

# PREVENTING AND RESPONDING TO BULLYING: AN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL'S 4-YEAR JOURNEY

*Bullying continues to be a pervasive problem in schools and requires a schoolwide approach. This article describes the action research process used to examine the impact of a 4-year, K-5 school bullying prevention and intervention. The school counselors collaborated with students, staff, and parents to implement the program, and collected and analyzed data to improve the program. Results indicated that the program reduced bullying and increased students' perception that adults listen to bullying reports. The author offers suggestions for improving bullying interventions.*

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ullying is unfair and one-sided behavior that happens when someone keeps hurting, frightening, threatening, or leaving someone out on purpose (Committee for Children, 2001). Tolerating bullying makes the whole school environment unsafe and negative because it affects children who are bullied, children who bully, and the bystanders (Smolinski & Kopasz, 2005). Bullying continues to be a pervasive problem in schools today, so state governments have mandated that schools be responsive to this threat to children's safety (Sacco, Silbaugh, Corredor, Casey, & Doherty, 2012). Bullying begins once students enter kindergarten, but many programs wait until the upper elementary grades to address the issue, despite evidence that peer group rejection in kindergarten may continue throughout the primary school years (Buhs, Ladd, & Harald, 2006). Although research on bullying in early childhood is limited, studies conducted in a variety of countries have shown that bullying occurs at the same rate in kindergarten as in elementary school (Alsaker & Nägele, 2008).

A suburban elementary school in the southeast United States implemented a schoolwide intervention because bullying incidents were negatively impacting school climate and being handled inconsistently by staff. The intervention was based on Steps to Respect (STR), which provides universal interventions at the school and classroom levels with a selective intervention aimed at students involved in bully-

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ing events (Frey et al., 2005). District administrators selected STR because it was one of the evidence-based programs on a list approved by the state. In 2007, the district provided train-the-trainers staff development (which the author attended) for all elementary school counselors, led by a Committee for Children trainer.

## TOLERATING BULLYING MAKES THE WHOLE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT UNSAFE.

The purpose of this research was to examine the effectiveness of a bully prevention intervention program designed to reduce incidences of bullying and to use the data to improve the program. This article offers suggestions to school counselors regarding a leadership role in establishing collaborative bullying interventions, advocating for the resources to implement and maintain effective interventions, and collecting data to make informed decisions about how efforts can be improved.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Bullying often goes unreported because students believe adults will not listen to the concern, think the school cannot help, or fear retaliation. Petrosino, Guckenburg, DeVoe, and Hanson (2010) found that 36% of bullying victims (ages 11-17) reported their victimization to a teacher or other adult at school and 64% of victims did not. In the study, student-reported bullying declined by grade level, with the highest rate (52.9%) for students in grade six. In two school systems in central Virginia, 35% of students in grades 3-5 reported, "I have been bullied, but I have not told anyone" (University of Virginia Violence Project, 2012). Physical bullying was generally reported but bullying that involved making fun of the victim, excluding the victim, spreading rumors about the victim, and forcing the victim to do things he or she did not want to do

were often not reported (Petrosino et al., 2010). The behaviors that did not get reported were commonly labeled relational aggression, often associated with female bullying.

Since the Columbine High School shootings in 1999, a growing body of literature has addressed the importance of a schoolwide approach to

have support from administrators, staff, students, and parents.

To help elementary schools build a safe school climate, the Committee for Children (2001) developed Steps to Respect (STR), a school-based prevention program that is aligned with the social-ecological model of bullying and asserts that youth behavior is shaped by multiple factors. STR recommends establishing a schoolwide policy that is acceptable to administrators, teachers, counselors, and parents to eliminate the culture of denial associated with bullying (Austin, Reynolds, & Barnes, 2012). STR has three levels of curriculum for the upper elementary grades that promote the development of friendship, recognizing and responding to bullying, and personal responsibility of the bystander (Committee for Children, 2001).

Several studies have shown evidence for the efficacy of the STR school bullying prevention program (Brown, Low, Smith, & Haggerty, 2011). One year after implementation, Hirschstein, Edstrom, Frey, Snel, & MacKenzie (2007) found positive changes in playground behavior and less aggression, victimization, and bystander encouragement of bullying. Implementing STR resulted in less acceptance of bullying, greater bystander responsibility, and increased perceived adult responsiveness (Frey et al., 2005). Frey, Hirschstein, Edstrom, and Snell (2009) found that whole-classroom lessons reduced behaviors that reinforced bullying, increased children's empathy toward victims, and positively influenced self-efficacy to defend. Low, Frey, and Brockman (2010) reported that students who endorsed retaliatory aggression in the fall and then participated in a three-month STR program reduced their victimization. The study showed a 72% decrease in malicious gossip on the playground (Low et al., 2010). Brown, Low, Smith, and Haggerty (2011) conducted a rigorous experimental design that randomized 33 California elementary schools to waitlisted or intervention condition using STR for two years. The intervention schools

had a 31% decrease in bullying and victimization in the schools and saw decreases in destructive bystander behavior, which can encourage bullying.

As mandated by law, 40 states require that students receive some type of bullying education (Sacco et al., 2012). Because the curriculum is already overcrowded, children's literature can be an effective and non-threatening way to integrate bullying education into existing programs. Teachers can read books about bullying as part of the language arts curriculum. Students can be engaged through small and large group discussions, writing, role-play, artwork, and other activities to move from literal interpretations of books to analyses that have personal meaning and real-life applications (Anti-Defamation League [ADL], 2005). Literature-based lessons serve as a bridge that connects students to new ways of seeing themselves and others, to new coping mechanisms and social possibilities, and to a shared sense of humanity (ADL, 2005).

The research showed bullying can be significantly reduced through comprehensive, schoolwide programs developed to educate staff and students. Research indicated that administrative buy-in and a focus on the role of bystanders were keys to success. Schools where staff reinforced positive interactions among children and coached those involved in bullying saw less aggression (Hirschstein et al., 2007).

Based on this background research, the aim of the present study was to investigate a school-based implementation, led by the counselor, designed to reduce all types of bullying. The author focused on providing a consistent response to bullying incidents and sought to raise awareness of bullying for all staff and students in K-5 through a literature-based approach.

### Implementing a Bullying Intervention

The school counselor conducted a schoolwide needs assessment in August 2007. The students, staff, and parents all indicated that bully-

## BYSTANDER RESPONSES INFLUENCE THE FREQUENCY OF BULLYING; THEREFORE, BYSTANDERS NEED ANTIBULLYING INTERVENTIONS.

ing was a problem at all grade levels. Relational aggression was identified as an issue, as was bullying of students who were different in an obvious way such as special education students. This finding was consistent with Blake, Lund, Zhou, Oi-man, and Benz's (2012) research indicating that bully victimization among students with disabilities exceeded national rates of bullying for elementary students. Students, parents, and staff had concerns that the repeated verbal bullying and relational aggression at the school was not being successfully addressed. Funding was obtained from the district's Safe and Drug-Free Schools grant for materials and a K-5 bullying prevention program was begun in the 2008-2009 school year. The school developed a schoolwide bullying policy that was in line with district and state mandates and specific to an elementary school. The district requires that all school personnel receive in-service training on the antibullying policy to ensure that a consistent approach is adopted on a division-wide basis. The program included several components: (a) annual all-staff training (new staff also receive the training module to take reports and coach those who bully or are bullied); (b) the STR literature-based pro-social and bullying prevention lessons for grades 3-5; (c) specific children's books on bullying with follow-up lessons for grades kindergarten-2; (d) parent outreach regarding bullying; (e) a "bully box" for anonymous self-reports and confidential peer reports of bullying; and (f) evaluation of all bullying reports and, if determined to be bullying, forms to coach the bully and target. The author, who is a full-time school counselor at the school, led the antibullying program with guidance from a committee comprising administrators, other pupil services staff, parents, teachers,

and students. The school counselors and school psychologist conducted the training. The bully prevention program was evaluated over the course of 4 years.

## METHOD

The program evaluation study of an elementary school bullying prevention and intervention program involved collecting data to answer six research questions concerning the effectiveness of the intervention. The six research questions were: (a) How frequently is bullying occurring and where? (b) Do the students know how to respond to bullying behavior? (c) Do students who report bullying feel the concerns were listened to and taken seriously by the adults? (d) At what rate is coaching occurring for bullying situations and who is being coached? (e) Are the lessons and books read as part of the program useful? (f) What do all teachers (including specialists) think of the bullying prevention program?

### Participants

The site of the evaluation study was a Mid-Atlantic, suburban, K-5 elementary school. During the course of the 4-year evaluation, the enrollment of the school grew from 498 to 608 students who participated in one or more aspects of the bully prevention program and the evaluation study. Eighty-five percent of the students were Caucasian, 6% Hispanic, 5% multiple races, 3% Asian, and 1% other. Student stability was very high with the student population changing by five or fewer students during any of the school years of the study. All students received instruction about bullying from their classroom teachers using children's literature: K-2 read books selected by the school;

# STEPS TO RESPECT HAS THREE LEVELS . . . THAT PROMOTE THE DEVELOPMENT OF FRIENDSHIP, RECOGNIZING AND RESPONDING TO BULLYING, AND PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY OF THE BYSTANDER.

and grades 3-5 completed two STR literature units per level. In year four, 299 upper grade students completed a survey about their perceptions of the bullying prevention program. In year four, 36 teachers completed surveys about their perceptions of the bullying prevention program.

## Curriculum: Steps to Respect

The two school counselors taught the skills-based lessons. The counselors taught positive social skills and bullying prevention skill lessons using children's literature in the lower grades and the curriculum kit at the upper grades. The lessons were sequentially more challenging but dealt with common topics such as the bullying triangle, tattling versus reporting, assertive skills can refuse bullying, and bystanders can be part of the solution (Committee for Children, 2001). (Books are listed in Appendix B.)

The Steps to Respect (STR) curriculum included skills-based and literature-based classroom lessons delivered by teachers and the librarian. The librarian taught a bully prevention lesson using a book and reinforced one of the STR skills in every grade level (e.g., controlling rumors in grade 4). Teachers intervened at both the classroom level by delivering lessons and the individual level by prompting and reinforcing social behaviors (Hirschstein et al., 2007).

## Reporting Bullying and Coaching

All school staff, including paraprofessionals, were trained to take bullying reports. If the report indicated that the incident was bullying, both the victim and bully were coached using a prescribed system in which a trained staff member met separately with the child who was bullied and the child who

was bullying. The coaching model for the bullied children followed a framework:

1. Affirm the child's feelings.
2. Ask questions.
3. Assess what has and has not worked in the past.
4. Generate solutions for the future and create a plan with the child.
5. Follow up.

In the coaching process, staff met with the child who was bullied and made a plan for how to handle the situation if bullying continued (Committee for Children, 2001). The student who bullied was:

1. asked for an account of what happened,
2. given consequences in accordance with the school bullying policy, and
3. assisted in making a plan for how not to bully in the future (Committee for Children, 2001).

Coaching was typically done by the teacher who knew the child involved in the bullying best and was familiar with the environment (i.e., classroom dynamics); however, if the situation was particularly serious or chronic, then the administrators or pupil services staff did the coaching. Counseling was provided to students involved in bullying, individually and in small groups, as needed.

## Procedures

The STR program was delivered across the school for 4 years beginning in 2008. All staff participated in professional development led by the school counselor and school psychologist to become informed about bullying and get trained to take bullying reports. Teachers, counselors, and administrators were trained to coach students and provide follow-up. Parents were

routinely provided information about the schoolwide bullying prevention program, encouraged to report bullying to staff, and provided suggestions about the best responses to bullying.

Year one of the program implementation in grades 3-5 followed the lessons in the STR curriculum kits very closely, including using the overhead transparencies and showing the DVDs. Beginning in year two, the counselors adapted the lessons for delivery on electronic white boards, scanned the overheads into software, and included interactive activities to reinforce learning of key terms. The counselors also revised lessons based on student attainment of lesson competencies and responses to post-assessments. In years three and four, the counselors taught an average of four skills-based lessons that addressed some aspect of bullying as part of their regular classroom lessons in each classroom K-5.

The literature units were used by teachers and the librarian at all grade levels and were scheduled by quarters throughout the year (i.e., librarian first quarter and teachers second and third quarters). In years two and three, two books were substituted (one read by counselors and one read by teachers) based on student and staff feedback, but the number of books used at each grade level remained the same.

During year one, parents were surveyed about bullying and offered two general information sessions. Parents were sent several communications each year via backpack mail, including a summary of skills taught in lessons and the school's bullying policy. In year three, a parent workshop addressing cyber citizenship and cyberbullying was offered. To address data showing that younger children and girls were not being coached, the counseling program organized an online staff-parent book club in year four using the book *Little Girls Can Be Mean*, by Michelle Anthony and Reyna Lindert.

The school counselor collected and monitored all bullying report forms completed by staff, all anonymous reports placed in the bullying reporting box, and all bullying coaching

forms throughout the school year. In June of each year, the counselor reviewed all office referrals in which bullying was indicated as the reason for referral (physical and sexual bullying was always sent directly to the office, coached by an administrator, and documented on the school office referral form rather than the more informal bullying report form). In June, all teachers and students in grades 3-5 completed an end-of-year evaluation of the schoolwide program. All data were analyzed by the school counselor and shared with the building and district administrators, the school counseling advisory council, and teachers during the annual staff development for ongoing STR training.

### **Data Collection and Data Collection Instruments**

Twemlow and Sacco (2008) recommended that schools use a variety of data sources to evaluate bullying, including teachers' reports, children's self-reports, teachers' perceptions, and teachers' observations. Data related to bullying at this school was based on bullying reports, coaching forms, and student and teacher surveys.

**Bullying reports.** To ensure that all types of bullying were reported, the counselor designed a simple half-page form for adults and students. The bullying report form for adults was completed by staff to document bullying when they were not going to coach the student. This form was added in year four to be used mostly by support staff such as cafeteria and recess monitors. The bullying report form for children was completed by students and given to a counselor or placed anonymously in the Bully Box located outside the counselor's office. These forms were kept until the annual evaluation of the program was completed each summer and then they were shredded.

**Bullying coaching form.** The coaching form was designed by the counselor and the school psychologist based on the STR model (see Appendix A: Bullying Coaching Form). The coaching form consisted of demographic data, description of incident,

action taken, steps or plan to handle the situation, and follow-up. The staff members who coached the students kept a copy and provided a copy to the counselor after they completed the follow-up, typically a week after the incident. These forms also were kept until the annual evaluation of the program was completed each summer and then shredded.

**Student survey.** The annual student survey was developed to gain students' perspectives of their bullying experiences, their knowledge about how they resist bullying, and their satisfaction with the STR program (see Appendix B: Student Survey). The instrument was designed by the counselor to be administered to students in grades 3-5. Students in grades K-2 did not complete the student survey because the reading skills of younger children made it difficult to obtain reliable information (Twemlow & Sacco, 2008). The student survey was a 10-item questionnaire that asked about experiences with bullying, responses to bullying, reaction to the bullying education curriculum, and retention of strategies taught. The surveys consisted of four yes/no questions, four 5-point Likert scale questions (e.g., *strongly agree, agree, unsure, disagree, strongly disagree*), two check-all-that-apply questions, and two open-ended questions. Teachers administered the student surveys each June, and these took less than 10 minutes to complete in grades 3-5.

survey via school mailboxes in June to all teaching staff, including resource and specialists. Only the classroom teachers completed items related to specific class read-aloud books and lessons. The survey took approximately 5 minutes to complete. The teachers returned their surveys without names to an envelope in the counselor's mailbox and crossed off their name on a staff list indicating they had completed a survey.

## **RESULTS**

The focus of the action research was to evaluate the impact of a bullying intervention over 4 years. Overall, upper grade-level students reported a reduction in their involvement as victims or bystanders of bullying since the implementation of the schoolwide intervention. Students and teachers reported a very favorable response to the program, and students indicated that they felt the staff listened to them. Disaggregating the data of bullying incidents by gender and grade level in year three revealed that students who received coaching were primarily boys in the upper grades.

**Question 1: How frequently is bullying occurring and where?** According to the end-of-year survey of students in grades three to five, 34% of the students ( $n = 72$ ) reported being bullied in year one (2008-2009;  $N = 212$ ) and 28% of the students ( $n = 83$ )

## **CHILDREN'S LITERATURE CAN BE AN EFFECTIVE AND NON-THREATENING WAY TO INTEGRATE BULLYING EDUCATION INTO EXISTING PROGRAMS.**

**Teacher survey.** The annual teacher survey was developed to attain the teachers' viewpoints on bullying and the program (see Appendix C: Teacher Survey). A seven-item questionnaire that assessed the teachers' participation in the program and reaction to it was designed by the counselor. The counselor distributed the teacher

in year four (2011-2012;  $N = 299$ ), which was an 18% decrease in bullying behavior. The percentage of students who reported witnessing bullying was 55% ( $n = 116$ ) in the first year (2008-2009;  $N = 212$ ) and 41% ( $n = 124$ ) in the fourth year (2011-2012;  $N = 299$ ), a 25% decrease. Students reported that bullying

**TABLE 1** STUDENT SURVEY DATA

	2008-2009			2009-2010			2010-2011			2011-2012		
	N	n	%	N	n	%	N	n	%	N	n	%
Survey Q1 3rd-5th grade students who reported being bullied	212	72	34%	251	89	35%	260	63	24%	299	83	28%
Survey Q2 3rd-5th grade students who reported witnessing bullying	212	116	55%	251	120	48%	260	122	47%	299	124	41%
Survey Q3 Is it okay to ignore bullying?	212		N/A	251	23	9%	260	18	7%	299	12	4%
Grade 3										120	11	9%
Grade 4										79	2	2%
Grade 5										100	0	0%
Survey Q4 If you reported bullying behavior did you feel your concerns were taken seriously by an adult?	114	62	54%	112	69	61%	104	65	63%	88	61	69%
Grade 3	44	38	88%	59	36	61%	48	24	50%	26	22	86%
Grade 4	39	16	42%	29	22	77%	34	24	71%	41	24	58%
Grade 5	31	8	27%	24	11	45%	22	17	76%	21	15	73%
Survey Q7 Students who agreed or strongly agreed that they learned from the discussion about the books										84	57	68%
Grade 3										120	101	84%
Grade 4										100	43	43%
Grade 5										76	39	51%
										100	69	69%

## UPPER GRADE-LEVEL STUDENTS REPORTED A REDUCTION IN THEIR INVOLVEMENT AS VICTIMS OR BYSTANDERS OF BULLYING.

occurred, in order of frequency: (a) during recess, (b) in school (classrooms, hallways, and bathrooms), and (c) in the cafeteria. Bullying was also reported in the before-school and after-school program, on the bus, and at the bus stop (see Table 1: Student Survey Data).

**Question 2: Do the students know how to respond to bullying behavior?** Overall, students in grades 3-5 increased their understanding that ignoring bullying is not okay because ignoring reinforces the pattern of

behavior. In 2009-2010, 23 students (9%; N = 251) answered “yes” to the question, “It is okay to ignore bullying” and in 2011-2012, 12 students (4%; N = 299) agreed with the question, which was a 56% decrease. The data by grade level showed that the students developed this understanding as they aged. In 2011-12, 11 students in grade three (9%, N = 120), 2 students in grade 4 (2%; N = 79), and 0 students in grade 5 (0%; N = 100) said it was okay to ignore bullying (see Table 1: Student Survey Data).

**Question 3: Do students who report bullying feel the concerns were listened to and taken seriously by the adults?** In 2011-12, 15 5th-grade students (73%; N = 21) felt listened to when they reported bullying compared to 8 5th-grade students (27%; N = 31) in 2008-2009, a 46% increase. The numbers of students who reported bullying in grades 3-5 that felt the concern was listened to and taken seriously by an adult was 54% in the first year (2008-2009) and 69% in year four (2011-2012; see Table 1: Student Survey Data).

**Question 4: At what rate is coaching occurring for bullying situations and who is being coached?** Completed coaching forms indicated that 62 students in grades K-5 (12.4%) were coached in year one (N = 498); 58 stu-

**TABLE 2** STUDENT COACHING DATA

	2008-2009			2009-2010			2010-2011			2011-2012		
	N	n	%	N	n	%	N	n	%	N	n	%
Students in grades K-5 receiving coaching	498	62	12.4%	537	58	10.8%	580	36	6.2%	607	52 <sup>1</sup>	8.6%
Boys coached for bullying							18 <sup>2</sup>			14		
Girls coached for bullying							0			12		
Boys coached who were victims							14			11		
Girls coached who were victims							4			15		

Notes. 1. Students coached were in grades K-5. 2. Students coached were in grades 2-5.

dents (10.8%) in year two ( $N = 537$ ); 36 students (6.2%) in year three ( $N = 580$ ); and 52 students (8.6%) in year four ( $N = 607$ ). To examine who was being coached, the data was disaggregated by grade level and gender beginning in year three. In 2010-2011, all 18 students who were coached for bullying were boys in grades 2-5. That same year, of the students coached because they were bullied, 4 were girls and 14 were boys. In 2011-2012, 12 girls and 14 boys were coached for bullying in grades K-5 and the students coached because they were victims included 15 girls and 11 boys (see Table 2: Student Coaching Data).

**Question 5: Are the lessons and books being read as part of the program useful?** In year four, 101 students in grade 3 (84%;  $N = 120$ ), 55 students in grade 4 (69%;  $N = 79$ ), and 69 students in grade 5 (69%;  $N = 100$ ) responded “agree” or “strongly agree” that they learned helpful information from the lessons that the counselor presented on bullying in the fall. This was a marked increase of 16-26% from year three, showing greater appreciation of the value of the lessons (see Table 1: Student Survey Data). The program also saw a significant increase in positive responses to the read-aloud done by teachers.

In year four, 87% of teachers at all grade levels gave positive responses (“agree” or “strongly agree”), indicating they felt the books read as part of the program were useful and appropriate, and 88% felt the accompanying lessons provided were useful and appropriate. This was significantly

## ONE HUNDRED PERCENT OF THOSE TEACHERS REPORTED COMFORT WITH THE COACHING MODEL AND 92% OF TEACHERS SURVEYED INDICATED THAT THE SCHOOL SHOULD CONTINUE [THE PROGRAM].

higher than in year three, when all the teachers in grade 3 had negative ratings for one of the STR literature units. The book in that unit, *Eagle Song*, was replaced with *Puppy Power* based on teacher feedback.

**Question 6: What do all teachers (including specialists) think of our schoolwide bullying program?** In year four (2011-2012), almost 40% of the classroom teachers ( $N = 36$ ) reported that they had coached students about bullying. One hundred percent of those teachers reported comfort with the coaching model. According to the teacher survey, 92% of teachers surveyed indicated that the school should continue implementing the Steps to Respect program. The remaining three teachers were unsure. No teacher thought the program should be discontinued. All but one teacher indicated that they encouraged students to report bullying. One teacher indicated that reporting bullying was not age appropriate. Another teacher pointed out that not all staff agreed on whether or not a given situation constituted bullying. The teachers’ comments were very positive and several mentioned that they appreciated how the program empowered bystanders to take action.

## DISCUSSION

Bullying was still occurring at this elementary school after 4 years of intervention. More students who reported bullying felt staff took their complaints seriously. Coaching was occurring but at a rate lower than expected given the number of students indicating that they were bullied. The classroom lessons were being taught and felt to be valuable. Overall, the professional staff was very positive about the program.

The number of students who reported on surveys that they were bullied decreased from 34% in year one to 28% in year four. This may indicate that bullying was decreasing but other data may be required to confirm an actual decline. In year four, students reported that bullying occurred most frequently outside and in school. These are the same top two places found in the study by the University of Virginia Violence Project (2012). The students demonstrated knowledge of the key concepts from the classroom lessons including the definition of bullying and that ignoring bullying will not stop it since bullying is a repeated pattern of behavior. Most

of the students identified one strategy they would use if bullied. However, in future research, the author will ask which strategies students actually use to combat various types of bullying behavior, distinguishing between which strategies they use in different roles (victim versus bystander).

A safe school climate was developing as evidenced by the number of students that felt listened to when reporting bullying and the perceptions by staff. Although the overall data is positive that students report being listened to by adults, many students commented that the recess and cafeteria monitors frequently did not listen or complete bullying reports. Staff turnover was high among these hourly employees and the required one-hour training they received about bullying and taking bullying reports was not adequate. More needs to be done at the annual staff training to insure the staff agree on what is and what is not bullying. More also needs to be done with parents to ensure that they have ownership of the program.

manner. In year four, the counseling program incorporated a staff and parent online book club to examine “mean” bullying behavior in young girls. During year four (2011-2012), the data indicated that girls were being coached for both bullying and being bullied; students of all grade levels were coached for bullying and being bullied.

Students’ perception improved regarding the usefulness of the skills-based lessons from the STR curriculum that were taught by the counselors. All lessons were revised by the counselors and delivered primarily via interactive whiteboard technology in year four. New lessons were added in year four based on supplemental materials available online from the Committee for Children to more directly address cyberbullying in grades 3-5.

The teachers who deliver the majority of this program had an overall positive perception of its usefulness. They regarded the read-aloud approach as easy to incorporate and seamless because they were already

official to determine whether students are using the strategies taught in the program. The data collection instruments for teachers could be expanded to capture additional information about the impact of the program. Furthermore, parents’ perception of the program needs to be assessed. Because of advances in technology, data collection could be done using online survey instruments to make data analysis more efficient.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR SCHOOL COUNSELORS

Bullying is a serious problem in schools and efforts to reduce bullying should be the responsibility of everyone in the learning environment. Because the problem is ongoing, interventions need to continue and be responsive to the particular school’s needs. This research not only addressed how students are different based on interventions led by counselors but also provides an example of the leadership component of the ASCA National Model (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2012), which encourages counselors to collaborate and communicate with parents, teachers, administrators, and staff to promote school safety and emphasizes that counselors use data to drive program evaluation and improvement. As Bauman (2008) concluded, the school counselor is ideally suited for a central role in a school’s antibullying efforts.

School counselors may consider the following strategies to reduce bullying.

1. Use research-based interventions, like STR, with a common understanding and language. Bullying begins as soon as young students enter school and schools need to endorse multilevel bullying interventions that have evidence of effectiveness. STR provides a program guide that includes training modules, a process to develop

## MANY STUDENTS COMMENTED THAT THE RECESS AND CAFETERIA MONITORS FREQUENTLY DID NOT LISTEN OR COMPLETE BULLYING REPORTS.

In year three, all students who were coached because of involvement in bullying situations were boys and in the upper grades. In general, research suggests that boys are overrepresented in physical bullying instances but differences of participation in verbal and relational bullying are less pronounced (Veenstra et al., 2005). This data led the counselor to secure funding for additional resources from the district to address girl bullying and relational aggression. The data was shared at the annual staff training and included a reminder that verbal and social bullying are included by the district and school bullying policies that mandate staff to respond to all bullying and notify parents of incidents in a timely

required to do read-alouds as part of the language arts curriculum. Teachers also appreciated that they had a say in book selection.

In the present study, results indicated that the school’s management plan goal to reduce bullying and improve the school climate was addressed through the implementation of this universal intervention. Specific needs were identified such as how the bullying curriculum required revision and that staff required more training. The data was used to inform the stakeholders about the impact of the program and the decision to continue STR.

In the future, examining more perception data for skills-based and literature-based lessons would be ben-

a school policy, and materials to educate students about bullying (Committee for Children, 2001). School counselors should be trained to review resources and help decide which program fits the needs of the school.

2. Collect and analyze data to develop a clear understanding of the bullying that is occurring in the school and to assist in designing, implementing, evaluating, and improving the intervention (ASCA, 2012; Twemlow & Sacco, 2008). Leading the bullying intervention provides counselors with a way to tie the counseling program into the school management plan. Use data, such as tracking incidents by location, grade, class, gender, and special education identification, to transform an intervention and continually monitor its effectiveness. Share outcomes with key stakeholders including administrators, students, staff, and parents.

3. Provide ongoing training to all staff to recognize all types of bullying, develop skills to respond consistently and effectively, and maintain warmth and connectedness (Kokko & Porhola, 2009). Programs where everyone is involved and shares responsibility build ownership. The counselor should explain that some widely used strategies are not appropriate for bullying situations, such as mediation with aggressor and victim together, ignoring bullying, and group counseling for aggressors (Bauman, 2008). In addition to training, counselors can collaborate with teachers to create classroom opportunities for students involved in bullying to positively interact with their peers (Bradshaw, O'Brennan & Sawyer, 2008).

4. Deliver quality instruction to students on positive social skills, how to recognize types of bullying, and how to refuse and report bullying. New children's books on bullying are published every month that can serve as the stimulus for

powerful classroom discussions of bullying including skills needed to reduce bullying. For example, *One*, by Kathryn Otoshi, delivers the profound message that one person refusing bullying can lead to a safe climate. If students at school are not reporting covert relational aggression, the counselor can deliver classroom lessons about relational bullying and how to ask adults for help (Jacobsen & Bauman, 2007). *My Secret Bully*, by Trudy Ludwig, is a book that addresses relational bullying. For older students, lessons on cyberbullying should stay current with the technology that students are using. To keep the response to bullying fresh, organize special schoolwide events like Bullying Prevention Month, Unity Day, Mix It Up at Lunch Day (Southern Poverty Law Center, n.d.), and No Name-Calling Week (Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network, n.d.).

6. Provide children who are bullied with individual or group counseling, or other support as needed. Smolinski and Kopasz (2005) recommended that pupil services staff seek out children showing signs of being bullied because many victims cope by trying to be invisible. Shallcross (2013) suggested taking a strength-based approach with bullying targets to acknowledge the courage it takes to discuss being bullied. The victim may need help to build or maintain at least one friendship; this has been shown to markedly decrease the consequences of bullying (Committee for Children, 2001).

7. Develop safe reporting procedures for students. Include a process of anonymous reporting like a bullying box or online reporting system. The counselors are individuals to whom students and parents can report bullying and

## COLLECT AND ANALYZE DATA TO DEVELOP A CLEAR UNDERSTANDING OF THE BULLYING THAT IS OCCURRING IN THE SCHOOL.

5. Help students who bully develop new positive behaviors. Many children who are coached for bullying will say that they picked on the victim because they are provoked, do not like the victim, or because it was fun (Guerra, Williams & Sadek, 2011; Veenstra et al., 2005). Students who bully are typically skilled at avoiding the consequences of their actions (McAdams & Schmidt, 2007). STR encourages coaches to talk about a plan for what can be done if the behavior occurs again rather than trying to attack the denial. McAdams and Schmidt (2007) recommended that staff avoid factual debates about what occurred and instead focus on the feelings (e.g., fear) generated by hurtful behaviors.

feel confident that their privacy will be maintained (Bauman, 2008).

8. Educate and involve parents so they understand the bullying problem, recognize the signs of bullying, and intervene appropriately. Inform all parents about the program and offer additional information to parents of students who are consistently involved in bullying situations. Encourage parents to report bullying to school staff.

9. Collaborate with administrators to implement a schoolwide approach to address the complex issue of bullying. School climate can be a goal in the school management plan. To ensure that students and families know how bullying is handled in middle school, elemen-

tary counselors should collaborate with the middle school administrators and counselors.

10. Tailor interventions to meet the needs of a specific school and complement other programs. For example, if the majority of bullying is relational aggression, focus efforts to address this type of bullying and share the data with stakeholders. Black and Jackson (2007) recommended that programs with similar goals and core values be integrated to optimize time and resources. Bullying awareness can also be tied to character education, such as when a responsible bystander treats others with respect and shows good citizenship by sticking up for the victim or reporting to an adult. Guerra, Williams, and Sadek (2011) found that the exclusion of children who are different suggests a possible connection between diversity training and bullying prevention; that is, encouraging children to accept those who are different may have a positive effect on antibullying efforts. Finally, many schools use positive behavior supports (PBIS) to reduce student problem behavior and promote student success and positive school climate. Pugh and Chitiyo (2012) define STR as an example of a tier two intervention, although its implementation falls within both tier one (school-wide) and tier two (the coaching process). Because STR uses a social-ecological perspective, it is a good fit for schools using PBIS.

## CONCLUSION

School counselors are essential educators in the fight to reduce bullying in schools. Counselors can help staff, parents, and students understand bullying and how to handle incidents. The findings of this study indicated that a universal, schoolwide intervention that was tailored to a specific school reduced bullying incidents. The data

showed that the early training efforts were not sufficient to empower staff in how to recognize and respond to some types of indirect bullying, especially by girls and younger children. Additional training in relational aggression did improve staff recognition and response to girls and young students' involvement in bullying. This school's effort was successful because all staff and students had buy-in for the intervention. The bullying program was seamlessly incorporated into the normal routine of the school and continues to be improved through ongoing evaluation. ■

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**APPENDIX A****BULLYING COACHING FORM**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Adult receiving the report: \_\_\_\_\_ Staff Member/Coach: \_\_\_\_\_

Child who was bullied: \_\_\_\_\_ Child who bullied: \_\_\_\_\_  
Indicate: Male/female Male/female**Who reported the bullying:** Bullied child  Bystander  Adult ObserverWhere the bullying occurred:  Recess  Cafeteria  Hall/Bathroom  Class Extended Day  Specials  Bus  Other \_\_\_\_\_**Description of the incident.** Use initials and include grade level of student (e.g., MBP/5) Categorize type of bullying (Circle all that apply ) Physical Social Verbal Sexual Cyber  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_**Action taken:**

- Referred to administration
- Called parent of student who was bullying
- Teacher/Staff coached student
- Called parent of student who was bullied

Suggested next steps:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_**Follow-up date & assessment (Is plan working?)**

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(Staff who coaches keeps copy and puts a copy in counselor's box after follow-up is complete.)

**APPENDIX B****STUDENT SURVEY: STEPS TO RESPECT EVALUATION**

Grade 3

Teacher: \_\_\_\_\_

**Answer all questions.**

Definition: *Bullying is unfair and one-sided. It happens when someone keeps hurting, frightening, threatening, or leaving someone out on purpose.*

**Check one answer.**1. I was bullied this school year at school.  yes  no

If yes indicate where (check all that are true)

 Extended Day  Recess  Bus  Cafeteria  School  Other2. I observed (saw) bullying occur this year at school.  yes  no

If yes indicate where (check all that are true)

 Extended Day  Recess  Bus  Cafeteria  School  Other3. It is okay to ignore bullying behavior.  yes  no  unsure4. If you reported bullying behavior this year to any adult at school, did you feel your concerns were listened to and taken seriously by the adult?  yes  no  did not report

Circle one for each book (SA = strongly agree, A = agree, U = unsure, D = disagree, SD = strongly disagree, or Did not hear book read)

5. I liked the read aloud books about students who are bullied, bully, or witness bullying.

a. *Puppy Power* SA A U D SD Did not hear bookb. *Yang the Third and Her Impossible Family* SA A U D SD Did not hear book

Circle one (SA = strongly agree, A = agree, U = unsure, D = disagree, SD = strongly disagree, or Was not present)

6. I learned helpful information from the discussion led by my classroom teacher about these two books. SA A U D SD Was not present

7. I learned helpful information from the lessons the counselor presented on bullying in the fall. SA A U D SD Was not present

8. Write about a strategy that you can use when confronted with a peer conflict and a strategy for a bullying situation.

If I have a conflict with a peer I can \_\_\_\_\_

If I am being bullied I would \_\_\_\_\_

**APPENDIX C****TEACHER SURVEY: STEPS TO RESPECT EVALUATION**

Please indicate grade level. \_\_ K \_\_ 1 \_\_ 2 \_\_ 3 \_\_ 4 \_\_ 5

1. a. I coached a student (s) and completed a Bullying Report Form this year.  yes  no  
b. If yes, did you feel comfortable with the Steps to Respect coaching model?  yes  no
2. I read aloud the required books and did the follow-up discussion lessons for my grade this year.  yes  no
3. Please rate the books you read and indicate if you feel they were useful and appropriate for your grade level.  
(SA = strongly agree, A = agree, U = unsure, D = disagree, SD = strongly disagree, R = replace)

**Kindergarten**

<i>The Friendship Alphabet</i>	SA	A	U	D	SD	R
<i>Rhymritis</i>	SA	A	U	D	SD	R
<i>Hooway for Wodney Wat</i>	SA	A	U	D	SD	R
<i>The Recess Queen</i>	SA	A	U	D	SD	R

**Grade 1**

Character Traits books	SA	A	U	D	SD	R
<i>Stand Tall, Molly Lou Melon</i>	SA	A	U	D	SD	R
<i>King of the Playground</i>	SA	A	U	D	SD	R

**Grade 2**

<i>How to be a Friend</i>	SA	A	U	D	SD	R
<i>Emily Breaks Free</i>	SA	A	U	D	SD	R
<i>Just Kidding</i>	SA	A	U	D	SD	R
<i>Nobody Knew What to Do: A Story About Bullying</i>	SA	A	U	D	SD	R

**Grade 3**

<i>Puppy Power</i>	SA	A	U	D	SD	R
<i>Yang the Third and Her Impossible Family</i>	SA	A	U	D	SD	R

**Grade 4**

<i>There's a Boy in the Girls' Bathroom</i>	SA	A	U	D	SD	R
<i>Blubber</i>	SA	A	U	D	SD	R

**Grade 5**

<i>The Well</i>	SA	A	U	D	SD	R
<i>Crash</i>	SA	A	U	D	SD	R

4. I thought the lesson(s) I was provided to use with the books was useful and appropriate.  SA  A  U  D  SD  R

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

5. I encouraged my students to report all bullying behavior to an adult or use the bullying box outside the counseling office.  yes  no  not appropriate for age

6. I believe our school should continue with the implementation of a school wide approach to bullying based on the Steps to Respect researched based model.  SA  A  U  D  SD  R

7. Please provide suggestions for next year: \_\_\_\_\_