

INCREASING STUDENT RESILIENCE

A GUIDE FOR OREGON SCHOOLS

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Embrace Civility in the Digital Age

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In schools across Oregon, staff and students are experiencing increased levels of anxiety and stress. This appears to be resulting in increased bullying, harassment, aggression, disruption, and violence in classrooms, hallways, and other school spaces, as well as online. This spring saw a stark increase in the number of students who attempted or completed suicide. Nationally, the frequent school shootings have profoundly increased the anxiety of students everywhere.

With election season looming for next fall, these challenges are likely to continue and possibly even increase. Politics nationally have become fraught with contention over race, national origin, LGBTQ, and sexual harassment/assault issues. Regardless of which side someone is on regarding these issues, simply the focus of attention can be a trigger to distress and a possible aggressive reaction.

It is also clear that gun control and school shootings will have a major focus in the election. Based on research into the association of suicide and school shootings and the contagion of suicide, school shootings, and violence, there appears to be an increased risk that students who are distressed and angry at other students could think that killing those students, and then themselves, is an option they should consider.

Unfortunately, Oregon's education system is like a huge ship that has been proceeding in one direction for too long—a focus on academic achievement. This ship has been deprived of necessary funds that parts have become destabilized and all of the cabins have become overfilled. Oregon school leaders are striving mightily, against great odds, just to keep this ship afloat. And now the waters have become significantly more treacherous and troubled.

It must be understood that students who are stressed cannot effectively learn and staff who are stressed cannot effectively teach. The priority for Oregon schools, given these troubled waters, clearly must be on ensuring the the safety and emotional well-being of students and staff in an environment that is inclusive and welcoming to all. Only upon making this a priority, can effective learning occur.

The Deputy Superintendent's Advisory Committee on Safe and Effective Schools for ALL Students is developing comprehensive report with guidelines to create positive, equitable learning environments that address the needs of all students. This report will be released early summer and will form the basis for implementation strategies and legislation.

However, recognizing the upcoming challenges that Oregon schools are likely to face next fall, this document will set forth background insight, key data from the Oregon Healthy Teens survey and the Student Wellness Survey, and recommendations for research-based actions that can be implemented relatively rapidly that hold promise for helping schools maintain a positive school climate and support all students during the anticipated "troubling waters" starting fall of the 2018-19 school year.

BACKGROUND RESEARCH

As schools enter the 2018-19 school year, key concerns are:

- Students will model the hostility to others they are witnessing at a national level. This will lead to increased bullying and harassment, especially based on race, national origin, and LGBTQ, as well as the risk of increased retaliation. This will likely also lead to increased contention related to sexual harassment and assault.
- The level of student anxiety and emotional distress will increase and students will be at increased risk of triggering, which can result in school disruption, suicide, and school violence.
- Continued focus on school shootings will continue to have a contagion effect, resulting in more school shootings, thus increasing the anxiety and distress of students.

SUICIDE CONCERNS

In 2016, the Oregon Health Authority (OHA) completed the Youth Suicide Intervention and Prevention Plan, 2016–2020.¹ This plan notes that Oregon's youth suicide rate has been nearly twice the national rate for many years. The four Strategic Directions outlined in the Plan are:

- *Healthy and empowered individuals, families and communities.*
- *Clinical and community preventive services.*
- *Treatment and support services.*
- *Surveillance, research and evaluation.*

There is no single reason for or cause of suicide. It is known that suicide is multidimensional, involving many factors at many levels of influence. The OHA Plan also discussed two key risk factors. The noted Community and Society risk factors, which are largely outside of the control of schools, include:

Influences such as economic insecurity, child abuse and other trauma, lack of food, transportation, access to medical care, substance use, and the absence of positive social supports have an impact on the health of a population.

Addressing the other key risk factor is within the control of schools. As noted in the OHA Plan, bullying is a recognized risk factor associated with suicide. As the Plan stated:

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, bullying involves making threats, spreading rumors, attacking someone physically or verbally, or excluding them from a group intentionally. Bullying occurs both in-person and electronically. Bullying has serious and lasting effects on mental health and well-being of youth, whether they are bullied, bully others or witness the bullying of others. Outcomes can include depression, anxiety, participating in interpersonal or sexual violence, substance use, poor social functioning, and low school performance and attendance. Bullies themselves, those who are bullied and those who witness bullying are all at higher risk of suicide. While bullying is generally not seen as a cause of suicide, it nevertheless contributes to vulnerability when present with other risk factors. Risk is especially acute among lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning (LGBTQ) youth.

Backing up the importance of addressing concerns associated with hurtful student interactions and other stress related to school climate, a recent study released in Pediatrics found that youth suicides are most prevalent during the school year.² A news story announcing these findings was sobering:

New research suggests a sobering tie between school and suicide.

It's no secret the school year can bring students plenty of stress and other problems. But a study published Wednesday in the journal Pediatrics indicates the school year also corresponds with an increase in hospital visits for suicide attempts and serious suicidal thoughts among America's youth.

"We noticed that anecdotally here in our own hospital over the last several years, we would have a fairly quiet summer as far as kids coming in for mental health issues, then right about four to six weeks after school started, we became inundated," says Dr. Greg Plemmons, the study's lead author and an associate professor of clinical pediatrics at Monroe Carell Jr. Children's Hospital at Vanderbilt. "We found it really is consistent across all regions of the country."³

This was the first study that looked directly at the link between school year and incidents of suicide. Given the significant increased rate of youth suicide and now the clear understanding that such suicide is associated with what is happening in school, more proactive attention by educators to the emotional well-being of students is essential.

Oregon educators must think in terms of combining points of data. There is a clear link between the school year and youth suicides. Oregon’s youth suicide rate is twice the national average. Oregon schools also have a very high rate of chronic absences. Clearly ensuring positive improvements in the climate in Oregon schools must have a high priority.

Thus, while the Community and Society risk factors are prevalent throughout the year, it appears that student emotional well-being during the school year, which is clearly associated with the quality of peer relationships, must have a high priority.

The Plan also addressed concerns of contagion—that news of someone who has ended or has attempted to end his or her life by suicide, especially knowing someone who has suicided, can cause an increase in suicide. Knowing that someone has or has attempted suicide can lead others who are distressed to then see suicide as an option they could consider.⁴

It is likely that contagion was in effect this spring in Oregon. News of suicides and attempts spread throughout schools and communities. As students who were experiencing distress learned of other students who had attempted or completed suicide, this likely contributed to additional attempts and completions.

The Plan promotes universal “upstream” activities that include teaching emotional self-regulation, good decision-making and problem-solving skills, gatekeeper training so that school staff can effectively recognize and intervene in situations where a student appears to be at higher risk, and post-incident activities to reduce the possibility of contagion.

The important role of schools in achieving these directives was noted. This included the importance of helping young people gain coping and problem-solving skills, reducing bullying and establishing connectedness to the school community, and ensuring safe and supportive school communities.

An Oregon-specific toolkit also was developed for schools, the Oregon Youth Suicide Prevention Intervention and Postvention Guidelines: A Resource for School Personnel. School leaders should review this toolkit and ensure that each school has implemented the recommendations. An Inventory is provided to guide school leaders in making an assessment of the status of planning for their school. A booklet with information for teachers entitled, What Every Teacher Should Know, is available. Gatekeeper training for secondary students should also be helpful, with some caveats discussed below.

A strong focus in suicide prevention is on what is called “gatekeeper training.” The term gatekeeper refers to “individuals in a community who have face-to-face contact with large numbers of community members as part of their usual routine.” They may be trained to “identify persons at risk of suicide and refer them to treatment or supporting services as appropriate.”⁵

The Rand Corporation developed an excellent model for an analysis of gatekeeper training for use by the military. In developing this model, a meta-analysis of research studies was conducted. This research included studies in schools for both staff and student training. The framework identified was:

- 1. Knowledge about suicide, which includes declarative and perceived knowledge about suicide, depression, and resources available for at-risk individuals.*
- 2. Beliefs and attitudes about suicide prevention refers to whether individuals believe suicide is considered preventable, whether it is important or appropriate to intervene with at-risk individuals, and whether seeking help for mental illness is a form of self care.*
- 3. Reluctance to intervene refers to perceptions individuals may have that it is not their responsibility or that it is inappropriate to intervene; stigma of mental illness is one reason for gatekeeper reluctance.*
- 4. Self-efficacy to intervene reflects the extent to which the individual feels comfortable and competent to identify, care for, and facilitate referral for a person at risk of suicide.⁶*

Unfortunately, while the research has identified that gatekeeper training can increase knowledge and has a limited positive influence on beliefs and attitudes, it does not appear that such training has a positive impact on intervention or reduction in suicides. Specifically, the findings appear to demonstrate that though the training can reduce reluctance and increase self-reported intentions to intervene, such training does not translate into a significant behavioral change in terms of self-reported gatekeeper behaviors. Use of the term “mental illness” appears to be a major barrier.

It appears that pre-existing relationships are important. It has been found that teachers, who have a more direct relationship with students, are more likely to show notable changes in identifying suicidal behaviors in students as compared to other school staff who have more indirect relationships. Thus, for teachers and other staff who already have good relationships with distressed students, gatekeeper training can provide additional valuable insight and skills.

SCHOOL SHOOTING CONCERNS

Research has also reliably found that there is a connection between suicide and school shootings. Research has reliable found that a substantial portion of perpetrators end their lives.⁷ In an analysis published in the Washington Post provides this stark analysis:

(R)esearchers have found that the overwhelming majority of people who commit mass public shootings are suicidal at the time of their attacks: They fully intend to die, either by a self-inflicted gunshot wound or a shootout with police.

Moreover, data on the outcomes of mass shootings bears this out. Nearly half of the perpetrators of mass shootings carried out between 1982 and 2018 took their own lives at or near the scene of their crime.... Add in the individuals who were shot and killed during subsequent encounters with police and about 7 in 10 mass shooters don't survive.

Certainty of death, in other words, is no deterrent to mass shooters. Most of them may, in fact, be driven by it....

For many mass shooters, provoking a lethal response by law enforcement officers is part of the plan. The phenomenon is so common that it has a name: "suicide by cop."...

Shooters intending to go out in a "blaze of glory," either by their own hand or via a shootout with police, are unlikely to be deterred by the presence of more "good guys" with guns. The data on mass shootings would appear to bear this out.

People intending to commit mass shootings often study previous mass shooters closely, attempting to emulate or surpass them. Most would-be mass shooters are well aware, in other words, that they're unlikely to survive.⁸

The study of school shootings by the Secret Service published in 2002, provided these findings on school shooters:

- *There is no accurate or useful "profile" of students who engaged in targeted school violence.*
- ***Many attackers felt bullied, persecuted or injured by others prior to the attack.***
- *A history of having been the subject of a mental health evaluation, diagnosed with a mental disorder, or involved in substance abuse did not appear to be prevalent among attackers. **However, most attackers showed some history of suicidal attempts or thoughts, or a history of feeling extreme depression or desperation.***
- *Over half of the attackers demonstrated some interest in violence, through movies, video games, books, and other media However, there was no one common type of interest in violence indicated. Instead, the attackers' interest in violent themes took various forms.*
- *Most attackers had no history of prior violent or criminal behavior.*
- ***Most attackers were known to have had difficulty coping with significant losses or personal failures. Moreover, many had considered or attempted suicide.***
- ***Incidents of targeted violence at school rarely are sudden, impulsive acts. Prior to most incidents, other people knew about the attacker's idea and/or plan to attack.***
- *Most attackers did not threaten their targets directly prior to advancing the attack.*
- ***Most attackers engaged in some behavior, prior to the incident, that caused others concern or indicated a need for help.***
- ***In many cases, other students were involved in the attack in some capacity.***
- *Most attackers had access to and had used weapons prior to the attack.*
- *Despite prompt law enforcement responses, most attacks were stopped by means other than law enforcement intervention.*

The items set forth in bold are the findings that appear to be relevant to more effective prevention and intervention by schools. Essentially, most school shooters have experienced being bullied, have a history of suicidal thoughts, had difficulty coping with a significant loss **and** other people in school, both staff and students, had noted reasons for increased concern.

It also appears that news of mass shootings and murder suicides can contribute to shooting contagion. One recent meta-analysis of other studies found clear evidence that the process of imitation may be contributing further incidents of both mass shootings and murder-suicide.⁹

In an excellent report from National Academies Press, entitled Contagion of Violence: Workshop Summary, this statement was made:

While it is commonly accepted knowledge that violence begets violence, many workshop speakers emphasized that epidemiological research methods can reveal the ways in which violence spreads, both from one act of violence to many and as a spillover from one type of violence to others.

The primary findings of this workshop were:

- Violence is contagious both within and across types of violence, including suicide.
- Social norms contribute to the contagion of violence. Changing those norms has the potential to interrupt such violence.
- Media can both facilitate and prevent the contagion of violence. However, the role of the Internet in the contagion process is not well understood.
- Increased, repeated, and dramatic coverage of violence can lead to increased rates of violence, including suicide.
- Youth decision making and impulsivity might be one reason why young people may be more susceptible to contagion through media reporting and other peer and social networks.
- Understanding how the contagion process works inform the development of violence prevention interventions.
- Changing social norms and increasing protective factors are two key intervention strategies. Successful interventions require an evidence-base, an implementation system, and the political will.

A recent study published by Pediatrics documented that students who are bullied are twice as likely to bring weapons to school.¹⁰ As noted, the study of school shootings by the Secret Service published in 2002, demonstrated that bullying is associated with these shootings.¹¹ The specific findings were:

Almost three-quarters of the attackers felt persecuted, bullied, threatened, attacked or injured by others prior to the incident (71 percent, n=29).

In several cases, individual attackers had experienced bullying and harassment that was long-standing and severe. In some of these cases the experience of being bullied seemed to have a significant impact on the attacker and appeared to have been a factor in his decision to mount an attack at the school. In one case, most of the attacker's schoolmates described the attacker as "the kid every one teased." In witness statements from that incident, schoolmates alleged that nearly every child in the school had at some point thrown the attacker against a locker, tripped him in the hall, held his head under water in the pool or thrown things at him. Several schoolmates had noted that the attacker seemed more annoyed by, and less tolerant of, the teasing than usual in the days preceding the attack.¹²

In conclusion, this report noted:

(E)ducators can play a part in prevention by creating an environment where students feel comfortable telling an adult whenever they hear about someone who is considering doing harm to another person, or even whether the person is considering harming themselves. Once such an environment is created, it will remain important that the adults in that environment listen to students and handle the information they receive in a fair and responsible manner.

BULLYING AND HARASSMENT CONCERNS

Recent meta-analyses have raised attention to significant concerns associated with the current approaches to “bullying prevention.” As recently noted by Cohen and colleagues:

There have been five meta-analytic studies published in peer-review publications that have focused on the efficacy of school-based bully prevention programs. These review studies indicate that the efficacy of school bullying prevention programs have varied (from no effects to low effect sizes) across countries and contexts.¹³

A recent article by Yeager and colleagues explains how the predominant approach to addressing bullying developed is not effective at the secondary level.¹⁴ As the researchers noted:

Strong developmental theory supports the prediction that anti-bullying programs might be less effective in older age groups compared to younger children. This involves the developmental changes in the content of bullying, the characteristics of those who bully, the underlying psychological causes of bullying, and finally an overall increase in reactance against controlling adults among older adolescents.¹⁵

The National Crime Victimization Survey—School Crimes Supplement (NCVS) is one national survey on bullying. In 2013, there was a slight drop in the percentage of students reporting they had been bullied, but no declines in any other years, including 2015.¹⁶ On the Youth Risk Behavior Survey, there has not been a decline of student reports of being bullied since 2009.¹⁷ A recently study evaluating U.S. data from the 2005-2006 *Health Behavior in School-Aged Children* survey, determined

that 65% of schools had bullying prevention programs. Schools with such programs had **significantly higher levels** of reported bullying.¹⁸

Research documents that staff overwhelmingly think that they are effectively addressing bullying and have effective strategies are respond effectively to the bullying incidents they witness or are reported.¹⁹ The student perspective is that staff are not doing enough, ignore the hurtful incidents they witness, and generally make things worse when they respond. When school staff think what they are doing is effective, it is exceptionally hard to encourage them to change what they are doing.

To address concerns of bullying, and especially to reduce the the risks of suicide or school violence, increasing student reporting is of significant importance. There is troubling insight from research in the field of bullying prevention related to this issue.

The majority of secondary students do not report hurtful incidents. Data from 2015 NCVS indicated that only 43% of students who reported someone had bullied them at school said that they told an adult.²⁰

One 2004 study at the elementary school level found that there was a perception among the students that the school tolerated bullying because nothing was ever done and therefore it was a waste of time to report.²¹ A 2004 study of secondary students revealed that students did not report their situation to teachers or other adults for fear of being viewed as a “squealer,” belief that the school staff would act in a way that would make their situation worse, and they did not trust school staff to keep secrets told to them in confidence.²² In a 2007 study, students associated telling a teacher with a double jeopardy: they might not be believed and telling might result in retaliation by the perpetrators.²³

Another study in 2007 demonstrated that while only 7% of school staff thought they made things worse when they intervened in bullying situations, 61% of middle school students and 59% of high school students reported that staff who tried to stop bullying only made things worse.²⁴ A 2008 study found that students overwhelmingly believed that most teachers ignored or did not recognize such hurtful activities, were not prepared to intervene if asked, and were incapable of doing anything effective if they took actions.²⁵

The *Youth Voice Project* asked students who were repeatedly bullied and had experienced moderate to very severe levels of distress whether they reported to an adult at school and, if so, whether things got better, stayed the same, or got worse.²⁶ The findings indicated:

- Elementary (grade 5). 46% did not tell an adult, 29% told and things got better, 17% told and things stayed the same, 11% told and things got worse.
- Middle school (grades 6 to 8). 68% did not tell an adult at school, 12% told and things got better, 8% told and things stayed the same, 12% told and things got worse.
- High school (grades 9 to 12). 76% did not tell an adult at school, 7% told and things got better, 8% told and things stayed the same, 9% told and things got worse.²⁷

The author discussed concerns of bullying with Lane County behavioral health professionals. It is clear that there are many concerns associated with bullying situations to which the school’s response was not effective. It was stated that area counselors found it was “very frustrating” when they contacted a school in a quest to assist their patients achieve a better resolution of these situations.

Researchers in the field of suicide prevention who have focused on the effectiveness of gatekeeper programs in schools have not been attentive to the data on student perspectives about reporting bullying. As noted above, gatekeeper training programs have not demonstrated effectiveness in increasing intervention behavior. If approximately 60% of students think that reporting bullying incidents to the school will make things worse, it is likely appropriate to assume that this negative perception of the effectiveness of reporting is also impacting the willingness of students to report if they are feeling suicidal or they think a peer is distressed and considering an act of self-harm or violence.

OREGON DATA

It is necessary to consider some key findings from the Oregon Healthy Teen (OHT) survey and the Student Wellness Survey (SWS). These surveys are conducted every other year.

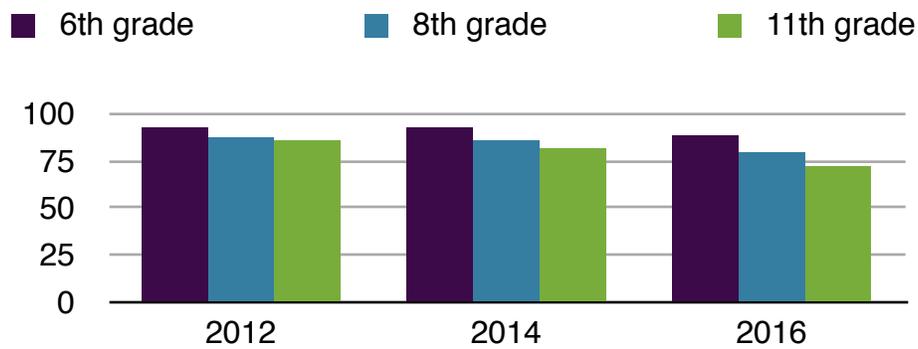
To begin with the most disturbing data, this is the 2016 SWS data on students who brought weapons to school.

Table 15: Serious Problem Behaviors on School Property - Past 30 Days

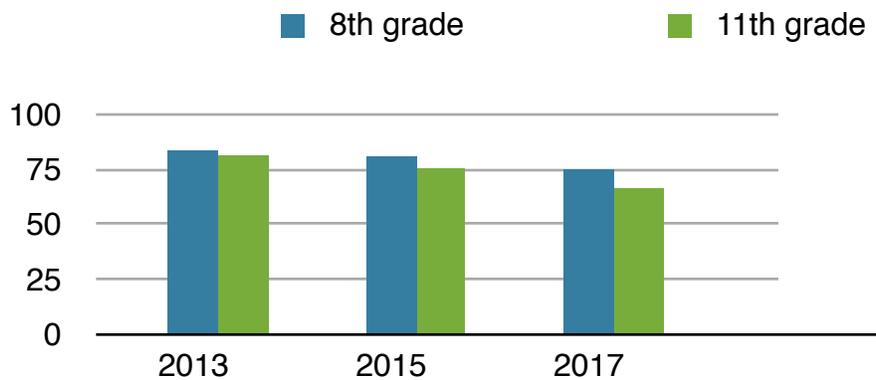
| | Grade 6 State | Grade 8 State | Grade 11 State |
|--|------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| Took a weapon other than a gun to school | 2.4 | 4.8 | 7.3 |
| Took a gun to school | 0.7 | 1.0 | 1.4 |
| Have a gun/weapon on school property | 2.5 | 5.0 | 7.6 |

As the data demonstrates, 7.6% of 11th grade students had brought a weapon to school in the 30 days before the survey in 2016. In a 1,500 student high school, that is 118 students who brought a weapon to school. And 1.4% of 11th grade students brought a gun. That is 21 students brought a gun to school in the 30 days before the survey. This is data from 2016, prior to the increased anxiety students were feeling in Spring 2018.

Based on both OHT and SWS, there has been a significant decline in student emotional well-being. One of the questions within the section on Positive Youth Development, a series of questions that is present in both OHT and SWS. Students are asked: Would you say that in general your emotional and mental health is... The responses include: Excellent, very good, good, fair, and poor. The students reporting excellent to good on SWS:²⁸

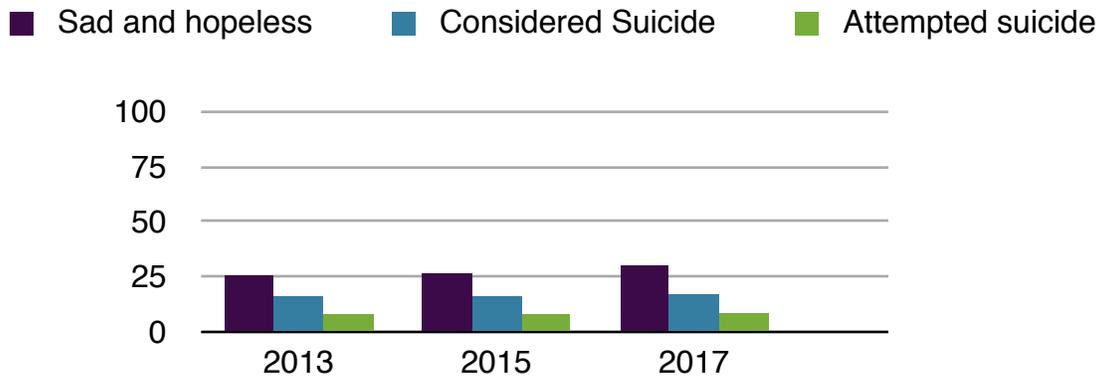


The students reporting excellent to good on the OHT:²⁹

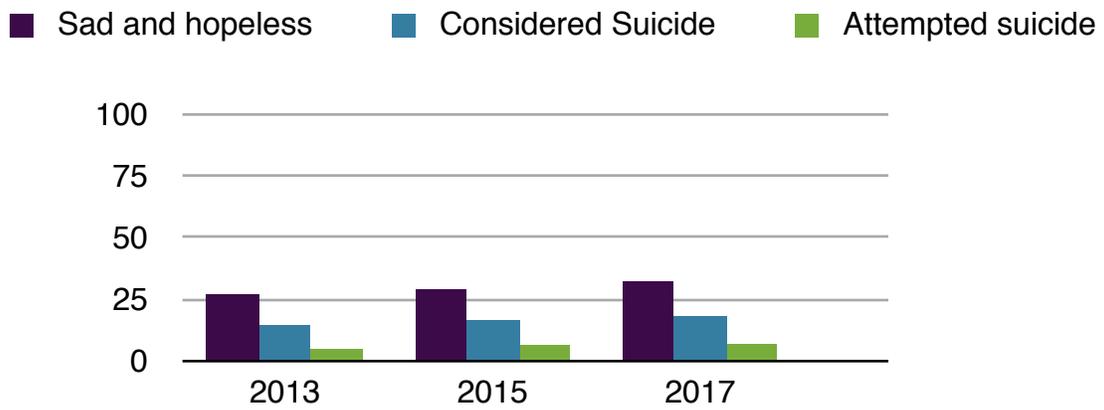


Based on data from OHT, 2013 to 2017, there is evidence of increasing concerns regarding the emotional health, risk of suicide, feeling and being unsafe in school, and being bullied.

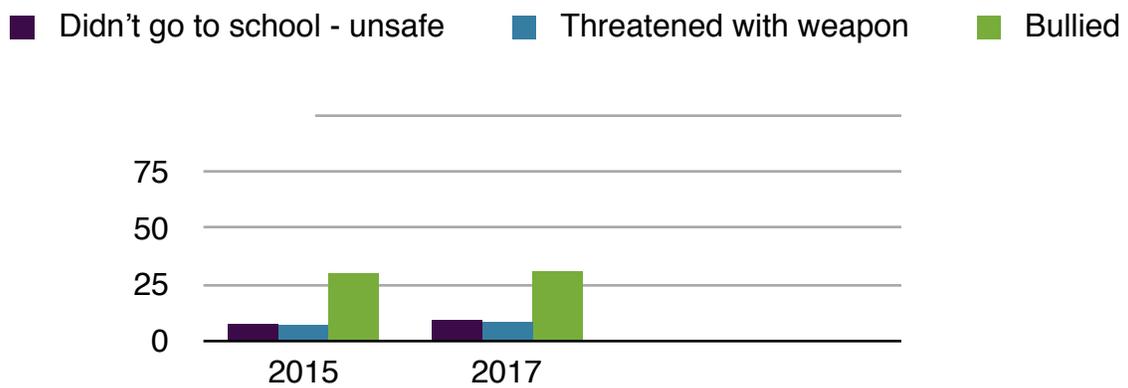
8th Grade³⁰



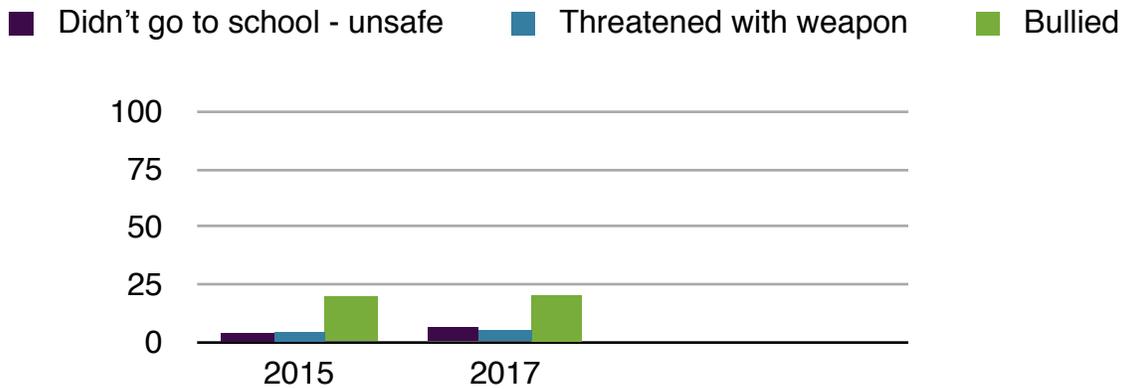
11th Grade³¹



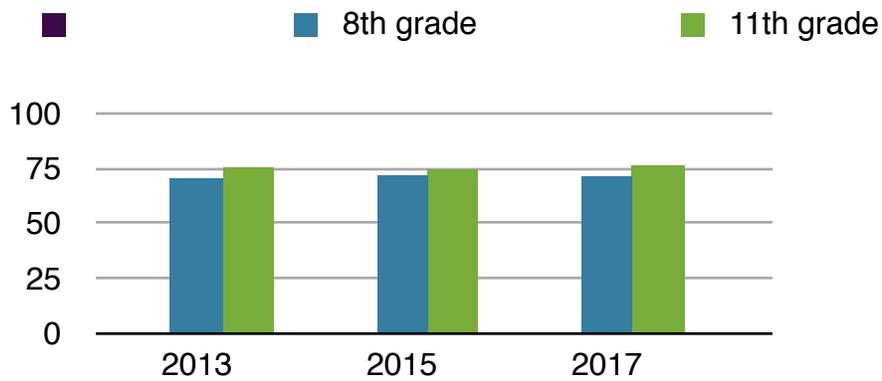
8th Grade³²



11th Grade³³



Given the importance of staff-student connections to support the emotional well-being of students, it is of significant concern that based on data from the OHT survey since 2013, there has been no significant improvement in staff-student relations. In the Positive Youth Development section, one of the questions states: “There is at least one teacher or staff member who really cares about me. “The students who responded to this as “pretty much true” or “very much true.”³⁴



The 2016 SWS asks additional questions about staff-student relations, as well as student-student support.

Table 6: Supportive Atmosphere

| | Grade 6 State | Grade 8 State | Grade 11 State |
|---|---------------|---------------|----------------|
| My teachers notice when I am doing a good job and let me know about it. | 79.0 | 68.8 | 64.7 |
| I can talk to my teachers openly and freely about my concerns. | 68.9 | 56.6 | 61.1 |
| In my school, teachers treat students with respect. | 88.6 | 77.1 | 76.6 |
| Most students at my school help each other when they are hurt or upset. | 76.8 | 63.8 | 60.9 |

The fact that a consistent 1 in 4 Oregon students does not think that there is a teacher or other school staff member who really cares about him or her and approximately 40% of secondary students do not think they can talk to their teachers openly and freely about their concerns is of high concern given that connections with a trusted adult are considered foundational for increasing resilience and given the increased rate of suicide and the potential for increased school violence and the need to ensure that students feel safe in reporting if they are distressed or are concerned about a peer.

RECOMMENDED STRATEGIES

A key understanding within the context of an understanding of the impact of trauma or toxic stress is the potential that incidents may occur that lead a student to trigger and overreact. To reduce the potential of this, it is necessary to focus on increasing student resilience. Insight from the Center for the Developing Child on Resilience is helpful.³⁵ From this site:

Research has identified a common set of factors that predispose children to positive outcomes in the face of significant adversity. Individuals who demonstrate resilience in response to one form of adversity may not necessarily do so in response to another. Yet when these positive influences are operating effectively, they “stack the scale” with positive weight and optimize resilience across multiple contexts. These counterbalancing factors include

- 1. facilitating supportive adult-child relationships;*
- 2. building a sense of self-efficacy and perceived control;*
- 3. providing opportunities to strengthen adaptive skills and self-regulatory capacities; and*
- 4. mobilizing sources of faith, hope, and cultural traditions*

Thanks to the leadership of the Confederation of Oregon School Administrators professional development program and others, Oregon educators have been gaining valuable insight into the impact of trauma on students. School districts throughout Oregon are in various stages of shifting their school climate and behavior management approaches to integrate trauma informed care.

The Deputy Superintendent’s Advisory Committee on Safe and Effective Schools for ALL Students Report will contain guidelines that seek to increase efforts to fully integrate trauma informed care approaches into Oregon schools.

The focus of the following guidance is on strategies that schools could relatively rapidly implement to better address the challenges that are likely to emerge next fall, the start of the 2018-19 school year.

As the author of this report has engaged in extensive research analysis of the challenges associated with bullying and cyberbullying and the development of strategies to better address these concerns, the following are the research-based strategies that are ones that could be implemented in an effective manner with assurance of a positive impact.

- Engage in a concerted effort to improve student-staff relations and increase positive communications by staff to students.
- Implement strategies known to help to increase resilience—especially implementing mindfulness, problem-solving, community circles, and strengths-focused activities in every school.
- Establishing student-leadership efforts to promote resilience, acts of kindness, and gratitude.
- Improve the effectiveness of staff interventions when hurtful incidents are witnessed or reported.
- Establish a process whereby local counselors, physicians, special education advocates and other professionals serving youth can approach the district in situations where a bullying or harassment situation has not been effectively addressed.

POSITIVE STAFF-STUDENT RELATIONS

Enunciate clear standards for how staff are expected to treat each other and students. Significantly increase staff positive acknowledgement and praise of students. Ensure that every student has at least one school staff member who has made a commitment to be a supporter. Identify those students who are at greater risk and ensure that every teacher knows to be attentive to making a positive connection with these students every day.

The Making Caring Common project at Harvard Graduate School of Education states this in the opening description for its relationship mapping tool:

There may be nothing more important in a child’s life than a positive and stable relationship with a caring adult. For students, a positive connection to at least one school adult—whether a teacher, counselor, sports coach, or other school staff member—can have tremendous benefits that include reduced bullying, lower drop-out rates, and improved social emotional

*capacities. Rather than leave these connections to chance, relationship mapping invests time in making sure that every student is known by at least one adult.*³⁶

Children who have more fully internalize the regulation for positive school-related behaviors are those who feel securely connected to, and cared for by, their parents and teachers.³⁷

Start with the Harvard Relationship Mapping tool or any other similar tool.³⁸ This tool requires establishing a list of all students and providing staff with “red” and “green” dots to identify whether students are at risk (“red dot”) and if they have a positive connection (“green dot”). Schools may consider adding a “yellow dot” for staff to indicate they have some relationship, that could be strengthened.

Make sure every student has an assigned adult supporter. For all students who are identified at higher risk, make sure several staff members will act as supporters. Provide regular opportunities for staff discussions about how their supportive relationships are going. If there are any challenges in any supportive relationships, investigate and problem solve to find a better path forward.

The Positive Behavior and Interventions and Support program recommended a 5 to 1 ratio between positive comment and negative comment or correction.³⁹ Another researcher has identified that a 3 to 1 ration between positive and negative is ideal.⁴⁰ Regardless of which ratio a school might want to adopt as a goal, the question is how best to accomplish this.

It is recommended that school leaders suggest to their teachers to record a class session or two and then replay the recording noting three different kinds of comments: negative comment or correction, neutral comment or instruction, and positive comment or acknowledgement. A ratio can then be identified comparing negative comments or corrections with positive comments or acknowledgements. From this, the teacher can make plans for any necessary improvement and measure at some time in the future to assess effectiveness.

These strategies can improve effectiveness:

- Make praise specific, noting accomplishments. Offer praise when a student deserves it, so that the praise has meaning. Praise efforts to achieve success even if those efforts did not achieve success—the efforts are what should be praised. Offer encouragement when the student is struggling.
- Do not praise a student in a way that sets him or her up as “better” than others. Do not use a rewards approach that rewards students who have few challenges and publicly shames or excludes the students who have greater challenges.
- Pay attention to the students known to be at higher risk and praise their efforts very regularly.
- Provide written notes offering praise of effort, strategy, and accomplishments. Regularly send a notes to parents or guardians, especially of students who are at higher risk.
- If a correction of student behavior is necessary, ensure that a positive acknowledgement of the student’s change in behavior in response to that correction is provided.
- Make expressions of gratitude when student behavior has been helpful to the school community, staff, or to other students.

STRATEGIES TO INCREASE RESILIENCE

Three key strategies can help increase student resilience: mindfulness, problem-solving, and a focus on strengths.

MINDFULNESS AND DE-ESCALATION PRACTICES

Often students who are treated badly overreact in response, which appears to lead to additional experiencing of hurtful behavior. Sometimes, they retaliate. Gaining skills in self-regulation is important for those who have experienced trauma. Being able to self-regulate is important to stop impulsive retaliation.

The practice of mindfulness helps people achieve calmness and focus—to self-regulate.⁴¹ Research has documented effectiveness of mindfulness training and practice in addressing stress-related concerns of children and adolescents, with documented positive results in students’ physical health, psychological well-being, social skills including emotional regulation, and academic performance.

One of the best instructional videos on mindfulness, Just Breathe, features kindergarten students explaining the principles and practice.⁴²

There are a number of excellent programs that have been established to support schools in implementing mindfulness practices. These include: Mindful, Mindfulness in schools, and Mindful Schools.⁴³ The University of Massachusetts Medical School, Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Healthcare, and Society is engaged on research on the benefits of mindfulness and has excellent insight on its site.⁴⁴

The mindfulness effort does not need to be complicated to start. Glitter jars are an amazing approach for the elementary level. Get started by leading a brief period of mindful breathing and reflection during morning announcements and an announcement after lunch break. Teachers can start classes with a moment for mindfulness. Alternatively, as set forth below, schools are advised to establish a Student Leadership Team. Encourage this team to research mindfulness and take the leadership in bringing mindfulness practices into the school.

These are some recommended Positive Reflection Statements that can be incorporated into a brief mindfulness moment:

- Something that happened that you are thankful for and why you are thankful.
- Something you did that you are proud of.
- A goal of yours and one action you took to accomplish this goal.
- How you reached out to be kind to someone.
- Who you recently connected with in a positive way and how this made you feel.
- A challenge you addressed and how you successfully thought things through.
- How you used a personal strength of yours.

Engaging students in the practice of Mindfulness is essential to supporting their ability to self-regulate and de-escalate when under stress. A critically important component of Trauma Informed Care in schools is the ability of all staff and students to know how to assist students who are showing signs of increased agitation to de-escalate.

The reason it is important for students to understand how to help a peer de-escalate is that they may be in a position to identify the increased agitation when a staff member does not notice or is not present. This includes online environments.

It is exceptionally important that staff avoid T.A.C.O.S. in any situation where a student is becoming agitated. T.A.C.O.S. are: Threaten. Argue. Challenge. Order. Shame. Excellent sources of guidance are listed in the citations.⁴⁵

It is recommended that schools:

- Discuss De-escalation strategies in community circles.
- Engage students in Problem Solving about how they best can De-escalate and how they can help friends De-escalate
- Identify students who are more likely to trigger and privately discuss their triggers and strategy.
- Have a pre-identified place where students can go to calm either in the classroom or the school.

PROBLEM-SOLVING SKILLS

When students gain interpersonal relationship problem-solving skills—that is learn how to think of their own solutions to problems, consequences to their actions, and how they and others feel about things—they are less likely to engage in risk behavior and are more resilient in figuring out how to respond if someone is hurtful to them.⁴⁶

Four key interpersonal cognitive problem-solving skills identified by Shure are:

- Means-ends thinking to reach a stated interpersonal goal by planning a step-by-step, sequenced means to reach that goal
- Alternative solution thinking to identify alternative solutions to a stated problem.
- Consequential thinking to consider what might happen in certain situations.
- Weighing pros and cons to decide whether to carry out an interpersonal act.

The Collaborative and Proactive Solutions or Collaborative Problem Solving approach can be used by a teacher or principal seeking to resolve a behavior problem with a student.⁴⁷ Students can be encouraged to use problem solving if they have been treated badly to identify a positive response, for conflict resolution, and to identify a way to remedy the harm if they have misbehaved or been hurtful.

A problem solving approach that has been fully incorporated into student instruction in Embrace Civility in the Digital Age's student program, *Embrace Civility*, is to ask these questions:

- What is the situation? (If this is a stressful situation, it is essential to first de-escalate. In some situations, the discussion may be extensive and require the practice of reflective thinking.)
- What are your objectives?
- What possible strategies could you implement that use your strengths?
- Is each strategy in accord with your values?
- For each strategy, what might happen? For each strategy, what challenges might you face and how could you best meet these challenges?
- What is your best first choice? What else could you do if this does not work?
- How will you determine success?⁴⁸

COMMUNITY CIRCLES

Gathering students together in community circle to discuss what is happening within their school community and address general challenges is a practice that increases positive connections.

Excellent guidance on coordinating the community circle process comes from The Circle Way.⁴⁹ As described on their site:

The Circle Way gathers people into a circular shape with participants at the rim and the purpose in the centre. Each person has a voice and everyone can see and hear one another. Social agreements and practices help facilitate respectful conversation. Circle supports a leader in every chair.

Community circles are also well integrated into Restorative Practices. Two helpful sources of insight are the International Institute for Restorative Practices and the Center for Restorative Process.⁵⁰

Schools are encouraged to fully incorporate Problem Solving into the Community Circles. Thus, when a concern is raised, the discussion about the concern only lasts for as long as necessary to understand the situation. Then the discussion should shift to Problem-Solving.

Further, do not allow negative situations to dominate the Community Circle discussions. The recommended Reflection Questions set forth above can be integrated into Community Circles.

CHARACTER STRENGTHS

A groundbreaking book, *Character Strengths and Virtues*, identified 24 character strengths.⁵¹ Every person possesses all 24 character strengths in different degrees, giving each person a unique character profile. When people understand and can use their character strengths effectively, this can have a significant positive impact on their lives.

The character strengths identified include: creativity, curiosity, judgment, love of learning, perspective and wisdom, bravery, perseverance, honesty, zest, love, kindness, social intelligence, teamwork, fairness, leadership, forgiveness, humility, prudence, self-control, appreciation of beauty and excellence, gratitude, hope, humor, and spirituality.

The VIA Institute on Character has a free strengths inventory on its web site that secondary students and school staff can complete.⁵² The Institute also has extensive additional resources for schools to support the development of these character strengths.⁵³ A brief version of this character strengths inventory, developed with the Institute's permission, is provided on the Embrace Civility in the Digital Age web site.⁵⁴

An emphasis on character strengths can help schools focus on student strengths, rather than current challenges and what they lack. It is recommended that schools have all students and staff complete the VIA Character Survey to identify their personal strengths. These strengths can be celebrated by presentation and creation of artwork displaying such personal strengths. This provides a way to celebrate a different kind of "differences" and focus on building important strengths.

Each week, schools can use the resources from the VIA site to focus on how to build a different character strength.⁵⁵ Reflections in morning announcements can include quotes related to the specific character strength. When any challenges emerge, in the context of problem-solving, students can be encouraged to think about their personal strengths and identify strategies to pursue that use their personal strengths.

STUDENT LEADERSHIP TEAM

The best way to motivate students to foster a positive and inclusive school climate and reduce hurtful behavior is to give them the responsibility to help to make things better. Shifting responsibility to students also requires giving them a strong voice in deciding what the school community will do to ensure a positive school climate for all students. There are excellent resources online to support increasing student voice.⁵⁶

The term “Student Leadership Team” is used in this document. Students should be encouraged to create their own name.

SELECTION OF STUDENT LEADERSHIP TEAM MEMBERS

Establish a Student Leadership Team that is diverse and includes those students who have a well-established reputation for treating others with respect and reaching out to help those who are treated badly. Strive to avoid including “popular” students who have been hurtful to establish social dominance. This is a recommended strategy to identify members of a Student Leadership Team:

- Ask school staff to identify students who are natural leaders, paying particular attention to the selection of student leaders from the full range of student groups.
- Ask students who are in a minority population within your school to identify which students they think would be strong representatives to express concerns that members of their community face. It is suggested that the application form ask questions such as these:
- Allow students to step forward on their own to apply to be a member of the Student Leadership Team.
- All students should be required to submit an application. This Student Leadership Team is being established to promote positive relations, kindness, and inclusion for all students at (name of school).
 - Please explain why you want to be a member of this Team.
 - Please explain a time when you saw that another student was being excluded or treated badly and you stepped in to help the student being treated badly. How did you step in to help? What did you learn from this?
 - Please explain a time when you stepped in to either help resolve a conflict between students or to tell a student who was being hurtful to stop. How did you step in to say “stop?” What did you learn from this?
 - Please explain a time when you made a mistake and were hurtful. How did you handle the situation afterwards? What did you learn from this?

Using a combination of this input, identify students to ask to serve on the initial Student Leadership Team and approve the applications of those who submitted them. Schools are advised to allow any interested student to join this Team. The bigger the Team, the greater the impact. All students who want to join the Team should be required to submit an application.

ACTS OF KINDNESS AND THOUGHTS OF GRATITUDE

The highest priority activities for the Student Leadership Team should be on school wide activities to promote acts of kindness and thoughts of gratitude.

Being kind to others has many positive benefits.⁵⁷ Research has documented the positive benefits of kindness, including the fact that kindness is contagious—witnessing kindness leads other people to be kind and that being kind helps people feel stronger, more energetic, calmer, less depressed, and leads to increased feelings of self-worth.⁵⁸ One key study in a school demonstrated that students who were instructed to perform three kind acts for others every day experienced significant increases in peer acceptance.⁵⁹

Students who have positive feelings about themselves and are happy are less likely to demonstrate perceived weakness that could lead to their being targeted and better situated to avoid thinking badly of themselves if this occurs. The Positive Psychology Center at the University of Pennsylvania assessed a number of positive strategies to determine their effectiveness in promoting happiness.⁶⁰ One key strategy that was found to have the highest success in generating happiness writing down every evening three things that went well or what they were grateful for.

The Student Leadership Team should be encouraged to investigate possibilities and to be creative in envisioning and implementing kindness and gratitude projects in their school.

The Random Acts of Kindness Foundation has excellent resources.⁶¹ Also search for “kindness, schools” online for creative ideas. Creating a Gratitude Tree is a common activity for Thanksgiving. Seek to extend this kind of activity throughout the school year and into the community.

SUICIDE PREVENTION EFFORTS

As noted, the Oregon Health Authority has created a document for Oregon schools entitled, Oregon Youth Suicide Prevention Intervention and Postvention Guidelines: A Resource for School Personnel. School leaders should review this toolkit and ensure that each school has implemented the recommendations. An Inventory is provided to guide school leaders in making an assessment of the status of planning for their school. A booklet with information for teachers entitled, What Every Teacher Should Know, is available.

Gatekeeper training for secondary students should also be helpful. However, a huge caveat is provided at this time. The following are some helpful sites providing guidance.

- Suicide Prevention Resource Center has a section on Resources and Programs. <http://www.sprc.org/resources-programs>.
- American Association for Suicidology maintains a section for resources, including recommended videos: <http://www.suicidology.org/resources/recommended-videos>
- A site on PBS provides an actual lesson. This lesson could be supplemented or modified by the videos noted on the <http://www.pbs.org/inthemix/educators/lessons/depression2/>
- Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction has a page with excellent guidance on what to do or not do. <https://dpi.wi.gov/sspw/mental-health/youth-suicide-prevention/student-programs/curriculum>. (It would be helpful if Oregon could follow the lead of other states in providing sound guidance to schools.)

Here is the caveat: A program called Signs of Suicide (SOS) can be found frequently mentioned as a resource for schools. This program is offered by Screening for Mental Health. This is from the web site:

The SOS Signs of Suicide Prevention Program is the only youth suicide prevention program that has demonstrated an improvement in students’ knowledge and adaptive attitudes about suicide risk and depression, as well as a reduction in actual suicide attempts. Listed on SAMHSA’s National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices, the SOS Program has shown a reduction in self-reported suicide attempts by 40-64% in randomized control studies (Aseltine et al., 2007 & Schilling et al., 2016).

SOS is unique among school-based suicide prevention programs as it incorporates two prominent suicide prevention strategies into a single program: an educational curriculum that raises awareness about suicide and depression, and a brief screening for depression.

More information about the program is found on the SAMHSA NREPP site.⁶² Based on two research studies, the following insight is found:

- This program is promising for reducing suicidal thoughts and behavior.
- This program is promising for improving knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs about mental health.
- This program is ineffective for increasing the receipt of mental health and/or substance use treatment.
- This program is ineffective for increasing social competence related to help-seeking behaviors. Specifically this finding: At a 3-month posttest, Schilling et al. (2014) found that SOS participation did not significantly affect a student’s likelihood of seeking help when feeling depressed or suicidal from 1) a parent, 2) a brother or sister, or 3) a friend. In fact, after controlling for pretest help-seeking behaviors and suicidal behaviors, they found that intervention students were less likely than control students to seek help.

It appears that the program evaluations did not assess whether the program increased reporting behaviors of students who may be concerned about the emotional well-being of friend—which should be considered essential, in the opinion of the author. Additionally, there do not appear to be any programs that teach students to watch for and report signs of potential violence, including school shooting. Further, as school shooters are likely also suicidal, the instruction on warning signs likely ought to be merged.

Current analysis and thoughts of the author are that there appear to be no-cost resources available that schools can use that can increase students understandings of the signs of suicide, especially the PBS instruction. Screening tools for depression are also available. Schools may want to consider engaging in such screening. Therefore, paying for a program that incorporates

these two easily available resources is likely not a wise investment, especially when there is no evidence of effectiveness in increasing help-seeking behavior or peer reporting of concerns.

The author has engaged in extensive research into how to increase positive peer intervention. A keynote presentation on this is available.⁶³ Based on an analysis of the available resources, it does not appear that any have incorporated key insight into strategies to increase positive peer intervention when a peer is suicidal or potentially violent. The author is going to continue to investigate these issues and will provide guidance to schools in the future.

INTERVENTIONS IN HURTFUL SITUATIONS

It is imperative to shift away from a disciplinary response in hurtful incidents to a response that holds students accountable. A disciplinary response usurps the role of the targeted student and turns the situation from a harmful offense against that student, which should require remedy, to a violation of a school rule—the consequence of which cannot even be disclosed to the targeted student. Disciplinary consequences teach nothing and often generate anger, which can lead to retaliation.

The restorative practices research insight is excellent. However, the restorative “circles” or “conferences” approaches present challenges in situations involving bullying, because often there are imbalances of power between the students and the outcome may not provide the ongoing support some students may require.

Hurtful incidents will occur along a continuum. It will be helpful for all staff to know their responsibilities when a hurtful incident is witnessed or reported. Tier I Level Incidents are minor incidents that participants are able to resolve by themselves or students are able to resolve with a low level of assistance by general school staff. Tier II Level Situations are more serious or chronic situations involving students or staff that require resolution by a designated staff person—a counselor or the principal. Tier III level situations involve students on either side who are at a much higher level of risk—frequently students who are both targeted and who are hurtful.

At the Tier II or III level a comprehensive investigation must identify how frequently hurtful acts are occurring, how many students are involved, and whether retaliation is involved. Challenges experienced by all involved students must be identified and a plan developed to address. Students who have been hurtful should be required to engage in problem solving to identify how they will remedy the harm to the one they treated in a hurtful manner and to the community, as well as how they plan to stop themselves from engaging in such harmful behavior. Aspects of the overall school environment that are hostile to any groups of students must be identified and a plan developed by a school leadership team to address these concerns.

CONCLUSION

Given the troubled waters we have entered, school leaders must place a high priority on ensuring the safety and well-being of students in an environment that is inclusive and welcoming to all. Hopefully, these recommended strategies will help.

EMBRACE CIVILITY IN THE DIGITAL AGE

Embrace Civility in the Digital Age focuses on the identification and development of research-based strategies to support positive school climate, foster positive relations between students and between students and staff, and support the effective resolution of hurtful incidents and situations. Embrace Civility in the Digital Age's new positive norms-based student program is *Embrace Civility*. Two videos and a book entitled *Engage Students to Embrace Civility* are available on the Embrace Civility in the Digital Age web site. .

The author of this document has developed comprehensive resources for educators to better address bullying. This includes:

- Two instructional videos, *Engage Students to Embrace Civility*, are freely available on the Embrace Civility in the Digital Age web site. It is recommended that school leaders and key staff watch these free instructional videos, as this will increase their insight into strategies to foster positive relations and effectively intervene in bullying situations. Professional Development Units are available for a modest fee.
- A book, *Engage Students to Embrace Civility*, for school leaders that provides insight with a specific focus on improving investigations and interventions. Improving effectiveness in investigations and interventions will be helpful in increasing student willingness to report a range of concerns that includes the potential for self-harm or violence. This insight can be helpful for principals and counselors in implementing a more effective intervention, as mentioned above.
- A student-leadership program, *Embrace Civility*. It is the author's intent to implement and evaluate the *Embrace Civility* in a select number of schools in Oregon during the 2018-19 school year. This program is undergoing an enhancement to increase focus on resilience, sexual harassment and intimate partner relationships, and digital issues. More information on this program is available.

Website: <http://embracecivility.org>

Email: nwillard@embracecivility.org

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28 2012: 6th grade: 93.1. 8th grade: 87.8. 11th grade 86.2.
 2014: 6th grade: 92.8. 8th grade: 85.8. 11th grade: 82.
 2016: 6th grade: 88.7. 8th grade: 79.5. 11th grade: 72.5.
 29 2013: 8th grade: 83.6. 11th grade: 81.2.
 2014: 8th grade: 80.6. 11: grade: 75.4.
 2016: 8th grade: 75. 11th grade: 66.3.
 30 Sad and hopeless: 25.6, 26.7, 30.1
 Considered suicide: 16.1, 16.2, 16.9
 Attempted suicide: 7.9, 8.1, 8.6
 31 Sad and hopeless: 27, 29, 32.1
 Considered suicide: 14.5, 16.3, 18.2
 Attempted suicide: 4.9, 6.2, 6.8
 32 Didn't go to school - unsafe: 7.6, 9.1
 Threatened with weapon: 7.1, 8.4
 Bullied: 29.9, 30.9
 33 Didn't go to school - unsafe: 4.3, 6.6
 Threatened with weapon: 4.7, 5.2
 Bullied: 19.9, 20.6
 34 8th grade: 70.6, 71.7, 71.1
 11th grade: 75.6, 74.6, 76.3
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