

Bullying, Safe Schools and Public Health: An Overview in Connecticut Private Schools

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Abstract

Introduction: As evident in the literature, bullying is frequently reported as a public health issue which affects the health and well-being of its victims. Bullying can also negatively impact student academic performance, leading to failure in school as evidenced by high and unacceptable drop-out rates and withdrawals.

Objective: This research aimed to examine the issue of bullying from a public health point of view and to assess the issue in a specific region of Connecticut's private school network. Furthermore, the study will assess the role of a Safe School Climate Coordinator in developing and implementing programs in schools that can serve as effective policy measures to improve school safety with the goal of reducing or eliminating bullying activities in the school environment.

Methods: The research employed the qualitative methodology from which six key themes emerged: mental health support; resource constraints; impact and influence of technology and social media; clear definition and distinction of bullying, harassment, and teasing; parental involvement and support; and importance and significance of the network's culture. Nine participants from seven private schools in Connecticut took part in semi-structured interviews that were specially designed and conducted by the researchers. The nature of the interviews allowed participants to provide useful insights into the role they played in enhancing school climate by carefully developing and implementing policies and programs that reject violence and promote a school environment that is safe and conducive to learning.

Findings: All participants expressed concerns over to the limited mental health services and support that is available within the private school system. All cited the possibility that students are under extreme pressure, and that students are often negatively affected by their home and living environments. These exposures can increase the urge to "act out" while they are in school. Due to the network's strict policy on bullying and any related behavior, there is ongoing monitoring to ensure there is adherence to the requirements. One administrator noted that the individual who was responsible for the Newtown incident had mental health issues. Another administrator opined that recently more referrals have been made to the Department of Children and Families than ever before. There are genuine concerns about what is going on and home environment. When students come into the school environment, they should have a positive outlook and willingness to learn. The message that is conveyed through the interviews is that there is great worry about the future of some students. Mental health support would be helpful in elevating some of the problems that they see in the school environment and work hard to prevent.

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Conclusion: Where bullying is concerned, the public health toll is great and can have physical and emotional effects throughout the life of those who participate or are targeted. All efforts made to mitigate these deleterious effects in the early years of child and adolescence development is paramount in supporting the psychological well-being of the students.

Keywords: Bullying, Antisocial behavior, Safe schools, Public health

Introduction

Bullying is a public health dilemma that if ignored or not appropriately addressed, can have a lasting and devastating effect throughout a child's developing years that can last from early childhood and adolescence into adulthood (Centers for Disease Control [CDC], 2011; Cohen & Freiberg, 2013; Gladden, Vivolo-Kantor, Hamburger, & Lumpkin, 2014). Bullying is a form of youth violence that involves aggressive and violent behavior that is perpetrated by one individual against another in an unbalanced power play situation that often results in physical, social, and emotional damage, abuse, anguish, humiliation, and subjugation (CDC, 2011; Soyibo & Lee, 2000). In some cases, bullying leads to the demise of the victim (Kim & Leventhal, 2008; Srabstein & Leventhal, 2010). Those who have been the target of such violent and aggressive behavior have reportedly been afflicted with short-term and long-term mental health issues, which include anxiety and depression, among other things (Bourne, Pinnock, & Blake, 2012; Bullying Statistics, n.d.; Simon & Olson, 2014).

Risk factors present themselves at an early stage of child development (Srabstein & Leventhal, 2010). The American Sociological Association (ASA, 2011) claimed that if not properly treated or addressed, these risk factors can develop into systemic problems that plague victimized individuals from early childhood into adulthood. The CDC (2011) and others have also identified bullying as a public health problem (Gladden et al., 2014; Srabstein & Leventhal, 2010). Cohen and Freiberg (2013) supported this claim by noting that this type of aggressive behavior impairs the students' ability and capacity to grow and mature into normal and healthy human beings. Studies found that bullying compromises students' learning process as well (Cohen & Freiberg, 2013; Hamburger, Basile, & Vivolo, 2011). Schools that do not provide a safe learning environment show increases in violence and higher dropout rates, which reduce the students' sense of safety and well-being (Soyibo & Lee, 2000).

The success and healthy development of children is contingent on positive social, physical, and psychological determinants, which are fundamental to children's growth and development (Ascher, 1994). Furthermore, the school setting and climate are necessary prerequisites for sustaining the general well-being of the student body (Soyibo & Lee, 2000). In striving to achieve state mandated

educational goals and objectives, it is important for schools in Connecticut to provide and a safe school environment where children can thrive, excel, learn, and develop in their formative years, by developing sound skills, talents and capabilities to help them reach their full human potential (Connecticut General Assembly [CGA], 2011). Bullying can disturb this social development process for students exposed to its negative effects, retarding, blocking, or hindering optimal human social, physical, emotional, and mental development (Perlus, Brooks-Russell, Wang, & Iannotti, 2014; Rigby, 2001).

For these reasons, bullying is seen as a public health issue. In its most subtle form of expression, bullying is an unwelcomed attack on a school's perceived safe milieu, inflicting substantial harm and damage on its victims (Olweus, 1999; Srabstein & Leventhal, 2010). The results are that students endowed with strong athletic, intellectual, artistic, and other skills, talents, and 3 abilities fail to achieve their full academic performance and human potential (Henderson, Hill, & Norton, 2014; Stanley, Juhnke, & Purkey, 2004). Although bullying activities and the causes of such behaviors have been the focus of many studies over the years, the need persists to continue examining this dilemma from a public health point of view (Perlus et al., 2014). Researchers have provided increasing amounts of evidence showing the adverse effects that bullying has on those who have been the target of these misaligned forms of aggressive student social behavior (CDC, 2011; Perlus et al., 2014).

In more than one report, bullying has been identified as a public health issue (Perlus et al., 2014; Srabstein, 2009; Srabstein & Leventhal, 2010). Therefore, continued research on this phenomenon is needed. Although recent reports claimed decreases in the behavior as a result of closer monitoring and reporting of such behavior, the rates are still high among schools in Connecticut and the United States. It is important to note that in the United States, at least one in four children reported being regularly bullied by students in the sixth through tenth grades (Bullying Statistics, n.d.).

In 2010, Connecticut reported that roughly 25% of public high school students and about 35% of the state's ninth graders, having been bullied or harassed on school property (CGA, 2011). However, with the advent of the Internet and social media use by students and adolescents, cyberbullying

is another form of bullying that has steadily increased over the years outside of the school setting (Elledge et al., 2013). Approximately 33% of men and 36% of women revealed that they were cyberbullied or bullied by other individuals through online sources (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008).

Roughly 77% of students who reported being bullied by peers indicated that this affected them physically and mentally (Bullying Statistics, n.d.). At least 14% of youths have reported severe psychological reactions to bullying, resulting in depression or suicidal thoughts or what is referred to as *bullycide* (Bullying Statistics, n.d.). Another study claimed that between 7% and 9% of victims who were bullied considered committing suicide (Kim & Leventhal, 2008). Although there is little to no data to document the number of bullying incidents that occur in parks, playgrounds, sporting arenas, movie theaters, and the broader community setting, where there may be limited adult supervision, it is important to note that these activities persist and can have the same adverse effects as when they occur in school or online.

For years, bullying was seen by many as a rite of passage associated with coming of age and maturity. As a result, limited attention was paid to the negative ramifications that bullying had on its victims or bystanders (Simon & Olson, 2014).

Theoretical & Conceptual Framework

The theory that will serve as the foundation for this action research project is agency theory. This theory was first introduced by Steven M. Ross and Barry Mitnick in the early 1970s (Ross, 1973). The concept of agency theory is appropriate for examining the role of the climate coordinator and assessing the relationship between the coordinator and the principal or school superintendent who delegates the work of improving the school climate to that agent (i.e., the Safe School Climate Coordinator) (Bush, 2007; Levacic, 2009; Ross, 1973) and the execution of the work by such an agent. The role of the school climate coordinator is an important one, and the expectation is that they will effectively work collaboratively with the district superintendent to implement the school climate program that prevents bullying and improves school safety (Hughes & Pickeral, 2013).

Bronfenbrenner's introduction of the ecological model was a response to the narrowly focused manner in which psychologists conducted research in the early 1970s. Bronfenbrenner created a framework that demonstrated the benefits of shifting the focus of research to include the child and family and the environment around them (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Concentric circles represent the overlapping connections between the individual, societies, and culture, with the connection of the individual to their society and culture represented as well (Eisenmann et

al., 2008). The ecological model can be illustrated by four circular layers that depict the interrelationship of the individual social and ecological structure (Bronfenbrenner, 2005): mesosystem, microsystem, exosystem, and macrosystem. The inner circle is the individual or the youth, who is surrounded by their family and peers in the ring identified as the microsystem. The exosystem comes next and represents the extended family, neighborhood, and mass media that the child will encounter each day. The outer circle is the macrosystem, defined as the laws, economic systems, culture, and social conditions that can have a positive or negative effect on the individual (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Eisenmann et al., 2008).

Methods

The qualitative methodology was appropriate for this project as it allowed the researchers to obtain relevant information about the school climate and the role of the Safe School Climate Coordinator through inquiry. Stringer (2014) noted that action research is collaborative, and through inquiry and investigation, it allows the researcher to take precise steps to address the issues at hand (Herr & Anderson, 2005; Stringer, 2014). The action from this research served to develop a school safety and anti-bullying manual as a means of raising awareness concerning the impact and effects of bullying.

Twenty individuals from selected private elementary schools within the Connecticut School Network system were identified as potential participants. These individuals were solicited to participate based on their role in improving the school climate and years of service within in the school system. Furthermore, these individuals were identified as being responsible for overseeing the implementation of the climate plan for the schools, and, therefore, would be appropriate to provide the necessary information to answer the research questions. The potential participants were identified based on their involvement with the school system. The superintendent of the schools was instrumental in identifying and assisted in the initial contact with the participants. Of the 20 participants who met the criteria to participate, 10 declined, and the remaining 10 agreed to learn more about the research and the activities surrounding the study. Selection of these individuals was purposeful in that the strategy allowed for picking individuals who had the ability and knowledge to provide the information needed. Patton (1990) explained that purposeful sampling can provide compelling information that would be otherwise lost. Before the start of the interviews, the researchers contacted those who agreed to participate to discuss the study purpose and the expectations for their involvement.

Also, an informed consent document, which outlined the steps in the research process, was developed and approved by the Capella University Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Before the start of the research activities, the informed consent form was used to obtain the participants' written agreement to participate in the study.

Based on this approach, 18 open-ended questions and sub-questions were developed for the semi-structured interview. Harrell and Bradley (2009) noted that interviews are a powerful method for obtaining relevant background information in addition to drawing on the experience of the individuals involved. Furthermore, in semi-structured interviews, the interviewer will often prepare standard questions, but will probe the interviewees to ensure adequate information is collected. The semi-structured approach is useful when there is a need to probe further into a topic to have a better understanding of the answers that are provided (Harrell & Bradley, 2009).

As is required, the researchers' team conducted a field test of the interview questions with members of the research team to ensure the adequacy of the survey and interview questions. Furthermore, five external subject matter experts were consulted based on their knowledge and experience in the areas of public health, research, school climate, and safety. The questions were shared with these individuals with explicit instructions to review and to provide honest and constructive feedback on the proposed questions. The purpose of the field tests was to assure alignment between the hypotheses and the research questions. All questions were modified or new questions created based on the feedback received. In one instance, the respondent indicated that there were inconsistencies between the interview questions and the intent of the research. The researchers' team reviewed the information and modified the questions accordingly. Another respondent suggested the tailoring of the questions with a more public health focus. The researchers' team reviewed the recommendations and amended the questions accordingly.

Definition of terms

Bullying

Bullying is the undesirable and destructive behavior(s) by another student or group of students that may involve the potential imbalance of power. In other words, one individual wields greater power over another, and this behavior is repeated more than once, or it has the likelihood of being

repeated. The aggressive behavior may exact injury or harm or anguish on those who are the target and may lead to physical, psychological, social, or educational disruption ("Bullying Definition," n.d.; Gladden et al., 2014).

Bullying includes but is not limited to physical actions such as hitting, kicking, pushing, and taking possession of an individual's person property. The verbal aspects of bullying are taunting, teasing, name calling, and threatening. Lastly, the emotional forms of bullying include harassment, spreading rumors, intimidation, social exclusion, and even extortion. These aggressive behavioral actions are ongoing and can escalate into fights outside the school's perimeter, supervision, and purview as time goes on (Buxton, Patel Potter, & Bostic, 2013).

Safe School Climate Coordinator

A member of the school staff who has been appointed by the school superintendent, as required by the Connecticut anti-bullying law, to ensure that the bill's requirements are met.

School Climate

The shared standards and principles of the school environment conducive to pupils and school staffs' faculty collective, impassioned, and natural well-being (Cohen, 2010). Furthermore, it is a setting that promotes positive interrelationships among school constituencies and across horizontal and vertical groups, such as administrators, teachers, and students (Cohen, 2010; Wimberly, 2002).

Victim

The individual who is the target of the bully's aggressive actions. This individual(s) is often subjected to repeated physical, social, or verbal aggression (Hawkins, Pepler, & Craig, 2001).

Research Results

Research participants consisted of the Connecticut School Network's school superintendent and eight administrators from Connecticut School Network located in the State of Connecticut. The participants represented about 17% of the schools in the network. The participants had been employed between five and 25 years in the school system (see Table 1).

Table 1. Participants' Roles & Service Records

Records Participant Code	Role	Years in Network
HAS	Superintendent	11
SMP	Principal	5
SRP	Principal	7
SAP	Principal	6
SSP	Principal	25
SBA	Assistant Principal	21
SBP	Principal	14
OLP	Principal	7
SLP	Principal	8

All had many years of teaching experience before their current roles as administrators. Five administrators were men, and four were women. It is also important to note that one of the participants was the superintendent of the school district and had been with the school district for over 11 years. One participant was recently appointed to the role of administrator. However, that individual had over 14 years of experience teaching in both the public and private schools. Two participants had seven years of experience in the administrator role. One participant reported that they have been with the institution for five years, and another indicated six years of service. One participant reported that they have been with the institution for five years, and another indicated six years of service. One participants had greater than 21 years of service, and another reporting 25 years of service.

At the beginning of the discussion, all participants declared their duty to maintain a safe and nurturing school environment for their students and staff. Each participant also reported that their local safety policies outlined in the Parent-Student Handbook were developed based on the district's policies. It is the expectation that all students and parents read and acknowledged the requirements to ensure full compliance.

The administrators were involved in training teachers and staff in detecting bullying activities and to immediately address them if identified. In order to protect the privacy and confidentiality of the participants and any information that was shared during the discussion, no personally identifiable information was used. A three-letter code or initials was used to further mask the identity of the participants. Each school administrator contributed equally to the discussion and actively participated in the semi-structured interviews. Most were interested in the outcome and willingly agreed to provide input regarding the development and implementation of school safety and anti-bullying manual as a deliverable for this action research project.

The Safe School Climate Coordinator is not a separate and independent function in the private schools. As evidenced from the interviews and documents reviewed, the function of the Safe School Climate Coordinator is taken on by the school administrators due to budget and resource constraints. Also, the Safe School Climate Coordinator role is geared towards the public schools in the State of Connecticut. This specific role does not have to be adopted by the private schools. As revealed during the discussions and data review and analysis, school administrators wear many hats, which includes the responsibility for ensuring the safety of their schools for all that enter the premises.

The superintendent prepares and makes available policies that the school administrators can use to model their individual school policies and parent school handbook to promote a school environment that is safe for all that enter the premises. The findings also demonstrated the administrators' alignment with the school's superintendent guidelines. The policies are evaluated on an ongoing basis and revisions are carried out annually. Also, there is routine training to increase staff and students' awareness of bullying and the consequences associated with this behavior. Although schools are a part of the network, they do operate independently.

School administrators agreed that bullying is an issue that if not appropriately addressed could have detrimental effects and consequences. Administrators have a keen sense of what bullying is and include it in their leadership strategy to be aware of such behaviors among the student and to discourage it by raising awareness and applying disciplinary actions whenever it occurs. Furthermore, there is ongoing training and partnership with the teachers to ensure that they too do not ignore these behaviors but work to address them as they occur.

Participants reported that there is zero tolerance for bullying in their schools and that all reports of bullying activities are immediately investigated and addressed.

Some administrators opined that there is a lack of parental involvement, and even awareness of bullying behavior needs to increase. Furthermore, some parents are confused by believing that teasing, harassment and bullying are the same. For example, one administrator mentioned that there would be calls from parents stating their child was being bullied and when the issue was mostly related to teasing. Administrators agreed on the need for more robust training that is geared towards the parents.

All participants expressed concerns over to the limited mental health services and support that is available within the private school system. All cited the possibility that students are under extreme pressure, and that students are often negatively affected by their home and living environments. These exposures can increase the urge to “act out” while they are in school. Due to the network’s strict policy on bullying and any related behavior, there is ongoing monitoring to ensure there is adherence to the requirements. One administrator noted that the individual who was responsible for the Newtown incident had mental health issues. Unfortunately, these issues are often not appropriately addressed, which can have detrimental consequences. This administrator indicated that mental health care has to be an ongoing process and that they monitor the situation on an ongoing basis to identify individuals who might want to be hurt another to get the help they need.

Another administrator opined that recently more referrals have been made to the Department of Children and Families than ever before. There are genuine concerns about what is going on and home environment. When students come into the school environment, they should have a positive outlook and willingness to learn. The message that is conveyed through the interviews is that there is great worry about the future of some students. Mental health support would be helpful in elevating some of the problems that they see in the school environment and work hard to prevent.

One administrator reflected on growing up in a two-parent household and that there was not as much stress as it is today. The administrator commented that “there is not a good structure for many of our families.” Moreover, “as educators, we have to be concerned with how to nurture these students and to have them come in a good frame of mind to learn well but to also prevent the violence from coming into the school.” Of the eight administrators, only four indicated that they have a psychologist on premises for part of the week whom students can have access to if needed.

One administrator indicated that there is collaboration with the town where the school is located to provide this type of service if the students require it. Another administrator reported that there is no social work or psychologist in

place, the implementation of a Peer Mediation Group that provides a platform whereby students can voice their concerns and get help in resolving issues proves to be beneficial to a certain extent.

There is a strong feeling that mental health support would benefit many and that having an individual such as a psychologist or social worker would benefit the students where needed. The concern is that bullying is a public health issue that can affect the victim or bystander emotional, psychologically or even physically. Availability of such services will help in improving the school safety programs.

Limitations

The research included a limited number of private schools from several different communities; however, because of the small number of schools involved, the findings will be limited if compared with public schools or other school districts. Therefore, the researchers’ team was also aware of the limitations of the results, which may not be generalized to a wider population of schools across Connecticut.

It was assumed that because the Safe School Climate Coordinator role is one that was mandated by the State of Connecticut in 2012, there might be a lack of data to support the research as not all schools may have had the time or resources to implement the recommended changes. This is an assumption that could be a limitation in clearly understanding the relevance of the role and obtaining sufficient evidence to support the benefits of assigning the coordinator to the Connecticut school districts to implement the climate plan. Furthermore, the requirements might differ somewhat from public schools versus that of the private schools. There was an assumption that the participants may talk to each other and share their responses, which could potentially bias the data. In addition to being an assumption, this could also limit the accuracy of the information obtained from the participants. A redesign of the research would not mitigate these limitations; however, the researchers are aware of them and will take steps to minimize their impact on the project. These steps will include ongoing review of the research plan and the research activities, and there will be frequent discussions with the research team to assess the progress of the project.

Discussion

Violence among youth is a leading public health burden, and even if no one is killed or injured, an enduring health consequence may persist through adulthood (Perlus et al., 2014). Bullying, fighting, and weapon packing are leading signals of potential youth violence (Perlus et al., 2014). These extreme behaviors and emotional effects correlate with a negative attitude that lasts throughout

the developing years and into adulthood (Perlus et al., 2014). Several leading studies have shown that bullying perpetration and victimization lead to future violence, which may result in severe mental illnesses such as depression (Perlus et al., 2014).

Reports indicate that bullying occurs mostly in the schools, although recently evidence has increasingly indicated that the perpetrators are displaying these behaviors electronically as well (Pepler & Craig, 2000). School staff may be unaware of the extent of bullying or be unable to intervene in an effective manner (Pepler & Craig, 2000). Because of low or infrequent teacher or school staff intervention, the occurrence of bullying may be greater than reported in the literature. The lack of staff interaction may be a result of the lack of a dedicated individual or team to oversee or manage these activities (Pepler & Craig, 2000). Although some progress has been made in improving the school climate and ensuring that schools are safe places for students to learn and grow, the number of students who report bullying highlights the need for further action.

Multiple studies have suggested that teachers and administrators are in the best position to intervene and address bullying activities (Black, 2010; Elledge et al., 2013). School administrators have a shared responsibility to develop strategies to create a 16 positive school climate which is secure and supportive of the teaching–learning process to be effective (Hughes & Pickeral, 2013). Although considerable steps have been made to improve school climate standards in efforts to reduce bullying and improve student outcomes (Guerra et al., 2011), much work still remains to be done.

The Safe School Climate Coordinator could play a major role in advocating for the progress, development, and implementation of a practical anti-bullying program to use as a guide for the benefit of students and staff. It is also important that parents, policy makers, and educators continue their diligence in ensuring school safety and reduction in bullying that must be carried forward into schools and the local community. It is imperative that there be a common understanding of the problem. Teachers and administrators responsible for anti-bullying programs and activities must have the ability to recognize and differentiate among bullying, harassment, teasing, and a normal disagreement between peers.

Bullying is a public health issue and if not addressed can have far-reaching implications, such as short- and long-term social and psychological challenges for those targeted. Youth violence, which includes bullying, is an aggressive form of behavior that hinders students' capacity to cultivate their development in a normal and gratifying manner, which could also compromise their learning process and abilities (Cohen & Freiberg, 2013; Hamburger et al., 2011).

Individuals targeted by bullying have been shown to exhibit anxiety and depression. Some of the victims have even committed suicide as their way to resolve the problem. Schools in which the climate is not conducive to a safe learning environment show increases in violence, dropout rates and reduce the students' sense of well-being (Soyibo & Lee, 2000).

A school with a robust process in place that routinely monitors students' behavior, consistently enforce the school's policies and regularly communicate the expectations to staff, students and parents can dramatically improve the quality of their school climate. Furthermore, administrators share a vital role in ensuring that the school climate is secured and work to promote an environment for students to learn and develop to their full potential. Therefore, efforts should be made to identify those behaviors such as bullying that could impact academic achievement and the well-being of students. This study examined the role of the Safe School Climate Coordinator in implementing programs and policies to improve the safety of their schools in addition to reducing bullying activities. Coordinators that promote a safe learning environment helps to build a school community that is free of bullying, which is vital in mitigating this public health issue.

As evidenced in published literature, there is little doubt that bullying is a public health issue that affects student safety and negatively impacts students learning the ability. This research is significant because the rate of bullying remains high and is a public health concern for educators, students, parents and lawmakers. Administrators and school staffers are required to be trained and aware of the bullying behaviors and to implement policies to monitor, report and address bullying activities. The climate of the school can be affected to the extent that it may result in the reduction of the number of students in attendance, which in turn can have a financial impact on the school or school district. If student attendance falls, funding is allocated elsewhere. In addition to the financial burden of this public health dilemma, the physical and mental toll is also great.

The administrators were fully aware that bullying is a public health issue. This research provided the justification for implementing measures to stop and prevent bullying activities in schools. The implications of the findings are two-fold.

First, administrators must strive to ensure robust policies are in place to promote a safe and bullying-free environment, and that such policies are appropriately enforced and monitored. Although only a select number of private schools' administrators participated in the study, it was clear that there are concerns about the safety of their schools. Second, there is the need for better clarity of the

terminologies for bullying, teasing, and harassment and a shared understanding by both school staff and parents in defining and recognizing bullying behavior. Through training and increased awareness, there would be alignment in how to address the behavior if encountered. Many participants reiterated that the number one barrier to doing more to develop further their school's safety programs is the need for increased funding from the state of Connecticut. However, they recognized that there are limitations as to the type of funding and the amount of financial support that can be allocated to non-public schools. The results can be used to raise awareness of bullying and the public health implications of this activity. As a requirement of this action research, the researchers and/or their team worked with the research participants to develop a safety manual. With input from the participants, bullying, teasing and harassment were defined and examples of each were included in the manual.

The way forward

Administrators should assess their anti-bullying policies and procedures to consider alternative strategies for managing and reforming those who bully other students. Where possible, there should be an assessment of the cause of the bullying behavior to aid in consultation with the parents, teachers and healthcare professionals to address the issue and improve student behavior. Action plans may include additional homework assignment, tutoring and extracurricular activities. These strategies may be an effective way of tackling bullying behavior without taking extreme punitive measure, which can include expulsion.

As a result, of this action research, a *School Safety and Anti-bullying Manual* was developed. This manual includes recommended prevention and intervention strategies to help to mitigate extreme measures such as expulsion. Some preventive measures include collaboration with the central community leaders, climate surveys, increased training and awareness for parents and students. Interventions include remedial activities such as peer mediation and support for families affected by this behavior. The laws governing the privacy and confidentiality in reporting and investigating cases related to bullying was also included to inform parents and students of their rights.

The Manual is recommended as a supplement to the Parent-Student Handbook, and the training offered to families on a yearly basis as it includes explicit details about bullying, teasing, and harassment; the laws that are in place to protect those who are targeted by these behaviors; and the consequences.

Conflict of Interest: None

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