

Strategies and resources for creating a safe school climate

representatives of the Anti-Harassment, Intimidation and Bullying Initiative

e would all like to think every Ohio student feels welcomed, respected and motivated to learn in school. When youth are connected to school, they are less likely to engage in disruptive and destructive behaviors and more likely to graduate from high school. But the reality is that, nationwide, 20% of students in grades nine-12 experience bullying, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's 2011 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System.

One job of the local board of education is to support the

Resources for promoting a positive school climate

Anti-HIB Initiative members offer the following resources to Ohio school board members at www.education.ohio.gov (use search keyword "bullying"):

- Ohio's Anti-Harassment, Intimidation and Bullying Model Policy
- · Creating and Promoting Positive School Climate in Ohio's Schools and Communities;
- Fact Sheets for School Personnel, Parents of Teens and Parents of Young Children;
- Free local presentations, called Parent Academies, on Ohio's Anti-HIB model policy.

Other state resources available at www.education.ohio.gov include:

- The Ohio School Climate Guidelines show how educators, families and communities can work together to create schools where all students succeed (use search keywords "Ohio School Climate Guidelines").
- The Comprehensive System of Learning Supports helps local district and school building leadership teams create plans and policies to ensure every student benefits from a safe and supportive learning environment that enables them to achieve high academic content standards (enter search keywords "Learning Supports Guidelines").

district's schools in creating environments where students and staff are safe and encouraged to succeed. The first step in this effort comes when local boards evaluate school data to develop and approve district policies that protect students. This includes anti-bullying, teen dating violence prevention and cyberbullying policies that promote positive behaviors.

It also is important to make sure the policies are not only effective, but also implemented fairly and consistently. So there are additional steps for a school board to take, which will be discussed later.

At the state level, Ohio has formed the Anti-Harassment, Intimidation and Bullying (Anti-HIB) Initiative. Members behind the initiative include the Ohio attorney general, Ohio Domestic Violence Network, eTech Ohio and the Ohio departments of Education, Health, Mental Health, and Alcohol and Drug Addiction Services.

During the 2011-12 school year, the initiative produced a series of webinars to support districts in their efforts to combat bullying and violence. Topics include cyber safety, anti-HIB on the bus, teen dating violence, girl aggression, support for policy implementation and legal ramifications. Each webinar includes a question-and-answer segment that can be used in school or district meetings to launch local discussions with families, teachers and administrators.

The Anti-HIB Initiative plans a webinar series for the 2012-13 school year, which will be at 3 p.m. on the first Wednesday of each month. The series was launched earlier this month. Find a schedule and information about these free webinars by visiting www.education.ohio.gov and searching the keyword "bullying."

The initiative recommends four additional steps for local school boards to take after they establish district policies:

• Request feedback from students, families and educators involved in implementing anti-bullying policies. Ask such questions as: How are policies

working for those impacted by incidents in your district over the last year? Are the policies effective? What tells you that? Is there a clearly identified coordinator responsible for implementing the district policy?

- Review data, including attendance and graduation records, student surveys, discipline reports and audits of existing programs, that promote safety, good nutrition, health care and substance abuse avoidance. Look into what data need to be improved. For example, does your attendance record tell you why students are calling in sick?
- Support professional development programs to help teachers, administrators and families better understand the social and emotional development of children and how it affects academic success. Find out if your district is partnering with local service providers for training and referrals.
- Identify potential partnerships with your community to learn positive ways to resolve conflicts and deal effectively with bullying, harassment and other violent or offensive acts. For instance, is your district partnering with other community agencies in a bullying prevention task force to coordinate programs and services available during school and non-school times?

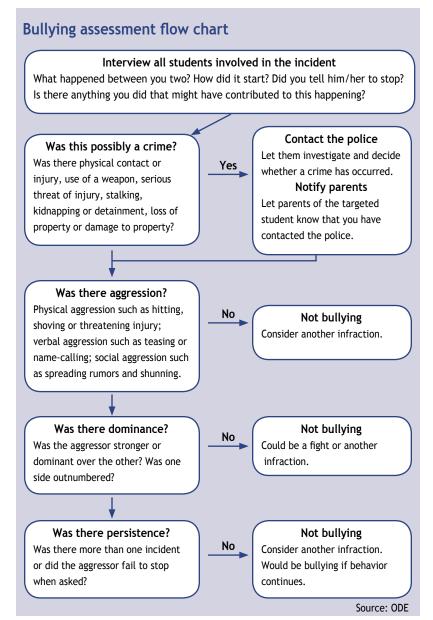
The initiative suggests that the best strategy for bullying and violence prevention is promoting healthy relationships. Initiative members point to Start Strong: Building Healthy Teen Relationships, a national program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, in collaboration with the Futures without Violence Fund. It is the largest-funded national program aimed at preventing relationship violence and abuse among young people by promoting healthy relationship behaviors.

The initiative targets youth 11 to 14 years old. In addition, Start Strong communities are engaging "teen influencers" (older teens, 15-18); parents and caregivers; teachers; coaches; and other mentors. Start Strong funded programming from 2008-2012 in 11 communities across the U.S. This work is posted at

www.startstrongteens.org under the "Communities" tab.

For example, youth in Start Strong Indianapolis are leading a social marketing campaign to educate peers about teen dating violence and abuse. Speak Up Speak Out is a blog for teens in Austin, Texas, to discuss topics such as, "Facebook can be a way to build friendships, but it can also be used in destructive ways to hurt people. What effect is it having on teen relationships?"

Boston's Start Strong website features a critical look at the messages in songs from Billboard's "Hot 100" chart for 2011.



For the third year in a row, program youth have created a Top 10 Healthy and Unhealthy Relationship Song List to help other teens think through which songs can serve as models for their own lives and relationships, and which should not.

Ohio districts can review all the Start Strong programs for ways to shift the emphasis from the negative — eliminating bullying — to the positive, spotlighting what healthy relationships are.

"Bullying exists because of a lack of adult intervention," said **Stuart Green**, founder and director of the New Jersey Coalition for Bullying Awareness and Prevention and the New Jersey Chapter of the National Association for Social Workers' 2011 Social Worker of the Year.

Ohio Anti-HIB agrees with Green's assessment.