

BUS DRIVERS AND BULLYING PREVENTION

Survey Shows Bus Drivers Witness, Intervene in Bullying Situations

Bullying behavior is a growing concern among America's educators. Bullying is generally defined as repeated aggressive acts intended to do harm, and is characterized by a power or status difference between the students. Bullying includes not only physical aggression such as hitting or stealing, but also verbal aggression, such as threatening, name calling, spreading rumors, socially rejecting and isolating someone, or cyberbullying (where bullies can hide behind the anonymity of the Internet).

Students who have been bullied report feeling depressed, anxious, and isolated. Many have low self-esteem. Their school attendance and performance may suffer. And in some cases, as the nation has seen recently, they are so tormented, they take their own lives.

VIEW FROM THE BUS

Growing up in New Jersey, Jameel Williams recalls vividly how he was bullied by older, bigger boys.

"I was short for my age, so my fellow classmates would pick on me," says Williams, a bus driver and paraeducator from North Carolina, and NEA's 2011 ESP of the Year. "I see the same thing happen to students in my school because of their size, the clothes they wear, or for some other artificial reason."

To counter bullying behavior, Williams says school districts need strong anti-bullying policies with explicit instructions on how to report incidents. Most of all, he says adults must intervene when appropriate.

"If you witness a student bullying someone, you must get involved immediately," he says. "We must explain to the bully that his or her behavior is not acceptable."



Even though there are many training programs that provide educators with tools to intervene in bullying situations, bullying often occurs outside the classroom, beyond teachers' reach. One such place is on the school bus.

According to the U.S. Department of Education, in 2006–2007, one-third of U.S. students ages 12 through 18 reported being bullied. Of those, 8 percent said they were bullied on the school bus.

NEA has long been committed to bullying and harassment prevention and intervention. For decades, members have received training and resources in how to recognize and intervene in student-to-student bullying situations. In 2010, NEA conducted the first nationwide survey to include the opinions of education support professionals (ESPs) as well as teachers on issues relating to bullying in public schools. Among the 2900 ESP respondents, 470 were bus drivers.

Highlights of the bus drivers' responses are presented on the next page.

What the Bus Drivers Said

They witness bullying. Bus drivers were more likely than other ESPs to report seeing bullying. Half of them reported witnessing it several times a month. They viewed bullying as a significantly greater problem at their school than did other ESPs.

Students and parents tell them about bullying. Approximately 40% of bus drivers indicated that a student reported bullying to them within the past month; 21% stated that a parent reported bullying to them. In fact, bus drivers were 36% more likely to hear reports of bullying from students and parents than other ESPs. This is valuable information they can share with all school staff—administrators, teachers and support professionals—to prevent further bullying.

Bus drivers are more likely to hear reports about bullying than other ESPs.

They feel it's their job to intervene. A significant majority—92%—of bus drivers surveyed reported that it is “their job” to intervene in bullying situations.

They need training on bullying prevention and intervention. Nearly all the bus drivers surveyed reported that their school district has a bullying policy, but only 56% said they received training on that policy.

They want training on different forms of bullying. More than two-thirds of bus drivers reported that they need additional training on how to address different forms of bullying—physical, verbal, relational, cyberbullying, and sexting—and in situations involving children being bullied because of sexual orientation, disability, race, gender, and religion.

They need to be invited/encouraged to join school committees on bullying prevention. Fewer bus drivers than other ESPs reported that their school had formal committees on bullying prevention. And only 23% of them were involved in bullying prevention efforts.

They are less likely than other ESPs to feel connected to their school community, which influences bullying intervention. Connectedness is the belief by adults in the school that they are cared about as individuals and professionals involved in the learning process. Research has shown there is an important link between feeling connected to the school and being comfortable intervening with all forms of bullying among all types of students. The more staff members, including bus drivers, feel connected to their school, the more likely they are to intervene and stop bullying when they see it.

They are likely to live in their school district. NEA surveys find that 81% of bus drivers live in the school district where they work. This means they know the students and their families, and can be an invaluable resource when seeking answers to bullying incidents.



TIPS FOR BUS DRIVERS

To Intervene in Bullying

- ✓ Learn about bullying so you know what you're looking for (see resources).
- ✓ When you see something, do something—be assertive and calm.
- ✓ Start with verbal warnings. Use the name of the student who is bullying.
- ✓ Call your school or dispatcher according to policy. Sometimes the call will stop the behavior.
- ✓ If the behavior escalates, stop the bus in a safe place if you have to.
- ✓ Maintain control of yourself.
- ✓ Stand up and speak, clearly and calmly, to the involved students.
- ✓ Do not argue with or try to convince the student who is bullying.
- ✓ Move affected students to new, safe seats.
- ✓ Report incidents as required by your school's policy.
- ✓ Talk to other school staff about what you've witnessed. Share your concerns about the students you drive, since they interact with the same students during the rest of the day.

To Prevent Bullying

- ✓ Establish a positive atmosphere on the bus. Be clear, fair, and consistent about rules.
- ✓ Treat students the way you want to be treated and the way you want them to treat each other.
- ✓ Learn and use their names. Introduce yourself.
- ✓ Get to know all of the students on your bus—including the students who bully.
- ✓ Use positive, non-verbal interactions—a smile, a nod, a thumbs up, a high five, a pat on the back.
- ✓ Notice something positive the students do and say something about it to them or someone else where they can hear it.
- ✓ If you regularly drive for a group like a sports team or club, get to know what they do. Go watch them in action and say something to them about it.
- ✓ Submit positive bus referrals.

Source: US Department of Education Safe and Supportive Schools Center

Inform Yourself and Your Association

- Visit www.nea.org/neabullyfree, a good go-to-source for resources about how to help bullied students and how to prevent bullying in your school.
- Request a bullying prevention and intervention training session from NEA at nea.org/neabullyfree under the training link.
- Ask your school district to provide more training on current policies for bullying prevention and intervention. Work with your local affiliate to ensure these trainings are scheduled at times that are convenient for bus drivers to attend along with other school staff.
- Make sure bus drivers are involved in bullying prevention teams, committees and other activities at your school or local affiliate.
- Download and share the two U.S. Department of Education-funded training modules for bus drivers: how to intervene in bullying incidents and how to

prevent bullying by establishing a positive climate on the bus at safesupportiveschools.ed.gov/index.php?id=9&eid=436

- Initiate meetings with other staff to share concerns about bullying in general or specific students in particular.

NEA'S BULLY FREE PLEDGE

I agree to be identified as a caring adult who pledges to help bullied students. I will listen carefully to all students who seek my help and act on their behalf to put an immediate stop to the bullying. I will work with other caring adults to create a safe learning environment for all students in my school.

Be that caring adult. Take the pledge at nea.org/neabullyfree

Bully Free: It Starts With Me!



Online Resources:

www.nea.org/neabullyfree

NEA's official website for the NEA Bully Free: It Starts with Me campaign, which contains links to numerous resources, including tip sheets and stories, research articles and tools, and bullying prevention and intervention training opportunities.

www.nea.org/home/3207.htm

Education Support Professionals website with links to bullying resources, including the 2010 NEA Nationwide Study of Bullying.

www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-201010.html

Thorough guidance on bullying from the U.S. Department of Education.

safesupportiveschools.ed.gov/index.php?id=9&eid=436

U.S. Department of Education page containing exemplary, free anti-bullying training materials for bus drivers, such as *Module 1: See Something. Do Something: Intervening in Bullying Behavior*, and *Module 2: Creating a Supportive Bus Climate: Preventing Bullying*.

www.schoolbusfleet.com/List/Tag/bullying.aspx

Pupil transportation website containing dozens of current articles related to bullying on school buses, including *Bullying is Unacceptable* (November 2010) and *Tackling School Bus Bullying* (November 2007).

www.safeandcivilschools.com/tn_supportstaff.php

Professional development and practical solutions website with specific materials for bus drivers, including *Bus Discipline: A Positive Approach* [Video] and *In the Driver's Seat: A Roadmap to Managing Student Behavior on the Bus* [CD/DVD].

Publications:

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