Empowering Youth Voice: Providing the Necessary Tools to Our Young That Have Been Proven to Assist in Decreasing Abuse and Violence

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Our Conversation

A Majority of Teens Have Experienced Some Form of Cyberbullying

50% of U.S. teens have been bullied or harmed online, and a similar above average is a major problem for people their age. At the same time, teens many think teachers, social media companies and politicians are failing at addressing this issue.
Some 45% of teens say they are online almost constantly, and these constant users are more likely to face online harassment. 67% of teens who are online almost constantly have been cyberbullied, compared with 53% of those who use the internet several times a day or less. These differences also extend to specific kinds of behaviors. For example, half of teens who are near-constant internet users say they have been called offensive names online, compared with about a third (36%) who use the internet less frequently.
While most of the debate over Title IX—the federal law that prohibits sexual discrimination in education—has centered on colleges and universities, the administration’s new civil rights guidance will affect K-12 schools. Survivors’ advocacy groups fear the changes will cause K-12 schools to “step off the gas” in improving how they address assault and harassment when we know many schools are already failing to provide adequate Title IX support to students.

Lara Kaufmann, the director of public policy for Girls Inc., an organization that serves and advocates for girls in press states that “K-12 students are more likely to be subjected to sexual assault or harassment than some might think, she added. Seven out 10 girls experience harassment before they leave high school. And 1 out 4 girls experience a sexual assault or abuse before turning 18, she said.”

The DOE guidance allows schools to shift the threshold if an assault happened from the “preponderance of evidence” to a “clear and convincing”.

Schools will be held responsible for addressing a complaint now only if they have “actual knowledge” that an offense occurred. This raises the bar from prior guidance, that required intervention if they “reasonably” should have known about a violation. Schools now will only be faulted if they are “deliberately indifferent” to known sexual harassment, the guidance says.

Sexual harassment is now more narrowly defined as sexual assault or “unwelcome conduct on the basis of sex that is so severe, pervasive and objectively offensive that it denies a person access to the school’s education program or activity.” Under the previous guidance, it was defined as “unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature.”

This definition might cause some schools to focus upon repeated conduct, “failing to take into account the age and developmental level of K-12 students, who are particularly sensitive to sexual harassment,” even on the first offense, according Elisabeth Tang of the National Women’s Law Center, quoted in Education Weekly.

The newest guidance requires schools to respond to “conduct within its education program or activity,” potentially resulting in some schools in ignoring off-campus incidents, incidents like those occurring at parties or other events. It also has created confusion about whether schools are required to respond to online harassment, including the the sharing of explicit photos or demeaning messages.

Following Charts, Information, from AP

May 2, 2017 Article

Hidden Horror of School Sexual Assaults revealed by AP

ROBIN McDOWELL & REESE DUNKLIN & EMILY SCHMALL & JUSTIN PRITCHARD  May. 02, 2017

https://apnews.com/1b74feef88df4475b377d cdd6406ebb7
Across the U.S., thousands of students have been sexually assaulted, by other students, in high schools, junior highs and even elementary schools — a hidden horror educators have long been warned not to ignore.

Relying on state education records, supplemented by federal crime data, a yearlong investigation by The Associated Press uncovered roughly 17,000 official reports of sexual assaults by students over a four-year period, from fall 2011 to spring 2015.

Though that figure represents the most complete tally yet of sexual assaults among the nation’s 50 million K-12 students, it does not fully capture the problem because such attacks are greatly under-reported, some states don’t track them and those that do vary widely in how they classify and catalog sexual violence. A number of academic estimates range sharply higher.

Elementary and secondary schools have no national requirement to track or disclose sexual violence, and they feel tremendous pressure to hide it. Even under varying state laws, acknowledging an incident can trigger liabilities and requirements to act.

Ranging from rape and sodomy to forced oral sex and fondling, the sexual violence that AP tracked often was mischaracterized as bullying, hazing or consensual behavior. It occurred anywhere students were left unsupervised: buses and bathrooms, hallways and locker rooms. No type of school was immune, whether it be in an upper-class suburb, an inner-city neighborhood or a blue-collar farm town.

Sexual abuse allegations can be difficult to investigate. Because many accusers initially keep quiet, physical evidence can be long gone once investigators step in. Often, there are no eyewitnesses, leaving only the conflicting accounts of the accuser and the accused.

Schools — where many more adults are keeping watch, and where parents trust their kids will be kept safe — are the No. 2 site where juveniles are sexually violated by their peers.

Unwanted fondling was the most common form of assault, but about one in five of the assaulted students were raped, sodomized or penetrated with an object, according to AP’s analysis of the federal incident-based crime data.

Fondling is the most frequent type of sex assault reported at school — nearly 90 percent of all school sexual assault cases between students are incidents of unwanted fondling. The remaining 20 percent are cases of sodomy, other penetration and rape, reports of which spike in the teen years. AP analyzed the most recent publicly available federal crime data.
More than 2,800 cases of sexual assault, involving more than 3,300 victims, were reported at elementary and secondary schools during 2013 and 2014. Victims of sexual assault in school are most often pre-teens or young teens. Boys are more than 40 percent of the youngest victims, but as students age, girls are much more likely to be sexually assaulted at school. AP analyzed the most recent available federal crime data.

- Contrary to public perception, data showed that student sexual assaults by peers were far more common than those by teachers. For every adult-on-child sexual attack reported on school property, there were seven assaults by students, AP's analysis of the federal crime data showed.
- Studies have long found bullying can be a precursor to sexual harassment and assault. Typically, victims' grades drop, attendance falls and rates of depression, anxiety and suicidal thoughts increase. Schools sometimes miss the warning signs, though, and think it's just "kids being kids."
- There's just a reluctance to see that there's sexual violence at such a young age," said Dorothy Espelage, who researched sexual offenses and harassment among middle schoolers while at the University of Illinois.

The Pentagon does not know the scope of the problem and does little to track it. AP was able to document nearly 600 sex assault cases on base since 2007 through dozens of interviews and by piecing together records and data from the military's four main branches and school system.

Sexual violence occurs anywhere children and teens gather on base — homes, schools, playgrounds, food courts, even a chapel bathroom. Many cases get lost in a dead zone of justice, with neither victim nor offender receiving help.

"These are the children that we need to be protecting, the children of our heroes," said Heather Ryan, former military investigator.

The tens of thousands of kids who live on bases in the U.S. and abroad are not covered by military law. The U.S. Justice Department, which has jurisdiction over many military bases, isn't equipped or inclined to handle cases involving juveniles, so it rarely takes them on.
Child-on-child sexual assaults soar, police figures revealed in England and Wales

- Almost 30,000 reports of children sexually assaulting other youngsters, including 2,625 alleged attacks on school premises, have been made to police in the last four years, figures reveal.
- The data released by 38 of the 43 areas in England and Wales, in response to freedom of information requests, showed reports of so-called “peer on peer” abuse rose from 4,603 in 2013 to 7,866 last year – an increase of 71%. The investigation found that 2,625 reported sexual offences, including 225 alleged rapes, carried out by under-18s on other children happened on school premises, including primary school playgrounds, across 31 of these areas.
- Figures from 30 areas reporting in document that reports of sexual offences by children aged 10 and under more than doubled from 204 in 2013-14 to 456 in 2016-17.
- Some children – anonymized to protect their identities – who were interviewed by the current affairs program told how they felt bullied, let down and isolated after reporting abuse.

Boys in the CSP class were the most violent youth on nearly all indices with boys in the HIP (Hyper-intimate Pursuit) class demonstrating an intermediate level of violence compared to NP (Non-Perpetrators) boys. Girls in the HIP class were more violent than NP girls on all indices. These findings suggest stalking in adolescence merits attention by violence prevention experts. In particular, juvenile stalking may signify youth at risk for multiple forms of violence perpetrated against multiple types of victims, not just the object of their infatuation.

- However, fear is a poor marker of what constitutes legitimate stalking and its risk of violence (Spitzberg, in press). Furthermore, our findings suggest that fear is irrelevant. Our data indicate youth who stalk are youth who are violent. Hence, regardless of whether the object of pursuit expresses fear, they are at risk of violent victimization. Thus, early identification of adolescent stalkers may have practical applications for the prevention of multiple forms of violence and associated adverse health outcomes.
TTY

• Dealing with resistance and language

The Problems

• Sexual harassment
• Assault
• Bullying
• Interpersonal violence

Cyber Problems

• Sextortion
• Cyberbullying
• Reputational damage
• Posting of pictures
The Problems

- Perception of anonymity online fuels non-social behavior
- 70% of millennial women have experienced online harassment
- 26% have been cyberstalked

Community Matters

- Fosters Connection
- Fuels Compassion
- Improving Communication skills
- Putting in more thought before action
- Creating more time for reflection
Community Matters Mission

“To wake up the courage of students and adults to create schools that are safe, welcoming and inclusive.”

The “Inside-Out” Approach

Relationship-Focused
Student-Centered
Restorative Measures
Focused on Changing Social Norms

The Student Determinant of Whole School Climate
What do students need to succeed and to thrive?

Empowering Youth: The Formula

The 3 “P’s”
(Purpose, Power and Place)

+  

The 3 “E’s”
(Engage, Equip, and Empower)

=  

The 3 “C’s”
(Competent, Caring and Contributing)

"We are living in an unprecedented social experiment. We have systematically changed the patterns and connections that have characterized human life as long as there has been human life."

Wachtel, Dreaming of a New Reality
School Safety: The Changing Landscape

- School Shootings (1995 – 99)
- Violence / Bullying (2000 – 09)

(2009 – present)
- Cyber-Bullying
- Sexual Misconduct
- Relational Aggression
- Indifference

Intolerance & Incivility

It’s not your typical playground bully anymore…

Younger
Meaner
More Pervasive
Harder to Identify

24/7 On & Off Campus
- Other’s Pain as “Entertainment”
- More Accepted as Normal

Leveraging the Power & Potential of Students

- See, hear and know things adults don’t
  (In 88% of bullying incidents, peers are present)
- Can effectively intervene in ways adults can’t
- First to arrive on the scene of mistreatment
- Set the tone and social norms on campus
### Empowering Students

- **Wake up Courage**
- **Foster Empathy**
- **Teach Skills to Gain Competence**

...to intervene safely and effectively

### Increasing Student Voice

(in both formal & informal settings)

- Leadership Opportunities, e.g., serving on a Climate Committee
- Restorative Education & Empowerment
- Peer Mediating
- Peer Involving & Mentoring
- Restorative Practices Leaders

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Criteria for Strong Youth Development Programs

1. Enroll diverse student leaders
2. Equip students with skills
3. Provide staff support and guidance
4. Collect data and measure impact
5. Celebrate successes

Safe School Ambassadors®

A SAMSHA NREPP Listed, evidenced-based, field-tested program that engages, equips and empowers student bystanders to reduce bullying and other forms of mistreatment.

Developed by

“Alpha” Students

- Socially-influential / Others follow their lead & model their behaviors
- Loyal / Have a tendency to speak up on behalf of others within their clique
- Outgoing by nature / Highly verbal
Identifying the “Alpha” Leaders

Student and Adult Surveys

Safe School Ambassadors® Training

- Two Days
- On- or Off-Site
- 25 to 40 Diverse Student Leaders
- 4 to 8 Adults

SSA 2 Day Training Flow

**DAY 1**
1. Foundation & Community Building
2. Understanding the Problem of Mistreatment
3. Ambassador’s Job
4. Actions: Overview & Practice
   1. Balancing
   2. Supporting
   3. Reasoning
   4. Distracting
   5. Directing
5. Meet with adults

**DAY 2**
6. Welcome & Launch
7. Review
8. More Amb Actions
   1. Listening
   2. Getting Help
9. Actions: Overview & Practice
10. Implementation: Safe School Ambassador Program Operation
11. Closure
12. Meet with adults
Six Skills for Ambassadors

- Balancing
- Supporting
- Reasoning
- Distracting
- Directing
- Getting Help

Ongoing Support & Supervision: Family Group Meetings

- Connect & Inspire
- Regularly-Scheduled
- Deepen Skills
- Debrief Experience
- Collect Data

Safe School Ambassadors® Are Active

A minimum of
2 “Actions” per week
x 40 Ambassadors =
80 Actions per week

34 Weeks x 80 Ambassador Actions =
More than 2,700 Actions per school year
Safe School Ambassadors® Are Effective

A two-year study by two different universities found statistically significant evidence of positive impact:

Suspension rates were 33% lower than prior to SSA implementation,

while suspension rates at demographically matched non-SSA control schools increased 10% in the same period.


Based on the results of the two-year study, the Safe School Ambassadors® Program was listed in SAMHSA’s National Registry of Evidence-Based Programs and Practices


Youth Empowerment Level 2

• Preventing and Intervening in LGBTQ Bullying and Harassment
• Peer to Peer ATOD Prevention Program
• Restorative Practices
• Youth Leadership Summits
"It’s easier to grow and develop healthy and strong children than to fix broken adults."

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Thank You!

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ABOUT US

Community Matters is recognized as a national leader in school safety efforts, school climate improvement and bullying and violence prevention. Founded in 1996 and headquartered in California, Community Matters is a successful 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization with a mission of **equipping and empowering students and adults to create schools that are welcoming, safe and inclusive.** During the past two decades, the organization has worked with 2,000 schools, agencies and organizations across 38 states, Puerto Rico, Guam, Canada, Paraguay and Japan. Community Matter’s work has been featured in the media, and has reached audiences at the local, state, regional and national levels.

SERVICES

Programs and services that focus on youth empowerment, restorative practices, school safety, school climate, bullying, cyberbullying and other forms of harmful behaviors and mistreatment

- Consulting, climate assessments and strategic planning for districts and schools
- Presentations, trainings and workshops for adults, children and youth

RESULTS

When Community Matter’s programs are implemented and delivered with fidelity, the following results are reported:

- Decreased incidents of bullying, harassment, cyber bullying, violence, exclusion and other forms of harmful behaviors and mistreatment
- Increased attendance and academic performance
- Reductions in the costs and losses in both time and money related to suspensions
- Improved relationships among and between students and adults
- Increased respect for diversity and different ways of thinking and acting
- Increased feelings of connectedness to school and each other

Community Matters' flagship program **Safe School Ambassadors®** was included in **SAMHSA'S National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices** based on a multi-year independent study. The results from the study showed that during the designated time period:

- SSA schools showed suspension rate **decreases of 33%**

  **While conversely:**

- Non-SSA control schools showed suspension rate **increases of 10%**

The Safe School Ambassadors (SSA) Program is:

- A proven anti-bullying and violence-prevention program
- A research-based, field-tested logic model
- Focused on social norms change
- Student-centered: designed for students in 4th - 12th grade
- Cost-effective

The program identifies and selects student leaders from diverse groups across the campus. Ambassadors are trained in the skills of non-violent communication to stop bullying, cyberbullying and harassment.

How the Safe School Ambassadors Program empowers youth:

Few schools have fully engaged, equipped and empowered their students as peacemakers to improve school climate. As a result, students believe that they have only two options:

- To be a bystander and condone the hurtful acts they see, or
- To “tell” on their peers

The Safe School Ambassadors Program provides students a third option: to be an “upstander” - giving them the motivation, support and intervention skills to prevent and stop bullying and harassment.

Why the SSA Program is student-centered:

- Students are a powerful, often underutilized force for improving school climate
- Students see, hear and know things adults don’t
- Students can intervene in ways adults can’t
- Students are often the first to arrive on the scene of an incident before adults even know about it
- Students determine the social norms - what’s OK and what’s not - while adults set the rules, policies and consequences

Impact of the SSA Program:

- Reduces bullying and cyberbullying
- Increases student reporting to adults
- Reduces suspensions and expulsions
- Improves school climate and student retention

Since 2000, the Safe School Ambassadors Program has been implemented in over 1,700 schools, training over 95,000 students and over 13,000 adults in 38 US states, Puerto Rico, Guam, Canada and Paraguay.

“We learned how to defuse conflicts that arise in everyday life and how to create a community of peace and unity.”

- Dani, 16, Safe School Ambassador, Northern CA

“The Safe School Ambassadors program has provided us with a well-designed student-to-student initiative that has made a positive difference in over 30 of our district’s schools.”

- Alison Adler, Ed.D., Chief, Safety & Learning Environment
  Palm Beach County, Florida

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