

Bullying Prevention Initiative

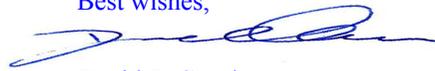
A Program of Community Outreach and Education
Berkshire County Educator Newsletter
Fall 2012

Dear Educator:

Our inaugural newsletter launched this spring received very positive feedback, so I am pleased to offer this fall edition to support your efforts in implementing a safe and healthy start to the 2012-13 school year.

Education and prevention initiatives which sustain schools, students, families and the community remain a top priority. My staff has had a busy summer preparing presentations for grades K – 12 as well as staff and parents, which include the most researched and innovative approaches to bullying prevention and positive behavior. As our work together promoting the whole school approach to bullying prevention continues, so too will our progress in creating school climates that foster empathy, respect and tolerance and a learning environment that allows all students and staff feel valued and protected.

Best wishes,



David F. Capeless
Berkshire District Attorney

A School's Legal Responsibility in Bullying Matters

The passage of Massachusetts' groundbreaking anti-bullying legislation in May of 2010 brought a number of welcome changes to our approach to dealing with bullying in our schools. It did not change, however, the legal responsibility schools have always had, and continue to have, when it comes to responding to bullying.

Schools must recognize that bullying is not a normal part of childhood, but rather it is an indicator for youth violence, poor social development, and diminished educational growth. Bullying is not a problem that can solve itself. Failing to understand that can

expose a school to lawsuits and civil liability.

Schools not only have a responsibility to deal with bullying, but are also liable if they dismiss or ignore it. In legal

terms, this is called **deliberate indifference**. When courts have found that a

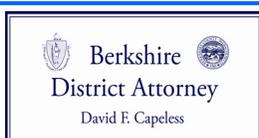
school has knowledge of and ample opportunity to intervene in a bullying or harassment incident but instead chooses to look the other way or to completely ignore it, it has demonstrated **deliberate indifference**.

Once a school has information about bullying, it has a fiduciary responsibility to protect the target. In short, if school personnel know about bullying, they must respond and take reasonable action. By failing to act, a school makes itself vulnerable to a civil lawsuit.

The best advice for any school is to demonstrate it has exercised **due diligence** in responding to a bullying incident by following its established policies and procedures. Documenting every meeting, conversation and action taken makes a complete record of the **due diligence** undertaken by a school. The Massachusetts anti-bullying law provides an expansive outline of what steps to take in practicing **due diligence**, and the documenting of those actions is vital.

Schools are not liable for spontaneous acts of violence. On the other hand, acts of violence that are a result of bullying behaviors can make a school subject to liability. The liability for a school comes from dismissing or ignoring incidents of bullying. If a school knows about bullying, it must take reasonable action in responding. Inaction on the part of a school can make it vulnerable to a multi-million dollar lawsuit.

The goal of Massachusetts' anti-bullying law is to take a comprehensive approach in recognizing and responding to bullying behaviors. It relies heavily on the education of everyone from school employees, to students, to parents and the community. Now that we are all on the same page regarding bullying behaviors, we must strive to make sure that we are exercising the due diligence necessary to address the causes. We cannot afford, socially or financially, to demonstrate deliberate indifference to the very real problem of bullying in our schools.



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Character Counts! Week

October 21-27, 2012

Every year, the U.S. President, U.S. Senate, state governors, and officials around the world proclaim the third week in October CHARACTER COUNTS! Week.

CHARACTER COUNTS! Week is the biggest celebration of character worldwide. Educators, youth group leaders, and communities all over the world will help students volunteer, paint murals, perform random acts of kindness, and learn about the six pillars of character: Trustworthiness, Respect, Responsibility, Fairness, Caring and Citizenship.

Character Counts! provides educators and schools with ideas for celebrating the

week, including resources, lesson plans, Red Ribbon Week tie-in activities and student leadership ideas. The website is releasing the resources in installments, two of which are available as soon as you register and the final two will be released in August and September. To register for the free resources, go to:

http://charactercounts.org/forms/ccweek_registration.php?email_check=0



By setting a positive example for our children, we can inspire in them the virtues that define our Nation: personal integrity, bold ingenuity, and a drive to serve others. America's role models from parents and teachers to community leaders and coaches play an integral role in shaping character. They foster patriotism, promote civic pride, and teach young people to live by the Golden Rule by treating others the way they want to be treated. Together, all Americans must cultivate moral fortitude, preach tolerance, and demonstrate the value of respect for those different from ourselves.

-President Barack Obama, Proclamation Character Counts! Week 2011

Ethics and Character are Important to Young People!



Every two years, the Josephson Institute, Center for Youth Ethics, conducts a comprehensive survey of high school students across the country. This survey, called the *Report Card on the Ethics of American Youth*, measures their self-reported values,

attitudes, and behavior.

The 2010 Report Card surveyed over 40,000 students and includes reports on honesty, integrity, bullying and at-risk behavior. Results showed that most young people feel that ethics and character are important on both a personal level and in business, but they express very cynical attitudes about whether a person can be ethical and succeed. Moreover, an alarming number of students admitted to recently lying, cheating, and stealing.

The 2012 survey is ongoing and your

school (students) can have the chance to be included. It's a great way to better understand the values, attitudes, and behaviors of your students. You will be able to identify areas where your students are doing well and areas that need your attention. The Institute publishes the national results, but *do not* publish the results of any individual school. If your school would like to get a report card on the ethical temperature of your students, you can go to their website and sign up: <http://charactercounts.org/programs/reportcard/index.html>

School Counselor Facebook Guide Released

With the prevalence of Facebook as one of the dominant social networks among young users, and the growing public awareness of issues like cyberbullying, online privacy, and digital literacy, the American School Counselor Association has combined with iKeepSafe, an Internet safety advocacy group, to publish a guide to help school counselors make sense of the website and its impact on schools.

"It's important to provide school counselors—often the first line of defense in managing digital incidents with students—the necessary tools and skills to be competent and confident," said Marsalil Hancock, president of iKeepSafe, in a

press release.

The guide is available for download and offers tips for counselor actions in four areas:

1. Developing school policies
2. Responding to online incidents that impact the school climate
3. Helping the community define dangerous behavior on Facebook
4. Educating students and staff about digital literacy

Besides empowering counselors to teach students how to identify the online bullying and how to report it, the guide recommends providing a clear outline of steps that will be taken after a report has been made. The guide notes, "This transparency is critical as students and their parents are far less likely to report incidents if they aren't confident that reporting will help the situation rather than make it worse."

With students' reputations being defined heavily by what they write and do online, they can get caught up in the moment and not see the long term impact. Counselors can encourage students to share "positive, respectful posts" that can enhance students' reputations and buffer them from devastating consequences.

Please take a moment to download the guide and measure up your readiness for the online bullying that may filter in your doors:

www.ikeepsafe.org/educators/facebook/

Facebook is a social network, but can it be used effectively in schools?

Of course, your school policies may make this decision for you, but if not make a visit to Jeff Thomas' [Tech the Plunge Blog](#) to get some information that can help you use it as an educational tool.



Like

Mix It Up at Lunch Day

October 30, 2012

A national campaign launched by Teaching Tolerance a decade ago, Mix It Up at Lunch Day encourages students to identify, question and cross social boundaries. Students move out of their comfort zones and connect with someone new over lunch. *This year that day is October 30th.*

It's a simple act that can have profound implications. Studies have shown that interactions across group lines can help reduce prejudice. When students interact

with those who are different from themselves, biases and misperceptions can fall away. Classroom activities to support Mix It Up Day are available for Pre-K—12, and most work to develop empathy, acceptance and teamwork while breaking down cliques and eliminating intolerance.

Visit [Teaching Tolerance](#) to access their free planning resources and activities or to become a Mix It Up Model School.



Model schools embrace respect and inclusiveness as core values all year long. These schools share their recipes for success and are beacons for other schools striving for inclusiveness. To find out more on the criteria for becoming a model, visit the Mix It Up [webpage](#).

Protecting Those Most Vulnerable

We are bound ethically and legally to protect all students, but due diligence is needed particularly to safeguard students who may be targeted based on race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, language, origin or physical or mental abilities.

The Safe Schools Coalition is an international public-private partnership in support of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender youth that is working to help schools at home and all over the world become safe places where every family can belong, where every educator can teach, and where every child can learn,

regardless of gender identity or sexual orientation. Beginning as an advisory committee in Seattle, WA, in 1988, the Coalition has grown worldwide and continues to help schools meet the needs of sexual minority youth and children with sexual minority parents/guardians.

In their downloadable guide for educators on how to intervene in harassment situations they indicate that “it is not enough to stop the behavior. Students may interpret a simple, ‘Stop it right now!’ to mean that it is OK to bully Johnny, but not during math. While stopping to educate may take a moment in the short run, it will save time

and energy, not to mention some child's heart, in the long run. And that child might not be the one who was targeted. It might be the bystander or the bully. You may be preventing a much more serious assault or a suicide down the road. It is worth the extra moment.”

This guide and many more tools and curricula are available on their website:

www.safeschoolscoalition.org

Safe Schools Coalition

Peers Leading the Way

Student leaders will hit the ground running this fall as 8 middle schools have signed on to participate in the District Attorney's Office's newly expanded Peer Mentor Leadership Program.

The 8-hour training which fosters leadership in young people through education and service to others applies best practices in peer mentoring fundamentals from Partners Against Hate, a collaborative of the Anti-Defamation League, the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights Education Fund and the Center for the Prevention of Hate Violence. The training program strives not only to build leadership skills for students as individuals and as a group, but also to reduce risky behaviors and improve the overall school climate.

The program, launched in 2009, raises students' awareness of attitudes and behaviors that impact schools and communities. Student leaders chosen to participate



DA Capeless with members of the Nessacus Mentors, Spring 2012

will be given the knowledge, skills and confidence to make smart personal choices and to positively influence their peers. The training, facilitated by District Attorney's staff certified in peer mentoring, includes interactive discussion, media, activities and exercises on topics such as leadership, communication, peer pressure, labels/stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination, bullying and cyberbullying and healthy relationships.

Middle & High School, Monument Valley Middle School, Mt. Everett, and Nessacus Middle School. The expansion of the program was made possible by a grant from the Executive Office of Public Safety & Security.

The program currently has a waitlist, however please let us know if your school is interested in participating.

The program gets underway the week of September 13 in the following schools: BART, Herberg Middle School, Hoosac Valley Middle School, Lee Middle & High School, Lenox Memorial

Teaching Strategies Nurture Students' Literacy & Critical Thinking

For more than 30 years, [Facing History and Ourselves](#) has believed that education is the key to combating bigotry and nurturing democracy. It works with educators to improve effectiveness in the classroom as well as students to improve academic performance and civic learning. Among the varied resources available on its website is a [page of teaching strategies](#) for all grade levels that encourage educators to use student-centered approaches within a respectful classroom climate.

Strategies range from Alphabet Brainstorm

to “Where I’m from?” Poems. Alphabet Brainstorm helps structure students’ brainstorming by asking them to generate an idea that begins with each letter of the alphabet. This can be done as an individual, small group, or whole class activity. It is a quick way to generate thoughts, measure prior knowledge, and evaluate learning. “Where I’m from?” Poems get students beyond aspects of identity that are often more obvious and familiar (such as ethnicity, gender and age), by focusing on other factors that shape our identities such as experiences, relationships, hopes and inter-



ests. Writing “Where I’m from” poems helps students clarify important elements of their identity. When these poems are shared they can help build peer relationships and foster a cohesive classroom community.

When you are looking to do something different, give this [website](#) a view.

Bullying Prevention Resources for Loan

One objective of our Bullying Prevention Initiative is to address a lack of community-wide prevention resources available to educators. Thanks to continued funding from the Executive Office of Public Safety and Security, we are able to provide access to cutting-edge prevention resources including books, teacher guides, curriculums and videos to help our partners in education foster peaceful classrooms.



Resources are available for students pre-K through grade 12

and their parents. A few to note include:

Deanna's Fund Bullying Prevention Kit.

The Bullying Prevention Kit includes a DVD with segments of the theatrical production *Doin' the Right Thing*, along with teacher's guide and activities. Grades 6 – 12.

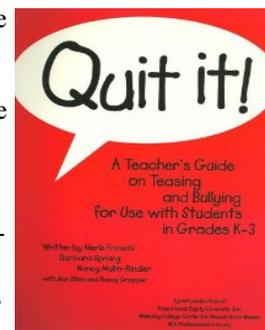
Adina's Deck.

Adina's Deck is the award-winning Internet Safety DVD program for educators and parents who want to help their young teens understand the social side of technology. Designed with 9—14 year-olds in mind,



the stories introduce cyber bullying, predators and plagiarism with an approach that is suspenseful, fun & educational!

Quit it! contains nine K—3 classroom lessons to help you and your students explore this topic. In addition, you'll get problem-solving assignments, literature connections, physical games and exercises, reproducible worksheets, and family activity letters.



These and many other resources are available for loan to you. Please contact us for the list of resources by request to Carol Mulcahy, Director of Community Outreach and Education:

carol.a.mulcahy@state.ma.us

The District Attorney's **Community Outreach and Education Program** works in partnership with schools, offering educational and enrichment programs which address the pressing social, legal, safety, and health issues facing schools, students and families.

For information on student, school staff and parent presentations call Community Outreach & Education Program at 413-443-5951.

Additional Online Resources

www.ConnectSafely.org—A non-profit that has all kinds of social media safety tips for teens and parents, the latest teen tech news and many other resources.

www.stopbullyingnow.com—Author and educator Stan Davis' website to help adults prevent bullying.

www.isafe.org—Dedicated to protecting the online experiences of youth everywhere.

www.cybertipline.com (1-800-THE-LOST)—The resource to report cybercrimes.

www.netsmartz.org—The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children's (NCMEC) Internet Safety resource and education program targeting children K—12, parents and educators.

www.stopbullying.gov—The official US Government website devoted to bullying prevention.

www.pacerkidsagainstbullying.org—The PACER Center (Parent Advocacy Coalition for Educational Rights) was founded initially for parents of youth with disabilities and now has become the **National Center for Bullying Prevention**.