred to as the act of one person threatening/gossiping (relational aggression) or physically assaulting another person for no apparent reason.

*Cyberbullying* is when someone uses technology to send mean, threatening, or embarrassing messages to or about another person. It might be in a text, e-mail, instant message, or on the internet. *The National School Safety Center considers bullying to be the single most enduring and underrated issue in U.S. schools.*

- 160,000 students miss school each day in the U.S. to avoid being bullied
- Nearly 15 to 20 percent of all students are victimized by bullies at some point in their school career
- A survey reported that American children 8 to 15 years of age rated bullying as a greater problem than racism or pressure to have sex or use alcohol and other drugs
- 25% of children who bully will have a criminal record by the time they are 30 years old

**Cyberbullying:**

- 43% of teenagers reported that they have experienced some form of cyberbullying
- A survey of 1,500 middle school students found that 37% were being bullied or threatened online
- About 4 in 5 teens think that bullying online is easier to get away with or to hide from their parents than bullying in person
- Over half of all cyberbullying is not reported to adults at all

**Consequences of Traditional Bullying and Cyberbullying:**

*Bullying affects everyone in the school*

- Victims have lower self-esteem and a variety of negative emotional responses, including being scared, frustrated, humiliated, angry and depressed
- Victims of bullying are 5 times more likely to be depressed and far more likely to be suicidal when compared to their peers who are not victims of bullying
- School bullies are more likely than their peers to drop out of school, have difficulty holding jobs, have problems sustaining relationships, be abusive toward their spouses, and have aggressive children

**School-Wide Bullying Prevention**

Schools can decrease bullying as much as 50% with a comprehensive school-wide prevention program. School officials should be aware of the fact that cyberbullying is simply another form of bullying, so interventions that address bullying broadly should
also be effective for preventing cyberbullying.

- **One preventive intervention** is for schools to develop school-wide anti-bullying policies that encourage and reward students for respecting each other and for recognizing the right of each student to be free from bullying.\(^2\)
- **The anti-bullying policies** should be translated into rules that are posted in every school setting as reminders to students and staff of the behavioral expectations.\(^2\)
- **One of the best school-wide strategies to prevent bullying** is to create a climate of fairness and trust, where others actively intervene rather than act as bystanders, and provide mutual support through positive peer support systems.\(^2\)
- **To address cyberbullying in particular, school personnel should carefully monitor computer use at school, block access to certain websites, and provide specific trainings on cyberbullying for all school staff and parents.**\(^2\)

The Three Tiered Model of Prevention and Intervention\(^4\)

- Tier 1: Primary prevention should include a school-wide anti-bullying policy that affects all students, all parents, and all staff including teachers, administrators, support staff, and playground staff.
- Tier 2: Targeted strategies focus on those children who have been identified as at-risk for being a bully or victim.
- Tier 3: Tertiary prevention programs are targeted at students with severe needs, including those students who are perpetual bullies and victims, and those who have threatened violence to peers and/or staff.

**Policy Recommendations:**

**Local Educational Agencies:**

- The School Board and District Level Administrators are responsible for ensuring the implementation of a school-wide comprehensive bullying program that focuses on traditional bullying and cyberbullying, and emphasizes strategies based on the Three Tiered Model of Prevention and Intervention.
- Provide necessary supports so schools can implement effective anti-bullying programs that follow best practice guidelines.
- Ensure availability of adequate staff training opportunities and materials necessary for implementing the program.

**State Education Leaders and Policymakers:**

- Include the Three Tiered Model in anti-bullying programs to ensure that schools are following best practice guidelines and focusing on systemic change.
- Support funding for professional development of school employees focused on implementation of an anti-bullying curriculum at all grade levels and training in conflict mediation.
- Provide support to schools to help guide them through the data-based decision making and program evaluation process, so they can gain the capacity to sustain their bullying prevention efforts.

**Selected References**


(Collier, J., 2011)