

Texas Children's Mental Health Forum

Convened by Texans Care for Children and the Texas Health Institute
Tuesday, February 15, 2011

TOPIC:

Bullying Prevention and Intervention: Supporting a Healthy School Environment

Bullying: Impact on Victims, Bullies, Bystanders and Schools

Presented by Barbara Ball, PhD, Program Evaluation Specialist, Start Strong Austin
Project Director, SafePlace

[Link to Presentation](#)

Notes from presentation:

Impact of Bullying on Victims, Bullies, Bystanders, and Schools.

- 86% of Students (11-15 yrs.) say teasing and bullying occur at their school.
- 7% of 8th graders stay home at least once per month because of bullies
- 15% of 13-18 yr-olds said they had been cyber-bullied online
- 10% had been cyber-bullied by cell phone
- 52% of middle school students identified another student at school as the cyber-bully
- 83% of girls and 79% of boys report experiencing sexual harassment
- 58% report physical harassment
- 35% were first harassed in K-5 grades
- One in three adolescent girls in the U.S. is a victim of physical, emotional, or verbal abuse from a dating partner
- One in 10 HS students (boys and girls) have experienced physical abuse in a dating relationship
- 60% of children between birth and 17 years of age were exposed to violence
 - 1 in 10 reported 5 or more experiences
 - 1 in 10 were injured
 - 1 in 5 girls (14-17) experience sexual assault
 - 1 in 3 teens (14-17) witnessed family violence
 - 6% experienced dating violence
- Family Violence is a risk factor for bullying – children exposed to family violence engaged in higher levels of physical bullying

Impact on Mental & Behavioral Health:

Targets of bullying are more likely to:

- Be depressed
- Feel lonely
- Be anxious
- Feel unwell
- Have low self-esteem
- Avoid social situations
- Self-mediate (substance use)
- Think about suicide

Students who repeatedly bully are more likely to:

- Get into frequent fights or be hurt in a fight
- Carry a weapon
- Vandalize property
- Drink alcohol or smoke
- 60% of bullies were convicted of a crime by age 24
- 35% had 3 or more convictions by age 24

Student engaging in bullying behavior has often been victim of bullying themselves.

Impact on Bystanders

- Ripple effect – others who witness bullying behaviors, even as bystanders, are impacted; affects school climate.
- Adult response to bullying influences the climate of the school
- Kids exposed to family violence increase their chances of engaging in bullying behavior
- *Recommendation:* Prevention efforts should include bystanders, include strategies to reduce family violence

Expect Respect – Promoting Healthy Teen Relationships is a program through SafePlace that engages youth and adults in building healthy teen relationships and preventing dating and sexual violence. Serving Austin schools since 1988, Expect Respect provides school-based support groups and counseling, youth leadership activities, and educational programs in schools and community settings. Components of the program include:

- 24 weekly support group sessions
- Youth Leadership training -- Safe Teen training; youth-led awareness campaigns
- School-wide prevention – school policy; staff & parent training; and curriculum
- Community Partnerships – Youth theatre ensemble; after-school programs; health care providers; faith-based groups; media; and law enforcement

Start Strong Austin is a collaboration of school and community partners working together to promote safe and healthy teen relationships and prevent teen dating abuse. This project is funded through the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. To find more about this project, go to:

www.startstrongaustin.org

Discussion of Issues:

- Cell phone policies vary widely among school districts. Schools who have accepted the fact that students have cell phones and are teaching them how to utilize them appropriately and effectively, are getting better results than schools who have more restrictive policies.
- Round Rock ISD PTA has set up a bullying hotline that allows children to text principals during lunch period and on the bus.
- Technology makes bullying easier now.
- There was some discussion whether cyber-bullying is a school issue or not – some take position that if it occurs outside the school it is not the school’s problem.
- There was discussion whether there a significant difference between public and private schools with regards to bullying and cyber-bullying. Private schools are now seeing more of these issues.

Helpful Website:

www.reportabully.com

-- Schools can sign up for free and students, parents or adults can safely report bullying. We have heard positive feedback from Austin schools using this system.

Bullying: Policy, Impact, Practice”

Presented by Albert Felts, Region 13 Education Service Center

[Link to Presentation](#)

Notes from Presentation:

Mr. Felts presented an over view of the current law as it relates to hazing and bullying:

Texas Education Code Chapter 37 (Discipline; Law & Order) –

- No current mention of bullying prevention in statute
- Requires school districts to address physical or verbal aggression, sexual harassment, and other forms of bullying in school, on school grounds, and in school vehicles;
- Requires a district code of conduct to prohibit bullying, harassment and making hit lists; Allows for a victim of bullying to move to another classroom or a different campus in the school district;
- Requires school districts to adopt a dating violence policy

Trends:

- Wide variation in school practices related to bullying prevention

- Wide range of discretionary interventions; campus often determines what action will be taken following incident
- ISDs often doing minimum because laws are so loosely defined; training becomes a “check-this-box-as-done” activity
- Don’t have accurate numbers (related to incidents?) in system because bullying falls within the Student Code of Conduct, which vary widely across schools
 - A high number of incidents reported can actually point to a district that is doing a lot to address bullying on its campuses
- No difference based on rural, suburban, or urban.
- Relational or social bullying tends to be ignored evidenced by the discrepancy between male and female office discipline referral data
- Confusion as to what is bullying versus normal student conflict
- Usually, presented as a guidance lesson from school counselors.

Region 13 ESC – Directions for the Future:

- Some bigger schools have internal resources; smaller schools often use Education Resource Centers (ESCs) for training, technical assistance related to bullying
- Region 13 ESC will continue to provide stand alone trainings for parents, teachers and students using the *Bully Proofing Your School’s* curriculum
- Cyber-bullying 201
- Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports and Bully Prevention – School-wide PBIS framework makes it so much easier to implement targeted programs.

Discussion of Issues:

Comment: Consequences of violation of student code of conduct vary widely among school districts.

Comment: It was discussed whether bullying factors into the persistent, dangerous school designations? No, the designation requires a significant level of dangerous incidents occurring over a period of years. Currently there are no persistently dangerous schools designated in Texas.

Comment: The quality, level of effective implementation of bullying prevention programming, policy is really up to the administration of the schools.

Recommendation: There is a need to put in place ways to measure the impact of the loss of these prevention programs on academic performance. The problem is going to be how to tease out which of the multi-factor variables that are going to be impacting academic performance (e.g., larger class sizes, lack of teacher training, teacher stress levels). It is essential to tie these impacts to dollars (drop-out rates, attendance, test scores).

Comment: Those schools who are embracing the fact of cell phones and teaching students how to appropriately using them instead of restricting use are getting better results.

Comment: Schools who have implemented PBIS are better able to effectively utilize other programs such as bullying prevention.

Comment: Bullying primarily occurs where there is no adult supervision (e.g., restrooms, locker rooms); children do not feel safe in these places.

Training Provisions within HB 224

Presented by Mary Throop, Chief of Staff, Rep. Mark Strama's Office

Ms. Throop provided an overview of [HB 224](#) by Rep. Mark Strama.

- Most of the bills filed this session are primarily punitive in nature
- HB 224 tries to get at the culture of schools and put direction in place to encourage teachers, administrators, parents, and students to recognize bullying, foster a culture where bullying is not acceptable and where students treat each other well.
- HB 224 has a prevention and education piece
- The bill provides a way for students to report easily and lets them know who to report to
- Currently, there is pushback from ACLU – about schools reaching out beyond the school boundaries.
- Allows for bullies rather than just victims to be relocated from the classroom and the campus
- Makes training mandatory (Note: This provision will be amended to make training voluntary since any unfunded mandates will be unlikely to pass).

Discussion of Issues:

Comment: There was discussion about whether the provision about moving bullies could possibly make it easier for schools to move the students into alternative education rather than addressing the problem with the student? Ms. Throop said that Rep. Strama's office has not heard those concerns so far.

Comment: It was asked whether there has been any discussion regarding the impact of the budget cuts on these preventive projects/bills?? Ms. Throop indicated they have received a great deal of pushback – bills with unfunded mandates are very unlikely to pass.

Comment: There is a need for school and community efforts to be braided. There is great concern that preventive efforts such as Social-Emotional Learning, TXCEDs and Safe Place will be redlined in the budget.

Comment: A hearing on this HB 224 will be held possibly next week; Rep. Strama’s office is working closely with Senator Davis’s office who has filed the companion bill in the Senate.

Aligning State Policies to Assist District in Implementing School-wide Positive Behavior Supports (SW-PBIS)

Presented by Lauren Rose, Policy Fellow, Texans Care for Children

HB 1340 by Walle would create a statewide action plan to support local level implementation of school-wide positive behavioral interventions and supports (SW-PBIS). With its whole school focus on social climate and behavior change, SW-PBIS offers a framework for effectively installing a bully prevention process.

SW-PBIS has had a direct impact on reducing disciplinary referrals, increased attendance, increased grades, and students feeling safer in schools.

To be effective and sustainable in their SW-PBIS efforts, local schools need state level support in regards to aligning policies, identifying resources, and assisting in training, technical assistance and data collection.

General Discussion

Comment: Foreseeing that substance abuse is going to increase due to loss of jobs and people/kids self-medicating and need to make money.

Comment: In times like these, we will probably see grassroots efforts at the community level to deal with issues locally.

Comment: There will be an increased need for organizations to collaborate and coordinate services and resources

Comment: There are many free programs out there than can assist schools, but schools often don’t know these programs exist.

Recommendation: Need for new roles for SHACs and Coordinated Health efforts in schools to begin to address behavioral health needs – opportunity to use what is already in place.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

House Bill 1192 and Senate Bill 574

Chris Bryan, Clarity, shared website for those interested in learning more about and [bills](#) to require private insurance coverage for children with serious emotional disturbance (SED) based on functionality and opportunities to support the bills.

- <http://www.texansforcedcoverage.org/>

Texas Suicide Prevention Program

- Seeking to link local suicide prevention coalitions and MHMR centers, universities.
- Free online training available for Texas high school educators
- <http://www.texasuicideprevention.org/>

Ninth Annual Children's Festival (Round Rock)– March 1, 2011 @ Dell Diamond

- Event features organizations that have an interest in children's health and safety. Local organizations provide information and resources on a variety of topics. Live demonstrations, health-oriented fun & games, & door prizes. [More info.](#)

Mental Health Day at the Capitol, Thursday, Feb. 17, 2011