



Imagine Newsletter

A School Climate Approach to Bullying Prevention

Information for School Staff

Issue # 15

Bullying: What's Happening in Waterloo Region Elementary Schools?

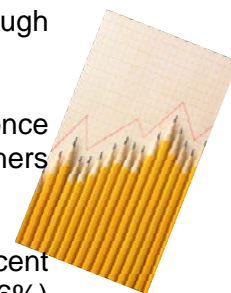


In the winter of 2007, before their school communities began to fully implement the **Imagine Framework**, students in grades 4-7, their parents, and school staff from ten catholic elementary schools participated in an adapted version of the Safe Schools Survey developed by Dr. Mark Totten on behalf of the Canadian Public Health Association and the National Crime Prevention Strategy. This survey is the most commonly recommended evaluation tool in Canada for elementary school-based anti-bullying programs because the three components are used together to create a complete “snapshot in time” of bullying in the school setting. These ten schools represented a variety of school communities—urban, rural, inner-city, suburban, smaller, larger, multicultural.

THE “WHAT”

What did the survey data reveal? Once analyzed, the surveys showed that though individual schools may vary, in general:

- Sixty-seven per cent (67%) of students surveyed reported being bullied at least once in the four weeks prior to the survey; forty-two per cent (42%) reported bullying others at least once
- Approximately one in five students was involved in serious bullying: nineteen per cent (19%) of students reported being bullied on a weekly basis, and six per cent (6%) reported bullying others on a weekly basis
- The negative impact of bullying on children was reflected in these survey results, showing that students being bullied four weeks prior to the survey felt significantly less safe and less respected; the more frequently students were bullied, the less they felt safe, respected and included in school
- Indirect bullying (such as social or verbal bullying) was more prevalent than physical bullying and there were significant gaps in awareness of bullying incidents between students and adults (school staff, school administrators, parents)
- The roles children assumed in bullying changed as they advanced through grades 4-7: The proportion of students “being bullied only” decreased steadily, while the proportion of students “bullying others only” increased steadily as they advanced in grade
- Students in the lower grades were more likely to be bullied and more vulnerable to the negative impact of bullying; the proportion of students who felt they had to stay at home to avoid being bullied was twice as high in grade 4 as in grade 7 (10% vs.5%)



For more information, contact Region of Waterloo Public Health 519-883-2003 ext. 5356

www.region.waterloo.on.ca/bullying



Imagine Newsletter

A School Climate Approach to Bullying Prevention

Information for School Staff

- It was noted that boys, in comparison to girls, were significantly less empathetic towards victims and significantly more likely to agree with the pro-bullying statements
- This increase in pro-bullying attitudes through grade progression was consistent with the increase in bullying behaviour; these trends were more prominent in boys

THE “SO WHAT”

So what do these statistics mean for school communities? First, it means that bullying is a real and significant issue for children in local elementary schools, with **nineteen percent of children reporting being bullied on a weekly basis**. In previous newsletters, we have discussed the negative impact of bullying, especially if it is happening frequently and over a period of time. The more frequently students were bullied, the less they felt safe, respected and included in school---these feelings have been proven to affect learning in school. Clearly, this level of bullying behaviour is having an impact on the ability of local children to learn and develop to their potential.



Most of the bullying that occurs is in social or verbal form, which is usually more difficult for adults to identify. This fact may help to explain why school staff and parents are not as aware as the students are of the extent of bullying, which in turn impacts the type and amount of supports that may be offered to students e.g. education, skill building opportunities, counselling, restorative justice, etc. Also, adults may find it more difficult to intervene in situations when there is no physical proof of bullying, and so student reports of bullying may not be acted on. This inaction can undermine trust between children and adults.

The proportion of students “being bullied only” decreased steadily, while the proportion of students “bullying others only” increased steadily as they advanced in grade, along with an increase in pro-bullying attitudes. This observation would suggest a lack of connectedness and empathy between the older students and the younger students. It may also suggest that students may just “toughen up” as they advance in grade and learn how better to bully, rather than actually learning better relationship skills. The data shows that this especially applies to male students.

THE “WHAT NOW”

What can school communities do to improve their situation with regard to bullying?

School communities need to gather, share and discuss their own data to increase awareness and commitment to bullying intervention/prevention efforts at the school. The survey findings discussed in this newsletter can be generalized to all elementary schools in the Waterloo Catholic District School Board, but every school could gather data using the surveys in the *Imagine* Resource Manual, by accessing various online surveys or through developing their own way of gathering the information.



Imagine Newsletter

A School Climate Approach to Bullying Prevention

Information for School Staff

All school communities receiving this newsletter have had some training and experience with the *Imagine...A School Without Bullying* Framework which outlines a process for creating a committee of school staff, parents and students. It is recommended that this committee be reformed each new school year to continue on with planning and overseeing implementation of a comprehensive bullying prevention/intervention/school climate improvement plan, which would become part of the school effectiveness plan. The essential pieces of the plan need to address a combination of school-wide, classroom, peer and individual interventions:

- age and gender appropriate education and skill development for healthy peer relationships, including recognizing bullying, responding to bullying and supporting someone who has been bullied
- a plan for reporting and responding to bullying effectively including tracking systems, appropriate consequences to help students learn, restorative justice practices, effective communication systems, etc.
- a supervision plan that is responsive to changing environmental conditions
- supports for students at high risk for problems associated with bullying
- activities to support community building e.g. cross divisional planning and activities, learning buddies, colour houses, intramurals, recognition systems, spirit raising activities, etc.



It will take time to see significant changes in rates of bullying due to its complex nature and its long term acceptance in society at large. All stakeholders need to make a long-term commitment to develop a school culture where bullying behaviour is inhibited---so keep on doing what you can do!