



# PA CASSP Newsletter

## Pennsylvania Child and Adolescent Service System Program

*A comprehensive system of care for children, adolescents and their families*

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## Bullying Awareness: Interrupting the Cycle of Hurt

*by Mary W. Ebersole*

Imagine a group of elementary school teachers ducking in and out of a bungee cord circle strung between their hands. A facilitator directed their movements by asking rapid-fire questions about bullying: "Did you ever feel unsafe on your school playground?" "Did other students in your school ever say they would hurt you if you didn't do what they wanted?" [Duck into the circle for "yes;" duck out for "no."] Suddenly, teachers who work with students every day revisited their own grade school days to connect with childhood experiences of bullying behavior directed at them or at their friends. Surprisingly, the bungee circle revealed how well teachers remembered their childhood frustration, fear, shame and impulse to run when confronted by the bullies of their past.

On October 13, 2008, this bungee activity kicked off Lititz Elementary's school-wide initiative to identify and prevent bullying. Learning Facilitator and Guidance Counselor Andrea Shertzer, along with Principal Dr. Joseph Elder, and a task force of teachers trained in Olweus Bullying Prevention strategies introduced teachers to the language, the look and the behavior of bullying. Shertzer explained that the Olweus program's school-wide approach is unique in that it prepares the staff and students to be proactive. Teachers and staff learn how to intervene on the spot and students learn how to use classroom meet-

ings to address concerns and problems. Lititz Elementary now has a common language about bullying as well as identified steps to respond to bullying. The school team has also created a rubric that outlines consequences for bullying behavior. Shertzer and the Olweus task force also reached out to another key group involved in bullying scenarios: the bystanders. The teachers at Lititz Elementary encourage those who witness bullying to step up and be a voice for the target of bullying instead of joining in or watching and doing nothing.



During the '08-'09 school year, Lititz Elementary staff and students participated in small and large group activities related to bullying prevention. Together, these initiatives rehearsed preventative strategies, conveyed messages of mutual respect and created scenarios for practicing rapid responses to bullying.

- Class meetings introduced bullying prevention to students.
- The school sent brochures home to parents with signatures required (coordinated with class meetings).
- Assemblies highlighted themes of respect and bullying prevention:
  - Ventriloquist Ryan Baumgardner (October) and musician Steven Courtney (January) performed.
  - Peter and Mary Alice Amidon (Artists in Residence) introduced a commissioned song about tolerance.
  - The Olweus task force presented a skit pinpointing the roles of students in relation to a bullying incident.
  - The Olweus task force presented the sequel to the kick-off skit, showing the bully, victim, and bystanders breaking free of former roles.
- Storyteller Rita Clarke presented a 4-day storytelling cycle in the school Library: "Stories of Tolerance, Respect, and Acceptance."
- Student-created video clips on morning announcements portrayed bullying incidents and demonstrated Olweus-coached responses by students and staff.

Dr. Elder, an enthusiastic supporter of these bullying awareness activities, remarked, "The Olweus Program was very effective at creating a forum for the Lititz Elementary staff and students to examine and improve negative behaviors and communication patterns. It was beautiful to

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# Bullying Prevention

At the beginning of my son's seventh grade year, he rode the bus to school as he had done since kindergarten. Only a few weeks into the school year, he suddenly refused to get on the bus, claiming he was being harassed every day. I reported the incidents to school authorities, but by then the damage was done. My son wouldn't get back on the bus and so we arranged alternate transportation for him for the rest of the school year. When he began eighth grade the next fall and braved the bus again, the same thing happened. The harassment (or bullying) he experienced, added to some other bullying-like incidents over a period of several years, had an impact on him that lasted many years.

Many children and parents can tell similar stories of their own experiences; however, today there is not only far more recognition of the problem of bullying and its impact on children, but also more information available to assist parents and schools in addressing the issue and preventing children from bullying or being bullied.

Consider these startling statistics about the incidence of bullying and its potential impact on children:

- 77 percent of students are bullied mentally, verbally or physically.
- A child is bullied in school every seven minutes, and six out of ten teens witness bullying at least once a day.
- Cyber-bullying has increased; twice as many children indicated that they were victims or perpetrators of online harassment in 2005 compared to 2000; girls are more likely to be victims and perpetrators of cyber-bullying.
- Children and youth who are bullied are more likely than other children to be depressed, lonely, anxious, have low self-esteem, feel unwell and think about suicide.
- Bullying has a significant impact on children's mental health including disruptive and aggressive behavior, school dropout, substance abuse, depression, anxiety and social withdrawal.

In recognition of the growing problem of bullying, in 2008 the Pennsylvania General Assembly amended the Pennsylvania School Code of 1949 to require all schools to "adopt a policy or amend its existing policy related to bullying and incorporate the policy into the school entity's code of student conduct." Effective January 1, 2009, the bill requires each school to publicize its policy online and in every building and classroom, review it every three years and annually submit to the Department of Education a copy of the policy which includes information about the development and implementation of bullying prevention, intervention and education programs.

An increasing number of schools in Pennsylvania are implementing bullying prevention programs; some of these same schools are also implementing Positive Behavior Support Programs. Bullying prevention and Positive Behavior support programs are natural allies; check [www.pbis.org](http://www.pbis.org) (left menu) for resources. The Department of Education also offers numerous resources on its Web site at [www.pde.state.pa.us/svcs\\_students/cwp/view](http://www.pde.state.pa.us/svcs_students/cwp/view) (click on Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Program).

*Harriet S. Bicksler, editor*



## Best Practices for Bullying Prevention and School Violence

### International Bullying Prevention Conference

November 16-18, 2009  
Omni William Penn Hotel  
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Sponsored by Highmark Healthy High 5

More information at  
[www.stopbullyingworld.org](http://www.stopbullyingworld.org)

# Bullying and the Role of Social Context

By Gordon R. Hodas, M.D.

What does recent research tell us about the causes and effects of childhood bullying? The apparent causes extend beyond the dynamics of individual perpetrators and victims and include the child's social context. Over time, psychotic symptoms may emerge at adolescence. The relevance of social context to bullying highlights the importance of a biopsychosocial approach to mental health and public health which looks at a child from three vantage points: biologically-based factors, psychologically-based factors and socially-based factors. Much research on bullying has focused on biological and psychological factors. However, two recent studies from England link socially based factors with childhood bullying.

Bullying can be usefully classified as involving three different childhood groups: victims only, bullies only and those who are both perpetrators and victims, referred to as "bully-victims." According to one study, each group had unique factors as well as some that were common to all three groups. In addition, as demonstrated in another study, children who experience peer victimization have been found to be at significantly greater risk of developing symptoms of psychosis during early adolescence (age 12). This article will briefly review each of these studies and then consider their implications for public health.

(1) "School, Neighborhood, and Family Factors Are Associated with Children's Bullying Involvement: A Nationally Representative Longitudinal Study," by Bowes et al (*Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry* (2009) 48:5, 545-553) examined a range of socio-environmental factors of children at age 5 and then determined which children became victims, bullies or bully-victims by age 7, coincident with their first years of formal schooling. Information on bullying came from interviews with mothers when the child was 7 years old, with the children interviewed separately at the same age. Teachers were also surveyed, and there was general concurrence among the informants.

We already know that children who engage in bullying, and those victimized by it, often exhibit externalizing behaviors (e.g., aggressive behaviors), internalizing behaviors (e.g., anxiety or depression) or both. Of particular relevance here is that the social context of children is strongly associated with their involvement in bullying even when the child's individual characteristics are factored out. Specific findings relate to the importance of the child's school, family and neighborhood. School-related factors include large class size, which in this study was associated with increased risk of a child being bullied. A child age 5 or younger witnessing domestic violence was strongly associated with bullying behaviors at 7 years. Child maltreatment by age 5 significantly increased the odds that the child would become a bullying victim by age 7. Children who experienced problems with neighbors at age 5 were at significant risk to become bully-victims by age 7.

The authors highlight the importance of identifying risk factors for early involvement in bullying in order "to prevent children from becoming involved in persistent bullying." They emphasize that relevant risk factors go beyond individual child characteristics to include school, neighborhood and family factors as part of a comprehensive public health approach.

(2) "Prospective Study of Peer Victimization in Childhood and Psychotic Symptoms in a Nonclinical Population at age 12 Years" by Schrier et al (*Archives of General Psychiatry* 66:5, 527-536) identifies British children from a community sample who were victimized by bullying at ages 8 and 10, and then follows them over time to determine which ones develop symptoms of psychosis at age 12.

This study usefully divides bullying behavior into two types: 1) overt victimization, which involves direct physical or verbal aggression, and 2) relational victimization, involving social exclusion from peer relationships. Information about bullying victimization was obtained when the child was 8 and 10 years old from the

child and from parent and teacher reports, with good agreement rates among the informants. Within the study group, 46.2 percent of the participants reported having been victims of bullying at either age 8 or 10 years.

This study identified a direct relationship between the severity and frequency of bullying victimization and the likelihood that psychotic symptoms emerge by age 12. Children who experienced chronic victimization were 3½ times more likely to develop psychotic symptoms than non-victimized children. Children with chronic victimization were twice as likely to develop symptoms as children exposed to only intermittent peer victimization. In terms of bullying type, while overt and relational victimization each significantly increased the risk of psychotic symptoms at age 12, the combination of both types increased this risk by 4½ times. The above data excludes the contributions of individual child characteristics and family adversity, making the argument that bullying had adverse effects on the onset of psychotic symptoms all the more compelling. In identifying what they regard as "the relevance of psychosocial factors in the etiology of psychotic symptoms" in children, the authors conclude that efforts to reduce peer victimization constitute "a worthwhile target for prevention and early intervention efforts."

There are two significant implications of these two research studies: 1) a biopsychosocial approach, with appreciation of the child's social context, is essential to understanding and responding to the needs of children; and 2) support for the wellbeing of children requires an unrelenting public health commitment to addressing interpersonal violence and working to promote safe communities.

*Gordon R. Hodas, M.D., Philadelphia, has been a child psychiatrist consultant for the Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services since 1992.*

# The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program at Westmont Hilltop

By Ted Benning

Last December, a teacher told middle school principals at Westmont Hilltop School District that Josh was being bullied. Josh's teacher explained that a bigger, older student frequently bullied him between classes. The assistant principal immediately implemented the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program. Josh and the older student spoke individually and confidentially with the assistant principal. The principals issued a bullying contract to the bullying student. The assistant principal also contacted the parents of both students. In addition, "circle-group" discussions continued to help prevent a future incident with Josh and others. Finally, teachers, peers and parents of students looked out for Josh indirectly. Josh was able to complete his school year without further incident.

The Olweus (pronounced Ol-Vay-Us) Bullying Prevention Program began in 2001 in Norwegian elementary, middle and high schools based on research, studies and books published as early as the 1970s by Dr. Dan Olweus, a research professor of psychology in Norway. Coinciding with the 2001 initiative in Norway, the Westmont Hilltop School District in Johnstown, Pa., piloted this program for kindergarten through eighth grade during the 2000-2001 school year and then implemented it in 2001-2002.

The program consists of four main components. The first is the school-wide element. In the first year, schools form an Olweus Bullying Prevention Program core committee. The committee typically consists of staff and administration volunteers. Core team members complete the two-day training and create a catchy name for their program. The core team plans the inaugural annual kickoff program to create awareness and posts the four school rules against bullying at various high visibility places within district. Finally, all other staff members are trained before the school year starts to ensure

that everyone knows the program's direction and goals.

The second component is the classroom element which helps ensure that students discuss anti-bullying topics with their peers and teachers in a friendly, confidential and collaborative manner. Student "circle-groups" discuss various topics including "What is bullying" and "How to avoid and/or properly confront a bully."

Individual interventions comprise the third component. The "individual" could be the victim, the bystander, the bully, the school staff or community member directly or indirectly involved in the bullying



situation. All individuals learn how to handle a bullying situation. Learning opportunities occur during classroom meetings for students, Olweus Bullying Prevention Program training sessions for school staff, and via letters, Web sites, and/or Olweus Bullying Prevention Program community night(s).

The fourth component is engaging the community. This includes creating awareness and soliciting financial, material, human and public relations support as well as helping support the bullying prevention efforts within each school of the district.

All four components are equally important and they interconnect. The key to each is communication with all necessary individuals in the school and community.

Since its implementation at West-

mont Hilltop, the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program continues to build on what worked in the past. It is reviewed and modified annually to keep the program fresh and effective. For example:

- In that first year, the acronym R.E.S.P.E.C.T. (Remember Every Student Prefers Equal Caring Treatment) was created to personalize the program. R.E.S.P.E.C.T. now means Remember Every Person deserves Equal Caring Treatment to include school personnel and community members along with students.
- The R.E.S.P.E.C.T. program kicks off annually to remind students of the importance of telling an adult or another student if they or others are bully victims. Previous kickoff events included student skits, motivational productions and motivational speakers to promote anti-bullying.
- The Westmont Hilltop School District will train all new and retrain all veteran staff this school year to maximize the program's potential for our students.
- We use technology including the Internet and e-mail to communicate and promote the R.E.S.P.E.C.T. program during classroom "circle-groups" and to notify parents/guardians of students who bully.
- We are planning an "Anti-Bullying Night" for the community during this school year to further promote the R.E.S.P.E.C.T. program.

The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program and the Westmont Hilltop's R.E.S.P.E.C.T. program help promote a positive school climate in our elementary and middle schools. Our success depends on students, school personnel and community working together, communicating with everyone, paying attention to detail, providing daily reminders and modifying the program when necessary.

*Ted Benning is the assistant principal at the middle school in the Westmont Hilltop School District, Cambria County.*

# Everybody Plays: A Place Where All Children Belong

by Debbie Hamilton

Close your eyes and take a step back in time to when you were a school aged child. Think about a time when you were bullied. Statistically, almost every person in the world has been a victim of bullying at one time or another in their life. How did you feel when you were being bullied? What was running through your mind? Were there other people present? Did they do anything to make it stop? How do you feel about it looking back?

I do this exercise with students when I speak in classrooms. Students are eager to talk about how the experience made them feel. Most students share words such as scared, irritated, frustrated, powerless, vulnerable, mad, and sad. The interesting thing is that bystanders of bullying report feeling the same way during this exercise. The words listed above are just a few examples of how children feel when being exposed to bullying. One Potter County student talked with other students during an assembly program and stated; "bullying can really add up and really hurt a person. You should try to accept people for who they are."

As adults, our goal is to make every student feel safe and secure, both at home and school. How can we as a community of educators, parents and social service agencies work together to eliminate these words from the vocabulary of our children? While the problem is complex, the antidote is simple. Teach children to be kind to themselves and one another. So how can this be done in a way that is both effective and fun?

The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program was implemented throughout Potter County approximately three years ago. The program encourages children to talk about how they are feeling in regard to bullying and various other life issues during classroom meeting times. These classroom meetings are a time for students to

talk about how they are feeling and life events taking place outside of academics. The thought is that if kids have a safe place to vent and issues can be brought to the table and dealt with, academics will be easier to handle and the overall physical and emotional health of students will be improved. The students use this time to talk about issues such as bullying, re-



spect and creating an overall better school atmosphere. Students are encouraged to develop classroom meeting guidelines, such as one person talks at a time. Students tend to follow the rules more if they are involved in making and implementing them in their classroom. This also encourages schools to work together as a community. These are lessons that extend much further than the classroom. Over the course of the year students feel more comfortable sharing issues and talking openly about bullying problems in their schools. Students are encouraged to come up with their own solutions to issues, thus fostering the development of problem solving skills and teamwork.

Students are encouraged to stand up for one another in a positive way and include students who may feel left out. Surprisingly, most students involved in bullying situations are involved indirectly and are labeled bystanders. These are students who see bullying happening. This can be an uncomfortable situation for them because according to survey results many want to help the victim, but feel scared or powerless. Classroom meetings

help all students to recognize bullying situations and empower students to stand up for one another simply by showing support for the victim or more assertively telling the bully to stop.

Each year students are surveyed using the Olweus Bullying Prevention Questionnaire. The results of the survey are quite impressive. They show that the program is working to reduce bullying among middle school students. More than half (55.5 percent) report not being bullied at all over the past few months, which is an increase since the program started. Many schools throughout Potter County are taking the program one step further and are supporting both the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program as well as character education. Through these programs they are working to make their schools a better place by hanging up school rules against bullying and participating in random acts of kindness such as sending care packages to the troops overseas, planting flowers around their school, and sticking up for each other.

Large and small efforts are making an impact on students and families. While it is not 100 percent effective in curbing all bullying, the program is having a positive impact. I encourage the youth I work with and anyone to be kind. A little bit of kindness, as simple as a smile, goes a long way in creating an atmosphere where people feel comfortable, learn, and grow. One random act of kindness may not change much, but combined with many other acts can change the world.

*Note: The survey data was taken from the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program questionnaire that has been administered in Potter County in 2006, 2007, 2008.*

*Debbie Hamilton works at Dickinson Mental Health Center, Potter County.*

# Accessible and Affordable Bullying Prevention Resources for Practitioners, Parents and Children

by Michael W. Valenti, M.S.

Experts define bullying as “a specific type of aggression in which (1) the behavior is intended to harm or disturb, (2) the behavior occurs repeatedly over time, and (3) there is an imbalance of power, with a more powerful person or group attacking a less powerful one” (Nansel et al, 2001). Typically, bullying behaviors begin in elementary school and persist through high school (Kerr and Nelson, 2009).

While reports of the prevalence of bullying in the United States vary (Borntrager, Davis, Bernstein, and Gorman, 2009), there is no doubt that bullying is a persistent challenge for educators, parents and the children who are victims of bullying. In fact, one study found that 32 percent of surveyed students reported being bullied at school during the course of one school year (National Center for Education Statistics, 2008). In addition, incidents of bullying may be on the rise. The National Education Association states that bullying is more frequent in the current decade than the previous two decades. This fact becomes more disconcerting when one considers the dangerous behaviors often associated with bullying such as weapon possession/use and fighting (Nansel et al, 2003).

In response to these concerns, many researchers and practitioners have developed techniques, programs, and curricula to help prevent bullying behaviors. While a number of excellent research-validated bullying prevention programs exist (such as the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program), many individuals are unable to participate due to the monetary and time

related costs. However, a number of exceptional free to use, highly accessible bullying prevention resources exist. This article highlights a small handful of these resources designed for use by schools, mental health service providers, parents and children.

## Schools and Mental Health Service Providers

Unfortunately, many adults who work with children may be unable to recognize bullying behaviors. One study found that only 4 percent of teachers could identify incidents of bullying in the classroom

(Skiba & Fontanini, 2000). Thankfully, the United States Department of Health and Human Services offers a free online course, The ABCs of Bullying. The ABCs of Bullying consists of seven different training modules designed to teach adults about the effects of bullying, available treatment options, prevention practices and other related concerns.

The ABCs of Bullying is a highly accessible and practical

resource for school staff members and service providers. Embedded within the modules are informative videos, audio clips, chapter summaries and quizzes that help to synthesize the content. Individuals can also take the course at their own pace, as the Web site allows users to save their progress along the way. In addition, staff members can earn continuing education credits upon completion of the course. The ABCs of Bullying is accessible at [http://pathwayscourses.samhsa.gov/bully/bully\\_intro\\_pg1.htm](http://pathwayscourses.samhsa.gov/bully/bully_intro_pg1.htm).

Another excellent resource for practitioners is the University of Pittsburgh’s School-based Behavioral Health Web site ([www.sbbh.pitt.edu](http://www.sbbh.pitt.edu)). This recently launched Web site contains hundreds of helpful resources for users to download at no cost. Bullying resources include pre-made staff newsletters, PowerPoint presentations, study guides and implementation tools such as planning worksheets and incident report forms. The site also includes various resources to help support children with emotional and behavioral disorders.

## Parents and Children

Educating children about the dangers of bullying can be a challenge for both parents and teachers. One helpful resource is Bullying. No Way! ([www.bullyingnoway.com.au/default.shtml/](http://www.bullyingnoway.com.au/default.shtml/)), a Web site formed by the Australian government with the goal of creating safe and supportive school environments for all children. Particularly useful is the “Chill Out Space,” a section of the website which contains interactive activities designed for use with children and adolescents.

It is best to begin teaching children about bullying at an early age. As such, many of the activities available on this site target younger school age children. The word searches, arcade games, painting activities and puzzles are effective tools which introduce children to many different topics such as cyber-bullying, racism and peer pressure. With the appropriate guidance from parents, even toddlers can participate in many of the activities. For older children, the crossword puzzles serve as a pleasurable way to learn key terms and concepts.

Another helpful resource for use with children is Stop Bullying Now! (<http://www.stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov/kids>) a learning Web site from the Department of Health and Human Services. Stop Bullying Now! includes fun, interactive



games such as connect the dots, tic-tac-toe and mazes. Children can also learn how to identify bullying behaviors by viewing one of the many colorful cartoons.

For more detailed information about bullying, please visit the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's Web site at <http://mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/15plus/aboutbullying.asp>.

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observe staff and students taking charge of their environment, creating ongoing forums for communication and setting expectations for behavior that has become part of everyday life in our school.”

After months of activities and training, Lititz Elementary did not emerge as a bully-free school. Instead, reported incidents seemed to spike upward as students felt more comfortable to talk about it and seek help. They could now put a name to what was happening to them and they knew it was not okay. Shertzer reported an increase in parent phone calls regarding bullying incidents. Parents were now informed and wanted to make sure incidents were addressed. It is clear that once the school community gained skills in identifying bullying and adopted common language for talking about it, students and staff reported and addressed incidents that earlier may have slid under

the radar. By year's end, students seemed genuinely relieved to learn that telling a bully “no,” then systematically asking for help from teachers and parents is not the same as petty tattling. With conviction and confidence, teachers felt empowered



to confront bullying words or actions between students with scripted words and plans for intervention: “I heard what you just said...” or “I saw your behavior just now...” “What I heard (or saw) is bully-

ing.” Teachers and students now recognize these straightforward words as a call to stop, revisit what just happened and intervene before bullying produces a cycle of hurt.

Shertzer is quick to point out that this first year of implementation is only the start. Lititz Elementary now has the foundation in place to address bullying behavior but there is a long road ahead. Shertzer hopes that with consistency and perseverance the anti-bullying message will become an inherent part of the school's culture. It is not a once-and-done type of approach. Each school year presents another opportunity to continue the anti-bullying message and to teach students about respect for all.

*Mary W. Ebersole is the librarian at the Lititz Elementary School in the Warwick School District, Lancaster County.*

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## Statewide Bullying Prevention Initiatives

by Kweilin Nassar and Stacie Molnar-Main

### Highmark Healthy High 5

Every day, more than 160,000 students miss school because of the fear of being bullied. Bullying comes in many forms: exclusion from groups, threatening messages, repeated teasing and taunting, and physical violence. Children who are bullied have lower self-esteem, higher rates of depression and more incidence of suicidal thinking. Furthermore, bullying impacts school performance and attendance. It leads to physical health problems and it's been clearly tied to episodes of school violence.

For that reason, Highmark Healthy High 5 is supporting the very best bullying prevention programs developed in the world. Through both Highmark Healthy High 5 HALT! and PA CARES (see below), the Highmark Foundation has awarded more than \$5.1 million to fund programs through 2010 in 400 schools across Pennsylvania. Both programs help schools to implement the internationally renowned, evidence-based Olweus Bullying Prevention Program. For more than 25 years the Olweus Program has produced excellent results, decreasing bullying behaviors among children in grades K-10 between 20 and 70 percent. It includes interventions at the individual, classroom, school-wide and community level in support of bullying prevention. HALT! includes a program for teens and on-site technical assistance.

In addition, through the Highmark Healthy High 5 Bullying Prevention Institute, the Highmark Foundation provides professional development training to increase the skill level of those adults involved in bullying prevention, emphasizing best practice solutions and

awarding teachers with continuing education credits. Currently more than 1200 school personnel have attended the Institute's sessions.

The initiative is timely because Pennsylvania schools are now required to adopt bullying prevention policies. "The Highmark Healthy High 5 initiative is leading the way in providing schools in our state with the funding, support and training to comply with an amendment to the school code that requires all Pennsylvania public school districts to adopt a bullying prevention policy in 2009," says Pennsylvania's Secretary of Education Gerald Zahorchak. After all, bullying prevention is crucial to good overall physical and mental health, and especially to success in school. According to Matthew Masiello, M.D., architect of the Highmark Healthy High 5 HALT! Program, "If students are worried about their safety in school, their focus gets diverted, making it exceedingly difficult to succeed academically."

*Kweilin Nassar is Project Director for Highmark Healthy High 5 at the Highmark Foundation, Pittsburgh. More information at [www.highmarkhealthyhigh5.org](http://www.highmarkhealthyhigh5.org).*

### PA CARES

The Center for Safe Schools coordinates the PA CARES (Creating an Atmosphere of Respect and Environment for Success) initiative, which provides bullying prevention education throughout the Commonwealth. With funding made possible by the Highmark Healthy High 5 Initiative, both public and private schools located in the Highmark service regions have the opportunity to apply for a mini-grant to implement the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (OBPP) model.

Schools that are selected receive program materials, funding to contract with a certified OBPP trainer and support to help the program to succeed. Schools are also required to participate in research evaluation.

Acceptance of this grant award requires the individual school buildings to complete the following over a twelve month period:

1. Survey students in grades 3-12, only in the building that will be implementing the model
2. Form and train an OBPP coordinating committee
3. Conduct the all-staff training
4. Launch the OBPP with a kick-off event
5. Implement the OBPP program throughout the school year
6. Survey the students one year from conducting the initial OBPP survey
7. Fully participate in the evaluation process

To date 88 schools in 21 counties have received PA CARES grants. In addition to the grant opportunities, the PA CARES initiative provides tools to help support schools with their efforts to reduce bullying behavior and improve school climate. The PA CARES initiative also increases the number and availability of Pennsylvania Olweus Bullying Prevention Program certified trainers. Trainers receive additional bullying prevention education to maintain certification and provide Pennsylvania schools with the highest quality of bullying prevention services.

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