

# IMPLICATIONS FROM UCEA

## Addressing Bullying in Schools



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Over the past five years awareness of bullying and its negative impact on students' educational and personal wellbeing has reached a new high. According to Cohn and Cantor (2003), bullying is the most common form of violence among youth; 3.7 million youth engage in it, while more than 3.2 million are victims of bullying annually (2003). The educational and public health issues associated with bullying include, but are not limited to: retaliation, depression, excessive school absence, dropping out of school, and in some extreme cases, suicide (Boyle, 2005). According to the National Education Association (2003), bullying is the main reason students miss school, and over 160,000 students miss school each year for fear of being attacked or intimidated by other students. Increased awareness has resulted in a resounding call to action for educators, clinicians, medical professionals, and policymakers with regards to bullying prevention and intervention.

### DEFINITION OF BULLYING

Bullying is defined as the mistreatment of an individual or group characterized by a willful intent to cause harm and a perceived advantage of power (Garrity, Jens, Porter, Sager, & Short-Camilli, 2000). Victims can experience acts of bullying physically (e.g. hitting, shoving), verbally (e.g. name-calling, teasing, threats, taunting), and psychologically (e.g. public humiliation, shunning, and manipulation) (Garrity et al., 2000). Bullying can also include racial, religious, ethnic, language, and sexual orientation

harassment, or bullying based on difference or "otherness."

Bullying behavior has three integral components: intentional, imbalanced, and repeated. The behavior is *intended* to cause harm; there is an *imbalance* of physical or psychological power or strength among the parties, and the behavior occurs *repeatedly* over time (Garrity et al., 2000; Olweus, 1993). Based on this understanding of bullying, Olweus (2011) reports that:

- About 56 percent of all students have witnessed bullying at school;
- Approximately 15 percent of students' absences are related to bullying;
- Over 71 percent of students report bullying to be an on-going problem;
- One out of every 10 students drops out or changes schools due to repeated bullying;
- Almost 90 percent of 4th through 8th graders report being bullied during these peak bullying years; and
- Approximately 282,000 students report being attacked in US high schools each month.

In general, bullying begins in elementary school, peaks in middle school, and declines in high school; however, verbal abuse remains constant in secondary education (Cohn & Cantor, 2003) and homophobic aggression has been found to increase in high school (Olweus, 2011). Sadly, the majority of students believe that adult help is infrequent and ineffective (Cohn & Cantor, 2003).

## FEDERAL LAW AND POLICY

No federal laws explicitly address bullying, however, the issues inherent in bullying overlap with laws based on discriminatory harassment. More specifically, when bullying and harassment overlap and go unresolved, it is incumbent on the part of federally funded schools, colleges, and universities, to engage the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights and the U.S. Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division.

A school that fails to respond appropriately to harassment of students based on a protected class may be violating one or more civil rights laws enforced by the Department of Education and the Department of Justice, including (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2011): (1) Title IV and Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964; (2) Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972; (3) Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973; (4) Titles II and III of the Americans with Disabilities Act; and (5) Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

## IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATIONAL LEADERS

Bullying can have a long-lasting and widespread impact, affecting multiple stakeholders including students, parents, educators, medical professionals, and the community. Experts advise educators to address bullying systematically and to attend to the needs of both bullies and victims. Several key strategies have been identified for addressing bullying in schools, including:

- Survey students about their experiences with bullying;
- Adopt an effective school-wide anti-bullying programs;
- Build emotionally healthy classroom and school climates;
- Offer small group and individual counseling for those at-risk of bullying or being bullied;
- Communicate with parent and community stakeholders regarding bullying procedures, policies, and consequences; and
- Develop opportunities for students to advocate against bullying and serve as positive role models for the school community.

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This brief, developed by Azadeh Osanloo of New Mexico State University, is part of a UCEA's Implications Briefs Series. The intent of the series is to highlight and share recent empirical research with significant implications for preparing leaders to support the learning of diverse student populations. Based at the University of Virginia, the University Council for Educational Administration is an international consortium of research universities with graduate level leadership programs. UCEA members are marked by a distinguishing commitment and capacity to lead the field of educational leadership and administration.

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