Bullying Prevention and Intervention:

Snapshots from Safe Schools/Healthy Students Initiatives

Safe Schools Healthy Students

EDC Learning transforms lives.

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I. Introduction

The problem of bullying is a central challenge of our time. Each year, millions of children and youth experience the humiliation and devastating effects of bullying. Twenty-eight percent of students ages 12 to 18 reported being bullied at school during the 2008–2009 school year.[1] Bullying begins in early childhood and continues through adolescence and beyond. According to the National Education Association's nationwide study of bullying, 43% of school staff surveyed reported that bullying was a moderate or major problem at their elementary or secondary school.[2]

Research indicates that bullying damages the physical, mental, emotional, and behavioral health of its victims. It also creates a climate of fear, callousness, and disrespect for everyone involved—the youth who bully, those who get bullied, and those who watch it happen. The potential harmful effects of bullying, as identified by the U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights,[3] can include the following:

» Lowered academic achievement and aspirations
» Increased anxiety
» Loss of self-esteem and confidence
» Depression and post-traumatic stress
» General deterioration in physical health
» Self-harm and suicidal thinking
» Feelings of alienation in the school environment, including fear of other children
» Absenteeism from school

Once viewed as a normal part of growing up or as a rite of passage, bullying is now seen as a deeply harmful and unacceptable behavior that must be stopped and prevented.

Bullying has recently received unprecedented attention due to highly publicized tragic cases of bullying-related suicides, graphic first-hand accounts and media depictions of bullying behavior, and growing public awareness of cyberbullying. The first White House Conference on Bullying Prevention was held on March 10, 2011, coinciding with the release of the federal government's updated Stop Bullying website (www.StopBullying.gov). Through anti-bullying legislation in 49 states—all but Montana—school personnel now have both a professional and a legal responsibility to ensure that students are safe to learn in bullying-free environments.

Over the past decade, what we know about bullying has increased dramatically. Through research and best practices, we now have the knowledge, tools, and strategies to ensure that students are safe to learn in bullying-free environments.

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1   Stopbullying.gov. (n.d.) *Bullying prevention & response base training module* (slide 18). Retrieved from www.stopbullying.gov/prevention/in-the-community/community-action-planning/training-module-speaker-notes.pdf

2   Bradshaw, C. P., Waasdorp, T. E., O'Brennan, L. M., Gulemetova, M., & Henderson, R. D. (2011). *Findings from the National Education Association's nationwide study of bullying: Teachers' and education support professionals' perspectives.* Washington, DC: National Education Association.

3   U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights. (2010). *Dear Colleague letter: Harassment and bullying (October 26, 2010). Background, summary, and fast facts.* Retrieved from www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/dcl-factsheet-201010.pdf

II. Bullying Prevention and Intervention in Safe Schools/Healthy Students Communities

Bullying is not only a school problem . . . the key is to work with the community, with the schools, and with parents and students. It's this synergy that the Safe Schools/Healthy Students Initiative beautifully allows us to do. Working with the partners in the community is key to creating this synergy.

—May Sagbakken, Safe Schools/Healthy Students Project Director,
Albuquerque Public Schools, Albuquerque, New Mexico

Launched in 1999 after a series of school shootings, the Safe Schools/Healthy Students (SS/HS) Initiative is instrumental in providing school districts across the country with the support, resources, and opportunities they need to successfully address bullying in their schools and communities. It is the first program jointly designed and supported by three federal agencies: the U.S. Departments of Education, Justice, and Health and Human Services. Providing support to school-community collaborations, SS/HS has reached millions of students and thousands of schools in 365 communities across 49 states.

The SS/HS Initiative calls on communities to apply a strategic approach to addressing bullying, violence prevention, and school safety by (a) forming cross-agency partnerships between schools and the community, (b) assessing school and community needs and resources, (c) applying programmatic interventions and practices, (d) evaluating efforts, (e) making data-driven decisions, and (f) ensuring sustainability of the Initiative's key functions. To help SS/HS communities apply this approach, the National Center for Mental Health Promotion and Youth Violence Prevention provides training, technical assistance, and resources tailored to the specific needs of each site.

The SS/HS Initiative has provided valuable lessons about successful strategies for prevention and intervention. SS/HS sites serve as models of effective bullying prevention efforts, and help to advance the national agenda on bullying prevention. This report presents brief descriptions—"snapshots"—of bullying prevention efforts from SS/HS communities across the country and highlights key themes that contribute to their success.

Most noteworthy, many sites have developed comprehensive, multi-faceted approaches that address in unique ways the complexity of the problem of bullying in their communities. Rather than using a single approach for one audience, sites engage in a range of activities designed for many audiences: students, school personnel, parents and families, partner organizations, and communities. Sites use every tool and strategy at their disposal: programmatic interventions and practices, student involvement, educational forums and activities, the performing and visual arts, community outreach campaigns, media coverage, and anti-bullying legislation and policies. Sites ensure that all adults and children in their communities receive consistent messages about bullying prevention, actively engage in bullying prevention activities, and commit fully to preventing bullying in their communities.

The sites highlighted in this report illustrate a variety of innovative and noteworthy approaches to the problem of bullying in their communities.

III. Comprehensive, Multi-Faceted Approaches

Comprehensive, multi-faceted approaches take advantage of many tools to protect children from bullying and build a coordinated support system. Some examples of such approaches are as follows:

» Linking programmatic interventions and practices to their community values

» Addressing bullying prevention needs and concerns at every grade level and in a variety of settings, both in and out of school

» Addressing bullying through prevention, intervention, and response

» Using media, such as public service announcements (PSAs), video contests, and news reports, to communicate consistent bullying prevention messages

The following SS/HS Initiatives exemplify comprehensive approaches to bullying prevention in a variety of communities.

SNAPSHOT: Albuquerque Public Schools, Albuquerque, New Mexico
Climbing a Ladder to Community Involvement: Students as Partners

The Albuquerque Public Schools (APS) SS/HS Initiative has built a multi-faceted, community-wide approach to bullying prevention:

❑ District-wide policies and procedures for addressing bullying incidents have been adopted.

❑ School personnel are trained annually on best practices in bullying prevention and response.

❑ Each school has a student-parent form for reporting incidents of bullying.

❑ Programmatic interventions, including *Positive Behavior Interventions and Support*, teach students what to do about bullying and how to contribute to a positive environment. Safe School Ambassadors— students trained in bullying prevention—help prevent and stop bullying in the hallways and classrooms of the three middle schools.

❏ To sustain the Initiative's work, the district created a full-time bullying prevention coordinator position.

❏ An extensive website (www.abqsafeschools.org) addresses bullying, youth violence, and suicide prevention; mental health services; and safety at school; and provides valuable resources for parents, students, school staff, and community partners in the district and across the state.

Recognizing the need to engage community partners in its bullying prevention efforts, the SS/HS team turned to youth to generate ideas. A student-led, community-wide bullying prevention campaign brought attention to the website and the SS/HS bullying prevention work. The campaign features flash mob events in which students gather and dance as a group in public places. Observers are given bracelets and educational information, including the website's URL.

An outgrowth of the flash mob events is the *Don't Just Stand There, Stop Bullying* task force, which includes the APS, Bernalillo County Parks and Recreation, and the University of New Mexico's Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning (LGBTQ) Resource Center. This collaboration has engaged more than 10,000 students and adults in dance events, PSAs, marches, and panel discussions to raise awareness about bullying prevention in the community.

Although media coverage prior to the Initiative was primarily concerned with the problem and incidents of bullying, it now focuses on positive stories of the Initiative's achievements in stopping and preventing bullying.

SNAPSHOT: Amarillo Independent School District, Amarillo, Texas
The End of Bullying Starts with Me: Involving Everyone

> *Kids are getting an understanding of how to respond to bullying, and they are taking personal responsibility for being the beginning of the end of bullying.*
>
> —Melynn Huntley, SS/HS Project Director

Amarillo Independent School District (AISD) developed a comprehensive approach to bullying prevention that couples programmatic intervention with thorough planning, youth-driven initiatives, and strong community partnerships. The district's anti-bullying approach is aimed at reducing classroom disruptions, improving student attendance, and increasing the overall health and safety of each campus. Programs that contribute to bullying prevention include *Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports* and *Too Good for Violence*.

The SS/HS project director regularly holds focus groups with middle school students, including students who bully, students who are targets of bullying, and bystanders. Insights from the focus groups help inform the work of the district's prevention coordinators, who engage students in activities and distribute educational material.

AISD students produced videos based on their personal experiences with bullying and submitted them to the regional film festival *Students Taking On Prevention* (STOP). A common message in the videos was the importance of student responsibility in bullying prevention: "The end of bullying starts with me." Overall, 165 students were involved in producing videos for STOP. Using QR codes, these videos were then embedded in school calendars distributed to all school administrators and mailed to schools in other districts.

The SS/HS project director reports that parents now call the school to talk to counselors when they have concerns about bullying. Parents and students can report bullying incidents through a form on the district's website. Students can also leave a note in the "bully boxes" that are available in every elementary school in the district. Guidance counselors follow up with all reported cases of bullying.

Cyberbullying Prevention in the Amarillo Independent School District

Cyberbullying is a form of bullying that involves sending or posting hurtful, embarrassing, or threatening text or images using the Internet, cell phones, or other electronic communication devices. Cyberbullying spreads quickly, is potentially anonymous, and can be extremely damaging. The AISD SS/HS site used an innovative approach to prevent and respond to cyberbullying.
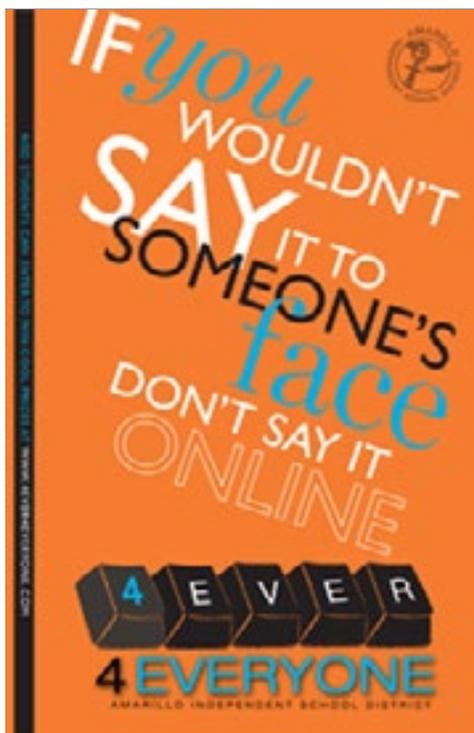
After local businesses explained that hiring students was difficult because the students' online presence often did not reflect the character standards the businesses were seeking, AISD decided to focus on digital responsibility. The SS/HS team developed *4Ever 4Everyone*, a week-long campaign to raise awareness of digital responsibility and cyberbullying. Each day during the campaign, students participate in a classroom activity and discussion on a topic of the day, such as *sexting* (youth sending sexually explicit images or messages to one another electronically), privacy issues, and the legal consequences of inappropriate online behavior. Each night on the news, a local television station reinforces the daily theme by broadcasting a short PSA featuring local community leaders.

AISD also engaged students in "stagnant flash mobs" in school hallways. Students dressed in red T-shirts and wearing signs with anti-cyberbullying messages suddenly freeze, as if caught mid-moment. In mock "jail and bail" dramas, a student "offender" reads a short scenario about a questionable online behavior. Students passing by are then questioned ("Is this a crime?") and are asked to "bail out" the "offender" by signing a no-bullying contract. This demonstration sparks discussion of the cyberbullying state laws and the consequences of breaking them.

SNAPSHOT: Montebello Unified School District, Montebello, California
Hands Across Montebello Unified: Full and Deep Implementation

> *I would describe our anti-bullying initiative as part of the culture and climate here at Montebello Unified School District. To have full implementation, deep implementation, and to be effective, it needs to become part of the fabric of your school district . . . Learning can only take place when students feel safe, attend school regularly, engage in the learning process, and view their school as supportive and caring.*
>
> —Michael Cobarrubias, SS/HS Project Director

The Montebello Unified School District (MUSD) SS/HS anti-bullying initiative features strong leadership, clear policies, effective staff training, and innovative programming. Key to its success was early support from the MUSD school board, which immediately adopted an anti-bullying policy that clearly defines anti-bullying plans and procedures, focuses on staff training, and includes district-wide rules about discipline. The board, administrators, school staff, students, parents, and local service organizations all contribute to building a culture of safety on each school campus.

Recognizing the need to have an anti-bullying champion at each school site to reach the district's 32,000 students across 29 schools, MUSD trained 35 site coordinators (teachers, counselors, and project directors) in the district's two cornerstone anti-bullying programs: the *Olweus Bullying Prevention Program* and *40 Developmental Assets*.

Of those site coordinators initially trained in the *Olweus Program*, six with a deep passion for the work became certified trainers and provide further training to principals, assistant principals, counselors, the board of education, and local service organizations. Ongoing professional development for staff addresses a variety of issues, including the needs of students with disabilities and LGBTQ youth. At MUSD elementary and middle schools, classroom meetings build class cohesion, reinforce anti-bullying rules, and teach prosocial behaviors. In the high schools, whole-school events and activities build a sense of community.

About 3,000 staff members were trained in the *40 Developmental Assets* approach to positive youth development, which fosters resiliency, respect, and positive assets to help youth avoid high-risk behaviors and succeed in school, and builds trust between students and adults, creating a safer atmosphere. Ongoing retreats help students develop leadership skills and build respect.

MUSD's Anti-Bullying Week included *Hands Across Montebello Unified*, where students locked hands in a show of unity against bullying, and *Teen Truth Live* assemblies, which provided multimedia presentations that challenged students to think about the harmful consequences of bullying and how their responses to bullying affect others. More than 15,000 students have now attended *Teen Truth Live* assemblies.

Over the first three years of this initiative, the number of students missing school in the previous 30 days because they felt unsafe at school or on their way to or from school decreased by 33%. There was also a 31% decrease in the number of students who reported being in a physical fight on school property in the previous 12 months.

IV. Four Key Components

Four key components contribute to the success of bullying prevention efforts in many SS/HS communities:

1. Partnerships and Community Involvement
2. Cultural Competence and Special Populations
3. Youth-Involved, Youth-Led, and Youth-Initiated Efforts
4. Mental Health Supports

Each component is described in detail below.

1. Partnerships and Community Involvement

SS/HS sites have discovered that successful bullying prevention initiatives rely on strong, collaborative partnerships among school districts, law enforcement, juvenile justice systems, early childhood educators, mental health providers, and other relevant organizations. Many sites have also reached out to parents and other partners, including youth organizations, Boys & Girls Clubs, community leaders, faith-based organizations, mentoring programs, media outlets, and businesses. By working together, schools, partners, families, and communities can produce enduring change in the climate of their schools and communities.

SNAPSHOT: Pueblo City Schools, Pueblo, Colorado
Safe Haven: Building Community Support

> *Students have a right to be safe at school and in their community, and if students do not feel safe at school, learning is affected. We consider it our duty to help students, staff, families, and the community understand the impact of bullying behavior and violence in schools.*
>
> —Maria Fieth, Program and Curriculum Specialist, SS/HS Initiative

In response to survey data reporting that students did not feel safe in the community, the *Safe Haven for Pueblo Bullying Victims Project* got input from more than 700 students on the design of posters denouncing bullying and then enlisted business owners to hang the posters in their windows. The posters alert students that these businesses will provide a refuge for them if they are being bullied or feel unsafe. The business owners agreed to help youth arrange for someone to pick up any students who are being bullied and to let them wait until a safe ride arrives. The owners are also educating their staff members about bullying and how to help youth involved in bullying.

To gain initial support for the project, SS/HS enlisted its community partners as project sponsors and then pounded the pavement to engage new businesses. Local TV, radio, and print media also helped spread the message. The response from business owners has been overwhelmingly positive. Approximately 200 businesses in the Pueblo City Schools area, as well as in the neighboring Pueblo District 70, have joined the project, and the posters include the logos of each SS/HS partner. SS/HS Program and Curriculum Specialist Maria Fieth remarked, "Kids want to feel safe. And somehow those posters all over town have destabilized the idea that bullying is the norm. Kids feel empowered."

The SS/HS team produced a four-minute video that describes the project and how to use the *Safe Haven* resources. The video has been viewed by more than 23,000 students.

Over the first three years of the SS/HS Initiative, the number of students who reported bullying another student two to three times per month or more in the past couple of months decreased by 34% in the elementary schools, 18% in the middle schools, and 10% in the high schools. In addition, the number of students who reported that they "try to help the bullied student" when asked, "How do you usually react if you see or learn that a student your age is being bullied by another student?" increased by 21% in the elementary schools, 42% in the middle schools, and 21% in the high schools.

SNAPSHOT: Newton Public Schools, Newton, Massachusetts
The Newton Partnership: Connecting School and Community

Meaningful bullying prevention is dependent upon children, teachers, administrators, parents, and the community working in partnership.

—Susan Linn, Co-Director,
The Newton Partnership

Early in its SS/HS Initiative, Newton Public Schools developed a partnership of more than a dozen agencies (e.g., city organizations, mental health providers, community service agencies, parent-teacher organizations, early childhood educators) to ensure that children of all ages stay safe and healthy. The district also enlisted a Community Team with representatives from partnering agencies, parents, and students to provide input to the project.

Adopting the title *The Newton Partnership* (TNP) to indicate the importance of building a community-wide support system to address bullying and other concerns for all children and families in Newton, the group has supported the implementation of programmatic interventions at all grade levels and in 40 early education and childcare programs. Early childhood specialists offer consultation, training, and support to parents, preschools, and childcare providers throughout Newton. Teacher workshops include training in *Second Step*, an empathy development and violence prevention curriculum. A week-long Circle of Respect initiative provided activities for parents, students, staff, and the community to address bullying, including cyberbullying.

All households in the community receive newsletters and electronic communications about bullying prevention activities and resources. Workshops on bullying prevention are offered for parents of children of all ages. Through its mental health service partners, TNP provides families and mental health service providers with resources, referrals, consultation, and counseling services.

Over the first three years of the SS/HS Initiative, there was a 55% decrease in the number of students who reported that they were harassed or bullied in school, and a 60% decrease in the number of students who reported being victims of cyberbullying, as measured in annual student surveys.

As TNP completes its five-year SS/HS Initiative, bullying prevention activities continue. For example, all public school staff participate in annual bullying prevention training. TNP provides prosocial out-of-school time outlets for children, especially for those with multiple risk factors, at the local Y and Boys & Girls Club. With the help of TNP, the mayor of Newton convened a youth summit on issues faced by Newton teens, including bullying. Action plans developed at the summit are engaging children, parents, and community decision-makers in ways to work together to sustain bullying prevention activities into the future.

2. Cultural Competence and Special Populations

Bullying prevention programs and strategies may need to be adapted for particular populations, since being perceived as "different" in some way can make students vulnerable to bullying. Students who are potential targets (e.g., students with disabilities, LGBTQ students) may need to learn appropriate ways to respond assertively to bullying. All students should learn to respect and support their fellow students and to celebrate diversity. Bullying prevention activities should teach culturally competent and inclusive strategies that help students understand, appreciate, and respect the values of all racial, ethnic, cultural, religious, and other groups that make up the school community.

The following example illustrates how SS/HS Initiatives can ensure that their bullying prevention programs and activities are culturally competent and that all students are included.

SNAPSHOT: Todd County School District 66-1, Mission, South Dakota
Lakota Life Values: Connecting with American Indian Culture

In the primarily American Indian community of Todd County, student survey data indicated high rates of bullying behavior, with students reporting that being bullied was one of the main reasons they skipped school and performed poorly in class. Todd County chose to implement the *Olweus Bullying Prevention Program* because it emphasizes involving the entire community and because it connects well with the statewide *Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports* program.

Through extensive discussions with the Tribal Education Committee, Tribal Council, and Tribal Board, as well as Elders and other community members, it was agreed that in order for the program to be successful, everyone in the community needed to be engaged. As SS/HS Project Director Dana Haukaas explained, "We knew that to make this work, everybody had to be involved, and we had to use the Lakota Life Values to bridge the gap between school and community."

It became clear that the Lakota Life Values (essential components that help create and maintain balance in all areas of life) could be linked directly to the four *Olweus Program* rules of behavior. The SS/HS team created a poster featuring the Lakota Life Values, which is displayed in every classroom and community hall, as well

as in the youth correction facility, the police station, and the tribal headquarters. At community meetings before the program was launched, the SS/HS team explained how the program would use Lakota values to connect the community to the school and to reinforce the components of the *Olweus Program*. The SS/HS project director explained, "The poster is a way to visually connect Lakota values with what we're trying to do with bystander behavior, such as being brave, showing fortitude, not giving up, helping others, and using your wisdom." Stories drawn from *The Lakota Way: Stories and Lessons for Living* by Joseph Marshall III (New York, NY: Penguin Group, Inc., 2001) were integrated into the program's role-playing exercises. These stories, passed down from generation to generation, teach positive behaviors, such as helping one another and being a good friend.

The SS/HS team has developed a variety of ways to integrate Lakota values and learnings from the community into its bullying prevention efforts. For example, for every incident of bullying, the SS/HS team uses the services of a Bullying Intervention Counselor from the Lakota community. The counselor works with the students involved in the bullying and their families, in their homes, in a non-threatening, respectful manner to develop an intervention plan.

Since implementing the program, the district has seen a decrease in bullying incidents and suicide attempts, both of which had been significant problems in the community. Caregivers, Tribal officials, students, and teachers now share a common understanding of how to prevent and respond to bullying and agree that stopping bullying is the responsibility of every member of the community.

3. Youth-Involved, Youth-Led, and Youth-Initiated Efforts

Youth involvement in bullying prevention efforts is important for many reasons:

» Young people are often the most knowledgeable about and the most motivated to help solve the problem.

» Youth bystanders can often serve as first responders, intervening to stop bullying and getting help.

» Students know far more about cyberbullying than most adults.

» Messages delivered by youth are often better received and more successful at changing behavior than messages created and delivered by adults.

» Partnering with adults to develop bullying prevention efforts helps youth feel more respected by and more connected to adults. Such partnerships also allow adults to see young people in a new light, leading to a newfound respect and appreciation for what these youth bring to the table.

» Youth involvement leads to feelings of empowerment—youth become committed to standing up to bullying and supporting their peers.

The following snapshots illustrate innovative ways that three sites are featuring youth in their bullying prevention efforts.

SNAPSHOT: Albuquerque Public Schools, Albuquerque, New Mexico
Safe School Ambassadors Program: Youth as Leaders

The whole idea of the Safe School Ambassadors program is that you are supposed to choose kids that have social influence. Kids who are in the program and are in the moment can stop bullying right there.

—Debbie Abrams-Burroughs, School Counselor

Albuquerque Public Schools (APS) trained nearly 200 middle school youth to be *Safe School Ambassadors* (SSAs) to help prevent bullying. Viewed as leaders among their peers, these students are trained to identify bullying, intervene when it occurs, and determine when to bring adults into the situation. They also work to prevent bullying by creating a more positive school culture; for example, SSAs may invite an excluded peer to join them for lunch or explain to their friends why they should not spread rumors.

The SSAs report that they diffuse conflicts and prevent fights among their peers. Teachers, administrators, and other school staff have witnessed the SSAs helping to create a positive school environment. These adults continue giving their time to train students because they are seeing results and because they truly believe in the program. Principal James Lujan says, "I truly believe that the *Safe School Ambassadors* are one huge factor in reducing our disciplinary referrals."

The program is being implemented in three APS middle schools, where it has become part of the fabric of the school culture, with changes seen in students' attitudes and behaviors related to bullying. The district is expanding the program to three additional middle schools and hopes to eventually reach all middle school students across the district. Additional information about the program and spotlights on an SSA from each middle school are included on the district's SS/HS website (www.abqsafeschools.org/results/safe-schools-ambassadors-program).

SNAPSHOT: Burke County Public Schools, Morganton, North Carolina
Student Advisory Group: Youth as Partners

When students feel that what they have to say is valued and respected by school administrators, they regard being chosen to be part of the group as an honor, and contribute enthusiastically. In return, the schools receive valuable feedback, new information, and creative ideas that can make positive changes in the school community.

—Robert Murray, SS/HS Project Director

Burke County Schools created a *Student Advisory Group* (SAG) to gather input directly from students on topics related to their safety, health, and well-being. This group of about 55 middle and high school students meets with SS/HS Project Director Robert Murray twice a year to discuss students' opinions and experiences in school. Says Murray, "They tell me what they think about bullying, where it goes on, and why it happens."

Discussions with the SAG have led to a greater focus on preventing bullying in the schools, including the development of new school policies and programs. For example, student concerns that "hazing-type bullying" was taking place on buses led the schools to install cameras on each school bus. Discussions about consequences for bullying led to changes in the schools' disciplinary policies.

Once selected, SAG members may participate until graduating, and many choose to do so. The SS/HS project director reports that group members have developed increased confidence, feelings of empowerment, and leadership abilities.

SNAPSHOT: Comal Independent School District, New Braunfels, Texas
Beatin' Up Bullyin': Students Create a Play

Doing something like this really builds your confidence. It makes you feel better because you know you're not only talking to people that are being bullied but also to the students doing the bullying. It lets the bullies know what they're doing is not okay or cool, and it relays the message to anyone being bullied to never be afraid to tell an adult.

—Middle school student actor

In the Comal Independent School District, a play written and acted by students, *Beatin' Up Bullyin'*, is teaching youth how to respond in a bullying situation. Middle school theater teacher Quay Logan had her students write a play based on their experiences with bullying. Performed by middle school students for elementary school students, the play is based on the themes of the *Olweus Bullying Prevention Program*, which the SS/HS Initiative is implementing in the district. The play begins with a video that shows examples of students being bullied in real life and includes stories of celebrities, such as Tom Cruise and Eva Longoria, who were bullied growing up. Student actors then read poems and act out scenes based on their own experiences, while a narrator describes what's happening and explains the roles of the bully, the bully's supporters, the bullied, and the defender.

This opportunity for elementary school students to see older performers address bullying through drama helps the younger students learn about bullying, how to respect one another, and the steps to take when bullying occurs. The play also builds skills and confidence among the student performers.

4. Mental Health Supports

Many students need mental health supports. Children with mental, emotional, and/or behavioral health disorders, such as anxiety or conduct disorders, may be at increased risk for becoming involved in bullying. Mental health problems, such as depression and suicidal thinking, can result from bullying—for those who bully, those who get bullied, and those who watch bullying happen. Many SS/HS communities support children's mental health needs through Mental Health Awareness Weeks, prevention programs, counseling, support, and interventions. Some place mental health counselors in schools to promote bullying and violence prevention and intervention and to support students who have problems with bullying and violence. Some provide students who are involved in or at risk for bullying with targeted mental health interventions or refer them to community mental health professionals.

The snapshots below offer examples of how to appropriately intervene and provide mental health supports for students who are involved with bullying.

> ## SNAPSHOT: Albemarle County Public Schools, Charlottesville, Virginia
> ## *Peer Support Survey*: Identifying At-Risk Students
>
> To provide students who are bullied with counseling services, the Albemarle County Public Schools SS/HS Initiative relies on students to identify which of their peers may be victims of bullying. Administered to more than 10,000 students in grades 3–12 every October, the *Peer Support Survey* helps schools identify students early in the school year so they can receive counseling and support before further victimization occurs. Describing the value of the survey for identifying bullying incidents that would be overlooked, a counselor reported, "We all missed it. Nobody had any idea. It's good that we had the *Peer Support Survey*."
>
> Under conditions of complete confidentiality, the survey asks students to provide the names of students who they believe may be targets of bullying. Students may also submit the names of those they believe may be bullying others. Because students understand that what they have written in the survey is taken seriously, false or "joke" nominations have decreased substantially since the program began.
>
> Students who receive at least three mentions are interviewed by a school counselor, who has received special training for these discussions, to assess whether an intervention is necessary. If so, the parents of the bully and the victim are then notified. The bully and victim are interviewed separately so as not to re-victimize the target. Counselors also notify classroom teachers and/or other school staff as appropriate, and may refer students to additional mental health services. Follow-up is conducted at one and three months after the initial meeting.
>
> In addition to mental health counseling interventions, the Albemarle SS/HS Initiative has implemented a variety of education programs and activities aimed at reducing bullying, including the *Olweus Bullying Prevention Program*, Bullying Prevention Month activities, schoolwide meetings to talk about bullying, school anti-bullying pledges, and schoolwide cyberbullying prevention activities. In the first three years of the SS/HS Initiative, the district has experienced a 26% decrease in the number of students in grades 6–12 reporting that they have been bullied in the last 30 days.

SNAPSHOT: Montebello Unified School District, Montebello, California
Interventions That Work: Supporting Students at Risk

In addition to providing bullying prevention policies, programs, and activities for all students, the Montebello Unified School District (MUSD) offers counseling and mental health support to students and their families in response to bullying incidents. Each of the district's 29 schools has an onsite mental health counselor trained to deal with incidents of bullying, including cyberbullying. All reports of bullying are investigated and responded to swiftly and thoroughly. When an incident is reported, students are interviewed to determine what kind of support is needed; if necessary, referrals are made to school-based mental health providers, and parents are contacted. Mental health counselors provide support both for students who bully and those who are bullied. Students who bully may also face consequences, such as suspension or expulsion. If the incident has criminal implications, students may be referred to school police, who have been trained in bullying response. In the first four years of this SS/HS Initiative, the number of mental health providers increased from 2 to 10, and the number of students receiving mental health services increased by 77%.

The story of "Isabella" [not her real name], a student in grade 10, illustrates how team efforts by well-trained staff can make a real difference in the lives of students. Isabella was a target of bullying at her school. The situation was reported to a school counselor, who interviewed Isabella and reviewed her grades and performance. It quickly became clear that there were negative changes in Isabella's demeanor and her performance in class. The school conducted a comprehensive assessment to determine how best to support Isabella. The resulting plan included weekly check-ins and social skills training with the counselor, regular communication between the school administrators and Isabella's parents, and an academic plan to recover her lost credits. At no point was Isabella encouraged to switch schools to avoid being bullied. In addition, the student responsible for the bullying was disciplined appropriately and received counseling and social skills training. Through this coordinated team effort, Isabella learned social skills and coping mechanisms, and she grew to feel safe in school again. Isabella is now a 12th-grade student who enjoys school and is on track to graduate.

V. Conclusion

SS/HS Initiatives have made it possible for communities across the country to take leadership in formulating systematic, multi-faceted, and long-lasting solutions to bullying. The snapshots in this report illustrate best practices in how schools and communities are preventing bullying by engaging community partners, building cultural competence, involving students, and supporting students' mental health.

These prevention efforts include the implementation of consistent policies and protocols, education and training for school personnel, programming and activities for students at all grade levels, decision-making based on evaluation, and outreach beyond school campuses. The media often provide vehicles for communicating educational messages to the community and engaging students, families, and community organizations in coordinated bullying prevention efforts. Students, with the support of adults, can lead the way in developing new and powerful methods to address bullying. Special populations that are at increased risk for involvement with bullying benefit from tailored support and intervention.

Communities throughout the nation can learn from the pioneering efforts, hard work, and bold leadership of SS/HS Initiatives. The SS/HS snapshots presented here capture successful, innovative strategies to keep our eyes on bullying and promote the health and well-being of the nation's youth.