

Stepping Up to Prevent Bullying in Kansas

Issue:

Bullying is a public health issue that has physical, social and emotional consequences that affects many students in schools across the United States (CDC, 2011). According to the 2009 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS), 19.9% of U.S. students grades nine through 12 had been the victim of bullying at school in the previous year (CDC, 2010). In Kansas, 18.5% of students grades nine through 12 were bullied during the same time period. Also, the Kansas YRBS indicated females (20.8%) reported experiencing bullying more than males (16.3%)(CDC, 2010). Given these figures, bully prevention needs to be implemented in schools so students feel safe.

Intervention:

In an effort to address the problem of bullying and build capacity in Kansas schools, the Kansas Department of Health and Environment's (KDHE) Sexual Violence Prevention and Education (SVPE) Program contracted with 15 schools across Kansas to implement evidence-based, comprehensive bullying prevention program. The Steps to Respect (STR) Program addresses bullying from a social ecological perspective and includes a manual with easy to follow scripted lessons for teachers, requiring very little preparation time, and includes a parent component. According to a study released in 2011, a key finding was that teachers in the Steps to Respect schools reported students were 33 percent less likely to engage in physical bullying as a result of implementing the program (Brown, Low, Smith & Haggerty, 2011)

An underlying theory of the curriculum is that if children develop the skills to make friends, this skill will serve as a protective factor against bullying (Hodges, Boivin, Vitaro, & Bukowski, 1999). This suggests that bullying is a problem that has to do with relationships and relationship problems such as bullying can best be addressed through teaching healthy relationships skills (Craig, Peplar, Murphy, & McCuaig, 2010).

Impact:

During the 2010/2011 academic year, fifteen schools implemented the Steps to Respect Program

- 1,849 students grades 3 through 6 were reached with the program
- 1100 educational sessions were provided to students.
- Several schools reported the program created an environment where school staff have a common language for bullying prevention. One critical component of the curriculum is getting all school staff trained and communicating the same message. Some of the participating schools included their bus drivers, cafeteria workers, custodians and other classified staff in their staff training. One of these schools reported that this inclusion has "*anchored the philosophy behind the program.*"
- One principal reported she thought she had a better rapport with students because of the program. She noted that before she started this initiative she would address a bullying situation but assumed that the students would come to her if the

- strategy she used did not work and the bullying was continuing. She reported through this initiative she learned that students may not have the courage to report a second time and she understood that her job is to follow-up to ensure the students are safe and the bullying has stopped.
- Thirteen programs have continued to implement the Steps to Respect Program in the 2011/2012 academic year. One previously funded school that is no longer implementing the program is not implementing because the school closed. However the entire district where that school was located is now implementing Steps to Respect in all four of their elementary schools. Two other schools located in one district also convinced their district to implement Steps to Respect and the district is now implementing the program in four additional schools.

Brown, E. C., Low, S., Smith, B. H., & Haggerty, K. P. (2011). Outcomes from a school-randomized controlled trial of STEPS TO RESPECT: A Bullying Prevention Program. *School Psychology Review, 40*(3), 423–443.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2010). 2009 U.S. Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Survey, Retrieved June 1, 2011, from CDC Website:

<http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/pdf/ss/ss5905.pdf>

<http://apps.nccd.cdc.gov/youthonline/App/Results.aspx?LID=KS>

Craig, W.M., Peplar, D. J., Murphy, A., & McCuaig-Edge, H. (2010). What works in bullying prevention? In E. Vernberg (Ed.), *Preventing and Treating Bullying and Victimization* (pp. 215-241). Oxford, NY: Osford University Press.

Hodges, E.V.W., Boivin, M., Vitaro, F., & Bukowski, W.M. (1999). The power of friendship: protecting against and escalating cycle of peer victimization. *Developmental Psychology, 35*, 94-101.