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Abstract

Over the years, the number of social network platforms have drastically increased and changed the way individuals interact with one another. The purpose of this paper is to develop a better understanding of cyberbullying and the anti-bullying laws that have been created. The information gathered identifies thirteen key components when developing an effective anti-bullying law, policy, or regulation. In this paper, the anti-bullying laws for Massachusetts and Wisconsin are compared and contrasted to highlight the subtle impactful but differences. One of the largest school districts in the Commonwealth, Boston Public Schools, created a bullying prevention and intervention plan that successfully applies anti-bullying law in Massachusetts. This paper concludes by proposing additional training for both school staff and students regarding cyberbullying and its consequences on youth.

Cyberbullying and Anti-Bullying Laws

In today's society, there has been a significant increase in different forms of technology and amount of time a youth spends utilizing this technology. The development of technology has helped individuals communicate in various ways, such as through online gaming, email, cellphones, and social media apps and websites. Just about all students have access to the Internet on a consistent basis with approximately 86% of students communicating and sharing personal information on social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter (Smith, Rainie, & Zickuhr, 2011), and Snapchat. The increase in the involvement on these social media platforms has its benefits and disadvantages. These benefits consist of an individual learning different forms of communication which can be educational, whereas increased involvement can be a disadvantage because it can potentially result in cyberbullying. Cyberbullying can be defined as an "a) intentional aggressive behavior that is, b) carried out repeatedly, c) occurs between a perpetrator and victims who are unequal in power, and d) occurs through electronic technologies" (Kowalski, Giumetti, Schroeder, & Lattanner, 2014, p. 1081). Individuals that engage in cyberbullying have the intent to inflict pain, embarrass, hurt, and cause distress to others.

Literature Review

Cyberbullying vs. Traditional Bullying

In previous studies, bullying has been grouped into different forms: cyber, social, physical, extortion, and verbal (Tsang, Hui, & Law, 2012). Individuals who send hurtful messages through electronic communication is an example of cyberbullying. Social bullying is when an individual is spreading rumors and or excluding individuals from participating in an event/activity. Physical bullying can be defined as shoving, kicking, or hitting another person.

Bullying in the form of extortion can be defined as asking for money in a threatening or forceful way. Lastly, verbal bullying can be defined as name calling, teasing, and cruel criticism (Tsang, Hui, & Law, 2012).

Much of the extant literature has focused on two major forms of bullying, traditional and cyberbullying. Hinduja and Patchin (2015) found that 65% of victims of cyberbullying had also been subjected to traditional bullying at a point in their lives and that 77% of bullies who were engaging in cyberbullying confessed to bullying individuals the traditional way as well. Kowalski, Morgan, and Limber (2012) examined the relationship between traditional bullying and the likelihood of cyberbullying. This study identified a number of similarities and differences between the two. A clear distinction between the two is that cyberbullying can take place at any time of day or night due to an individual's easy access to the internet. However, traditional bullying typically takes place in a school setting (Nansel, Overpeck, Pilla, Ruan, Simmons-Morton, & Scheidt, 2001) or whenever the victim and bully are in the same location. Another distinction is that when traditional bullying occurs the victim is usually aware of the aggressor whereas in cyberbullying the aggressor is protected by the internet. The aggressor's unknown identity gives them the opportunity to continue to harass their target through the web. The offender isn't necessarily bigger or stronger than the victim but because of this invisibility, it makes it easier to maintain the aggressor's anonymity (Kowalski & Limber, 2007).

Similar to bullying, cyberbullying focuses on the imbalance of power. Due to this imbalance of power, the aggressor is seen as in control because of their ability to remain unseen. On the other hand, victims of cyberbullying have power as well because they have the ability to discontinue the negative exchange with the aggressor. This provides an escape route for the victims of cyberbullying in comparison with victims of bullying (Francisco, Simao, Costa-

Ferreria, & Martins, 2014). While engaging in cyberbullying, the content can be easily saved on

numerous platforms which demonstrates and provides evidence of aggression on the offender's

behalf.

When studying the awareness of emotions that individuals have when engaging in

bullying and cyberbullying, Baroncelli and Ciucci (2014) found that youth who participated in

both forms of bullying didn't view themselves as inadequate when it came to receiving

emotional hints from others. These youth reported that they were able to manage and keep an eye

on their own emotional states and as a result, they selected the most effective way to attack a

victim without experiencing any penalties (Francisco et al., 2014). Francisco and colleagues

(2014) identified that cyberbullies were able to regulate their emotional processes which

empowered them to act out in behaviors that lead to cyberbullying.

Another way cyberbullying differs from traditional bullying is the repetition in which

these aggressive acts are occurring. Dooley, Pyzalski, & Cross (2009) states that it is challenging

to control the reoccurrence of cyberbullying when it comes down to how often a message is sent,

displayed online, and viewed by other individuals despite the aggressor's true objective. In other

words, an aggressor may reiterate his/her actions multiple times towards others and those

victimized may experience this repeatedly. With the advances in technology, cyberbullying has

become very difficult to detect (Li, 2006). In traditional bullying, the aggressive acts that take

place in person are easier to keep track of than through electronic means (Francisco et al., 2014).

Ages, Roles, and Causes of Cyberbullying

Similar to traditional bullying, young adults who engage in cyberbullying adopt specific

roles. In traditional bullying, young people can take on the roles of a bully, the bully's partner,

reinforcer of the bully, victim, the victim's protector, and a bystander. In cyberbullying, some of

these same roles are fulfilled and can be categorized as bullies, victims, and bully/victim (Betts,

Gkimitzoudis, Spencer, & Baguley, 2017). In cyberbullying, bullies are the individuals who

partake in the aggressive online behavior. Betts and colleagues (2017) defined the victims of

cyberbullying as individuals who are reporting that they are the main focus of these aggressive

behaviors. Prior research has attempted to identify whether an individual is involved as a victim,

bully or both (Betts et al., 2017). Young individuals who are the focal point of the cyberbullying

also engage in these cyber bullying behaviors at the same time which results in them being

classified as bully/victims (Lam, Cheng, & Liu, 2013; Selkie, Kota, Chan & Moreno, 2015).

Victims may obtain the victim/bully role because they usually participate in cyber

bullying behaviors as a way to strike back due to their experiences they faced as a victim (Frey,

Pearson, & Cohen, 2015). By engaging in retaliation, these individuals are able to readdress

unpleasant feelings that are associated with feeling and being labeled as victims (Varjas, Talley,

Meyers, Parris, & Cutts, 2010). These victims are demonstrating that they aren't weak and don't

want to be labeled as an easy target. Striking back serves as a protective factor and guards them

against further victimization on the internet (Frey, Pearson, & Cohen, 2015; Konig, Gollwitzer,

& Steffgen, 2010).

Evidence has been provided that the bully/victim role makes up a substantial size of all

cyberbullying roles among both university students (Brack & Caltabiana, 2014) and middle

school students ranging from grades fifth to eight (Bauman, 2010). Traditional bullying and

cyberbullying have a significant impact on youth of all ages and continues to appear at the

elementary, middle school, and higher education levels (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015). In 2014, a

latent class study was completed to identify four different groups of one hundred and thirty-three

American high school students that were involved in cyberbullying (Aoyama, Barnard-Brak, &

Talbert, 2011). Aoyama and colleagues (2011) found that 9.8% of the sample was identified as "more victim than bully," 10.5% of the sample was identified as "more bully than victim," 12.8% of the sample belonged to the "highly involved as bully and victim" group and a huge part of the sample belonged to the 'least involved group' by 51.1%. These results indicate a lack of evidence that a large percentage of young people fulfill either the victim or bully role when involved in cyberbullying (Aoyama et al., 2011). However, Schultze-Krumbholz and colleagues (2015) completed a latent class analysis of 6,260 young adults' participation in cyberbullying from six European countries. Similarly, the largest part of the sample belonged to the "non-involved group" by 70.1% and the smallest part of the sample was identified as "perpetrator with mild victimization" by 4%. These individuals involved in the sample admitted to participating in stealing, altering personal information, and verbal threats in the forms of cyberbullying (Schultze-Krumbholz et al., 2015).

These previous studies have aided the proposal that young individuals take on different roles when involved in cyberbullying despite the results being mixed (Betts et al., 2017). Suggestions have surfaced that there is not a unique divide when labeling an individual as a victim or a bully but instead groups that differ to the extent to which they are involved in cyberbullying (Betts et al., 2017). Limitation to these previous studies are that young people's involvement in cyberbullying across various media platforms hasn't been extensively tested and that studies have not examined the cyber bullying behaviors that young adults make, receive, similar to the bully and victim roles (Barboza, 2015).

The Effects of Cyberbullying

Research has demonstrated that victims who experience cyberbullying experience a range of emotional effects (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006). Specifically, research conducted in colleges

and universities have linked cyberbullying to lower self-esteem (Schäfer et al., 2004; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004). In 2011, the book "Cutting-Edge Technologies in Higher Education" was published and it describes techniques on how to deal with cyberbullying in a college setting (Smith, Grimm, Lombard & Wolfe, 2012). Schenk (2011) examined college students between the ages of eighteen and twenty-four years old. Schenk (2011) found that sixty-nine of those were victims of cyberbullying more than once in college and four students had attempted to take their own lives (Gaughran, 2013). Schenk (2011) reported that victims of cyberbullying had elevated levels of paranoia, anxiety, and depression compared to those who have never been bullied. Loneliness, depression, and low self-esteem are all risk factors for suicide among college students (Dieserud, Roysamb, Ekeberg, & Kraft, 2001). Corresponding with the effects of traditional bullying, cyberbullying causes a significant amount of pain and low self-esteem among college students who have been victims of cyberbullying (Mason, 2008). When looking at victims and bullies involved in cyberbullying, low self-esteem is one of the most commonly reported emotional problems (Gaughran, 2013).

A study that was conducted on the link between bullying behaviors and self-esteem identified the remarkable relationship between individuals being bullied and general levels of low self-esteem (O'Moore & Kirkham, 2001). Nevertheless, this relationship is arguable. It has been suggested that bullies do not experience low self-esteem but rather have elevated levels of self-esteem (Rigby & Slee, 1991). However, "pure bullies" are individuals who have never been a target of bullying, have a notable lower self-esteem than an individual who has never been a victim of bullying or experienced it first-hand (Gaughran, 2013, p. 11). An individual having low self-esteem is seen as an outcome of being bullied by peers and it has the ability to make an individual be viewed as vulnerable. In other words, the way to attain high self-esteem is to avoid

all potential "pure bullies." It was demonstrated that when the age of a bully increased, their level of anxiousness decreased in the study conducted on adolescence between the ages of eight and eighteen. The individuals identified as "pure bullies" who will continue to go beyond secondary schools, will display these same bullying behaviors in college if low self-esteem still plays a factor. While on the contrary, "pure victims" tend to have lower self-esteem levels and will continue to be vulnerable when they move on to college (Gaughran, 2013). What is most important to note is that a significant relationship was discovered between a victim and a bully throughout the three stages of school, primary, secondary and college level (Chapell, Hasselman, Kitchin, Lomon, MacIver & Sarullo, 2006). Therefore, for school administrators, teachers, and parents, cyberbullying is a behavior that cannot be ignored. Questions arise in identifying when it is appropriate for administrators, teachers, and parents to intervene when cyberbullying occurs on and off school grounds (Shariff, 2004; Shariff & Hoff, 2007).

Based on previous research, we now understand that cyberbullying is prevalent and can have detrimental effects on youth. Nationally, about one-fourth of youth in the U.S. say they have been cyberbullied at some point in their lives, and around 12 percent say they have bullied others online (Cyberbullying Research Center, 2015). All fifty states have an anti-bullying law in place with the goal to protect our youth. The state of Massachusetts just passed the country's most effective anti-bullying law (Bazelon, 2010), whereas the anti-bullying law in Wisconsin has been labeled as one of the weakest in the country (Fisher, 2019).

Anti-Bullying Laws

Massachusetts

In 2009, a young boy named Carl Joseph Walker-Hoover attended New Leadership Charter School in Springfield, MA where he was bullied and teased for his sexuality. Walker

confided in his mother and she immediately met with his school principal, teachers, and guidance

counselor. Sirdeaner Walker became more involved in the Parent Teachers Organization in order

to ensure her son was being effectively supported. Despite all his mother's efforts, Carl

continued to be bullied and was called names such as "faggot," "girlie," and "gay." Carl started

to act out in school and began to isolate himself. On April 6, 2009, eleven-year-old Carl Walker

committed suicide. His mother found him hanging with an extension cord wrapped around his

neck. He left a letter behind expressing that he couldn't take the bullying another day and

apologizing to his family. Sirdeaner Walker became an advocate who used the death of her son

to push for anti-bullying laws in Massachusetts.

Less than a year later, in South Hadley, MA another youth committed suicide due to

being bullied. Phoebe Prince was tormented by peers who were once considered her friends. The

constant bullying that Prince endured resulted in her crying at school, smiling less and self-

harming behavior. On January 14, 2010, Phoebe showed up to school with a visible cut on her

chest. On this same day, Prince was continually being tormented by peers who called her names

and threw a soda can at her on her walk home. Phoebe Prince committed suicide by hanging

herself in the hallway of her home with a scarf her little siter had given her for Christmas. The

deaths of Carl Walker-Hoover and Phoebe Prince were the result of being bullied and the

impetus for the creation of anti-bullying laws in Massachusetts.

On May 3, 2010, Governor Deval Patrick signed a bill, the Massachusetts Bullying

Prevention Law. This law was created to prevent bullying from occurring in schools. The law

has two parts: one applies to all students and schools and one applies to students who are eligible

for special education (Coyne & Lockhart, 2012). This bill was created to crack down on school

bullies and required teachers to report bullying to principals (Martinez, 2010). It requires

teachers and all school staff to attend mandated training, report any form of bullying, and

implement prevention and intervention plans. This bill also incorporates cyberbullying and the

significance of it. The state of Massachusetts is one of the states at the forefront of cyberbullying

legislation and has been dedicated to preventing cyberbullying (Wynn & Wynn, 2015).

      According to Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs (2019), "bullying" is defined as the

repeated use by one or more students of a written, verbal or electronic expression or a physical

act or gesture or any combination thereof, directed at a target that: (a) causes physical or

emotional harm to the target or damage to the target's property; (b) places the target in reasonable

fear of harm to himself or herself or damage to his or her property; (c) creates a hostile

environment at school for the target; (d) infringes on the rights of the target at school; or (e)

materially and substantially disrupts the education process or the orderly operation of a school.

Bullying shall include cyberbullying. "Cyberbullying" is defined as bullying through the use of

technology or any electronic communication, which shall include, but not be limited to, any

transfer of signs, signals, writing, images, sounds, data or intelligence of any nature transmitted

in whole or in part by a wire, radio, electromagnetic, photo electronic or photo optical system,

including, but not limited to, electronic mail, internet communications, instant messages or

facsimile communications. Cyberbullying shall also include: (a) the creation of a web page or

blog in which the creator assumes the identity of another person; or b) the knowing

impersonation of another person as the author of posted content or messages, if the creation or

impersonation creates any of the conditions in bullying (a) through (e).

In order to ensure policy requirements are being met, it is essential that school districts create a plan that specifically targets prevention and interventions for bullying. The plans that are created by school districts must include procedural elements and key policies. A few examples of the policy requirements that need to be included are "a) statements prohibiting bullying, cyberbullying and retaliation; b) procedures for reporting and investigations, including procedures for collecting, maintaining and reporting bullying incident data; c) statements of consequences for violation of policy; d) procedures for restoring sense of safety for victim and assessing needs for protection; e) strategies for providing counseling or referral for perpetrators and victims" (Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs (ASPA), 2019) and several more.

Wisconsin

In comparison, the anti-bullying law in Wisconsin has been labeled as one of the weakest in the country (Fisher, 2009). The anti-bullying law does not cover cyberbullying, nor does it address bullying that occurs outside a school environment. The state of Wisconsin adopted a bullying law Wisconsin Act 309; 2009 Senate Bill 154 which mandated that by March 1, 2010 all schools include ten main elements into their anti-bullying policies. A few of the examples of the requirements that need to be included are "a) define bullying; b) a prohibition on bullying; c) a procedure for reporting bullying that allows reports to be made confidentially; d) a prohibition against a pupil retaliating against another pupil for reporting an incident of bullying; and e) a procedure for investigating reports of bullying. The procedure shall identify the school district employee in each school who is responsible for conducting an investigation and require that the parent/guardian of each pupil in a bullying incident be notified" (Wisconsin State Legislature, 2009) and several more. According to Patchin (2016), the 2009 law that was created required all

school districts to adopt anti-bullying policies by the 2010-2011 school year and directed the

state's Department of Public Instruction (DPI) to develop a model policy.

Wisconsin's anti-bullying law directs the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) to

develop a model that supplies schools with an education program that focuses on prevention and

the significance of it. This program is then posted on the internet for everyone the public to

access. One reason why this law is considered weak is because this model doesn't require schools

to adopt this specific policy despite some school's deciding to adopt it. Every school should have

the flexibility to develop a policy that is appropriate for their needs, but it would be better to

require certain core elements to be included in all school policies across the state, including a

comprehensive definition of bullying (that includes cyberbullying), procedures for reporting and

investigating, appropriate consequences, as well as others listed in 118.46 sub. (1) (a) 1-10

(Patchin, 2016).

Another reason why the anti-bullying law is considered weak is because it does not

address cyberbullying or additional ways youth can be targeted different ways electronically.

Cyberbullying is a form of bullying and not acknowledging its significance can greatly impact

our youth. While Wisconsin doesn't have an actual law that addresses cyberbullying, they have

criminal laws, such as unlawful telephone use, unlawful use of computerized communications,

criminal harassment and stalking, that can apply to cyberbullying against youth. An additional

weakness of the anti-bullying law is that there is nothing in current law that acknowledges the

school's recognized ability to intervene or reasonably respond to incidents of bullying that occur

off school grounds (Patchin, 2016). Additionally, the law does not mandate school districts to

train teachers and staff on how to be responsive if an incident of bullying occurs.

In 2013, the Senate Committee on Education met to address a proposal to review the anti-bullying law. Justin W. Patchin, the co-director of the Cyberbullying Research Center, created a proposal that identified his comments and point of view on the current bullying law in Wisconsin. Patchin identified the strengths and weaknesses of the new proposal. Patchin argued that "the current bill does propose modest improvements to Wisconsin's bullying law, especially by requiring that the DPI model policy include bullying by 'electronic means'" (Patchin, 2016). He also suggested that the policy cover bullying that occurs off campus and ensure there is clear language in the model policy that prohibits bullying off school grounds to avoid creating a hostile environment in schools. The new proposed bill also required teachers, administrators, and school officials who learn or witness any bullying that may be violate the law to report it to law enforcement.

The main problem with the current proposal is that only the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) is mandated to include specific segments in a model policy. It does require schools to include any of these segments in their bullying policies (Pathin, 2016), nor does it require schools to update their policies. Patchin argued that if the DPI could clarify the appropriate responses to bullying that takes place off campus and what the specific circumstances are when responding to bullying, this would strengthen the existing law. Patchin recommended that the state of Wisconsin make changes to their anti-bullying law to ensure youth, parents, and faculty are effectively supported. In the proposal, Patchin stated "I urge the legislature to adopt even stronger language clearly demonstrating that any and all forms of bullying, no matter where it occurs, that (1) disrupts the ability of a student to learn, (2) infringes on the rights of a student (including the right to be "let alone" at school), or (3) creates a hostile

learning environment, is subject to reasonable school discipline" (Patchin, 2016). Schools need

the proper tools and resources to effectively help train their staff to prevent and appropriately

respond to all forms of bullying. Patchin emphasized the significance of schools adding core

elements in all of their policies, especially in Wisconsin. By providing a definition of bullying,

adequate training for teachers and school staff and supplying resources for families, this would

help policies be implemented more successfully.

Components of Anti-Bullying Laws

When developing anti-bullying law, state and local educational agencies should review

the proposal with their state and local officials to ensure there is consistency within the

applicable laws. For example, there appears to be thirteen common key components in state anti-

bullying laws, policies, and regulation. The first component is the purpose statement which

defines the harmful effects bullying has on youth and how it can impact their daily activities in

their lives. The purpose statement also states that any type of bullying is unacceptable and is to

be taken seriously by faculty, teachers, students, and families. The second component is the

definition. A specific definition of bullying should be included which also defines cyberbullying

as well. This definition should outline prohibited behaviors that will not be tolerated. The

definition should be clear and easy to understand for students, families, school administrators,

school staff, policymakers, and the general public (ASPA, 2019). The third component is scope.

This component explains where the regulation, policy, or law applies. The fourth component is

protected groups, which identifies what bullying entails and that bullying does not have to occur

based on a specific characteristic. The fifth component is a district policy requirement which

"directs every local educational agency (LEA) to develop and implement a policy prohibiting

bullying, through a collaborative process with all interested stakeholders, including school administrators, staff, students, students' families and the community, in order to best address local conditions" (ASPA, 2019).

The sixth component is reporting and investigations. This component identifies a plan for faculty, teachers, students, and families to report incidents of bullying that occur. This process needs to ensure that individuals can report bullying anonymously and be protected from any retaliation. The procedure includes contact information for the school faculty member who is responsible for receiving the report, investigating the incident, and reporting the incident in a timely manner. The investigation must include a specific plan on how to properly investigate the bullying and prevention strategies to protect the youth from additional bullying. The seventh component is consequences. Each anti-bullying law and policy must include the consequences and sanction for bullying that occurs. The eighth component is communication of policy, which means that there needs to be a plan on how students, student's families, and staff will be informed of the current policies and consequences if a youth engages in bullying. The ninth component is safeguards and supports. This component identifies support for youth who have been bullied and/or providing referrals for students who may need counseling or other mental health services if needed.

The tenth component is review and update local policies, which includes for each district to re-examine and update policies regularly to ensure they are meeting the goals of the statute. The eleventh component is preventive education, which recommends school districts create school appropriate and community-based bullying prevention programs. The twelfth component is staff training for all school staff including teachers, support staff, teacher aids, and bus drivers

on how to identify, respond, and prevent bullying. The final component is parent engagement, which requires school districts to involve students' families in the response and prevention efforts that are being made. If a student is bullied, parents should be immediately notified of the incident and the process being taken to assist the student.

Comparing Massachusetts and Wisconsin's Anti-Bullying Laws

When comparing the anti-bullying laws in Massachusetts to Wisconsin there are several notable differences. Massachusetts includes all thirteen key components in their anti-bullying laws and policy requirements, whereas Wisconsin includes only eight of the thirteen recommended components. The most significant part of the anti-bullying law in Massachusetts is that it requires training on prevention and intervention for all teachers and school staff every year. It also requires that all teachers and school staff report bullying incidents to any school administrator as soon as they become aware of it. According to Bazelon (2010), the Massachusetts bill calls for instruction on heading off bullying students in every grade level as part of the curriculum. Therefore, the components in the Massachusetts anti-bullying law complement one another to ensure the students and adults know what to look for.

Wisconsin's anti-bullying law includes a prohibiting statement, scope, district policy requirement, reporting and investigations, communication of policy, prevention education and parent engagement. However, Wisconsin's anti-bullying law lacks a definition that informs students, students' families, teachers, and additional school staff of prohibited behavior. Another component the Wisconsin anti-bullying law is lacking is not requiring districts to provide support and/or mental health services for youth who are involved in bullying incidents. Additionally, the Wisconsin anti-bullying law does not cover any off-campus conduct. An important challenge to

Wisconsin's' law is that "there are no specific groups listed under Wisconsin anti-bullying laws or regulations. However, Wisconsin state regulations do list specific groups in separate non-discrimination policies that define 'pupil harassment' as behavior towards pupils based, in whole or in part, on sex race, religion, national origin, ancestry, creed" (ASPA, 2019). Without this, the anti-bullying law doesn't recognize that there are students who can be more vulnerable to becoming a target of bullying because of different characteristics that can include a developmental or sensory disability, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, homelessness, gender identity, race, and religion. There should be a procedure implemented that informs teachers and other school faculty on how to support vulnerable students.

Application of Laws to Schools

Out of the 289 school districts in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Boston Public Schools is one of the largest school districts. Boston Public Schools created a bullying prevention and intervention plan in response to the anti-bullying law that was created in Massachusetts in 2010. The Boston Public School's code of conduct and student handbook is updated annually to assure alignment, to include language prohibiting bullying and cyberbullying and clearly defining the consequences connected to it" (Boston Public Schools, 2020). To ensure there is public involvement with this plan, BPS meets with community stakeholders, administrators, parents, teachers and students bi-annually to review this plan. The most recent updated plan was issued on September 30, 2020 for the 2020-2021 academic school year. The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education has approved the current bullying prevention and intervention plan which is posted online so families, teachers, and all

school faculty have access to it. Additional copies of this plan are accessible in all schools in an area which is visible to parents and staff (Boston Public School, 2020).

According to a Boston Public School correspondence, "BPS will support this 'Bullying and Intervention Plan' in all aspects of its activities, including its curricula, instructional programs, staff development, parent meetings/ training, and extracurricular activities" (Boston Public Schools, 2020). Students who have concerns or are suffering from bullying have access to the Safe Space and Bullying Prevention Hotline that is led by Succeed Boston located at the Counseling and Intervention Center. Individuals who are the head of schools in Boston play a significant role in implementing the Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan and any continuing updates. Boston Public School (2020) states, the district/head of schools take on the responsibility of setting boundaries, staying up to date with current research regarding how to prevent and respond to bullying, teaching students to be civil to one another while promoting an understanding of and respect for diversity and differences.

In this plan, all thirteen components were included by Boston Public Schools. The district policy requirement is met due to there being a collaboration when creating and revising the plan with members of the community, stakeholders, administrators, parents, teachers and students. The plan has a thorough statement of purpose which addresses how committed staff are to serve students and provide a safe learning environment where each individual is treated with the utmost respect. For example, "under M.G.L. Ch. 71 section 370, at the beginning of each school year, schools will provide the community, including administrators, external providers, staff, students, and parents or guardians, with written notice of its policies for reporting acts of bullying and retaliation (Boston Public Schools, 2020). The plan also includes definitions of

bullying, aggressor, cyberbullying, hostile environment, retaliation, target and school

environment. Moreover, this bullying prevention and intervention plan identifies scope to ensure

that Boston Public Schools are in accordance with the Massachusetts anti-bullying law. The

policy guarantees that students, parents, school faculty, and individuals in the community are

informed of next steps when incidents of bullying are reported.

Importantly, there is a specific section of the plan that addresses students with disabilities

and how students may be more vulnerable and susceptible to bullying. The plan targets how to

report retaliation and bullying and how any individual can report bullying whether it be a staff,

parent, or student. This section also includes how to effectively respond when there is a report of

bullying being made. Additionally, there are steps that must be taken to ensure that parents, other

schools districts, if needed, and law enforcement are notified of bullying. The head of the school

will then start an investigation where a decision will be made if bullying has taken place after

interviews with students, staff, and parents. "Within 5 days of receipt of the allegation, the

Principal/Head of School or designee will: 1) determine what remedial action is required (e.g.

Safety Plan, seating plan), if any, and 2) determine what responsive actions and/or disciplinary

action is necessary, if any, and 3) notify the parents or guardians of the target and the aggressor

about the results of the investigation and, if bullying or retaliation is found, what action is being

taken to prevent further acts of bullying or retaliation, and 4) submit the investigation and

findings using the Safe Schools and Bullying Prevention Investigation Form, and, if bullying was

found document it" (Boston Public Schools, 2020). The plan additionally includes disciplinary

actions that will be taken if deemed appropriate.

One of the strongest parts of Boston Public School's bullying prevention and intervention plan is the number of safeguards and support it has for the students. To show that they are committed to ensuring the students feel safe, they created the Safe Space and Bullying Prevention Hotline that is available to students 24/7. The plan includes steps that school counselors, psychologists, nurses, and special educators take to ensure a student's needs are being met in and out of school. The services that are offered in a school setting include risk assessments, crisis intervention, on-going emotional support and help with referrals for community-based counseling, if appropriate (Boston Public Schools, 2020). All of these collaborate to support the student and the parents/guardians involved to ensure the youth is being supported at school, home, and in the community. The top priority for Boston Public Schools is the emotional needs of every student, whether the student is the victim of bullying, aggressor, or bystanders of cyberbullying and bullying (Boston Public Schools, 2020).

The Boston Public School bullying prevention and intervention plan includes strategies to include parents and increase communication so that they are involved in preventing and responding to bullying. "The bullying prevention and intervention curricula used by the schools and made available to parents and families include information about: (a) how parents and guardians can reinforce the curricula at home and support the school or district plan; (b) the dynamics of bullying; and (c) online safety and cyberbullying" (Boston Public Schools, 2020). Lastly, this plan addresses annual bullying prevention and intervention training for all staff ranging from the teachers, security guards, lunch monitors, secretaries, bus drivers, and all administrators. Boston Public Schools (2020) states that they offer professional development that includes Identifying Bullying Behavior, Types of Bullying, Roles of Aggressors/ Targets/

Bystanders, Rights and Responsibilities under the Law M. G. L. c. 71, § 37O, Information of our

most at-risk populations (including LGBTQ and students with disabilities), Internet Safety,

Reporting Responsibility, Adult Bias and Addressing Student Bias-Based Speech and Behavior.

Boston Public Schools offers anti-bullying programs for students as well. One program is

called "Boston vs. Bullies." According to Boston Public Schools (2020), this anti-bullying

program was started by The Sports Museum and the Boston sports community which features

famous athletes from all professional sports teams in Boston. This program has a website where

athletes share their own stories with the youth in the community and demonstrate ways to stand

up against bullies. On the "Boston vs Bullies" website, there are the necessary tools for youth to

prevent and stand up to bullying in the community. Another anti-bullying program that is offered

to students is called "Saturday for Success" at the Boston Public School Counseling and

Intervention Center. This program occurs Saturday mornings and consists of eight skill building

sessions for students. "This program is for students referred for bullying (as an educational

alternative to suspension), students referred for victimization, and selected peer leaders" (Boston

Public Schools, 2020). The "Saturdays for Success" program supplies youth with counseling,

assists with developing their emotional and social skills, provides intervention sessions and helps

students apply bullying prevention strategies. The overall goal is to engage students in activities

that hopefully provide students with nurturing friendships.

The last program that Boston Public School offers is called "Eyes on Bullying" created

by the Education Development Center, Inc. The Eyes on Bullying Kit was created with the intent

to provide bullying prevention for parents, teachers, and any child care professionals in the

community, schools, day care centers, after school programs, providers who work in homes,

camps, and healthcare settings. The key to successful bullying prevention is education, being prepared and teamwork. The toolkit supplies activities, strategies, insights and resources to address bullying. According to Boston Public Schools (2020), the toolkit will help an individual 1) understand the extent, seriousness, and dynamics of bullying; 2) recognize and respond early and effectively to behaviors that can lead to bullying; 3) learn about new, effective strategies for preventing bullying; 4) prepare children to recognize and respond effectively to early bullying behavior; 5) teach children how everyone—bullies, victims, bystanders, and supportive adults— can help prevent and stop bullying; 6) create an environment where everyone understands that bullying behaviors are unacceptable, harmful, and preventable; and 7) empower yourself and children to actively intervene to prevent and stop bullying.

Proposed Additional Training for School Personnel

"Children from kindergarten to college spend more time in school throughout the year than they do awake in the presence of their parents or caregivers. Parents may not always spot the signs of their child being bullied" (Bleich, 2017).

In order for teachers and school staff to ensure the safety of the students, they need to be adequately trained. All school personnel are obligated to attend an annual training at the start of each new school year. The annual training will consist of three four-hour days and each day there will be specific topics covered in each module.

Day 1

During day one of training the first module will consist of a) defining all forms of bullying, b) learning about the anti-bullying law for Massachusetts, c) the school's policies and rules, and d)

consequences of any form of bullying. The first day of training is most important because it will

provide all school personnel the necessary information required to understand how the state of

Massachusetts and their school addresses bullying, specifically cyberbullying. It is important for

teachers and school staff to be aware of the curriculum that is being followed. This module ends

with covering the consequences and any disciplinary action that may be taken if a student

engages in cyberbullying. The trainees will learn how to handle and report cyberbullying as well.

This process includes steps on how to effectively complete a bullying investigation.

Day 2

The second day of training consists of a) learning what your role is as a teacher/school

staff in preventing cyberbullying, b) recognizing signs of any form of bullying, c) how to prevent

an escalation, and d) safety planning for victims and action plans for the aggressors. All school

personnel play a significant role in creating a safe learning environment for students. Ensuring

that all school staff feel confident in their ability to establish a safe environment opens a line of

communication for students if needed. All school personnel will learn warning signs of any form

of bullying. The third part of the module focuses on how to intervene and prevent any further

escalation. School staff will learn what steps to take to ensure they are responding immediately

and effectively. Examples of steps that seem so basic but are vital are staying calm when

engaging, separating students, making sure everyone is safe, meeting a student's mental health

and/or medical needs if necessary. This module spends time normalizing asking for assistance if

a staff may need it and reviewing common mistakes when trying to intervene and prevent

cyberbullying. The last part of the module introduces safety planning for students who are targets

of bullying and action plans for aggressors. These particular safety plans will be created based on

the needs of the student and include coping skills, preventive steps and supports, whereas the

action plan that is created for the aggressor includes disciplinary actions.

Day 3

The module for the last day of training consist of a) learning about how cyberbullying

impacts all youth, b) suicide and suicide prevention, c) bystanders, and d) role playing scenarios.

The first section of the module addresses how cyberbullying can impact a student in the school,

community, or in their family home. The entire student population is at risk of being

cyberbullied and this specific section reviews how this impacts LGBTQ students and students

with disabilities. Due to the detrimental effects of cyberbullying, if a child is feeling hopeless,

helpless or is thinking about harming themselves it is very important school staff are aware of

self-harm, suicide and suicide prevention. All school personnel will have access to the national

suicide prevention line if students don't feel comfortable confiding in them. The next section of

the final modules reviews the crucial role bystanders have. Students who are witnesses to any

form of bullying may not intervene because they fear it may cause problems for themselves. This

section is about empowering school staff to empower bystanders to speak up whether it be to a

peer or to someone they trust. An example of this can be a student taking pictures of a student

being cyberbullied and showing it to a school staff they trust, or reporting the post or assisting

the target block the aggressor. This section is all about encouraging students to stick together and

support one another. The final section of this module is providing the school personnel with real

life scenarios so each individual can take turns role playing. The overall goal is to provide real

world application of the material that will help school staff become familiar with the slang

students use online, how to interact with students, handle situations and respond appropriately.

Proposed Additional Training for Students

Students should be educated about cyberbullying just as much as school personnel should be. It should be mandatory that students attend a two-hour seminar for two days at the start of the school year. Day one of the seminar will include students learning about a) traditional bullying vs cyberbullying, b) knowing the difference between a conflict and cyberbullying, and c) supports. The seminar will start off by defining traditional bullying and cyberbullying. Students will be able to identify the similarities and differences. It is key that students are able to differentiate between a conflict and cyberbullying because there are very clear differences. Bullying can be defined as when there is intent to hurt or humiliate another individual whereas a conflict is a disagreement where both sides express their point of views. The last part of the seminar is assisting students in identifying supports they have access to in school. This section will also teach students who to report incidents to.

Day two of the seminar will be more discussion-based and students will be split up into small groups so that discussions can be more personal. Students will be prompted to think about and answer how they should appropriately present themselves online, how to treat others when online, how to identify if you are a victim of cyberbullying or if they have bullied someone online. The goal is that students will feel like they are being provided a safe space to share their own experiences and hear about other student's experiences. Students will learn about the different roles in bullying and learn the significance of each role (bully, the bully's partner, reinforcer of the bully, victim, the victim's protector and a bystander). This two-day seminar was created for students so that they are provided with information to help educate them and help them feel like their school is a safe learning environment.

Conclusion

Cyberbullying is a growing concern and continues to have detrimental effects on youth across the globe. The Center for Disease and Control (2017) reported that students who experience bullying are more likely to have social, mental health, and behavior problems in school. All fifty states have an anti-bullying law and some differ greatly when addressing policy requirements for school districts. The states of Massachusetts and Wisconsin are two examples of anti-bullying laws that differ significantly from one another when addressing how to educate, respond to, and prevent all forms of bullying, especially cyberbullying. It is critical that students and all school personnel are provided with adequate resources, training and/or seminars on cyberbullying to ensure a safe learning environment for all. Cyberbullying is a complex issue that has occurred for many years and in order to successfully tackle this issue, individuals need to understand all the harm that is associated with it.

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