“Bullying,” School Climate & Restorative Practices: What are the Connections and What Do These Look Like in Practice

Jo Ann Freiberg, Ph.D.
CT State Department of Education Leadership Team, National School Climate Council
OPENING CIRCLE!!
Introduction: How do I Know What I Know?

- Brief background
  - Experience
  - Education
- My “day” job at the Connecticut State Department of Education
  - Turnaround Office
  - School Climate Improvement, Restorative Practices, Bullying and Character Education
    - Professional Development
    - “Bullying” Complaints
Lessons Learned from My Own Bullying Inquiry Log

Eleven years worth of data...trends are clear

Approximately 2345 unique inquiries

- Bullying knows no demographic boundaries
- Bullying takes ALL forms without patterns
- Bullying affects all grade levels
  - Very slight increase in the middle school years
- Bullying overwhelmingly involves children with special needs (IEPs & 504 Plans)
  - Children who are “different”
- The family perceptions about what is happening to the child is in a separate universe from what is objectively happening at school
Making Schools Safer by Passing State Anti-Bullying Laws: Reactive vs. Preventive

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Missouri’s Law originally only pertained to “Cyber-Bullying”
CT and WY: Only two states that combine (the problem of) Bullying and (the solution of creating positive) School Climate in the same legislation

120 – 150+ total amendments throughout the country!!!!

SCHOOL CLIMATE TASK FORCE SEATED IN 2016
Public Act 11-232 (CT)

• Effective July 1, 2011
• Safe School Climate Coordinator
  – District level
• Safe School Climate Specialist
  – School level
• Safe School Climate Committee
  – School level
• School Climate Assessments
  – 2014 Amendments: Common Student Survey Questions
Public Act 11-232 (CT)

- Defines bullying
  - Student to student only
  - Enumerates targeted groups
    • Confuses protected with non-protected classes
- Procedure for filing bullying complaints
- School employees must be “trained”
2014 Amendments: Five (Six) Statutes

- P.A. 11 – 232
- P.A. 13 – 3
- P.A. 14 – 172
- P.A. 14 – 232
- P.A. 14 – 234
  - Teen Dating Violence added
  - Culturally Responsive Curriculum added
  - Minor procedural changes to investigations and notifications
- P.A. 14 – 196
The World Of Inappropriate Behavior

- Bullying
- Protected Class Harassment
- Criminal Behavior

Mean Spirited Behavior/Inappropriate peer interactions
Understanding and working effectively requires 3 Critical Paradigm Shifts in Thinking and Leadership
Pivotal/Paradigm Shift in Thinking & Engaging

Fixing Problems & Putting Out Fires (reactive)

Developing Character & Creating the Climate** (pro-active)

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Why NOT Look Through The Lens of “Bullying Prevention?”

“Bullying” is a TOXIC School Concept: A True Conversation Closer

- No school/institution wants to have any of it (bullying)
- No parent/guardian/care giver will admit their dependent is one (bully)
- No individual will own up to being one (bully)
- Everyone avoids these terms except the Target/Target’s family (“She/he has been bullied,” or “I’ve been bullied”)
Bullying is “one bucket” thinking…any form of inappropriate behavior is either BULLYING or it is NOT BULLYING…and because of this, everything is bullying!!!! And when everything is bullying…NOTHING is bullying!!!!

The way out of this practical dilemma is to focus NOT on bullying, but on school climate improvement…

the ultimate remedy for this beast called, “bullying.” Without making this switch, we’re all living in BULLIMANIA!!!!!
Why “School Climate”?  

- On-going Issues with labels/titles and Content  
  - Character/Moral Education  
  - Moral Community  
  - Religious Education  
  - Social/Emotional Learning  
  - Citizenship or Civics  
  - Bullying Prevention  
  - Service Learning  
  - Whole Child Education  
- Politically correct: everyone is supportive  
- No one questions the “content” of lessons  
  - School climate is “ephemeral”  
- Not perceived as a separate subject - integrated into all subject matter
A Call To Action: Improving School Climate

Improving school climate is among the most effective ways of improving the lives of youth, preventing violence and creating physically, emotionally and intellectually safe, supportive and positive learning environments.
Years of focusing on what is *absolutely necessary* for optimal learning to occur…

• Positive and meaningful *relationships* between and among all school community members

• Learning environments that are *physically, emotionally and intellectually safe*

**School Climate:** *The Character and Quality of School Life* (safety, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning, leadership, environment and leadership)
Focus on School Climate (Improvement)

- Forward thinking perspective
- Comprehensive approach
- Standards-based
- Foundation for student success
- Strength-based perspective
- Fosters student, family, faculty/staff engagement
School Climate

Simple definition:

The Character and Quality of School Life
DIMENSIONS OF SCHOOL CLIMATE
School Climate: Key Dimensions**

** Strong, Positive Leadership in embedded and assumed in every dimension
School Climate: Key Dimensions

Safety

• Rules and Norms
• Sense of Physical Security
• Sense of Social-Emotional Security
School Climate: Key Dimensions

Interpersonal Relationships

- Respect for diversity
- Social support – adults
- Social support – students
- Professional relationships
- Strong bonds to school
- Effective/Available support
- Leadership
School Climate: Key Dimensions

Teaching and Learning

- Support for learning
- Academic, Social, emotional, and civic learning
- Leadership
School Climate: Key Dimensions

Environment

- School Connectedness (social environment)
- Physical Surroundings
School Climate: Key Dimensions

Social Media

- Sense that students feel safe when online or on electronic devices
School Climate: Key Dimensions**

** Strong, Positive Leadership in embedded and assumed in every dimension
There is growing appreciation that school climate – the quality and character of school life\(^1\) – fosters children’s development, learning and achievement. School climate is based on the patterns of people’s experiences of school life; it reflects the norms, goals values, interpersonal relationships, teaching, learning and leadership practices, and organizational structures that comprise school life.”

\(^1\)This definition of school climate was consensually developed by members of the National School Climate Council (2007). The terms “school climate”, “school culture” and “learning environment have been used in overlapping but sometimes quite different ways in the educational literature. Here, we use the terms interchangeably.
National School Climate Standards

Present a vision and framework for a positive and sustainable school climate. They compliment national standards for Content, Leadership and Professional Development and the Parent Teacher Association’s National Standards for Family School Partnerships.
National School Climate Standards: Endorsements

- American School Health Assoc.
- ASCD (Assoc. for Supervision & Curriculum Development)
- Character Educ. Partnership
- Nat’l Network of Educ. Renewal
- Nat’l School Boards Assoc.
- Public Education Network
- School Mental Health Project
- Search Institute
- FairTest
- Nat’l Assoc. of School Psych.
- American School Counselors Assoc.

- Committee for Children
- Pacer Center
- Teaching Tolerance
- Nat’l Rural Educ. Association
- Nat’l Org. for Youth Safety
- National PTA
- CT Juvenile Justice Alliance
- Futures without Violence
- iKeep Safe (Internet Keep Safe Coalition)
- Nat’l Cntr. for Student Engagement
- **Westbrook, CT Public Schools**
- Portland, CT Public Schools

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Model School Climate Policy

• “Umbrella” policy for all other relevant legislation and policies
  • Used for all school and district improvement…not just school climate
  • Nearly a 1 ½ year process
• Unanimously adopted March 19, 2014
• CT Assoc. for Boards of Educ. Policy # 5131.914
• Shipman & Goodwin Education Law Firm review
• Model for other CT districts and states
• Model for the National School Climate Center
Standard One

The school community has a shared *vision* and plan for promoting, enhancing and sustaining a *positive school climate*. 

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Standard Two

The school community sets policies specifically promoting (a) the development and sustainability of social, emotional, ethical, civic and intellectual skills, knowledge, dispositions and engagement, and (b) a comprehensive system to address barriers to learning and teaching and reengage students who have become disengaged.
Standard Three

The school community’s practices are identified, prioritized and supported to (a) promote the learning and positive social, emotional, ethical and civic development of students, (b) enhance engagement in teaching, learning, and school-wide activities; (c) address barriers to learning and teaching and reengage those who have become disengaged; and (d) develop and sustain an appropriate operational infrastructure and capacity building mechanisms for meeting this standard.
Standard Four

The school community creates an environment where all members are welcomed, supported, and feel safe in school: socially, emotionally, intellectually and physically.
Standard Five

The school community develops meaningful and engaging practices, activities and norms that promote social and civic responsibilities and a commitment to social justice.
SCHOOL CLIMATE DEVELOPMENT MODEL
Time

From the cards provided, select the one that represents the area you spend the majority of your time on.
Putting it Together

Using the grid provided, place the four cards in the area that best matches title with description.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individual Intervention</th>
<th>School-Wide Community Intervention</th>
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<td>Individual Development</td>
<td>School-Wide Community Development</td>
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Individual FOCUS Environment!

Dealing with, Problem Solving, Intervening w/ Individual Student Behavior

School-wide Interventions in Response to Pervasive Issues

Individual Student Growth & Skill Development

Safe & Respectful Community-wide: School Climate Building

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Inextricably Interconnected and interrelated

Character
Education

School
Climate

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individual Intervention</th>
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<tr>
<td>(Reaction to <em>individual</em> inappropriate behavior)</td>
<td>(Reaction to <em>pervasive</em> inappropriate behavior)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Individual Development</td>
<td>School-Wide Community Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Character Education/Development)</td>
<td>(School Climate Improvement/Moral Community)</td>
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The First Bookend of Research

SCHOOL CONNECTEDNESS
School Connectedness: Simple Measures

- I feel close to people at this school
  - Peers
  - Every student should have a caring adult
- I am happy to be at this school
  - A “destination”
- I feel like I am part of this school
  - A sense of belonging
- The teachers at this school treat students fairly (not identically)
  - Fairness = Listening
- I feel safe (physically, emotionally and intellectually) in this school
The Second Bookend of Research

School Shooters
School Shooter Commonalities

- Five necessary (not sufficient conditions)
  - Marginalized by their Peers
    - Teased, ridiculed, excluded, etc.
    - Subjected to homophobic slurs
  - Under the “Radar Screen”
    - Marginalized by the adults who could have helped them
    - No caring adult they could count on
  - Very Rigid Parameters for being Acceptable
    - Being “different” is not acceptable
  - Personal Problems
    - Mental health conditions
    - Family instability
  - Easy Access to Guns
Tragedy Vs. Solution Aligned

Students at Risk Factors (School Shooters)
- No Caring Adult
- Alienated from School Culture
- Peer Marginalization

Connectedness Factors
- Close to people at school
  - Special adult connection
- Happy to Be at School
- Feeling a part of the school
  - Sense of belonging at school
- Adults treat students fairly
- Sense of (physical, emotional and intellectual Safety) at School

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“I’ve come to a frightening conclusion that I am the decisive element in the classroom [school]. It’s my personal approach that creates the climate. It’s my daily mood that makes the weather. As a teacher [administrator], I possess a tremendous power to make a child’s [adult’s] life miserable or joyous. I can be a tool of torture or an instrument of inspiration. I can humiliate or humor, hurt or heal. In all situations, it is my response that decides whether a crisis will be escalated or de-escalated and a child [adult] humanized or dehumanized.”

Haim Ginott, Teacher and Child
Paradigm Shift

From Punitive
- Rule broken
- Establish guilt or innocence
- Suppress misbehavior
- Authority driven disciplinary action
- Accountability = Punishment
- Using fear of punishment and exclusion to motivate positive behavior (or the use of “carrots”)

To Restorative
- Who has been harmed and how
- Address needs
- Recognize misbehavior as a learning opportunity
- Those impacted determine resolution collectively in Circles
- Accountability =
  - Understanding the impacts
  - Taking responsibility
  - Suggesting ways to repair harm
- Positive Behavior results from the opportunity to make amends and honorably reintegrate

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The Road goes ever on and on… The Hobbit

*It’s a dangerous business, walking out one’s front door*

© PAC JAF 2015

Gandalf
The Restorative Practices Journey…

*If you want to go there fast…*  
*go by yourself*

*If you want to go far…*  
*take someone with you*
Restorative Practices represent a philosophy that recognizes the importance of prioritizing the relationships and connections between and among all people within a school community and provides a framework for creating positive school climate and culture.
Restorative Practices: Primary Channels

- **Pro-active**
  - Strengthen relationships
  - Develop community

- **Responsive**
  - Manage conflict and misbehavior
  - Meet needs
  - Repair harm
  - Restore relationships
"Human beings are happiest, healthiest and most likely to make positive changes in their behavior when those in authority do things with them rather than to them or for them."

Ted Wachtel
SOCIAL DISCIPLINE WINDOW

CONTROL
(limit-setting, discipline)

HIGH

SUPPORT
(encouragement, nurture)

LOW

HIGH

Adapted by Paul McCold and Ted Wachtel from Glaser, 1969
SOCIAL DISCIPLINE WINDOW

HIGH

CONTROL
(limit-setting, discipline)

TO
Punitive

WITH
Restorative

NOT
Neglectful

FOR
Permissive

SUPPORT
(encouragement, nurture)

LOW

HIGH

Adapted by Paul McCold and Ted Wachtel from Glaser, 1969
Adult Responsibility and Looking Through a “Restorative Practices” Lens
(another paradigm shift in thinking and leading)
Focusing on changing student behavior (reacting to & teaching students skills)

Adult actions and reactions determine student behavior (Adults matter)
Filling Tool Boxes and Getting Off The Isle of Punishment!

- Many (unfortunately) believe that if there is not a “punishment” then nothing happens.
- There are miles and miles of restorative consequences between the Isle of Punishment and the Isle of Permissiveness.
- Academic skill needs must be treated identically as social/behavioral needs.
  - Educators never give up on academic skill learning.
  - Behavior is almost always treated differently.
CONSEQUENCES!!

Responses to inappropriate behaviors do not have to be "punishing" consequences

Responses to inappropriate behaviors should be consequential …

What is the difference??
“Punishing” consequences are...
Exclusionary... Repetitive without result...
Feel ‘painful’ without behavior change...
Meaningless... Often elicit rage in perpetrator... Often elicit fear in target

Consequential Responses are...

Educative... meaningful... ethical...
thoughtful... logical... character building... restorative for the community... and restorative for the individuals involved
The Nature of Restorative Practice

- Restorative Practices is not:
  - A program or a curriculum
  - A discipline system
  - Reactive
  - Punitive

- Restorative Practices ARE:
  - A way of thinking and being
  - About changing school climate and culture
  - Proactive and responsive
  - Relational
Create Balance: Restorative Practices Achieve Both

The Outside Approach: SECURITY
– Security focused
– Adult driven
– Punitive policies
– Control oriented

The Inside Approach: CLIMATE
– Relationship focused
– Student centered
– Formative/Restorative
– Focused on changing social norms
Key Points of Restorative Practices

- The root cause of most misbehavior is a result of our disconnected world.
- Build community and respond to conflict and misbehavior restoratively.
- Authority works “WITH” – Not “to” or “for”.
- Continuum of practices.
- Paradigm shift from punitive to restorative.
Positive Outcomes of Implementing Restorative Practices

- Reductions in the number and intensity of fights and physical altercations
- Fewer classroom and cafeteria disruptions
- Drastic reduction in the number of students suspended and expelled, as well as referred out of the classroom
- Higher academic performance including standardized test score increases
- Greater sense of physical, overall safety in the school
- A more positive school climate for students and school personnel
- Healthier relationships among and between students and adults – including parents and guardians
- Increased and more meaningful communication
“One of the goals of implementing restorative practices school-wide is to build a cohesive, caring school community that allows for improved and increased communication. This includes setting a school climate that promotes healthy relationships, identifies common values and guidelines, develops social-emotional understanding and skills, and promotes a sense of belonging to the school community.”

Alameda County School Health Services
School-Wide Prevention Practices = Positive School Climate

Managing Difficulties

Intensive Intervention

Restoring Community

Creating a Positive School Climate

Building Community
Intensive Intervention

Managing Difficulties

School-Wide Prevention Practices = Positive School Climate

Restoring Community

Building Community: Creating a Positive School Climate
Restorative Practices Triangle

In a small group, put the provided cards together to create a triangle that represents the levels and activities that comprise the Restorative Practices Triangle.
Each Practice also has 2 Cards: Title & Description
Building a cohesive, caring school community that allows for improved and increased communication
Managing Difficulties

= Managing Minor Difficulties

Responding to situations with a restorative intention; represents a shift in thinking; behavior issues provide youth with teachable moments
Focusing on rebuilding relationships and repairing harm
The Foundation of Restorative Practices

School Climate

= School-Wide Prevention Practices

• Relational Practices
  • Working to understand how individuals in the classroom or school community relate to one another

• “Circles”
  • Coming together to facilitate student and teacher connectivity

• Routines
  • Creating classroom values, such as working agreements/social contracts, adhering to them, discussing them and questioning them (continually over time)
Managing Minor Difficulties

- **Problem-Solving Circles**
  - Brings people together to give voice to every individual; makes space in the classroom to resolve conflict and solve problems

- **Restorative Conversations**
  - Having informal conversations using restorative language to repair or prevent harm

- **Hallway Conferences/Conversations**
  - Quick conferences/conversations to understand how people were affected and take steps to prevent harm

- **Restorative Conferences**
  - Meeting formally to prevent harm, enable people to resolve differences, and build social-emotional capacity through empathy

- **Peer and/or Adult Mediation**
  - Appropriate neutral third party supports those in conflict to come to a mutually acceptable resolution, or to find a way of moving forward
Restorative Questions

- Can you explain what happened?
- How did it happen?
- What was the harm?
- Who do you think was affected?
- How were you affected?
- How were they affected?
- How do you feel about what happened?
- What needs to happen to make things right?
- How are you doing now in relation to the event and its consequences?
- What were you looking for when you chose to act?
- What would you like to offer and to whom?
IIRP Restorative Questions I (To respond to challenging behavior)
• What happened?
• What were you thinking at the time?
• What have you thought about since?
• What has been affected by what you have done? In what way?
• What do you think you need to do to make things right?

IIRP Restorative Questions II (To help those harmed by other’s actions)
• What did you think when you realized what had happened?
• What impact has this incident had on you and others?
• What has been the hardest thing for you?
• What do you think needs to happen to make things right?
Questions *Never* to Ask Children....

- Why did you do that?

- *What* were you thinking?
• **Intervention Circles**
  - Brings people together to make space in the classroom to resolve conflict and solve problems at the intense level

• **Special (Stipulated) Circumstances**
  - Considering the individual and contextual issues to come to an agreement that provides appropriate consequences and honors the principles of Restorative Practices

• **Restorative Conferences**
  - Meeting formally with those involved to repair harm, enable resolution of differences, and build social-emotional capacity through empathy
Intensive Intervention
School-Wide Prevention Practices = Positive School Climate

Managing Difficulties

Intensive Intervention

Restoring Community

80%

20%

Building Community
Creating a Positive School Climate
Strategic, Incremental Implementation

Create 3 year roll-out plan including strategies for:

– Gaining buy-in
– Training
– Experimentation
– Ongoing learning
– Monitoring progress and gathering feedback
– Updating policies and procedures
– Reporting out progress
Individual FOCUS Environment

Dealing with, Problem Solving, Intervening w/ Individual Student Behavior

School-wide Interventions in Response to Pervasive Issues

Individual Student Growth & Skill Development

Safe & Respectful Community-wide School Climate Building

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Horton, the Elephant says....
“A person’s a person, no matter how small”
Adult Modeling: We Are All Models... We might As Well Be Good Ones

- Language Use
- Moral/Ethical Behavior
- Demonstrating Compassion
- Living Core Values
- Listening
- Mentorship, not Friendship
- Conflict Resolution
- Display of Common Courtesy
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