Addressing Bullying Behavior through School-wide Positive Behavior Supports

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Unfortunately, large percentages of students will face or observe bullying behavior in their school career. It is estimated that up to 30% of children in American public schools are bullying victims (Feinberg, 2003; Robers, Zhang, Truman, & Snyder, 2010) and up to 20% engage in bullying behavior (Swearer, Espelague, Vaillancourt, & Hymel, 2010). While developmentally, all children may engage in teasing or other unwanted negative actions directed toward their peers, bullying behavior has three distinct characteristics: a) there is a clear power imbalance, b) the actions on the part of the student engaging in bullying are meant to cause harm (physical or psychological), and c) the pattern is chronic (Elliott, 2002). An additional important consideration is that bullying behavior occurs in the presence of, and often to attain, peer

attention. Regardless of the type of bullying behavior, physical, emotional, or sexual and the manner it is conducted, face-to-face, cyber, or rumor, educators are an integral component in the prevention and intervention to reduce bullying behavior and the potential impact.

The unfortunate long-term outcomes of not addressing bullying behavior are clear. For example students who engage in bullying behavior are more likely to exhibit violent behaviors later in life, as well as have children who engage in bullying behavior (Nansel, Overpeck, Pilla, Simons-Morton, & Scheidt, 2001). Victims of bullying are often truant or drop out of school, and may display psychosocial problems, such as depression and poor self-esteem (Espelage & Swearer 2003). In addition to students who engage in bullying and victims, the bullying-dynamic includes two other student groups. First are students Olweus (1993) referred to as "by-standers." By-standers do not engage in bullying behaviors themselves, but heavily reinforce the bully through their attention and encouragement. The final group is referred to as "non-participants." Non-participants do not reinforce the student who engages in bullying behavior but fail to intervene and disrupt the bullying. If educators are to effectively prevent and address bullying behavior, all four groups must be addressed simultaneously across all school environments.

While the temptation to simply adopt a "bully program" in hopes it will address the challenge is great, research has consistently demonstrated this approach will simply not work without considering local factors and context. Any bully prevention/intervention efforts should take into account a) the current prevalence and severity of the problem, b) the environments in which bullying occurs, c) instructional strategies to teach all students and staff appropriate ways to address bullying behavior, d) a continuum of whole group to individualized supports for students who engage in high rates of bullying behavior and victims, and e) a plan to carefully monitor implementation and make data-based decisions to insure success (Espelage, 2013).

School-wide Positive Behavior Supports (SW-PBS) is a problem-solving framework that allows teams of educators to address social/emotional behavior challenges within their school (Lewis. Jones, Sugai, & Horner, 2010). Teams of educators are taught to examine multiple sources of data collected within the school to determine what types of challenge educators are facing along with the intensity of problems and school contexts. Based on school data, the SW-PBS teams selects an evidence-based practice to address the challenge, as well as continues examination of data to insure practices are effective. The third essential element of the SW-PBS process is to insure ALL the adults within the school are aware of their role in implementing and supporting selected practices. This problem solving process also allows educators to build a continuum of supports, starting with universal supports designed to teach and promote pro-social behavior across all settings and involve all students and staff. For students who demonstrate universal supports are not sufficient to allow them to be successful, small group (tier II) or individual (tier III) supports are put in place following the same basic logic of data-practices-systems.

SW-PBS is not a package, program or curriculum (Sugai et al., 2010). The problem-solving framework allows educators to build in supports to address type and intensity of local challenges, including bullying behavior. Specifically, universal expectations and lesson plans

can be taught throughout the school to focus on pro-social alternatives to bullying behavior (e.g., being respectful, being safe) and giving students strategies to reduce attention to bullying (i.e., reduce by-stander role), as well as advocate for victims (i.e., strategies for non-participants who prior did nothing). Small group and individualized supports can then be built in to address victim needs and students who engage in high rates of bullying behavior (see attached SW-PBS Bullying Action Plan).

The good news is that rates of bullying behavior, while garnering a lot of media attention, have not significantly increased in recent years. The bad news is that too many children, especially those with disabilities (Rose & Espelage, 2012), are bullied each day, and technological advances are making it easier for students to bully and serve as perhaps unintended by-standers by forwarding on texts or social-media messages. To truly prevent and intervene with bullying behavior educators must implement school-wide systemic efforts, ideally, district and community-wide systemic efforts. Educators are encouraged to seek out additional resources and implement systemic sustained efforts and avoid superficial strategies such as simply discussing the issue with students or relying on counselors or others to address bullying.

SW-PBS

Bully Prevention / Intervention Action Plan*

Review Data to Determine:

1. Is Bullying a problem? (student/staff)

2. What types of bullying are occurring? (student/staff)

   a. Are there gender differences (student/staff)

3. Where is bullying occurring ? (student /staff)

4. Where do students seek help? (student)

5. Where do staff feel students should seek help? (staff)

6. What strategies do staff feel most successful to date? (staff)

7. Are staff aware of district/school policy and procedures? (staff)

8. Parent perceptions of issues and school interventions?

Intervention

1. Identify pro-social behaviors for noted types of bullying behavior.

Bullying Behavior	Replacement Skill	Link to School-wide Expectation

*Lewis, T.J. (2011). *SW-PBS bullying action plan*. University of Missouri Center on School-wide Positive Behavior Support, Columbia, MO.

2. Lesson plans and teaching strategies (with schedule) for each replacement skill

Skill	By Stander Role	Non-Participant Role	Who Develop	Due date

By-stander/non-participant role = use language of school expectation / encourage "victim" to walk away with them / do not attend to bully / report what they have seen to adults per school procedure

Establish a clear reporting procedure for students to report bullying (establish / teach / practice / monitor):

Establish a clear reporting procedure for parents to report bullying (establish / communicate in multiple formats / monitor):

Teaching Schedule (all in school must teach across all classrooms):

3. **Supervision of high risk locations**

Setting	Current Supervision	Training & Support Need	Additional Supervision Ideas

Training for supervision:

- Who will train

- Core replacement social skills and prompts for student roles

- Prompts for students to use problem-solving strategies

- High rates of reinforcement for students who do not engage/attend to bullying

- Appropriate referrals when students do not respond

4. dentify strategies and lesson plans for "victims"

Bully Behavior	Desired Student Response	Lesson plans/ Strategies to teach	Connect Point to School-wide Expectations

Training:

- Who & when will strategies be taught to victims (small group or one:one)
- Curriculum
- Consistent and reliable contact point for victims
- Appropriate range of supports, goal to fade adult support out

5. Identify instructional strategies and consequences for bullying

Bully Behavior	Desired Outcome (get /avoid)	Replacement with same outcome	Connect Point to School-wide Expectations

Training:

- Curriculum development

- One:One (who/when)

- Practice Opportunities (including peers)

- Tier II/III supports (focus on increasing use of appropriate skills)

    o Small group social skills ("empathy")

    o Check in/Check out or Check & Connect

Consequences

- Removal from access to peers

- Restrictions on non-supervised time

- Restitution (if empathy in place)

Bully Prevention/Intervention

Action Plan Summary

Action	Additional Information Needed	Product Outcome	Who	Due Date	Goal/ Objective

References

Elliott, D. S. (Ed.) (2002). *Blueprints for violence prevention: Bully prevention program*. Boulder, CO: Institute of Behavioral Since, Regents of the University of Colorado.

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Robers, S., Zhang, J., Truman, J., & Snyder, T. D. (2010). Indicators of school crime and safety: 2010. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office.

Rose, C. A., & Espelage, D. L. (2012). Risk and protective factors associated with the bullying involvement of students with emotional and behavioral disorders. *Behavioral Disorders, 37*(3) 133 – 148.

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Additional Resources

pbis.org — *OSEP Center for Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports*

osepideasthatwork.org — *IDEAS that Work*

ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc — *What Works Clearinghouse*

stopbullying.gov — *U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, U.S. Department of Education, & Department of Justice*

pacer.org/bullying — *Parent information center*

pacerteensagainstbullying.org

web.uvic.ca/wits — *Canadian bully prevention program*

http://www.nrepp.samhsa.gov/Index.aspx — *SAMHSA's National Registry of Evidence-Based Programs and Practices*

http://www.education.com/topic/school-bullying-teasing/ — *Education.com's online special online issue for bullying*

http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-201010.html — *U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights' Dear Colleagues letter addressing disability based harassment and bullying*

http://www.aera.net/Newsroom/News/PreventionofBullyingResearchReportandRecomm/ tabid/14865/Default.aspx — *American Educational Research Associations Commissioned Task Force on Prevention of Bullying in Schools' Report and Recommendations*

http://www.ncd.gov/publications/2011/March92011 — *National Council on Disability's Brief for White House Conference on Bullying Prevention*

http://www.bullypolice.org/ — *Bully Police Details all of the Nation's state anti-bullying laws.*

http://www.anti-bullyingalliance.org/research/sen-and-disabilities.aspx — *Anti-Bullying Alliance's reports and resources for bullying and students with disabilities*