A positive school climate

Includes a safe learning environment, a network of supportive and caring teachers and administrators, students who feel connected to their school and school staff, and parents who are involved and engaged.

BULLYING PREVENTION MATTERS

HRSA's National Initiative

Introducing Bullying Prevention Matters

The Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), Maternal and Child Health Bureau (MCHB) has been working in bullying prevention since 2001. HRSA addresses this important public health issue through resource development, partner engagement, and the translation of research. We work closely with our Federal Partners in Bullying Prevention to actively contribute information and resources to StopBullying.gov, a collaborative federal effort launched in 2011 that engages federal and community stakeholders from across the health, education, justice, and youth domains.

We are pleased to share our first issue of *Bullying Prevention Matters*. This quarterly newsletter is a resource for HRSA's partners in bullying prevention to highlight HRSA-supported bullying prevention work at the national and state levels, as well as research and resources that support our collective work to prevent bullying. In future issues you can expect to read about topics like cyberbullying, HRSA's Bullying Prevention Assessment and Change Package, and Bullying Prevention Awareness Month.

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Creating Positive School Climate to Stop Bullying

Many Common Bullying Prevention Programs Are Not Working

Research shows that some bullying prevention programs simply are not effective, and may even cause harm. For example, we now know that once popular zero-tolerance policies – those that impose an automatic suspension or expulsion after one incident – do not effectively reduce bullying or make schools safer. Unintended consequences of suspending or expelling students include missed classwork and punitive responses can increase the likelihood that youth are involved in criminal activity, the juvenile justice system, or drop out of school. In addition, other common bullying prevention efforts that use one-off or short-term curriculum-based programs have been shown to have minimal, if any, impact on the ongoing behavior of kids who bully, are bullied, or are bystanders.

HRSA has been working to increase awareness about policies and interventions that are effective. As such, HRSA created an [online bullying prevention continuing education course](#) summarizing key research about effective policies and practices to reduce bullying.

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Improving School Climate to Prevent Bullying

HRSA joined with public and private partners to fund a consensus study by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine (NASEM) to answer this question. The resulting report, "[Preventing Bullying Through Science, Policy and Practice](#)," finds that the most effective programs are ones "that promote a positive school environment and combine social and emotional skill-building for all students, with targeted interventions for those at greatest risk for being involved in bullying."

An essential piece of bullying prevention includes working to improve the school environment, also known as "school climate." School climate refers to how encouraging and constructive the whole school environment is – from academic teaching and learning, to the way people interact and feel in the school community. A positive school climate includes a safe learning environment, a network of supportive and caring teachers and administrators, students who feel connected to their school and school staff, and parents who are involved and engaged.

A positive school climate has long been known to positively impact student outcomes, including better attendance rates, increased motivation to learn, improved student achievement, lower dropout rates, and even greater teacher retention. Researchers are also finding that students in schools with a good school climate are less likely to experience violence, peer victimization, and punitive disciplinary action. Additionally, making improvements in school climate has been found to decrease bullying and increase both perceived and actual safety.

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Researchers have also found that there is no connection between the socioeconomic status of a school and school climate, which means that creating an encouraging and constructive school climate does not necessarily depend on financial resources and can likely benefit kids from all socioeconomic backgrounds.

HRSA has translated many of the findings of this important study into several resources:

- [Research summaries](#), which outlines the findings of the NASEM in specific topics, such as [Integrated Healthcare](#) and the [Multi-tiered Systems of Support](#)
- [Factsheets](#) that translate research findings into a brief informational resource
- A 3-part [webinar series](#) on the NASEM study's findings, conclusions, and recommendations

Action Steps

For those considering efforts to improve school climate, the [National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine](#) has highlighted several key elements that are effective in decreasing bullying. They recommend intervening at three levels, or "tiers": universal, selective, and indicated prevention interventions. Schools should also work *across* the three tiers to "layer" the other interventions with universal preventive interventions. The three tiers are:

- **Universal interventions** that every student receives. Examples of universal interventions including guidelines for use of digital media and classroom lessons on social-emotional learning.

- **Selective interventions** for students at increased risk of being bullying or engaging in bullying behavior. Examples of selective interventions are intensive training in social-emotional skills and de-escalation approaches, or staff supervision of "hot spots," or parts of the school where bullying is more likely to occur.
- **Indicated interventions** for students already engaging in bullying behavior or being bullied and are showing signs of behavioral, academic, and mental health consequences. Indicated interventions are usually tailored to the needs of the student and frequently involve professionals in various fields, as well as community members.

Measuring School Climate

Measuring school climate is the first step to making changes where they are needed most. The [Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)](#) requires states to consider at least one non-academic factor when assessing school success, one of which is school climate and safety. This encourages states to recognize and emphasize the importance of measuring and improving school climate.

There are a number of tools available to help schools measure school climate:

- [ED School Climate Surveys](#) and an associated web-based platform are available from the U.S. Department of Education to help states, school districts, and school administrators measure and understand school climate effectively.
- [StopBullying.gov](#) provides information and resources from various government agencies on school climate, risk factors, and other aspects of bullying prevention.

Partnering to Prevent Bullying

Along with the Department of Education, HRSA co-chairs the Federal Partners in Bullying Prevention workgroup, a collaborative federal effort launched in 2011 comprised of a variety of federal agencies. [StopBullying.gov](#), the principal product from this collaboration, is a clearinghouse on bullying prevention information. HRSA provides support for the website and is a member of the Editorial Board that oversees the web content. HRSA also supports communications services to manage the StopBullying.gov social media accounts, [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [Instagram](#).

In addition to these national level efforts, in 2010 HRSA created the Bullying Prevention Partners, a group of key stakeholders interested in bullying prevention, to collaborate, share resources, and have a bigger collective impact throughout the United States to reduce the harmful effects of bullying. We are proud to have 274 partners engaged with us in preventing and addressing bullying as a public health issue. If your organization is interested in joining the Bullying Prevention Partners group, please email Bullyingworkgroup@hrsa.gov. If you have important bullying prevention news to share, tag @StopBullyingGov on Twitter to reach our more than 90,000 followers.

StopBullying.gov – Recent Resources

Can Kindness Overcome Bullying?

Imagine a world where kindness is the norm. Is it possible to create homes, schools, and communities where kindness is the norm? The answer is, yes – but to make this imagined world a reality, we need to teach, model, and reward kindness.

That Long Pause was Really a Seizure: Understanding Epilepsy and Bullying

Epilepsy is a neurological condition that causes the brain to seize. A child who witnesses a peer having an epileptic seizure may feel scared and confused. Kids may try to use humor to deflect their fears, but that can quickly lead to bullying and can be hurtful. Co-authored by HRSA, this blog addresses how to prevent bullying of children with epilepsy and other health conditions.

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New CDC Resource Can Help States and Communities Prevent Youth Violence

The CDC recently released a new resource – "A Comprehensive Technical Package for the Prevention of Youth Violence and Associated Risk Behaviors," that outlines six science-based strategies states and communities can use to stop and prevent youth violence including bullying.

New OJJDP Resource Helps Schools Implement Evidence-Based Bullying Prevention Programs

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) released a guide for schools seeking evidence-based solutions to address bullying among students. The "School-based Bullying Prevention Implementation Guide" outlines ten steps that schools can take to implement bullying prevention research into practice.

Full blogs on a wide range of bullying-related topics can be found on the StopBullying.gov Blog. Subscribe to StopBullying.gov to stay up-to-date on new blogs, resources, and trainings.