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COMPONENTS OF A SCHOOL-WIDE ANTI-BULLYING PROGRAM

A COMPREHENSIVE PROGRAM INCLUDES STRUCTURAL, CULTURAL, & CURRICULAR ELEMENTS

Professional development is an essential component of a comprehensive school-wide anti-bullying program, but it is only one component. An effective anti-bullying program requires the coordination and cooperation of every segment of the school community, and requires the development of a culture and structures that support school-wide anti-bullying efforts.

Misdirections: Many curricular and other educational programs are now marketed as “anti-bullying programs.” Mediation, Conflict Resolution, and Social Skills training are excellent approaches to some of life’s problems, and they have a role to play in bullying prevention, but they can be inappropriate and even damaging when used as responses to bullying situations. Beware of programs that focus on helping a victimized student develop better social skills, greater confidence, etc; although an individual bullied student might benefit from social skills development or other personal development, make no mistake: addressing bullying in a school requires addressing the school climate and changing the bullying behavior, **not** *changing the victim*.

Education and Assessment:

- **Professional Development Education for Professional Staff**, including teachers and professional support staff such as psychologists, social workers, guidance and SAC counselors, child study team members, school resource officers, etc. Although the skills and information needed by teaching and non-teaching professional staff overlap, professional support staff can also benefit from specialized training because their roles vis-à-vis students in general, and students involved in bullying incidents in particular, differ from the roles of teachers. PD training should include certain key topics, and meet criteria that support a school-wide approach.
- **Education for Administrators.** The support of both school and district administration is key in the success of an anti-bullying program. Regardless of the quality of their training and the sincerity of their motivation, teachers cannot effectively address bullying unless they have, and know they have, full support from their administration. Administrators who attend faculty PD workshops prepare themselves to support and coordinate staff anti-bullying efforts, demonstrate that staff are expected to take bullying seriously, show their support for staff efforts, and become aware of any concerns or needs voiced by staff during the training. In addition, administrators need information about legal requirements, jurisdictional issues, reporting and procedural requirements, and school-wide oversight.
- **Education for Non-Professional Staff.** Aides and other non-professional staff also have roles to play in a school-wide anti-bullying program. Although many of these individuals are not required by law, policy, or contract to receive training, they often observe student behaviors from a different perspective than professional staff, and can be empowered to participate in a school's bullying prevention program. Maintenance personnel, for example, see the graffiti before cleaning it off the walls, and aides are often present in the "unstructured" areas in which most bullying occurs; they need training, and have insights to share.
- **Education for Students.** This includes both highly visible, one-time events, as well as ongoing curricular attention. Many pre-packaged curricula are available for students, including social skills curricula, lesson plans pertaining to various aspects of diversity, anti-violence programs, etc. Many of these curricula are now being marketed as "anti-bullying" programs; investigate thoroughly, because many of these curricula can be included as important components of an anti-bullying program, but do not in and of themselves constitute a complete anti-bullying curriculum, much less a complete anti-bullying program. In addition to standard social skills, socio-emotional learning, and character education curricula, anti-bullying education for students should include 1) social skills training for students in their roles as bystanders to peer misbehavior, 2) intercultural competence skills, 3) education about the full range of human diversity that goes beyond the different foods and clothing traditional in various cultures, and includes a deep understanding of differences in cultural values and beliefs, as well as an understanding of prejudice, stereotypes, and the enduring effects of historical disadvantage, 4) concordant attitudes, e.g., a positive attitude toward difference, and motivation to put forth the extra effort to understand someone who is different from one's self.
- **School Survey.** Students, staff, and parents can be surveyed. A survey of students provides a baseline assessment for use in identifying areas of primary concern, and provides evidence of the success of anti-bullying programming when compared to follow-up surveys conducted in subsequent years. A survey of staff can assess staff knowledge and feelings of preparedness, identify barriers to effectiveness, and pinpoint specific resources and training needed by staff.

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Structural Components:

- **Anti-Bullying Leadership Team**, including representatives of all segments of the school community, including administration, teaching staff, professional non-teaching staff, non-professional staff, students, parents, and key community members. This team should meet regularly to oversee, plan, and assess the school's anti-bullying efforts. The team ensures that attention to bullying is ongoing, responsive to changing circumstances and issues, and reflects the perspectives of all key segments of the school community. Although students, parents, and community members should be included on the team because their perspectives are valuable and their buy-in is important, many of the issues discussed by the team will be confidential and should be discussed only in the presence of adult school staff with clearance to receive confidential student information. The Students' Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights requires each school to have a "safety team;" this requirement refers to this structural component of comprehensive bullying prevention.
- **Clear School Rules, Consistently Applied, and Developed through Student Discussion.** School rules against bullying must be clear, and all segments of the school community must be fully informed about the types of behaviors that are covered by these school rules. Responses to misbehavior must be consistent, and students must know and expect that school rules will be applied fairly and equally to all students, without favoritism. School rules should include guidelines encouraging students to speak up on behalf of others, and expected behaviors should include not only respectful behavior toward others, but also pro-active behaviors that contribute to a respectful and welcoming school climate for all students. School and classroom rules should be developed with active student participation, not only to enhance student investment in the rules, but because the very act of discussion among the students of the type of school climate they want to create will help create that very climate.
- **Supervision of Unstructured Areas of the School.** Most bullying occurs during less structured times during the school day, and in less structured areas of the school, including lunch time, recess, rest rooms, and hallways. During these times, students are not otherwise occupied with academic activities, and they are often supervised by non-teaching staff so they will choose these times to misbehave. Staff who supervise these areas require training, and need to know that they are expected and authorized to pro-actively prevent and respond to bullying behaviors in these areas.
- **Reporting, Communication, and Documentation.** Clear communication is essential in any coordinated effort. Types of communication that are necessary components of an effective anti-bullying program include: 1) Explicit procedures for reporting incidents, including clear instructions regarding which types of incidents should be reported, and to whom, 2) Clear and explicit procedures for documenting incidents, including suspected incidents, that ensure the recording of information that is necessary not only to respond to individual incidents, but to detect developing patterns including bias-based patterns of behavior, 3) Procedures for follow-up with offenders, targets, witnesses and reporters designed to assess the effectiveness of the initial response, identify whether additional responses are necessary, and promote faith in the ability of the school to respond effectively while also respecting confidentiality, 4) Documentation of all investigatory and responsive measures taken, 5) Sharing of information about incidents with additional adult staff who might be in a position to prevent, notice, or respond to subsequent incidents, e.g., counselors, school resources officers, social workers, and teachers who supervise areas or teach classes containing the individuals who offended or were targeted in an incident. The Students' Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights places new requirements on schools regarding reporting and documentation.

Cultural Components:

- **Positive, Pleasant School Atmosphere.** The atmosphere in a school is established by the interactions of the people within it. When students enter your school in the morning, how are they greeted? When visitors enter, how are they greeted? What posters or displays are visible on the walls? How do faculty treat each other in the faculty lounge? When students are corrected for minor misbehaviors, are they respectfully reminded of appropriate behavior or are they shamed or embarrassed for misbehaving? What types of interactions are adults in the school role modeling for students? What types of interactions do older students role model for younger students?
- **Sense of Responsibility for Climate.** In general, we live in a very individualistic society, in which success is measured in terms of individual achievement and responsibility is defined in terms of one's own responsibility to take care of one's self and to refrain from personal misbehavior. To the extent that we can teach our students that they are responsible not only for themselves and their own friends, but also for the welfare of everyone in their environment, and for the *quality of the social climate itself*, the more empowered our students will be to participate in the creation of a climate that actively discourages bullying.

There are many sources of information about best practices in school bullying prevention.

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