

**2007 Report on Act 117 of 2004:
An Act Relating to Bullying Prevention
Policies**

Report to the House and Senate Committees on Education

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Act 117 of 2004: An Act Relating to Bullying Prevention Policies

This Act requires the Education Commissioner to do the following:

By January 1, 2005 the commissioner shall update and distribute a model school plan on discipline for use on addressing bullying in schools. During October of 2004 the commissioner distributed the updated plan to be used with the Model Discipline Plan published in 2001. See attached.

As part of the plan, schools are required to report verified incidents of bullying.

In 2004 the department's Combined Incident Reporting Software, required to be used by all Vermont public schools, was updated to include verified incidents of bullying. In the 2004-2005 school year, there were 558 bullying incidents reported. In the 2005-2006 year, there were 660 bullying incidents reported.

This Act also requires the commissioner to report on the implementation of this process.

Prior to and since the passage of the Act, many Vermont schools have put in place prevention and response-oriented approaches to address bullying. There are a number of programs used by some schools that address bullying e.g., the Responsive Classroom, A World of Difference, Olweus Bullying Prevention Program, Outright Vermont, Second Growth, I-SAFE (internet safety) and Bully Police USA. Using the DOE's Model Discipline Plan as a guide, schools have developed reporting procedures, trained staff and students and employed a variety of prevention-oriented strategies. Within the Department of Education, staff members are providing technical assistance and professional development addressing bullying in a variety of ways as described within this report.

The Safe Schools consultant receives requests for technical assistance and problem-solving from school personnel and families throughout Vermont. A substantial number of parents express concern about their perception of the schools' inadequate response to the bullying of their child, on the bus, during less supervised times (e.g. lunch or recess), but also in the classroom. Recently, we have worked with a number of high schools coping with the aftermath of bullying, murder, racial profiling, suicide and bomb threats. All of these schools require a labor-intensive, systemic and sustained focus to create a sense of wellness and a community of caring, where ongoing supportive relationships among faculty, staff and parents can be established. We use variations of Study Circle technology, the principles of restorative justice and complex adaptive systems as core disciplines for much of this work.

A World of Difference Program

For the past few years the Department of Education has co-sponsored A World of Difference (AWOD) Institute for school staff. This week-long training addresses issues of discrimination, bullying and harassment in schools. Since the program's inception, Vermont has prepared many students to take strong leadership roles on issues of equity, diversity, and bullying and harassment prevention. These students have cumulatively led workshop sessions with over 10,000 other students and adults in Vermont school and community settings.

In 2004-2005, facilitators trained 232 student Peer Trainers who led workshop sessions with over 3500 students and 1474 adults. During the 2005-2006 school year AWOD was implemented in 16 Vermont sites and facilitators trained 227 new peer trainers who then led workshops attended by over 3,400 students.

Schools participating in the Anti-Defamation League's A World of Difference Institute Peer training program identify one or more adult peer training coordinator(s) to oversee the program. The program coordinators work with educators and other school staff to identify and recruit up to 30 students in either middle or high school who will become peer trainers. These students participate in 18 hours of anti-bias education and facilitation training. The 18 hours of workshops are divided into four sessions of 4.5 hours each for middle school students, or three sessions of six hours each for high school students.

Meetings are held at the school with the peer trainers after the initial training is completed. Students meet weekly or bi-weekly to practice facilitation techniques, learn more about equity issues in their schools, and explore additional activities that can assist them to teach others about equity and diversity topics relative to their school.

Peer trainers then deliver workshops to groups of 15 to 30 students in their school as well as other schools. Through identity, language, cultural awareness and action planning activities, these student gain:

- An increased understanding of the causes of prejudice
- A fuller appreciation of racial, ethnic, cultural, and other individual differences
- Facilitation and conflict resolution skills to respond positively in the face of discrimination.

Olweus Bullying Prevention Program

The DOE Building Effective Supports for Teaching Students with Emotional and Behavioral Challenges (BEST) team identified the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program as an appropriate match for Vermont schools. Two members were trained in the program. As of December 2006 they have implemented the program in 15 Vermont schools.

Participating schools over the past two years

Alburgh School	Hardwick Elementary School
Brewster Pierce School	Hartford Memorial Middle School
Cabot School	Riverside Middle School
Cavendish Town Elementary School	Sheldon Elementary School
Chester-Andover School	St. Johnsbury School
Fisher Elementary School	Twinfield School
Flood Brook School	Washington Village School
Folsom Education & Community Center	

Olweus is a multi-level, multi-component program designed to reduce and prevent schools' bullying/target problems that has been shown to significantly reduce the frequency which students report being bullied or bullying others; as well as in peer and teacher ratings of bullying/victim problems. Anecdotally, students have also reported significant reductions in general antisocial behavior and overall improvement in social climate.

This program attempts to restructure the existing school environment to reduce opportunities and rewards for bullying behavior. All personnel in a school have a part in the implementation of the program, and their efforts are directed toward improving peer relations and making the school a safe place for everyone.

Content of the Program

The core components of the program are implemented at the school, classroom, community and individual levels:

1. School level components include an anonymous student and teacher questionnaire assessing the nature, prevalence and location of bullying at the school; one half-day school training conference for all staff; the formation and training of a Bullying Prevention Coordinating Committee; 12 - 15 monthly follow-up on-site visits or conference calls between an Olweus trainer and a designated member of the Bullying Prevention Coordinating Committee; establishment of schoolwide rules against bullying; development of a coordinated system of supervising students during identified times that bullying happens (i.e., break periods, recess, busing, transitions, in the classroom), and use of consistent interventions with students.
2. Classroom level components include establishing and enforcing classroom rules against bullying and holding regular classroom meetings with students to increase knowledge and empathy, and to encourage pro-social norms and behavior; and, meetings with parents to foster more active involvement at the classroom and school levels.
3. Community components include a parent survey to parallel measures used with teachers and students; regular communication with families and community organizations in regard to the prevention of bullying; and involvement of the community in scheduled school events that focus on the issue of bullying.
4. Individual level components include interventions with students identified as bullies and targets, and discussions with the parents of involved students.

Every participating school completes an Olweus evaluation prior to participating in the program. Four schools have had the opportunity to complete the Olweus evaluation following at least six months of program implementation. There have been some statistically significant changes in a positive direction for the schools that have implemented the program six months or longer. Students in Vermont schools report the occurrence of bullying at a far higher level than the national average, and it is especially high for girls.

Folsom Educational & Community Center reduced reported bullying behavior by students in grades K – 8, from 32.8 percent to 10.1 percent (girls: 36 percent to 5.8 percent; and boys: 27 percent to 14.1 percent). Students showed increases in trying to help another student if they were being bullied; reported that their teachers were doing more to counteract bullying; and students that had bullied another student indicated an increase in their parents talking to them about bullying, from 7.2 percent to 60 percent.

Students at ***Hartford Memorial Middle School*** statistically reduced the amount of bullying, from 16.7 percent to 8.7 percent overall (girls: 9.3 percent to 4.4 percent; boys: 23.7 percent to 13.9 percent). Bystanders to a bullying event were also more likely to try to help a targeted student, increasing from none to almost 28 percent. The data also indicated that the school's rules and policies about bullying were clearer and communicated to everyone; that teachers were discussing observed bullying more with the students and other adults at school; adults were stopping bullying events more often and were more comfortable intervening; that teachers were

talking more with individual students about bullying others (increase from 28.2 percent to 49.9 percent) or with the targeted child (increase from 19.9 percent to 29.2 percent). Overall, teachers indicated that they or other adults had increased what they were doing to counteract bullying from 25 percent to 48.9 percent and 26 percent to 55.3 percent, respectively. As noted by the school's principal, more than just bullying behavior seemed to have been effected. Disciplinary Planning Guides for students also dropped, with 515 in the 2004-2005 school year and 341 in 2005-2006.

St. Johnsbury School data showed a significant increase in reported clarity about what the rules and policies are in regard to bullying. Students are telling an adult at school more often if someone is bullying them or others; teachers and other school faculty are talking more often with others about bullying events, and are talking significantly more about bullying with their classes and children who have been targeted. The school faculty reports being more comfortable intervening in bullying events, and when events are seen, more adults now report that they try to stop it. Teachers also feel that they and other adults at school have increased what they are doing to counteract bullying.

Fisher Elementary School. After implementation of the Olweus program at their school, bullying decreased from the high of 44 percent (two to three incidents or more often during the last few months) to 26.2 percent. Girls reported a decrease from 20 percent to 14.8 percent; and boys indicated a decrease from 57 percent to 26.4 percent. The students are also telling someone about being bullied more often, with an increase from 72 percent to 93.3 percent reporting. Of those students who reported bullying others, there was an increase in these students not bullying during the last few months from 44 percent to 73.7 percent. The bystanders of bullying events have also increased their desire to help the targeted child from 70.6 percent to 87 percent; and no child indicated that the target child deserved getting bullied.

The Work Ahead

As demonstrated by some of the Olweus schools and consistent with the national literature on bullying in schools, school discipline and bullying prevention requires pronounced schoolwide reform efforts involving all school staff, students and families. We know that schools that have undertaken such measures are reporting significant drops in bullying behavior and increased positive indicators of school climate. We also know, as demonstrated by the data and work of the DOE teams, that many more schools need to implement comprehensive bullying prevention programs. Perceived competing interests focused on high achievement of all of our students and the all-encompassing effort to meet these standards by focusing on academic preparation have left little time to devote to such efforts. The Department of Education will continue to be a resource to schools about bullying prevention. In the months ahead, the Safe and Healthy Schools team and members of the BEST Team will continue to provide guidance for schools to address all aspects of school climate.