

Community-Level Strategies

Interrupting Bullying & Harassment in Schools – Toolkit

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Although the focus of this resource is on the prevention of school-based bullying and harassment – and therefore on the role of educators in this work – it is important to acknowledge the role of community participation in these efforts. Because students and educators are directly influenced by the social narratives that exist in a community, as well as local and national policies, it is critical that educators work to bridge their efforts with community-based work.

Community-level strategies refer to tools that enable school administrators and teachers to connect with community-based organizations and local leaders to create a broader network of support for preventing bullying and harassment.

There is significant evidence to suggest that the cultural norms of a community filter down into the behaviors of young people at school, including the types of language that they use, their interactions with each other, and the probability that youth will experience discrimination based on specific identities. For example, research suggests that the level of implicit bias in a community – particularly as directed toward people of color – is predictive of community-wide behaviors, such as the likelihood that police will discriminate in their interactions (see research by Hehman, Flake & Calachini, 2018; Lai & Banaji, 2020). In addition, there is ample qualitative evidence that local and national discourse both influence the language and behaviors of students in a community (e.g., Erdely, 2012; Holt, et al., 2013; Staats, et al., 2017; SPLC, 2016).

While it is not the job of the school to shift or influence community culture or values, it is important for school personnel to understand that any implicit bias and stereotypes that exist in a community can – and often do – filter into the school setting. The more connected the school becomes to its broader community, the more administrators, teachers and educational support providers can build on these relationships to reinforce school climate efforts. This may be particularly important when the inclusive values of your school community are at odds with dominant cultural narratives in the surrounding community or national culture, at large.

Guidelines for Building Bridges with Community Actors

There is an extensive body of research on the importance of school-family partnerships (e.g., Montemayor & Chavkin, 2016; Henderson, et al., 2007; Cohen & Freiberg, 2013; Bradshaw, 2015) and school-community partnerships (e.g., Mapp & Kuttner, 2013) in nurturing positive school climates and fostering academic outcomes for youth. This literature provides rich examples of best practices for how to build bridges with community-based actors. In addition, several guides exist to help schools consider how to build more holistic connections with community-based support providers. For one example, see Adelman & Taylor, *School-Community Partnerships: A Guide*.

Often, the process of building bridges with community-based actors begins with the creation of a community asset map, in which educators and communities come together to reflect on resources and challenges within their community, the connections between these resources and challenges, and the holes in existing support systems. From here, a team of practitioners and families that represent stakeholders in the school and community can begin to build out a plan for future work. (Note the overlap between this and the suggestion of a school-based leadership team that includes multiple stakeholders in the work of preventing bullying and harassment.)

Below, we provide a set of strategies from which educators might draw to support the work of building bridges with community-based actors to prevent bullying and harassment. We want to explicitly note that we consider families key community-based actors; not only are families incredibly knowledgeable about their own student's needs, but they are often the folks who physically bridge the contexts of school and community for youth. The strategies listed below work best when integrated into an explicit, multi-tiered effort to improve school culture and climate, such that administrators, teachers, educational support providers, and families are integrated into these efforts.

Strategies for School-Community Involvement

Create an asset map of the resources, assets and challenges that exist in your community, as related to issues of bullying and harassment. You might consider spaces and places and people who provide social and emotional support to students, as well as the spaces and places where students spend large amounts of time. If there are dominant narratives or stereotypes in your community about certain groups, you might spend some time researching the institutions that seem to be reinforcing these or you might talk to community leaders about the fears and misunderstandings underlying these narratives.

Create a leadership team that includes stakeholders from multiple groups, including administrators, teachers, educational support providers, families, community leaders, community-based organizations and (when appropriate) youth. The leadership team should begin by examining existing data from your community, including your asset map. When necessary, have the leadership team collect additional data to inform their work.

Always bring families and community members into schoolwide efforts to include culture and climate. This might take the form of family and community member training activities, meetings and information. The important thing is to make it clear to outside stakeholders that they hold responsibility in this effort as well and that there are resources for them.

In addition to acknowledging identity-based bullying, be sure to confront this issue as a *community issue*. Address issues of racism and discrimination, publicly, and call on all community members to speak up and interrupt behaviors or language that fall into this category, and others related to marginalized identities.

- If you are in a community where there are strong, dominant cultural stereotypes or values that undermine the rights of a particular community (e.g., racism, xenophobia or homophobia), be careful to frame your questions around behaviors and not values. While schools cannot control the values of a family or community, they can ask families and students to make sure that their values are not manifested in harmful ways. Educators must clearly communicate that stereotypes, bias, and harmful language or behavior toward particular social groups will not be tolerated within the school community.
- Block any efforts to prevent your school community from explicitly discussing bias. For example, do not allow community-members or school board leaders to prevent conversations about racism, the needs of the LGBTQ community, comprehensive sex

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education, immigration or disability rights.

- Generate a comprehensive anti-bullying policy *with the stakeholders from your community*, which includes specific, enumerated protection for vulnerable groups.

Provide opportunities for adults connected to the school to consider their own biases and any language they may use that perpetuates (intentionally or unintentionally) discrimination.

Additional Resources

- **Creating Your Education Blueprint for Action – Mendez and Brown Community Dialogues – A Launch Kit**, IDRA: http://mendezbrown.wpengine.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/IDRA_Guide_FINAL.pdf
- **Making Caring Common**, a project of the Harvard Graduate School of Education: <https://mcc.gse.harvard.edu/>
- **PREVNet** (Promoting Relationships and Eliminating Violence Network), family resources: <http://www.prevnet.ca/bullying/parents>

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