

Arizona's Bullying Prevention Partnership

By Stephen A. Reiher



Talk to most people and chances are they will remember at least one school bullying story from their youth. Many of us experienced it, some of us participated in it, and most of all, we often stood idly by while bullies picked on "our" classmates. So bullying is not rare. In fact, a 2001 study found that nearly 30 percent of all youth ages 11-15 said they had been a victim or perpetrator of bullying.

What is new is that teachers, administrators, parents and policymakers across Arizona clearly see that there are short- and long-term negative effects of bullying on individual students and on the school climate. And they want to stop it.

From a school-wide perspective, repeated bullying negatively impacts the learning environment and results in a marked decrease in academic achievement for everyone involved. Responding to bullying can tie up important school resources. Not responding adequately can result in lawsuits.

Then there's the impact that bullying has on the individuals involved. Statistics show child bullies often grow up to be adult bullies because, their earlier pattern of achieving desired goals through bullying likely inhibited the learning of more socially acceptable ways of negotiating with others.

In fact, "one in four children who bully will have a criminal record by the age of 20." (U.S. Dept of Education). Additionally, "bullies are more likely to be involved in alcohol and tobacco use." (Nansel, 2001).

Victims of bullying are often insecure, depressed and lonely. They exhibit greater absenteeism and are prone to depression and, sometimes, suicide. Over the long-term, victims continue to suffer from lower self-esteem and depression and may have difficulty forming close, meaningful relationships.

Bystanders become desensitized to violence and are less likely to get involved when they see improper behavior. They also have to deal with a school climate of fear and disrespect that often impacts their ability to learn.

Not good news, especially when a 2002 US Department of Education study determined that instances of bullying are increasing across the nation.

Educators have for a long time dealt with bullying on a case-by-case basis. In recent years, schools and in some cases entire school districts have implemented various "bullying prevention programs" to try and combat the problem.

The results have been mixed. Some of the programs have produced immediate improvements, but those gains have tended to evaporate over time. Tracking long-term results has also proven very difficult.

Recently, a new program has been introduced to several schools

across the state. It appears to be having success where other programs have struggled.

Olweus Bullying Prevention Program

Named after its Norwegian creator, the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program has more than 20 years of research behind it. It is one of 11 "blueprint" programs listed by the University of Colorado evaluation of 500 anti-violence programs, which was funded by the U.S. Department of Justice.

According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Olweus is listed as an "exemplary program," and also is recognized by the U.S. Department of Education.

The Arizona Bullying Prevention Partnership sponsors the program in Arizona. The partnership includes Governor Janet Napolitano's Office, the Arizona Prevention Resource Center (APRC) of Arizona State University, and the Men's Anti-violence Network (MAN), a group of Phoenix-area business and community leaders dedicated to stopping domestic violence through prevention and by holding the abuser accountable. MAN is an initiative of the Arizona Foundation for Women.

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The program is funded mostly by the Governor's Parents Commission, and corporate and private sponsors include Aetna, Inc., the American Express Foundation, Bashas', Bill Carstens, The Phoenix Suns, the Restaurant Source, and U.S. Bank. Significant monies also come from the state Child Abuse License Plate Fund.

Only in its second year, the Arizona Bullying Prevention Partnership continues to grow. In the 2003-04 school year, 13 schools from eight districts participated in the Olweus Program, reaching more than 10,000 students. In the 2004-05 school year, the program was implemented in more than 50 schools in 14 districts, reaching more than 40,000 students.

Participating districts currently include Washington, Murphy, Eloy, Phoenix and Tempe and Yuma Elementary Districts, and Chandler, Peoria, Flagstaff, Paradise Valley, and Humboldt Unified School Districts. Additionally, interested charter schools are being trained along with smaller rural schools in Yavapai County.

Early Results are Positive

Early results from the program are very promising. Schools fully implementing the program have seen a decrease in the number of children engaging in bullying behavior — 26 percent in all schools; 44 percent in schools implementing program true to its original design.

Some have seen an increase in reporting bullying behavior to adults at school.

Most sites that have implemented the program have reported a decrease in disciplinary referrals (30 percent in one school).

Continued on page 24

Arizona's Bullying Prevention Partnership

continued from page 21



PROVIDING A GOOD EXAMPLE

Obafemi "Femi" Ayanbadego, #30, of the Arizona Cardinals, poses with students at Pinnacle Peak Elementary in Paradise Valley Unified School District. The athlete helped "kick-off" the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program at the school.

Some reported a decrease in absenteeism (20 percent in one school). Many have seen a change in school climate through building an increased sense of community within classrooms.

Schools where bullying was an issue also reported a favorable response from parents.

When cafeteria workers, bus drivers, or playground monitors were trained, those areas reported noticeable reduction in bullying.

These results correlate with the results of previous studies, and included a 50-70 percent reduction in students' self-reports of bullying and victimization, as well as general anti-social behavior such as vandalism, fighting, theft, alcohol and illicit substance use and truancy.

Teachers and administrators are pleased with the program. "The (Olweus Bullying

Prevention) Program has made the kids more aware of what bullying is," wrote Trina Howard, Mary Griffin, Mike Hohmam and Ginger Baron, teachers at Lowell Elementary School in the Phoenix Elementary School District. "The students are now more comfortable and more likely to come to teachers when they witness a bullying incident. Everyone is very satisfied with it."

Pam Green, a former Intervention Specialist at Oasis Elementary and current Peoria Unified School District Intervention Coordinator, comments, "I am so happy to have had the Olweus Program introduced to the students at our school. Student awareness and education on the risks of bullying has improved the climate and safety for all."

Why It Works

The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program works for three main reasons. First, it's fact-based. The climate of each school is assessed before the program begins, and progress is measured throughout the year. The assessment helps school leaders identify the "who," "what," and "where" of bullying behaviors. With that information, the school can create very specific action plans.

Second, Olweus is a year-round program — instead of a one-time assembly. Expected behaviors within the classroom community are set, discussed, modeled and consequence throughout the year. Over time, those behaviors become the "norm" and the classroom reflects a climate of inclusion.

Third, the program involves everyone in the school community in some way. Teachers and students actively participate, but so does school staff, including counselors, nurses, bus drivers, cafeteria staff and even custodians. Parents are also involved.

Every school district in Arizona already has an opportunity and an obligation to reduce school violence and make their schools into safer, more inclusive campuses for all students. By measuring results, keeping a constant focus on bullying, and involving everyone in the school community, the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program is proving to be a very effective tool in reducing bullying in our schools.

Editor's Note: Stephen A. Reiher, is Vice Chairman of the Men's Anti-violence Network (MAN). For more information on the Arizona Bullying Prevention Partnership or the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program, contact the Arizona Prevention Resource Center (APRC) at 480-727-2772.

TESTIMONIAL

"The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program is in place in five schools in WESD. Next year, we plan to implement the program in four more. I think schools really find the program attractive because it's school-wide, it involves all school staff, students and even parents in bullying prevention... (The program) also forces you to look at bullying in a different light, giving it a much more serious approach rather than something that kids just do, it really works to change attitudes toward bullying. The one thing I like best about the program is that it teaches school staff to really concentrate on the victim first and then deal with the bully in bullying incidents on campus... Students are role models for their peers, which is so much more effective than the teacher dictating to students what they should do. Kids love to share stories and the classroom meeting gives them the opportunity to share while conveying an anti-bullying message."

***— Ellen McCandless,
Prevention Grants Coordinator/
Specialist, Washington
Elementary School District***

TESTIMONIAL

"I was exposed to the Olweus program when it was first introduced to Arizona Schools. One of our schools, Connolly Middle School, was involved in the state pilot. Since that time I have had the opportunity to be trained as a trainer. We currently have 14 of our 24 schools implementing the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program at different stages. At Connolly, we have seen amazing results after the first year: increased attendance, increased student achievement and decreased incidents that lead to suspensions. The research on the program states that most results will be seen after the third year of implementation. We can hardly wait!"

***— Sherri Travisano, Math and Science Coordinator, Temp
Elementary School District***

STEPS REQUIRED FOR IMPLEMENTING THE OLWEUS BULLYING PREVENTION PROGRAM

Schools leaders interested in implementing the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program should recognize that several steps are required:

1. A bully/victim questionnaire is administered to all students in grades three through eight during the spring semester preceding implementation of the program. This provides baseline results.
2. A Bullying Prevention coordinating committee is formed that includes the principal and should include one teacher from each grade as well as school staff. This committee attends a short training program during the summer.
3. The committee develops school rules around bullying and inclusion.
4. The school holds school-wide kick-off events in the fall.
5. The school increases supervision in what the questionnaires identify as “hot spots.”
6. The school involves parents through newsletter articles, brochures, parents’ nights, kick-off events.
7. In the classroom, teachers:
 - Post and discuss school rules.
 - Use consistent positive and negative consequences.
 - Hold regular classroom meetings about bullying issues for 15-20 minutes each week
 - Incorporate bullying themes across the curriculum.
 - Hold class-level parent meetings when possible.
8. All school employees are expected to:
 - Intervene on-the-spot when bullying occurs.
 - Hold follow-up discussions with children who are bullied.
 - Hold follow-up discussions with children who bully.
 - Share information on these individuals with other staff.
 - Involve parents of children who are involved.

Help with Implementation

The Arizona Bullying Prevention Partnership was created to assist schools with this process.

“Our goal is to provide this evidence-based program to all schools interested in offering it to their students,” said Stephen Reiher, vice chairman of the Men’s Anti-violence Network (MAN).

According to Reiher, Arizona is the only state in the country which has created a centralized training and technical assistance project to provide the program.

Through the partnership, districts and schools can order materials at volume discounts, find local certified trainers, and can be provided with technical assistance in program implementation. An available pool of money helps defray some of the costs.

“This public/private collaboration was created to serve Arizona’s students—this is not a profit-making venture,” Reiher said.

Program Costs

The cost of implementing the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program is about \$7-\$10 per student, depending on the size of the school. Costs drop significantly after the first year of implementation.

Schools interested in implementing the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program can call on several sources of funding. The Arizona Bullying Prevention Program has a pool of funds that will help cover all or a portion of the program costs. In some circumstances, Title I, Title IV and Title V funds can be used for the program. City Block Grants are another possible funding source, as are local businesses and concerned parents.