Grandville Public Schools — Taking On The Bullies

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Is bullying on the increase? Are students the only ones that suffer from the consequences of bullying issues? Our district took this issue on by adopting one consistent perspective to approaching and dealing with bullying in our schools. This became our school-wide initiative. Every staff member; principal, teacher, para professional, and supervisor, was trained in our process of defining what would be acceptable behavior, dealing with those behaviors, as well as creating a rubric that clearly stated categories with consequences that matched various levels of bullying. We believe the fact that every stakeholder in our school is on the same page with our program is the only reason we have seen success. Stakeholders in our school came together and participated in our initial training sessions with a renowned psychologist who specializes in bullying. The psychologist started with many samples of bullying and the many forms it can take among children, adults, boys, girls, men, and women. As a staff, we learned about the specific actions, words, and “play” behavior that are forms of bullying. Staff participation in an awareness activity identified just how dramatically different we were in how we see and handle various behaviors. Many steps were taken to develop the program we have in place now.

As a staff, we created or developed:
- The “line in the sand” and made a united decision on the behavior we all agreed would be the place we would each step in when witnessed.
- Our definition of mean behaviors and bullying, phrasing the definition to be easily understood by all students, staff, and parents.
- Posters outlining our definition for bullying, a set of rules for each behavior, what it looks like, and sounds like, these were hung in every area of our school.
- A list and a four level system of mean aggressive behaviors including; horseplay, moderate aggression, and severe aggression. Each level contains specific examples of the types of behaviors we may see in each level.
- A consequence rubric that would be used to help students learn from poor choices made by participating in a mean behavior. The rubric we developed mirrored the list of four levels of mean behaviors we had created. In addition, each level on the rubric is divided into three offences. For each offence in the same level the level of consequences increase.
- Scripts to use with our students to ensure we are all using common and consistent language and dialog with our students.

Parents and students were provided with information and training opportunities on the
no bullying policy that had been adopted by our school. Students participated in classroom "community" style meetings each week around classroom and school issues. Students were given opportunities to explore scenarios, role play, listen to stories, and share personal experiences. Teachers coached students through ways to problem solve, what to say and how to "report" incidents. These meetings were critical to the success of our program. Teachers found they had more time for developing healthier relationships and helping students learn.

Initially, there was an increase in write ups of bullying incidents, as was expected by the psychologist. This was due to the staff becoming more aware of inappropriate behaviors and taking action to resolve the problems. Gradually, the number of reported incidents decreased. We found students became empowered, instead of seemingly giving the bullies attention, either to laugh or be a quiet bystander, students noticeably began to discourage any imbalance of power. Many students did not realize the tones, words, looks, and actions they were displaying towards others was bullying. An awareness to these behaviors and the impact they were having on the emotions and learning of their classmates became apparent. Students had total buy in because they experienced a dramatic difference in their relationships with each other.

In our third year of implementation of the "No Bullying" initiative, we have seen a decrease in aggressive mean behaviors in most of our students. Many times one referral is all it takes to help a student become aware of, reflect on, and change their aggressive behavior. For others, we participate in Functional Behavior Assessments (FBA) and the creation of specific behavior plans. We find for most of our students, a good behavior plan puts them back on track to be successful at school.

By coming together as a staff, creating a unified definition of bullying and mean behaviors, implementing a consequence rubric, using common scripts and language, and holding weekly classroom meetings, we have been able to successfully take on bullying in our school. While we still see some mean behaviors in our school, we have seen a very significant drop in all of the aggressive behaviors in our building. Our students feel safe and cared for so they can focus on their learning in a safe environment. That is something we as a school feel very proud about and something we plan to continue actively.

You can find a copy of our definition of mean behaviors and a copy of the consequence rubric on line, go to the Grandville Public Schools Website at http://www.grandville.k12.mi.us/Resources/PDF/GPS/West%20Above%20the%20Line%20Plan.pdf

http://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/colleagues/vol6/iss2/6

The Anti-Defamation League

By Harry Weaver, III, Educational Project Director, Anti-Defamation League

“The Anti-Defamation League was founded in 1913 “to stop the defamation of the Jewish people and to secure justice and fair treatment to all.” Now the nation’s premier civil rights/human relations agency, ADL fights anti-Semitism and all forms of bigotry, defends democratic ideals and protects civil rights for all.”

That is the mission of the Anti-Defamation League. Over the years and decades, that mission has expanded greatly with programs like A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE Institute®. This education program has allowed the ADL to reach out to: schools, both staff and students, through A CLASSROOM OF DIFFERENCE; college students through A CAMPUS OF DIFFERENCE; and professional and community entities through A WORKPLACE OF DIFFERENCE. Through these programs, the ADL has been able to reach communities that may have otherwise been unaware of us. The ADL is a civil rights organization that serves all populations, regardless of their ethnic identity.

Lately, youth who are being bullied need our special attention. Historically we have heard that bullying was considered a rite of passage, but of late it has taken on a more sinister tone. What ADL is doing through their anti-bullying and cyber-bullying programs is educating teachers, counselors, administrators and students on how to become an ally to those who are being bullied. That education starts with a definition of bullying.

Bullying- Repeated actions or threats of action directed toward a person by one or more people who have (or are perceived to have) more power or status than their target in order to cause fear, distress, or harm. Bullying can be physical, verbal, psychological or any combination of these three. Bullying behaviors can include name-calling, obscene gesturing, threats and physical violence.

With that working definition, we now know what to look for regarding bullying and we are able to deal with it more effectively. Our educational and training programs are very interactive and involve a mix of different media (i.e.: print, audio, video, etc.) that serve to hold the attention of the participants, whether they are adults or youth. We emphasize that bullying is not something that has to be tolerated and that if you are being bullied, you have allies in the adults that are responsible for your care while under their supervision. A considerable amount of time is spent in these trainings emphasizing to adults that bullying is a serious issue and not a matter of “kids being kids” or “a necessary part of growing up”. The bullying act is destructive and leads young people to believe they have no hope.

The impact of bullying has been well documented. Studies have shown that difficulty making friends, loneliness, low self esteem, depression, poor academic achievement and truancy are all associated with being bullied.

Schools must become safe place for students. They must nurture a climate and culture in which members are willing to condemn bigotry, bullying and harassment. ADL’s programs help to explain the need and provide the basis for that climate.

We believe that while laws are appropriate, inclusive school-based policies can be a focal point for addressing bullying; education strategies, training programs, and community involvement are a necessary complement to any effective response. ADL has been at the forefront of responding to bias and bullying, and cyber-bullying through a combination of education and legislative advocacy, including drafting a model state anti-bullying prevention policy.

ADL provides a number of resources that allow training participants to follow up with what they have learned, as well as spread the message to others. Bullying has become epidemic and the ADL, in keeping with our spirit of social justice for all, is at the forefront of the movement to eradicate it from our schools.

For more information about the Anti-Defamation League programming, please visit www.adl.org/education or call your regional ADL office.