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2012

Student Facilitated Anti-Bully Program

Ashley Kiefer
Minnesota State University Mankato

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Recommended Citation

Kiefer, A. (2012). Student Facilitated Anti-Bully Program [Master's capstone project, Minnesota State University, Mankato]. Cornerstone: A Collection of Scholarly and Creative Works for Minnesota State University, Mankato. <https://cornerstone.lib.mnsu.edu/etds/559/>

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Student Facilitated Anti-Bully Program

Statement of Need and Purpose of Project

Minnesota law currently states that each school district should have a policy that addresses all forms of bullying but allows each district to create their own. This past year, the state of Minnesota has begun to scrutinize this legislation with the purpose of studying the extent of bullying in Minnesota schools and developing policies to stop it. Many schools in the state have unfortunately experienced the negative effects of bullying; some such as the Anoka-Hennepin Schools have experienced investigation and lawsuits due to suicides related to bullying (Post, 2012).

At Byron Middle School, there has been limited student involvement in the bullying curriculum. This was brought to the attention of the middle school staff by stakeholders. In the last half of the school year alone, three students within 20 miles of the Byron School District committed suicide. Although not believed to be the direct cause, each student had experienced bullying. Bullying is a student experienced problem yet, students are not vastly involved in the process.

This leads to the purpose for this capstone project. The intention is to incorporate students into the bullying curriculum currently in place at the middle school, creating the Student Facilitated Bully Project. The program includes a model for the school to implement each year. The goal for the Student Facilitated Bully Project is to ultimately decrease the incidents of bullying in the school. The anticipated outcome is that with student involvement, the incidences of bullying will decrease and students will feel empowered on an individual and group level to prevent bullying.

Relevant Literature

According to PACER'S National Bullying Prevention Center, over 160,000 children miss school each day due to a fear of being bullied (2012). It is common for children who are bullied to develop mental health disorders such as depression and anxiety which can outlast a school career, poor academic performance, and in extreme cases, can lead to suicide (Blake et al. 2011 as cited in Klomek, Marrocco, Kleinman, Schonfeld, & Gould, 2008; as cited in Hoglund, 2007; PACER, 2012). Bullying doesn't decrease over a student's academic career, but instead increases to the end of a student's senior year (Elledge et al., 2010). The National Center for Education Statistics and the Bureau of Justice Statistics (2010), reported 32% of students age 12 to 18 experience bullying (as cited in the Center for School Mental Health, 2010). The Centers for Disease Control also reported that 25% of public school students reported that they had been bullied on a daily to weekly basis with the highest prevalence rates in the middle schools (as cited in the Center for School Mental Health, 2010).

Blake, Kim, McCormick, and Hayes (2011) stated that bullying is a national concern as nearly 36% of children experiencing bullying during their school years. Bullying can be presented in many different ways, as there are several different dimensions of bullying. According to Elledge et al., these dimensions include overt bullying and relational forms of victimization.

- Overt bullying is the physical or verbal forms of bullying such as hitting, kicking, punching or name calling
- Relational forms of victimization are the indirect forms of bullying such as rumor spreading, and exclusion (Elledge et al., 2010).

Blake et al. (2011) slightly modified and added to these dimensions and described bullying behavior to include the overt, verbal social, nonverbal social, and peer exclusion.

- Overt continues to be defined as physical acts as well as verbal threats of harm (Blake et al., 2011).
- Verbal social victimization is when a person is the target of social bullying when an aggressor tells others not to be the victim's friend and spreading gossip (Blake et al., 2011).
- Students commonly use nonverbal social victimization which includes the glares, eye rolling, and negative facial expressions directed towards the victim (Blake et al., 2011).
- Peer exclusion is exactly what it sounds like: excluding the victim from peer groups (Blake et al., 2011).

One study found that elementary students are the most likely to report an incident of bullying to themselves with high school student the least likely to report (Elledge et al., 2010). This same study found that although self reports decrease, instances of bullying continue to be stable over time and may actually increase to the end of high school (Elledge et al., 2010).

Several articles supported the involvement of students in the anti-bullying effort. PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center created an information sheet on peer advocacy in regards to bullying which states, "research has demonstrated that peer engagement is a critical factor in reducing bullying in the school climate" (p. 1, 2011). Elledge et al. (2010) found that peer groups can contribute to bullying in schools as bystanders inadvertently add to the bullying behavior by not acting. The bullying behavior can be reduced and even stopped if students can identify a friend to assist (Elledge et al., 2010). Another study by Allen (2010) further supported the idea of social peer support and discussed encouraging the victim of a bullying incident in identifying other students who are friends and others who could be supportive. This group of students would meet with the faculty advisor and engage in identifying positive solutions and ways to help and support the victim. Another study conducted by Packman, Lepkowski, Overton, and Smaby (2005) researched a student driven anti-bully approach where interested students were invited to participate in a bullying committee; they found that students were more invested, creating increased success.

Ashley Kiefer, LSW
Department of Social Work
Minnesota State University, Mankato

Practicum Agency: **Byron Middle School**
Agency Field Instructor: **Christine Jostock, LSW, MA**
Field Liaison: **Carol Goodemann, MSW, LICSW**
Academic Advisor: **Annelies Hagemester, PhD, MSW, LISW**

Bully Busters

Support, Report, Defend

Bullying: Only WE Can Stop it

Byron Independent School District

No. 531



"Maximizing Learning Opportunities for All"

Methodology

Students were invited to attend an informational meeting regarding the bully project. Those who were interested in joining the program were asked to attend weekly meetings where the program was set into motion and students were asked to form the purpose, methods, and name of the group. The students were able to create a list of ideas on how they could be involved in the effort. After the ideas were brought forth, the students met with their staff advisor to develop an action plan for implementation of the ideas approved.

Students created a list of ideas to implement including:

- making anti-bully posters with slogans and the group's name
- announcing 1 fact about bullying weekly
- presenting at elementary, i.e. skits, role plays teaching about bullying with alternate stations and allowing the elementary students to be involved and actively assisting the actors to problem solve a solution
- talking with incoming 5th graders on the day they are introduced to the teachers and shown around the middle school building
- teaching about self-esteem and assertiveness
- creating a student support team (5th graders are assigned a buddy to meet with from the Bully Busters during den or homeroom times where all grade levels are mixed together)
- Create skits, role plays, and recordings to show during den and present to middle school

The program model and the plan of action is aligned with the evidence base of student involvement in the bullying effort. There was no data obtained from the students except for the ideas they proposed for the group to complete. Participation in the group was voluntary and open to all who were interested which resulted in growing numbers of participants through the end of the year.

The potential benefits of student involvement in the effort resulted in increased communication and clarification of the depth of bullying at Byron Middle School between students and staff. Student involvement has assisted in the increased knowledge of the extent of bullying among the student body and will help to create a safe and health learning environment for all.

Reflection on Project

The facilitator met with the group and introduced the topic of the Student Facilitated Bully Project. The students were excited to be included in the anti-bully project. They came up with numerous ideas from small scale, making posters and developing skits, to large scale, creating a mentor program, monitoring the hallways and cameras, as well making matching shirts. The group was able to narrow down the focus for this year to developing skits and creating awareness of the student experienced problem. They also created an abstract plan for next year and the goals they would like to meet.

This year, the group was able to create the basis for the program:

- Name: Bully Busters.
- Meeting times: one time weekly
- Purpose: to reduce bullying in the Byron Middle School
- Activities accomplished:
- developing skits and incorporating ICI (Interrupt, Compliment, and Invite away)

The students also developed a questionnaire for teacher completion. This was developed as a member of the group voiced the opinion that only students took the annual bully survey the school implemented. Other group members supported this statement and shared that although bullying in a student experienced problem, teachers were the ones who dealt with it. The group was interested in finding out how much the teachers actually witnessed, how often they intervened, and if their interventions were effective. The group shared a feeling of hopelessness that the teachers did not notice bullying and felt that they did not intervene enough. One student in particular shared that the students did not witness the school's actions in regard to bullying and therefore, felt that the school did nothing. This was addressed, and the students were assured that the school did indeed take action when a report of bullying was made. The school had previously had a "Bully Box" where students could fill out a report if they were victims or witnesses of bullying. Students voiced that they did not like this reporting system as it did not seem to be confidential located in a high traffic area where people could visibly see someone filling out a report. This system was recently changed, however, to be an online reporting system. Student can now call, email, or text the online reporting system to make a report of bullying.

Recommendations for Future Use

The Bully Busters created a list of activities that they would like to accomplish for the next 2012-2013 school year which includes:

- posters
- skits
- announcing one fact about bullying weekly
- presenting interactive skits at the elementary
- recording and presenting skits at the middle school,
- meeting with incoming 5th graders for additional support
- present on self-esteem and assertiveness
- creating a mentor group with the members of the Bully Busters mentoring younger students who struggled with being bullied.

Members of the Bully Busters also voiced their opinion of the students' bully survey conducted by the school. They were interested in seeing the results of the survey to assist the group in being effective. School administrators were brought into the conversation and agreed that the group may view the results as the survey was anonymous. A teacher survey was also created by the group and will be conducted along with the student survey in the future.

Recommendations for the Bully Buster group are to continue with the activities identified by the group. The Byron Middle School has a great new reporting system where students can feel more confident about reporting instances of bullying. The Bully Busters will also foster a greater sense of empowerment among the students. The school administration has recognized the need for the input and support of the students; that the students are the key to creating a bully-free school.

For the following 2012-2013 school year and in the future, it is hoped that the Bully Busters will continue to strive towards reducing bullying in their school and become a permanent part of the effort. The activities that have been outlined and prepared for this year will be repeated next year. Other activities, such as the mentor group and the interactive skits that were not completed during the current school year will be of benefit to the schools if completed as well.

References

References are available from the author upon request.