

AN ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT TO DETERMINE THE UTILITY OF BULLY PREVENTION IN POSITIVE BEHAVIOR SUPPORT FOR ELEMENTARY SCHOOL BULLYING PREVENTION

A trio of researchers presents a case study from a practical, participatory action research project to demonstrate how one school district implemented a school-wide bullying prevention initiative for all elementary schools based on Bully Prevention in Positive Behavior Support (BP-PBS). The purpose of this manuscript is to discuss the process of creating a district-wide bullying initiative, including the initial years of implementation, to assist other school counselors and districts in their bullying prevention efforts. The researchers briefly describe the initiative, the action research process, and reflect on results from the project.

All students have the right to attend school where their individual differences are respected and where they are free of fear of harassment and bullying. ...[our schools] actively uphold and support efforts to prevent harassment and bullying” (Loudoun County Public Schools [LCPS], 2010, *Framework for Bullying Prevention*, Introduction). Loudoun County Public Schools (LCPS), a school district in northern Virginia with a school enrollment of more than 70,000 students (LCPS, 2013) took a proactive, preventative stance to address bullying. Although bullying was not identified as a serious concern within the school district, the community was committed to a preventative approach to support a safe school environment. School leaders came together as a team to develop a bullying prevention framework for all school levels, beginning by implementing a bullying prevention initiative (BP initiative) at the elementary level, led primarily by school counselors. Recognizing that other school counselors and district administrators may benefit from what was learned, the researchers present an action research project that addressed both the process and outcomes of the

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initiative. The purpose of this article is to share how LCPS leaders collaborated and implemented a BP initiative across all district elementary schools, using an action research process and data to inform implementation. The authors hope that the framework, timeline, and lessons learned will assist school counselors and district administrators in creating and implementing district-wide programs to address bullying and promote safe learning environments for all students.

BULLYING PREVENTION

The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) *National Standards for Students Personal/Social Development Standards* (ASCA, 2004) state the importance of students acquiring “the knowledge, attitudes, and interpersonal skills to help them understand and respect self and others” (p.9) and understanding “safety and survival skills” (p.10). These standards are intertwined with having safe schools (e.g., Safe and Drug Free Schools, bullying prevention programs, positive school climate, school improvement plans), and school counselors promoting safe schools and school-wide violence-prevention programs (ASCA, 2011). However, the intentional and repeated verbal, physical, and relational acts that happen when there is a power difference (i.e., bullying; Olweus, 1993) continue to plague schools. According to the 2011 National Indicator of School Crime and Safety (Robert, Zhang, & Truman, 2012), both students and public schools reported bullying as a school problem. Martinez (2009) found that zero-tolerance policies are not effective, and other authors (Merrell, Gueldner, Ross, & Isava, 2008; Smith, Schneider, Smith, & Ananiadou, 2004; Swearer, Espelage, Vaillancourt, & Hymel, 2010) reported mixed results in the effectiveness of anti-bullying programs. Often, these policies and programs are reactive rather than pro-

active, using punishment rather than building students’ attitudes and skills.

School counselors who are implementing evidence-based programs and data-driven interventions can include bullying prevention strategies as an integral part of the school counseling program. Prevention strategies are

SCHOOL LEADERS CAME TOGETHER AS A TEAM TO DEVELOP A BULLYING PREVENTION FRAMEWORK FOR ALL SCHOOL LEVELS.

most effective when they are comprehensive, systemically implemented throughout the school, proactive, anticipate student needs, and include a partnership among the school personnel, parents/guardians, students, and community members (Casebeer, 2012; Coker, 2001; Pugh & Chitiyo, 2011; Ross & Horner, 2009). Models for school-wide programs that foster a positive school climate through positive behaviors show promising results (Ross & Horner, 2009; Waasdorp, Bradshaw, & Leaf, 2012). One such program is Bully Prevention in Positive Behavior Support (BP-PBS), a component of School-Wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS; Ross, Horner, & Stiller, 2008).

SCHOOL-WIDE POSITIVE BEHAVIORAL INTERVENTIONS AND SUPPORTS

PBIS is a data-driven, behavioral, systemic, and preventative-based framework for teaching appropriate behaviors, expectations, and discipline processes to students and school personnel school wide (PBIS, 2013; Sugai et al., 2000). In the 1980s and 1990s, researchers at the University of Oregon, in collaboration with other universities, developed PBIS and created the national Center on Positive

Behavioral Interventions and Supports through a grant from the Individuals with Disabilities Act of 1997 (Sugai & Simonsen, 2012). PBIS schools identify a team of school personnel that decides on school expectations (e.g., be safe, try your best, be respectful), which are implemented in every

part of the school (e.g., bathrooms, school buses, classrooms). PBIS teams continually collect, analyze, and reanalyze data through discipline referrals, tardy records, and individual student behavior plans, and these data drive the team’s decisions and the overall intervention (PBIS, 2013). In PBIS schools, interventions are implemented on a spectrum to meet students’ needs including specific interventions for students with the highest needs and preventative strategies for all students (PBIS, 2013; Sugai et al., 2000).

Researchers found that schools with fully implemented PBIS frameworks had fewer student suspensions and office discipline referrals (Bradshaw, Mitchell, & Leaf, 2010); greater academic performance (Luiselli, Putnam, Handler, & Feinberg, 2005); lower rates of teacher-reported bullying (Waasdorp et al., 2012); and work settings with greater collaboration, positivity, and friendliness (Bradshaw, Koth, Bevans, Ialongo, & Leaf, 2008). PBIS has been increasing in popularity, having been implemented in 50 states (Horner, 2013) and more than 18,000 schools (PBIS, 2014). PBIS are aligned with the ASCA National Model (Kay, 2005), and researchers recommend that school counselors are active leaders in implementing PBIS (Curtis, Van Horne, Robertson, & Karvonen, 2010; Goodman-Scott, 2014). This article builds on the Goodman-Scott (2014) description of PBIS in which an elementary school counselor implemented PBIS as a data-driven school counseling program.

BULLY PREVENTION IN POSITIVE BEHAVIOR SUPPORT

BP-PBS is a component of PBIS that can be integrated into the delivery system within the elementary school counseling program. This approach places school counselors in leadership roles within their respective schools, delivering lessons, collecting data, and educating and consulting with school personnel. BP-PBS is a behavioral approach to bullying prevention designed to complement the existing PBIS framework in schools (Ross & Horner, 2009; Ross, Horner, & Stiller, 2008); BP-PBS is viewed as an efficient intervention for PBIS schools because the approach builds on the pre-existing PBIS framework (Ross et al., 2008). Through the BP-PBS approach, students learn to respectfully respond to peers both when experiencing or witnessing bullying behaviors and when engaging in bullying behaviors (Ross & Horner, 2009). Specifically, students are taught a three-step response to react to disrespectful bullying behavior: *Stop/Walk/Talk* (Ross & Horner, 2009; Ross et al., 2008). When a student is treated disrespectfully by peers, students are taught to ask the offending student to *Stop*; if the disrespectful behavior continues, this student is taught to *Walk* away

THIS APPROACH PLACES SCHOOL COUNSELORS IN LEADERSHIP ROLES WITHIN THEIR RESPECTIVE SCHOOLS, DELIVERING LESSONS, COLLECTING DATA, AND EDUCATING AND CONSULTING WITH SCHOOL PERSONNEL.

from the offending student; if the disrespectful behavior continues further, the offended student is taught to then *Talk* to an adult. Similarly if a student demonstrating disrespectful behavior is asked to *Stop*, or if a student *Walks* away, the offending student is asked to

comply with the peer's request. School personnel support is crucial for the success of BP-PBS (Ross & Horner, 2009; Ross et al., 2008). School personnel are trained to utilize a specific response sequence when approached by students regarding disrespectful student bullying behaviors: ask students if they used the *Stop/Walk/Talk* strategies and, if not, encourage students to do so (Ross & Horner, 2009; Ross et al., 2008). Ross, Horner, and Stiller (2008) created a BP-PBS curriculum for students and staff that includes describing BP-PBS concepts and application; defining school rules; outlining the difference between tattling, telling, and dangerous situations; and addressing gossip, cyber-bullying, staff supervision, and responses in unstructured environments. In a small study of PBIS schools, Ross and Horner (2009) found that BP-PBS implementation led to decreased bullying incidences.

AN ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT

Action research provides a practical, participatory approach to inquiry in order to involve many individuals, understand local issues, and promote change (Creswell, 2002). The purpose of practical action research is to improve practice; the purpose of participatory action research is social change (Creswell, 2002). Therefore, given

the focus of inquiry for this project, the authors used a practical, participatory action research approach to address both improvement of practice and social change within the school district. The process for this project is reported through the action research

phases of *planning, acting, observing,* and *reflecting*. Researchers developed a strategy to address the problem and collected data during the planning phase; implemented the intervention during the acting phase; collected and analyzed data during the observing phase; and reflected and evaluated the plan, intervention, and data in the reflecting phase (Creswell, 2002).

The School District

As of April 2012, LCPS consisted of 52 elementary schools, 31,935 students in grades K-5, and 70 elementary school counselors with a student-to-school-counselor ratio of 456:1. The student demographics (57% White, 16% Asian, 15% Hispanic of any race, 7% Black, 5% multiple races, <1% Pacific Islander) had not significantly changed over the past 5 years. Although they had no significant concerns over student safety, leaders in the school district were committed to a preventative approach to maintain a safe environment for student learning.

Planning: Development of the Bullying Prevention Initiative

LCPS formed a bullying prevention committee (BP committee) composed of school counselors, students, parents, and school- and district-level administrators including the supervisor of School Counseling Services and the school counseling specialist. The BP committee developed the *Framework for Bullying Prevention* ("the Framework"; LCPS, 2010), a document that defined bullying, outlined bullying prevention expectations, and listed bullying prevention resources for all LCPS schools. At the same time, the Framework allowed each school the flexibility to individualize implementation. Although the Framework was completed in spring 2010, the BP committee determined that the document would remain open to revisions deemed necessary based on future assessment, and this is reflective of an action research approach (Creswell, 2002).

The Framework was written for all school levels; however, the BP commit-

FIGURE 1 FIGURE 1. LOUDOUN COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS BULLYING PREVENTION DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE: THE FIRST TWO YEARS

Timeframe	Activity
2009-2010 School Year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The BP committee formed and met monthly to analyze the district’s bullying prevention needs and create the Framework. ● Elementary school counselors conducted a cluster sampling of fourth grade students’ perceptions of bullying pervasiveness and prevention strategies. ● A BP subcommittee conducted K-12 parent focus groups in the spring to gather perceptions of the pervasiveness and types of bullying, and ideas for bullying prevention. ● The BP-PBS curriculum committee met monthly during the spring to develop the elementary BP-PBS curriculum, data collection process, and school personnel trainings.
Summer and Fall 2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● District level administrators created internal and external websites with bullying prevention resources. ● BP committee members presented the Framework and BP initiative to school administrators and facilitated discussions on school specific implementation. ● The BP-PBS curriculum committee trained elementary school counselors on the Framework and BP initiative. ● Elementary school counselors and building administrators provided information on the Framework and BP initiative to school personnel and parents through presentations and marketing (school websites, brochures, etc.). ● Elementary school counselors administered student pretests, BP lessons, and then posttests.
2010-2011 School Year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● BP committee members presented and provided information on the Framework and BP initiative to the school board, new special education teachers, parents of children in special education, district bus drivers, substitute teachers, county personnel providing after-school student care, and county librarians. ● The school counseling specialist surveyed elementary school counselors in June on their perceptions of the BP initiative. ● At the end of the school year, the research team, including the school counseling specialist, reviewed student and school counseling data, making modifications for implementation during the 2011-2012 school year.

tee decided to begin at the elementary level and expand to other grades in future years. Since PBIS was being used in approximately half of the LCPS elementary schools, the BP committee decided that the BP-PBS curriculum would be an efficient strategy to implement with proven effectiveness.

Partnerships among school personnel, parents/guardians, students, and community members are important for effective prevention programs (Coker, 2001; Pugh & Chitiyo, 2011; Ross & Horner, 2009). Likewise, key themes of the Framework and the BP initiative were that bullying prevention is a school- and community-wide effort. For example, the BP committee used student, parent, and school personnel feedback when developing the Framework and the BP initiative. The LCPS BP development and implementation timeline for the first 2 years is outlined in Figure 1.

STUDENTS ARE TAUGHT A THREE-STEP RESPONSE TO REACT TO DISRESPECTFUL BULLYING BEHAVIOR: STOP/WALK/TALK.

Acting: Implementation of the Bullying Prevention Initiative

The BP curriculum committee, led by the district school counseling specialist and three school counselors, developed a K-5 bullying prevention curriculum, corresponding pre- and posttests, and school personnel trainings. Student curriculum was based on BP-PBS concepts and the following stakeholder-driven goals: (a) students will be able to identify and label inappropriate behavior, (b) students will learn strategies to employ when faced with bullying, and (c) students will identify a trusted adult at school. The committee determined that elementary school counselors would teach the student lessons in the fall.

Consistent school personnel involvement is a key component of BP-PBS (Ross & Horner, 2009; Ross et al., 2008). Similarly, LCPS prioritized educating a wide variety of stakeholders on the Framework and BP initiative (Figure 1). For example, elementary school counselors presented the BP initiative to their respective school personnel, highlighting the adult BP-PBS response sequences to provide students with consistent responses.

Observing: Assessment

The school counseling specialist oversaw the collection of both student and school counselor perception data. Student data collection was started during the fall of the 2010-2011 school year

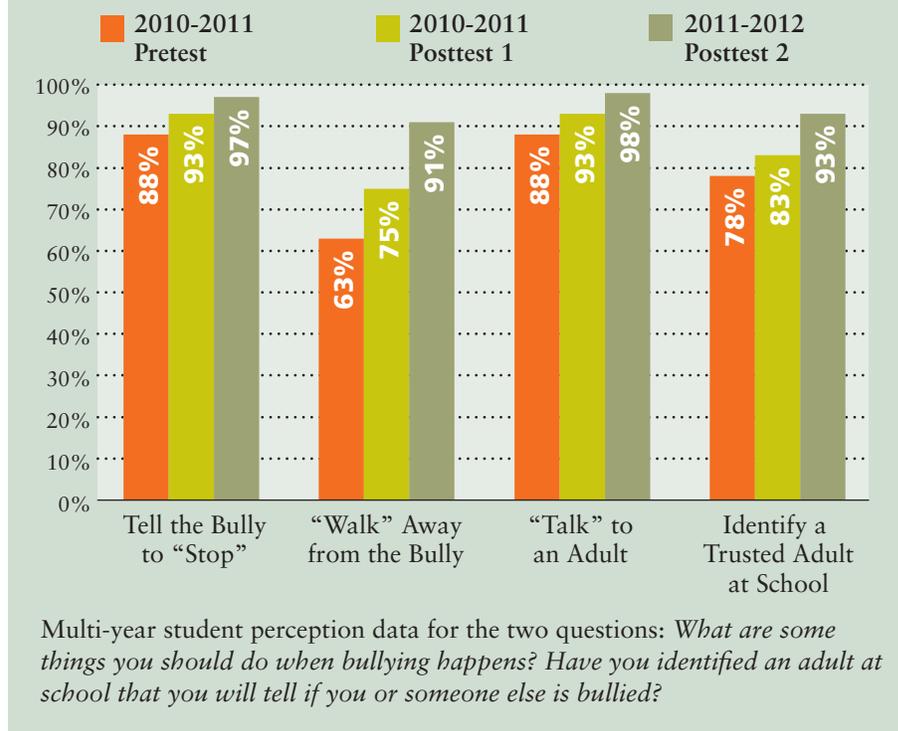
and continued into the 2011-2012 school year. The purpose of multi-year data was to observe ongoing student trends. School counselors completed a survey in June 2011 to report their perceptions of the effectiveness of the BP initiative and provide suggestions for future implementation.

Student data 2010-2011. In the fall of 2010, school counselors at each elementary school were asked to choose one class in third, fourth, and fifth grades to complete an online pretest to determine students' knowledge of bullying prevention strategies and perceptions about bullying incidents occurring at their school. Pretest data ($N=2,083$) were collected prior to the implementation of the bullying prevention classroom lessons. Posttest data ($N=1,436$) were collected within 4 months of the implemented classroom lessons as a formative evaluation. Due to a computer program malfunction, not all posttest data were available for analysis; as a result, the number of posttest responses was fewer. Student pre- and posttest items were identical; students were asked for their perceptions of (a) school bullying location and type, (b) appropriate actions to take when bullying occurs, (c) school personnel responses after a student reported bullying, (d) school bullying lessons, (e) identifying and talking to a trusted adult at school, and (f) school bullying rules. Descriptive statistical data analysis uncovered trends from the 2010-2011 students' pre- and posttests based on location, grade level, gender, and Title I (TI) school status (see Tables 1, 2, and 3).

PARTNERSHIPS AMONG SCHOOL PERSONNEL, PARENTS/GUARDIANS, STUDENTS, AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS ARE IMPORTANT FOR EFFECTIVE PREVENTION PROGRAMS.

Multi-year student data. During the spring of 2012, school counselors administered a survey to one class of fourth grade students in each elementary school ($N = 1,044$). The 2011-2012 survey was similar to the

FIGURE 2 MULTI-YEAR PERCEPTION DATA



two surveys given the previous school year (i.e., baseline) to examine student responses during multiple school years (pretest = fall 2010; posttest 1 = spring 2011; posttest 2 = spring 2012). The results from the multi-year assessment are reported in Figure 2.

School counselor data. In the spring of 2011, elementary school counselors were asked to complete a survey communicating their opinions of the BP initiative and giving suggestions for implementation in the subsequent year; the survey had a 69% ($N=48$) response rate. As a result of the BP initiative, the majority of school counselors reported that (a) students were better prepared to respond to bullying (86%), (b) parents were aware of the

lessons and the Stop/Walk/Talk strategies (81%), (c) the lessons were effective in promoting bullying prevention (70%), (d) students used the strategies throughout the year (60%), and (e) faculty supported the BP initiative

and reinforced the concepts (60%). Anecdotally, the school counselors appreciated the common language and consistent message for students and the school community. School counselors also suggested increased flexibility to modify the content and timing of the lessons based on school needs.

Reflecting: Connect Past, Present, and Future

The next step in the action research process was to reflect on and evaluate the BP initiative. The school counseling specialist oversaw student and school counselor perception data collection. The trio of researchers met to evaluate and reflect on the student and school counselor data that had been collected and analyzed, and to recommend future LCPS actions.

Student reflection. When examining the BP-PBS intervention and data, the researchers found that LCPS students reported differences in bullying trends based on bullying location, grade level, gender, and TI status. Consequently, researchers recommended that LCPS regularly communicate results to stakeholders throughout the school year, adapt the BP-PBS implementation according to results, and collect outcome data to show how students were

TABLE 1

STUDENTS' RESPONSE FREQUENCY PERCENTAGES BY: ALL STUDENTS AND GRADE LEVEL

Location	All Students		Grade 3		Grade 4		Grade 5	
	Pretest	Posttest	Pretest	Posttest	Pretest	Posttest	Pretest	Posttest
Playground	29%	26%						
School Bus	18%	17%						
Cafeteria	13%	15%						
Classroom	11%	11%						
Hallway	8%	9%						
Walking to/from School	8%	9%						
Bathroom	7%	9%						
Total Frequency Responses	3,936	3,456						
Bullying Type								
Name Calling			24%	23%	23%	23%	22%	24%
Laughing at/Making Fun of/Teasing			21%	23%	24%	26%	26%	28%
Leaving Someone Out			22%	22%	21%	23%	21%	24%
Hitting/Kicking/Pushing			18%	17%	16%	15%	16%	11%
Ruining or Stealing Personal Property			10%	9%	12%	11%	11%	11%
Total Frequency Responses			858	571	2,598	2,375	1,108	723

Note. Pre-test responses were collected in the 2010 fall before the bullying prevention curriculum implementation ($N=2,083$); post-test responses were collected within four months of the bullying prevention curriculum implementation ($N=1,436$). Students' Response Frequency Percentages are the percentages of the frequency of student responses for each location and bullying type by all students and grade level, compared to the number of *Total Frequency Responses* for all students and grade level, respectively.

directly impacted as a result of the BP initiative and BP-PBS.

Location. All students reported that the *playground*, *school bus*, and *cafeteria* were the most common bullying locations; these locations are often low structured with less direct adult supervision compared to other locations such as the classroom. As a result, researchers suggested LCPS increase school personnel's awareness of this trend. For example, bus drivers should routinely be given information on recognizing and addressing bullying and school-specific expectations and reporting protocol. Next, school counselors should give school-specific presentations to school personnel reporting the data that identify where bullying occurs based on student perceptions.

Grade level. Students reported differences in bullying behavior by grade level. For example, *hitting/kicking/*

LCPS STUDENTS REPORTED DIFFERENCES IN BULLYING TRENDS BASED ON BULLYING LOCATION, GRADE LEVEL, GENDER, AND TI STATUS.

pushing bullying behaviors tended to decrease with students' grade level while *laughing at/making fun of/teasing* bullying increased with students' grade level. LCPS student perceptions indicated a pattern of higher incidences of relational bullying and fewer physical bullying incidences with increases in grade level. As a result, researchers recommended school counselors should use this knowledge when planning classroom guidance lessons by differentiating the lesson topic by grade level. The lessons in upper elementary grades should include topics on exclusion and cyberbullying,

while lessons in lower grades should continue to include defining inappropriate behavior and reporting to a trusted adult. Also, school counselors should inform their school personnel of the school-specific, student-reported bullying behaviors by grade level.

Gender. According to students, bullying trends varied by gender according to both location and bullying type. Girls reported higher classroom and leaving someone out bullying behaviors while boys reported higher bathroom and hitting/kicking/pushing bullying behaviors. Thus, boys perceived more frequent physical

TABLE 2

STUDENTS' RESPONSE FREQUENCY PERCENTAGES BY: GENDER AND TITLE I SCHOOL STATUS

Location	Girls		Boys		Title I Schools		Non-Title I Schools	
	Pretest	Posttest	Pretest	Posttest	Pretest	Posttest	Pretest	Posttest
Playground	30%	27%	28%	26%	32%	28%	29%	26%
School Bus	17%	17%	18%	17%	7%	8%	19%	18%
Cafeteria	13%	16%	13%	15%	10%	14%	14%	16%
Classroom	13%	12%	9%	10%	11%	10%	11%	11%
Hallway	7%	9%	8%	9%	10%	9%	7%	9%
Walking to/from School	7%	8%	8%	10%	16%	16%	7%	8%
Bathroom	6%	7%	9%	10%	7%	10%	7%	9%
Total Frequency Responses	1,972	1,706	1,964	1,750	326	372	3,610	3,084
Bullying Type								
Name Calling	23%	22%	23%	24%	24%	26%	23%	23%
Laughing at/Making Fun of/Teasing	24%	26%	24%	26%	23%	24%	24%	26%
Leaving Someone Out	23%	25%	20%	22%	19%	19%	22%	24%
Hitting/Kicking/Pushing	15%	13%	18%	15%	20%	18%	16%	14%
Ruining or Stealing Personal Property	11%	11%	11%	11%	11%	10%	11%	11%
Total Frequency Responses	2,275	1,797	2,289	1,872	421	377	4,143	3,292

Note. Pre-test responses were collected in the 2010 fall before the bullying prevention curriculum implementation ($N=2,083$); post-test responses were collected within four months of the bullying prevention curriculum implementation ($N=1,436$). *Students' Response Frequency Percentages* are the percentages of the frequency of student responses for each location and bullying type by *gender* and *Title I school status*, compared to the number of *Total Frequency Responses* for *gender* and *Title school I status*, respectively.

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL COUNSELORS REPORTED THAT THE BP INITIATIVE POSITIVELY IMPACTED THEIR SCHOOL, STUDENTS, SCHOOL PERSONNEL, AND PARENTS.

bullying in a less supervised location, while girls perceived more frequent relational bullying in a more supervised location.

As a result of student reports, researchers suggested school counselors should educate school personnel on bullying behavior trends according to gender and plan unique interventions accordingly. For example, school counselors could offer small group interventions to address the girl-based covert, relational bullying and consult with classroom teachers regarding different classroom-based bathroom practices for the boys.

Title I school status. Students in TI schools reported differences in bullying location, behavior, and adult communication compared to students in non-TI schools. Specifically, students in TI schools reported higher bullying on the *school bus*, in the *cafeteria*, and *walking to and from school*. In fact, students in TI schools reported approximately twice as much bullying *walking to and from school* compared to students in non-TI schools, while students in non-TI schools reported nearly twice as much bullying on the *school bus* than students in TI schools. With regard to bullying behavior,

students attending TI schools reported higher *hitting/kicking/pushing* and name calling behaviors, while students in non-TI schools reported greater *laughing at/making fun of/teasing* and *leaving someone out* behaviors. Finally, students in TI schools reported greater levels of identifying a trusted adult compared with students in non-TI schools who reported greater frequencies of telling a trusted adult about bullying. Overall, although students in TI schools reported identifying a trusted adult, the students in non-TI schools reported actually communicating with that adult.

Consequently, researchers recommended school counselors inform their school personnel and community members of bullying trends based on the TI and non-TI school status. In particular, school counselors at TI schools could facilitate increased

TABLE 3 PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS' REPORTED ADULT COMMUNICATION

	Title I Schools		Non-Title I Schools	
	Pretest	Posttest	Pretest	Posttest
Identified an Adult	84%	88%	77%	83%
Told an Adult	62%	64%	69%	76%

Note. Pretest responses were collected in fall 2010 before the bullying prevention curriculum implementation ($N=2,083$); posttest responses were collected within 4 months of the bullying prevention curriculum implementation ($N=1,436$). Identified an Adult represents the following student response: *identified an adult at school that you will tell if you or someone else is bullied*; Told an Adult represents the student response: *told an adult when bullying has happened*.

student supervision walking to and from school and strategies to increase students reporting bullying to a trusted adult at school.

Multiyear student findings. According to multiyear data, students reported (a) an increase in identifying a trusted adult at school, (b) school personnel were increasingly following the recommended BP-PBS *Stop/Walk/Talk* sequence in their student interactions, and (c) greater student knowledge on BP-PBS and *Stop/Walk/Talk* over time. Hence, there was an increase in positive student and school personnel responses over time. The researchers suggested that, in the future, the school counseling specialist and school counselors (a) communicate multi-year findings to all stakeholders, (b) continue to train new and educate current school personnel on school-specific and district trends, (c) gather outcome data to supplement students' perception data to assess students' actual implementation of BP-PBS, and (d) track student perception and outcome data over time as students progress through middle and high school.

School counselor reflection. Elementary school counselors reported that the BP initiative positively impacted their school, students, school personnel, and parents. These school counselors' responses mirrored student reports, and this strengthens the reliability of both sets of responses. Although this initial feedback was helpful, the trio of researchers suggested that direct feedback from

other stakeholders should also be collected, including feedback from school personnel, parents, and administrators.

School counselors also reported the benefits of having a common bullying-prevention school language. These findings were consistent with BP-PBS and PBIS goals, as school-wide expectations are a primary objective of PBIS (PBIS, 2013; Sugai et al., 2000). Hence, researchers suggested LCPS should continue using consistent, school-wide expectations in their elementary schools and explore implementation at the secondary level.

THE CALL FOR ACCOUNTABILITY AND EVALUATION CAN BE ADDRESSED WHEN SCHOOL COUNSELORS CONNECT THEIR WORK WITH STUDENTS' ACADEMIC SUCCESS.

Last, school counselors asked for greater autonomy in both creating and implementing classroom guidance lessons. As a result, the school counseling specialist provided school counselors with the flexibility to adapt the BP-PBS lessons to their unique school. These adaptations included (a) changing the lesson content while maintaining the overarching goals and concepts (e.g., *Stop/Walk/Talk*), (b) deciding when to implement the lessons, and (c) continually reinforcing the BP-PBS concepts throughout the year. Researchers recommended that the school counseling specialist continue to solicit

school counselors' feedback and make changes as appropriate.

DISCUSSION AND SCHOOL COUNSELOR IMPLICATIONS

The BP initiative was successful based on the initial goals set, as the LCPS BP committee created elementary school-wide and district-wide bullying prevention strategies; utilized stakeholder involvement including input, education, and assistance with implementation; and created bullying prevention resources. Elementary school counselors' leadership was key to the BP initiative by implementing lessons, using resources, and giving presentations. Elementary students reported recognizing bullying behaviors, knowing *Stop/Walk/Talk* strategies, and identifying a trusted adult at school. However, in accordance with action research, changes to the LCPS BP initiative are far from over. Action research is an organic circular process; when one question is answered, it

leads to another question (Creswell, 2002). After completing a cycle of action research, the BP committee created plans to implement further changes and to continue the action research cycle.

In the spring of 2013, the LCPS director of Student Services initiated a bullying prevention professional learning community (BP-PLC) to enable stakeholders to continue working collaboratively to strengthen bullying prevention efforts. The BP-PLC consisted of original members of the BP committee and new members representing additional stakeholders. The goal of

the BP-PLC was to reflect on and assess the BP initiative implementation based on gathered data, plans for future changes and implementation, and systematically expanding BP-PBS to the secondary level. The BP-PLC will oversee the action research process of the BP initiative.

This project resulted in several school counseling implications. First, school counselors and stakeholders should consider implementing prevention programs systemically throughout their districts and schools, such as PBIS and BP-PBS. Systemically implemented programs provide consistency to students and staff, and are an effective and efficient use of resources at both the district and school level. School counselors and stakeholders can learn from the linear timeline in Figure 1 and description given in the text of this article when planning a school counselor-facilitated, district-wide approach.

SCHOOL COUNSELORS, ADMINISTRATORS, AND THE COMMUNITY CAN COME TOGETHER IN A PROACTIVE INITIATIVE TO ENSURE A SAFE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT FOR STUDENTS.

Next, when implementing district-wide projects, school counselors need to identify, collaborate with, and seek feedback from stakeholders district wide, including district and school-based administrators, teachers, parents, community members, and students. The involvement of stakeholders is crucial in prevention programs (Coker, 2001; Pugh & Chitiyo, 2011; Ross & Horner, 2009).

Last, school counselors should use action research. Action research is rooted in practice and is, therefore, especially useful for practitioners such as school counselors (Rowell, 2005). Research is particularly important for the school counseling field. The call for accountability and evaluation can be addressed when school counselors connect their work with students' academic success (Dimmitt, 2009). Furthermore, research supporting school

counseling effectiveness may increase the credibility of the profession. The description and application of practitioner-guided action research, such as the project reported in this article, gives school counselors information about and suggestions for implementing action research in their schools.

The researchers on this project faced a number of challenges that are best viewed as lessons learned. Computer program malfunctions resulted in some posttest data being inaccessible, which impacted the ability to review and analyze all posttest data. First lesson learned: some things out of the researchers' control will happen. Next, the authors collected data on student and school counselor perceptions rather than outcome data. Second lesson learned: plan ahead for data collection and remember the power of outcome data. School counselors were responsible for implementing student lessons and parent education,

working with their respective school personnel, and collecting student data. As a result, the fidelity of implementation likely varied by school counselor. Third lesson learned: recognize that there will be variation in delivering the program. Some school counselors reported seeing an increase in reported bullying behaviors immediately after teaching lessons as students became increasingly aware of bullying and more likely to report such behaviors. Fourth lesson learned: increased knowledge may initially skew the results so keep your eye on the big picture over time.

SUMMARY

Action research is a practical approach to address a variety of school issues including bullying prevention. Action research provides a framework

to make sense of how to organize and implement district-wide interventions. Further, the framework challenges participants to collect data and look for trends to better inform their decision making. This project is an example of how school counselors, administrators, and the community can come together in a proactive initiative to ensure a safe school environment for students. Just as LCPS utilized action research to create and implement a district-wide bullying prevention program, other school counselors, schools, and school districts can make a difference in creating a safe school environment for all students. ■

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