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Understanding the Roles of Business Professionals in Community-Wide Bullying Prevention Efforts

What is known about bullying and how it relates to business professionals?

Bullying affects a large number of students and may have a serious impact on those who are involved. In 2011, 28% of students aged 12-18 were bullied at school and 9% were cyberbullied anywhere (Robers, Kemp, Truman, & Snyder, 2013).

Many business professionals correctly see bullying as a significant obstacle to learning that could undermine the productivity of their current and future employees (Copeland, Wolke, Angold, & Costello, 2013). They have experience in identifying efforts that can positively impact their workers and their families. Business leaders also have a stake in improving the communities where they reside and raise their own children. Many avenues exist for them to build relationships with future and current business partners through community-wide bullying prevention efforts:

- **Business partnerships.** Partnering with community stakeholders through sponsorships, donations, and volunteering.

- **School partnerships.** Actively participating in mentoring and apprenticeship programs, offering strategic expertise on school boards and school safety committees, and making decisions on curriculum needs (placing an emphasis on communication, teamwork, and interpersonal skills that are also critical to student success in today's economy).

- **Business alliances.** Developing relationships with professional and trade associations, local foundations, and civic organizations.

- **Advising policymakers.** Supporting workforce needs and school-to-work initiatives through business councils aimed at offering job training opportunities to disadvantaged youth.

Business Professionals' Unique Roles in Addressing Bullying

How can corporate and business professionals help to prevent bullying?

As community investors and employers, business professionals can be persuasive advocates for comprehensive prevention efforts with a unique ability to implement and execute community-wide efforts.

- **Persuasive advocates for effective policy and improved approaches to prevention.** Business professionals can advocate for effective policies and bullying prevention efforts since many represent the community's interest with state and national policymakers, as well as other highly visible forums. Business leaders can speak to the workforce implications of denying youth positive and healthy environments for learning.

- **Expertise in business operations to strengthen the community's planning capacity.** Private sector leaders who are engaged in the community – serving as officers and board members with schools, foundations, chambers of commerce, and hospitals – are well-positioned to initiate a community-wide planning process and galvanize support for an action plan to protect youth from bullying where they live, learn, and play. Their entrepreneurial and executive expertise can strengthen the management capacities of coalitions appointed to plan prevention responses.

- **Fundraising to promote awareness and prevention.** Business representatives can promote the community's strategies and assist in securing funding for prevention programs in schools and communities. A business professional's connections with potential funders, and their knowledge of and access to necessary resources, facilities, and supplies, could result in in-kind donations. Corporations and larger businesses may agree to sponsor a media campaign to raise the community's awareness about the effects of bullying.

Challenges and Opportunities for Business Leaders

While business leaders have a unique interest in the health of their employees and broader community, they might experience the following challenges and unique opportunities when trying to launch bullying prevention efforts:

- **Problem Recognition.** As business professionals navigate the many priorities of their lives, it may not be immediately apparent that bullying prevention is an opportunity to engage the community and help alleviate a serious problem that could negatively impact their employees and their potential future hires.

- **Financial Limitations.** Other business leaders may find it problematic in a lean economy to provide financial support for bullying awareness and prevention efforts in

their communities, especially when it can be difficult to measure success. However, there are opportunities to support such efforts in other ways, such as with in-kind contributions of products, or leadership in community-level efforts.

- **Educational Networks.** Making in-roads with educational leaders whose priorities have not been to foster broad-level community involvement can be a challenge for emerging leaders in bullying prevention. However, schools that are characterized as inclusive and collaborative (or those that aim to be) have been found to be more receptive to such partnerships and will likely be more open to comprehensive efforts to prevent bullying (Cohen & Freiberg, 2013).

Ideas for Next Steps

- Learn more about bullying prevention through StopBullying.gov and the resources listed below. Review the research presented in the training modules and how it is best communicated to motivated audiences.

- Consult the Community Action Toolkit and perform a landscape assessment that will help identify relevant data along with broader needs and opportunities within the community. Use this as a starting point for building out a strategic plan with the action planning matrix included in the toolkit.

- Plan a bullying prevention training or event that will inform other business leaders and community stakeholders such as school administrators, elected officials or organizational leaders. Use this opportunity to help dispel common myths and misdirections such as zero tolerance, which have been found to harm child-adult relationships, dampen school climate and contribute to poor student achievement. This may also develop the capacity for building a holistic, community-based effort.

Resources and References

Examples of Corporate Action

Anti-Defamation League's World of Difference Institute – ADL provides tools and resources to assist people in taking action to prevent and respond to bullying and cyberbullying. The organization develops anti-bullying and anti-cyberbullying trainings, curricula, and resources for youth, educators, youth providers, and adult family members. For more information, visit www.adl.org.

Cartoon Network's *Stop Bullying Speak Up* – This campaign raises awareness about the actions that parents, youth, and educators can take to prevent and address bullying. One of its primary goals is to inspire youth and adults to take action by speaking up when they see bullying and to grow a community committed to ending bullying. For more information, visit www.cartoonnetwork.com.

GLSEN's *No Name Calling Week* –The Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network (GLSEN), in partnership with Simon and Schuster Children's Publishing, launched an awareness campaign to end name-calling and bullying. Communities and schools all over the country now offer a week of "No Name Calling" educational and creative projects. For more information, visit www.nonamecallingweek.org.

Internet Safety Coalition – The Ad Council and industry leaders joined together to promote safe, responsible Internet use among teens and parents in the "Beware What You Share" campaign. Industry partners share the anti-bullying messages on their websites. For more information, visit www.internetsafetypartners.org.

Safe Haven for Pueblo Bullying Victims Project – Students and faculty at Pueblo City Schools reached out to business owners to hang "No Bullying Zone" posters in their windows in order to show their community support for the project. The business owners agreed to help youth arrange for someone to pick up any students who are being bullied and let them wait there until a safe ride arrives. The owners are also educating their staff members about bullying and how to help youth involved. For more information, visit the StopBullying.gov blog.

References

Copeland, W. E., Wolke, D., Angold, A., & Costello, E. J. (2013). Adult psychiatric outcomes of bullying and being bullied by peers in childhood and adolescence. *JAMA Psychiatry*, 70, 419-426.

Cohen, J. & Freiberg, J. A. (2013). School climate and bullying prevention. In T. Dary & T. Pickeral (Eds.), *School Climate Practices for Implementation and Sustainability.* A School Climate Practice Brief, Number 1. New York: NY: National School Climate Center. Retrieved from www.schoolclimate.org.

Robers, S., Kemp, J., Truman, J., & Snyder, T. D. (2013). *Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2012.* Retrieved from: http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2013/2013036.pdf.