Chapter 4

Community Programs:
Local School Boards and Anti-Bullying Programs

ABSTRACT

The United States has a federal system. One advantage of a federal system is that it can encourage competition among the states resulting in the testing of new policy solutions and the diffusion of best practices. This holds true for online aggression policy, particularly those addressing cyberbullying. This chapter begins with a discussion of the literature on strategies being adopted at the school board level to limit the spread of cyberbullying. It concludes with an overview of current evaluation research comparing recent policies being implemented by local schools.

INTRODUCTION

As illustrated by Chapter 3, there has been considerable legislative efforts at both the federal and state levels to combat online aggression. While policy adoption is crucial to solving any public problem, the policy process does not stop there. Programs once adopted must be implemented and those adopted at the state-level to curb cyber aggression have often been left to local law enforcement and school districts to carry out. It is not that unusual for local governmental agencies to be given considerable leeway in how they will implement policy. A typical state-level anti-bullying policy may direct school

districts to have a policy in place to address both traditional and cyberbullying but may not provide any guidance on which preventive measures to use. This has resulted in significate differences in anti-bullying programs, not only across the nation, but intrastate. The effectiveness of each program also varies greatly. One positive result of this variation in programs is that the school districts are acting as "laboratories of democracy." Because many different programs have been implemented, we are able to compare them to help develop a list of best practices. This chapter looks at the contribution of local government in the battle against cyber aggression through the role of local school districts in implementing anti-bullying policy. It begins with an overview of the impact of bullying, followed by a discussion of anti-bullying programs in the United States. It will conclude with a presentation of research into the effectiveness of different intervention strategies.

BULLYING AS A PUBLIC HEALTH PROBLEM

The research speaks very clearly and with little ambiguity, in stating that the impact of bullying and its cyber companion is linked to many negative outcomes such as mental health issues, substance abuse, and suicide (Institute of Medicine [IOM] & National Research Council [NRC], 2014; Ttofi & Farrington, 2008, 2012; Polanin, Espelage, & Pigott, 2012; Olweus, 1993, Olweus, Limber & Mihalic, 1999). Bullying is associated with anxiety, depression, failing or near failing school performance, and delinquent behavior. The act of bullying can manifest itself in derogatory comments and name calling; social exclusion and isolation; hitting, kicking, shoving and spitting; lying and spreading false rumors; having personal items and money taken and/or damaged; being threatened or forced to do something not wanted; and, negative actions directed at a another because of race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, gender expression, gender identity, sexual orientation, or disability (Hazelden, 2016; IOM & NRC, 2014; Olweus, 2013).

Victimization can and does occur in all age groups ranging from children younger than elementary school age and adolescents and young adults high school age and beyond (IOM & NRC, 2014). Students who attend schools with high incidences of bullying have lower grades than students at schools with less bullying (Strom, Thoresen, Wentzel-Larsen, & Dyb, 2013). Poor academic outcomes can be attributed to anxiety, inability to concentrate, and attendance problems (Lee & Cornell, 2009). Participation in bullying, whether as a perpetrator or victim, has long term consequences on the physiological and

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