

Operation Respect-CT: Promoting Positive School Climate & Preventing Bullying

The Need:

- Bullying is defined as student-to-student mean behavior (such as name-calling, teasing, threats and attacks) that makes a young person a frequent target and leaves lasting emotional scars.
- Negative school climate, a condition in which bullying flourishes, leaves students feeling unsafe and often results in discipline problems, poor attachment to school and low academic achievement.
- Bullying can cause depression, increase the risk of suicide, and decrease academic performance.
- In CT, one in four high-school students reported being bullied in the past year (*2009 School Health Survey*).
- Social networking media open up new avenues for bullying, since they can lower young people's inhibitions. Cyberbullying often perpetuates face-to-face bullying that has taken place on school grounds.
- A 2008 Operation Respect-CT survey of Connecticut schools indicated that many would welcome assistance in promoting positive school climate and preventing bullying. A 2010 survey confirmed that schools continue to experience a high need for support, particularly in terms of staff professional development.

Our Initiative:

- In order to provide schools with comprehensive assistance, The Partnership collaborates with our state's key stakeholders and service providers in the area of positive school climate and bullying prevention. These include: State Education Resource Center, CT Commission on Children, Connecticut Association of Boards of Education, Connecticut State Department of Education, True Colors, Anti-Defamation League, and others.
- Staff use a science-based approach—informed by state anti-bullying law, national school climate standards and the Olweus model bullying prevention program—that helps schools build an effective infrastructure for positive school climate.
- Schools receive training, resource documents/tools and step-by-step implementation guidance that cover assessing needs and gaps, setting appropriate policies, building staff skills, administering student/staff/parent surveys, and other proven practices.

Our Results:

- The Partnership reached over 160 school staff and over 150 students during the 2009-2010 program year with on-site assistance and/or training regarding school climate improvement and bullying prevention. Customer evaluations indicated significant gains in staff knowledge and readiness for implementation. Ongoing evaluation will track positive changes achieved in schools as a result of Partnership services.
- In April 2010, The Partnership hosted a groundbreaking school climate/bullying prevention conference for educators, with over 200 in attendance from across the state. The conference featured workshops on topics such as cyberbullying, connecting with hard-to-reach youth, and understanding state anti-bullying law. Keynote speakers included internationally renowned school climate researcher Dr. Jane Bluestein and CT Commission on Children Executive Director Elaine Zimmerman.