



BULLYING AND HARASSMENT

The approach schools have been implementing to address bullying is not effective. There has been no decline in the number of students reporting being bullied for a decade. This is not the fault of principals or teachers. The problem is based on what they have been told to do.

Nature of Hurtful Behavior

Educators are told those who engage in bullying are “at risk” students. The primary source of bullying is socially skilled, “popular,” compliant students who are hurtful to achieve high social status and dominance.

The only way to correct this behavior is to change the culture of the school by placing kind and compassionate students into leadership positions to foster positive relations and to focus on positive social norms held by the majority.

Disciplinary Code Response

Educators are told to respond to a report of “bullying” in the context of the disciplinary code. This turns what should be a process to resolve hurtful situation into a determination about sanctions. Sanctions are ineffective. Schools are under pressure to reduce sanctions. The hurtful situation generally remains unresolved, retaliation is frequent, and there is no remedy of harm to the one who was treated badly.

Educators must shift to an approach that supports increased resilience of all involved students and that requires any student who was hurtful to accept personal responsibility and take steps to remedy the harm to the one treated badly and the community.

Developmental Factors

Teens want to resolve their own relationship challenges, not “tell an adult.”

Empower students with effective skills to resolve relationship challenges—as a witness, the one targeted, or the one who was hurtful.

PBIS AND TOKEN REWARDS

Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS) originated at the U. of O. Some aspects of PBIS are helpful, including Multiple Tier System of Supports and a team-based approach grounded in an analysis of school data.

PBIS has not been updated to fully integrate trauma informed practices, cultural inclusion, and restorative practices. PBIS functions in an authoritarian manner and does not fully engage students as partners in the establishment of a positive school community.

A significant concern is promotion of the use of token rewards. This approach is premised on the mistaken idea that students who have challenges will be motivated to behave if they see other students get rewards.

The token rewards approach results in the students who do not have challenges and come from secure families getting rewards and privileges, whereas the students who have experienced trauma, have disabilities or other challenges, and/or come from less secure families do not. These students are routinely discouraged, shamed, and excluded.

The PBIS rewards approach models relational aggression, a form of bullying. Principals often ignore reports that the “good” students have been hurtful, especially if reported by students with challenges.

OREGON STUDENT WELLNESS SURVEY

Oregon students from 6th, 8th, and 11th grades may be asked to complete the Student Wellness Survey (SWS) every 2 years.

The following are the outcomes of the 2018 SWS from Eugene 4J and Springfield School Districts. Bethel students did not complete the survey in 2018.

Staff-Student Relationships

- 36% of students reported they did not think they could talk openly and freely about their concerns with a teacher.
- 34% reported there was no adult at school who really cares about them.
- These percentages have remained consistent since 2012.

Feeling Unsafe at School

- 11% of students did not go to school one or more times in the past 30 days because they felt unsafe at school or on their way to and from school.
- This percentage has increased since 2012.

Being Harassed

- 48% of students reported being “harassed” in the past 30 days—which included threatening, bullying, name-calling or obscenities, offensive notes or graffiti, unwanted touching, or being pushed around or hit.
- This percentage has remained consistent since 2012.

Emotional and Mental Health

- Only 72% of students reported good to excellent emotional and mental health
- 34% of students reported they had experienced depression in the last 12 months
- 19% of students reported they had seriously considered attempting suicide in the past 12 months.
- 8% of students reported they had actually attempted suicide.
- These percentages have all increased since 2012, especially in 2018.

BETHEL SCHOOL DISTRICT

Bethel School District is implementing a comprehensive approach that is grounded in trauma informed care, cultural inclusion, and restorative practices.

Bethel is on the right path. It will take some time for this new thinking to be fully implemented.

Bethel is developing a more comprehensive school climate survey. Because Bethel did not have its students participate in the 2018 SWS survey, there is no data for comparison or to determine progress.

EUGENE 4J

Eugene 4J has conducted a school climate survey since 2009. The district asks about being bullied and being harassed (minority class).

The questions ask if this has occurred “never,” “rarely,” (once or twice a year), “sometimes,” (once or twice a month), or “often” (once or more a week). The focus must be on those who reported “often” because this frequency can result in serious emotional harm and interference with learning.

4J reported that there was a decline in students reporting they were bullied in 2016 and 2017. However, a close analysis of the data reveals that a different student population participated in the survey—more high school students. There has been no actual decline since 2009.

In 2018, 6.5% of students reported they had been often bullied, 5.5% of students reported they had been often harassed, and 8.8% reported they had been often bullied, harassed or both. This is over 800 students.

Of significant concern, 64% of students who reported they had been often bullied and 68% who had been often harassed said they would not talk to a staff member to get help.

The district proposal to address these concerns:

- Provide guidance to administrators on how to take, respond, and document reports of bullying and to implement discipline practices.
 - The district has been using this approach for years and this has not resulted in any decline in bullying.
 - This approach clearly will not work if students do not feel safe asking for help.
- Increase focus on PBIS to improve school climate.
 - PBIS has been implemented in the district for years and has not resulted in a decline in bullying.
 - See results in Springfield.
- Continue to work on trauma informed care practices.
 - Trauma informed care is vitally important for many reasons. But this will not reduce bullying because most bullying is dominance behavior, not risk behavior.
 - Also, 4J has not yet developed a comprehensive approach to shift to trauma informed care practices.

SPRINGFIELD SCHOOL DISTRICT

Springfield School District has been diligently implementing PBIS with fidelity for 5 years, with significant support from the U. of O. This district is considered to be a “model PBIS district.”

The following is data from SWS in 2018. (Compare: Bethel 2016, 4J 2018)

- It is claimed that PBIS will reduce bullying.
 - There has been no decline in the rate at which students reported being bullied in Springfield from 2012 to 2018. Springfield: 48%, B: 46%, 4J: 48%)
 - 13% of Springfield students reported they felt unsafe coming to school. (B: 7%, 4J: 9%)
- PBIS maintains that the token reward approach provides the opportunity for staff to build positive relations with all students.
 - 35% of Springfield students reported they could not talk to teachers freely and openly about their concerns. (B and 4J: same)
 - 34% reported there was no adult at school who really cared about them. (B and 4J: same)
- PBIS maintains that its approach will improve social and emotional outcomes for all students.
 - 38% of Springfield students reported they had experienced depression. (30% B, 29% 4J)
 - 21% reported they had seriously considered suicide. (18% B, 18% 4J)
 - 11% reported they had actually attempted suicide. (10% B, 9% 4J)

These outcomes raise significant concerns about the effectiveness of PBIS. These results are not the fault of Springfield principals and teachers. They have been implementing this approach in good faith.

Based on these concerning figures, it is certainly imperative for the U. of O. PBIS program to pay heed to what other researchers have been trying to communicate for years and make significant modifications to its nationally promoted program.

POSITIVE STRATEGIES TO MORE FORWARD

- Stop using token rewards. Engage students in the collaborative development of shared values and commitments. Focus on increasing acts of kindness and expressions of gratitude.
- Place a very high priority on improving staff-student relationships. Engage in relationship mapping to ensure all students have one or more school staff members assigned to watch out for their well-being and check in regularly on how they are doing. Ensure all staff are making a consistent effort to achieve 5:1 positive to negative comments and are making a concerted effort to positively interact with the students who have greater challenges
- Increase student resilience. Engage students in daily mindfulness practices and provide training in de-escalation strategies to staff and students. Increase students’ problem-solving skills and focus on building personal strengths.
- Establish student leadership teams to foster kindness and inclusion and help all students gain effective personal relationship skills.
- Significantly improve how principals investigate and intervene when hurtful incidents or other concerns are reported. Shift from thinking in terms of discipline to increasing resilience, ensuring accountability, and achieving a positive resolution for all involved students.
- Make a commitment to implement a comprehensive positive school climate approach that integrates trauma informed practices, cultural inclusion, and restorative practices into the schools.



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