

Prevention of School Bullying Task Force Notes: June 18, 2012

Members Present: Willie Bridges, Brenda Cassellius, Vangie Castro, Rep. Jim Davnie; Sen. Scott Dibble, Philip Duran, Alana Friedman, Julie Hertzog, Kevin Lindsey, Lyn Mitchell, Jacob Reitan, Walter Roberts, Thomas Scott,

Ex officio Members: Curt Carpenter; Kelly Smith

Agenda was accepted as written

Reporting Back: Listening Sessions

Metro – Youth Session: Task Force members commented on the thoughtful comments provided by the youth participants attending the youth listening session. Key points noted by Task Force members were:

- Teacher and student relationships – importance of to build trust and working together – both youth bullying and being bullied
- Need for staff/teacher training
- Need for consistency of policies and rules
- Need for parent involvement and training for parents
- Suspension is not the answer but consequences should be real and have meaning
- Need to actively work with youth bullying to help change their behavior
- Call for youth voice and involvement at all levels
- Adults in schools need to model behavior; avoid the impression of favorites and uneven application of consequences and assistance
- Spoke about how students feel shame about being bullied and the disappointment when it is talked about and adults do not help
- Wanted to balance consequences with the ability to work through problems without immediate punishment
- Recognized that schools cannot work alone
- Posters and assemblies alone are not enough

Metro – Parent/Adult Session: Several Task Force members met separately with parents and other adults who had brought youth to the listening sessions. Key points noted from that session included:

- Need to keep parents connected and involved
- Adults need to listen more to kids
- Talked about the importance of supporting/enabling parent to parent connections
- Parents didn't have as much input on consequences as the youth participants did
- Recognition that kids don't tell adults until a serious problem is happening

Duluth session: Key points noted from the Duluth listening session were:

- Diverse group that include people from Fond du Lac, police
- Need to continued diversity training
 - Need for positive role models
- Difficulty of working through issues in small communities was raised
 - Accountability has to be available outside the local level to address ongoing problems that cannot be resolved locally

- Duluth’s history of community-building around bullying shows the positive impact possible when a community has a long-term commitment to change

Reporting Back: Definitions Work Group

Vangie Castro reported on the latest draft of definitions from the working group. Discussion by the group included the following comments, questions and answers.

1. Question: What aren’t protected classes included in the bullying definition as in harassment?
 - The working group did not want to exclude any group by not including them or limit the scope of actions included
 - The group tried to focus in on actions not included in the definition of harassment.
2. Comment: Concern that using the harassment list of protected classes loses a chance to reinforce rights for those groups
3. Question: Why differentiate between bullying and harassment?
 - The working group wanted to reflect current statutes relating to harassment.
 - The group hoped to continue to point out the differences between the two.
4. Question: Did the working group review any bullying related lawsuits?
 - A New York case was reviewed
5. Comment by staff: The Task Force was referred to GAO report included in the meeting packets as an example of the complexity of the issues being addressed by the Task Force.
6. Comment: The definition does not seem to include adult as well as student behavior.
 - That was not really discussed by the group.
 - Concerns were raised about questions of employment/employment law confusing the issue.
 - Could adult behavior be addressed through other venues such as the Code of Ethics.
 - Could be discussed in the report but not included in statute or policy.
 - Request that staff investigate how the harassment statute addressed adult behavior.
7. Question: Is it true that this definition is intended to fall short of civil or criminal liability?
 - Still need to discuss whether a policy will be mandated or left to local school districts to amend

Other discussion by the members focused on the need for definitions that a student and/or parent would understand and that could be useful in discussions of behavior between parents and school personnel. The Task Force still needs to clarify whether their work will apply to pre-K, private and post-secondary schools. A suggestion was made that the final report includes information on why the Task Force chose the definition elements and why some items were not included.

Additional comments and suggestions on the definitions should be sent to Vangie Castro. It is the intent to finalize these definitions at the July 9th Task Force meeting.

Reporting Back: Working Recommendations Draft

Rose Hermodson reviewed draft recommendations. Members were asked to again indicate priority areas and to suggest edits during the break period. Rose is working with the chairs to begin to draft elements of the report to provide a framework for the recommendations.

Core Belief Statements list developed. Suggested key elements were: Prevention/Intervention, Community Issue, Policy/Practice, Consequences, and Training. Task Force members provided feedback on the draft elements that included suggestions to also include social, emotional learning, civic and youth engagement, equity; that community issues be changed to community engagement; and that training should be inclusive in scope.

Suggestion to add preamble statement state that academic achievement is the primary goal of educational efforts and that preventing bullying links to achievement of that goal.

There was discussion about substituting accountability for consequences but the members were not in agreement. Accountability was linked to districts, school board and administrators in relation to implementation of effective prevention strategies and interventions while consequences focused more on the individual student who bullied.

Other suggestions relating to the task force report included using the format used in OLA reports; providing information learned from panelists and from listening sessions to recommendations; and inclusion of a statement of student rights and assurances of protections and access to resources

Panel Presentations

Dr. Stuart Green, Director of the NJ Coalition for Bullying Awareness and Prevention (www.njbullying.org) – by phone. Dr. Green will send a copy of his statement that includes 20 key points. PACER has been a tremendous contributor to national work on bullying prevention. New Jersey new law is intended to address gaps in previous legislation. It is intended to be “strong law.” There is funding provided for a Task Force to continue to push implementation of the law. Key points to be considered during statute development and/or implementation

- Role of adults in promoting/implementing the elements of the law
- Rights of all students/student groups, especially vulnerable populations
- Bullying is a systemic problem – part of the ecology of schools (culture)
 - Schools need a welcoming environment
 - Schools must support diversity of student population including engagement with community activities
- Must be consequences that are reasonable and reasonably escalate if behavior continues or escalates
- Must have a timeline of action that is quick and reasonable
- Must address bullying off the campus and include cyber activities
- Support for parents when they seek assistance
- Should not require purchase of any particular program
- Schools must have persistent commitment to engage all children and be “known” to at least one staff member
- Preventing bullying is a matter of attitude/commitment

Dan Solomon – field representative for Senator Al Franken. GAO report shows about 25% of all students report being bullied during their student years. 9 out of 10 LGBT kids report being bullied and about 1/3 of those youth report missing school as a result. Senator Franken is working on adoption of the Student Non-Discrimination Act of 2011 focused to address discrimination and/or harassment of students related to actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity. Another proposed federal legislation is the Safe Schools Improvement Act developed by Senator Casey.

Wade Setter – Supt. of MN Bureau of Criminal Apprehension and past Director of the Minnesota School Safety Center. Cited the link between school safety and unaddressed incidences of bullying as documented in *Preventing School Shootings* by the US Secret Service. Students have reported that possible incidents of school violence were not reported to adults because young people reported that they did not know an adult that they could report that information to. Prevention and a positive school climate have been demonstrated to avoid the harm caused by violent incidences and the long-term costs of recovery associated with those incidents. Training for all adults working with youth, including SRO staff, was a focus of the Center, along with school-based emergency management – which includes a focus on prevention.

Jamie Nabozny – engaged in successful lawsuit against a school district relating to harassment. He emphasized the necessity for statutes that clearly define the rights of all groups. He called for changes in methods used to prevent bullying and harassment. These are:

1. Teach kids about the world they will live in and the diversity they will encounter
2. Mandate empathy training for k-2 students to prevent bullying and increase the willingness of bystanders to act
3. Must help students recover from bullying acts – bystanders, those bullied, those bullying; have students at the center of addressing and resolving issues and incidents
4. Involve parents in identifying solutions and fostering positive behavior
5. Use teachable moments that differentiate behaviors of concern
6. Train all staff including bus drivers, lunch room staff, janitors and hall monitors and empower all to act

Comments and questions from Task Force members to the panelists:

To Dr Green: What does a strong bullying law do re: consequences; does NJ allow parents right to action against schools?

- NJ law does not specifically address right of action at this time due to controversy.
- Law directed Dept of Ed and others to specify what steps could be used by parents and students.
- Law does provide a section related to consequences. Too many schools are still using zero tolerance.

To W Setter: How do we deal with the importance of relationships when we cannot legislate it?

- Training is the answer – for all adults that can impact students.

To Dr. Green – what would you change to strengthen the NJ law?

- Require data analysis to identify students that are isolated such as students not involved in school activities.
- Parental support such as peer support groups for parents of students with special needs; measure engagement in parent conferences and/or PTA engagement.
- Does not adequately require assessment of school climate.
- Schools are not required to inform parents of their rights and available resources.

To W Setter: Tell more about the MN School Safety Center and why it no longer exists.

- Co-founded by MDE and DPS through federal monies.
- Resulted from a Task Force targeted to address school safety.
- Focused on prevention, intervention, response and recovery and focused on school climate as much as preventing school violence.

- Funding was provided by federal Education and Justice sources that have been eliminated. Some of the resources are being made available at the following website: <https://dps.mn.gov/divisions/hsem/mn-school-safety-center/Pages/default.aspx>

To Dr. Green and/or W Setter: When we try not to criminalize adolescent behavior, what are your thoughts about restorative justice?

- Dr. Green – institutionalizing a reflective process is important in helping students who bully learn different behavior; care should be taken to ensure that students engaged in restorative processes are not re-injured.
- W Setter – agreed with Dr. Green about careful use of restorative processes in relation to bullying.

To the panel: Is there agreement about what not to include; not to do (to the panel) in addition to zero tolerance?

- Dr. Green – one time programs, short-term events that are not supported by an ongoing system and/or culture.
- J Nabozny – treat it as a one-time issue, rather than a system event; focus on changing the victim such as moving the student and re-victimizing.

To Dr. Green – Is there something like voluntary accreditation around school climate?

- Am not aware of any. Resource in this area that is strong – National School Climate Center in NY that has an assessment instrument on school climate that is very strong.

Follow-up question about assessment: Should that information be reported publicly?

- Community should be involved in the assessment process and the information available to them to guide decision-making.

Group Discussion Items

- Announcement – all requests for reimbursement must be in to MDE by 7/10 due to end of fiscal year.
- Send reflections and suggestions to Rose H. on ideas generated by the panel.
- July 9th meeting – focus will be on completing a full draft of the report and recommendations that includes the definitions. It is possible another working meeting in July will be added depending on the work accomplished at this meeting.
- July 26th meeting is moved to Monday, July 30th at MDE.
- Final listening session – Metro area adults – is in the process of being scheduled. Will probably happen after the July 9th Task Force meeting.

Public Comments

Dr. Ginger Gustafson, Associate Superintendent of Anoka School District and Peg Wetli, CLIMB Theater staff member provided a brief overview of Anoka School District's bullying and harassment activities

CLIMB Theater provided resources and learning opportunities for school staff in the Anoka District through use of theater arts in areas related to bullying and harassment prevention. Packets of materials were distributed to members.