S.T.A.R.

School Technology Action Report

Tackling School Bullying:

What you need to know about bullying and cyber bullying legislation, prevention, and best practices

eSCHOOL MEDIA INC.

"Empowering Today's Ed-Tech Leader"

Dear Reader,

One of the largest issues schools must contend with today is bullying, including cyber bullying. Although bullying has been in the national spotlight for the last few years, many states, districts, and teachers have yet to design a complete online safety curriculum or know how to combat cyber bullying that occurs outside of school effectively.

This isn't because educators and stakeholders don't care. Often, it's because many are unsure where the line exists between students' free-speech rights and the rights of educators to discipline their students for off-campus transgressions.

In this latest School Technology Action Report (STAR) from eSchool Media, "Tackling School Bullying: What you need to know about bullying and cyber bullying legislation, prevention, and best practices," you'll find research on safety education, expert testimony on what it means to be safe and bully-free online, information about freedom-of-speech issues and federal policies concerning bullying, and best practices for how to respond to and prevent bullying in schools and online.

Thank you for reading this latest report, and be sure to check back soon for another **STAR** on a new topic.

Sincerely,
The editors at eSchool Media

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A message from Houghton Mifflin Harcourt:

"To be yourself in a world that is constantly trying to make you something else is the greatest accomplishment."

While I imagine Ralph Waldo Emerson could not foresee the extent to which our children would struggle in their attempt to experience such an accomplishment, his words remind us of the tremendous work that still needs to be done.

In America alone, according to the NEA, approximately 160,000 children miss school every day due to fear of attack or intimidation by other students. The pressures facing our children reflect a changing world, built on instant access, broadcast communication style, and unreachable benchmarks set by a culture fueled by celebrity and status. As the publisher of many authors, including Emerson, who have spent their lives reflecting on the value of humanity and individuality, we believe constant voice needs to be given to this issue. ***Bullying will be this generation's greatest social problem, if we do not recognize its complexity and create systems to address its impact.***

Over the past 18 months we have seen increased attention directed at this issue; viral videos, award winning documentaries, public-private partnerships, targeted legislation, tweets, posts, and "likes"… We seem to be throwing everything we have at it. And yet, the need seems to be growing. Our worry is that unfortunately, as a nation, we have a propensity for short "issue attention spans." The concerts come and go. The PSAs are taped and shown. Regrettably, after the interest wears thin, thousands of kids will go to school, sit in a cafeteria by themselves and try to suffer through another day. This preventable waste of human capital is an unnecessary drain on our economy and more importantly an unacceptable reflection of our values.

At Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, our mission is to change people's lives, by fostering passionate and curious learners. We recognize the complexity in delivering on this mission and we seek to find ways to holistically support the educators and students we serve. While there is much work that needs to be done, we are committed to identifying, improving and innovating in all areas of education reform, including addressing the effects of bullying and working to prevent it. Through services, professional development, and valued content, we seek to deliver more. We seek to support the idea echoed by one of our greatest writers… We seek to help kids be themselves, in a world that is constantly trying to make them something else.

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Bullying and student safety

From teen password sharing to stolen identities, bullying can be more than just a push in the hallway. Yet, online safety education is still a major issue schools need to address—and many educators say they need help in identifying the warning signs for teen bullying and suicide.

Survey reveals disconnect in online safety education

A new report suggests that many schools are not adequately preparing students to be safe in today's digitally connected age, and it cites basic online safety and ethics as two areas in which students need more education.

The report, "State of K-12 Cyberethics, Cybersafety, and Cybersecurity Curriculum in the United States," was published by the National Cyber Security Alliance (NCSA) and sponsored by Microsoft.

Although policy makers have urged K-12 schools to integrate technology into their curriculum and expose students to devices that will help them in college and the workforce, the survey reveals that administrators, teachers, and IT coordinators have different opinions on how best to ensure that children are adequately prepared for cyber safety and online security the digital age.

Eighty-one percent of school administrators, including principals and superintendents, said they believe their districts are adequately preparing students in online safety, security, and ethics. However, only 51 percent of teachers agree.

Despite some different opinions about how well schools are educating students on cyber safety, school leaders agree that schools should prepare students to be "cyber-capable" in college and the workforce. In fact, 68 percent of principals and superintendents said they feel confident that their schools are preparing students to follow a college-level coursework in cyber security.

Nearly all administrators (97 percent) said that schools should help K-12 students build basic technology skills that incorporate safety and security. Eighty-one percent of administrators said schools should teach cyber safety curriculum throughout all grades, so that students are equipped for careers in the cyber security field.

Many teachers say they're not prepared to teach these subjects, however.

Just over half of teachers surveyed (55 percent) said they feel prepared to teach their students how to protect personal information online. Fifty-seven percent said they are

prepared to address cyber bullying, 58 percent feel prepared to address sexting, and 67 percent said they are confident that they can discuss basic computer security with their students.

Thirty-six percent of teachers say they have received zero hours of district-provided training in cyber security, cyber safety, and cyber ethics training. Forty percent of teachers received between one and three hours of training in their school districts.

Overall, 86 percent of teachers received fewer than 6 hours of training in the last year, up from 2010?s survey, which indicated that 78 percent of teachers reported receiving fewer than 6 hours of cyber safety, cyber security, and cyber ethics training.

"The survey reveals a critical need for new curricula and teacher training that will encourage safe, secure, and responsible behavior among school students," said Dena Haritos Tsamitis, director of Carnegie Mellon University's Information Networking Institute, as well as director of education, training, and outreach at the university's CyLab. "It's essential to address this need in order to prepare a cyber-savvy workforce for our nation's future."

To date, not a single state has passed comprehensive legislation that mandates online safety, security, and ethics be a part of K-12 curriculum. The NCSA is urging states to support legislation that does just that.

"Kids and teens have embraced the digital world with great intensity, spending as many as eight hours a day online by some estimates," said Michael Kaiser, executive director of the NCSA. "Yet America's schools have not caught up with the realities of the modern economy. Teachers are not getting adequate training in online safety topics, and schools have yet to adopt a comprehensive approach to online safety, security, and ethics as part of a primary education."

Though student computer and internet use in school increases, teacher efforts to instruct students in cyber safety and security are not keeping pace.

Thirty-three percent of teachers said they believe their school or district requires a cyber safety curriculum be taught in the classroom setting, 68 percent of administrators said they believe the same thing, and 64 percent of IT specialists agreed.

More than half of teachers (56 percent) said their students use computers at least twice per week in school, and 81 percent said students use computers in school at least once per week. But only 34 percent of teachers have taught about risks associated with social networking over the past year.

Eighteen percent of teachers said they have taught their students about dealing with alarming posts, videos, or other content. Thirty-four percent of teachers have taught their students about how to make decisions about sharing personal information online.

Plagiarism appears to be among the most-taught aspects of cyber ethics—74 percent of teachers said they taught students about this topic.

Over the past 12 months, teachers responded that they have taught the following:

- Risks tied to social networking sites (34 percent)
- Using strong passwords (23 percent)
- How to send an eMail (20 percent)
- How to identify a secure website (18 percent)
- Identity theft (17 percent)
- The role of a more secure internet in U.S. economy (7 percent)
- The role of a more secure internet in national security (6 percent)
- Protecting a mobile device (6 percent)
- Careers in cyber security (4 percent)

Many stakeholders struggle to determine who holds the responsibility for teaching students about online safety, and they wonder if the duty falls to schools, parents, or both.

Teachers said they believe parents should take the most ownership over education children about safe and responsible online behavior. Seventy-nine percent of teachers said parents should take the lead, and 18 percent said teachers and schools should play the largest role in students' online safety education.

Sixty percent of administrators agreed that parents should be responsible for educating their children about online safety, while 34 percent said teachers and schools should take the lead.

Interestingly, 52 percent of IT coordinators said teachers and schools should have biggest role in educating students about online safety, and 45 percent said parents should assume that role.

Cyber bullying can start with a miscue, study says

Mixing the teenage mind, text messaging, and social media can be a recipe for dangerous miscues in the communication age, experts say.

A study released this month and co-written by a Florida Atlantic University professor casts new light on the dangers of cyber bullying among teenagers—and how a simple text message or Facebook post taken out of context can lead to violence.

The study looks at the phenomenon of "electronic dating violence," a growing subset of cyber bullying.

As in any generation, teenagers use relationships as status symbols, experts say. But with text messages and social media, relationships are more about keeping tabs and less about giving space, said FAU professor Sameer Hinduja, co-director of the Cyberbullying Research Center.

A generation ago, when people spoke face to face or on landlines, there was less misunderstanding, he said.

"Online, all you're left with is your interpretation of that text," Hinduja said. "Are they flirting? Is he cheating?"

A generation ago, there also was a parental buffer, he said. A parent might have picked up the house phone and not liked someone calling a child all the time.

But now, a teen sends out an average of 3,000 text messages a month, said Hinduja, who teaches criminology at FAU's Jupiter campus.

Hinduja co-wrote the study with Justin Patchin, a professor at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire. It's available online here.

The study revealed that 85 percent of teenage boys and 92 percent of girls engage in psychological aggression with their dating partner. It also showed that 24 percent of boys and 40 percent of girls physically attack their partner.

Some of this violence is spawned by, or goes hand in hand with, the electronic interactions that teens have with each other.

"Privacy violations can occur as perpetrators check up on, monitor, and even stalk their partners [online]," the study said. "There have also been incidents where aggressors utilize textual, audio, picture, or video content stored on their cell phones or computers to blackmail, extort, or otherwise manipulate their partner into saying or doing something against their will."

"I call it an electronic leash," said Dr. Jill Murray, a psychologist with the U.S. Department of Education. "I've had girls come into my office with cell phone bills showing 9,000 text messages and calls in a month. This is all hours of the day and night. And it's threatening: 'Hi. How are you? Where are you? Who are you with? Who are you talking to?'"

The motivations for teenage dating violence include anger and a need to exert power, the paper notes—and both of these "can be vividly demonstrated through the use of communications technologies. An adolescent can quickly send a scathing or harassing eMail or instant message to a girlfriend or boyfriend … without taking the time to calm down and react rationally to a feeling or situation."

Hinduja would not disclose the schools the study is based on, but educators say most cyber bullying happens away from school grounds.

"There's two to three times more cyber bullying than face-to-face bullying," said Aimee Wood, a prevention specialist at Broward County, Fla., schools. "They don't see a reaction, so there's a lack of empathy. They just hit 'send' without thinking."

An online survey of teens sponsored by the Liz Claiborne company revealed that 36 percent said their boyfriend or girlfriend checked up on them as many as 30 times per day—and 17 percent said their partner made them too afraid to ignore cell phone calls, eMail, or text messages.

Another recent poll found that 22 percent of youth between the ages of 14 and 24 who were involved in a romantic relationship said that partner wrote something about them online or in a text message that wasn't true.

Hinduja's paper called for more research into electronic dating violence. "Future research should work to identify which factors lead to harm in youthful romantic relationships and can also pave the way for more informed prevention and response strategies," it said.

Experts warn of a growing trend: Teen password sharing

Educators should be aware of an emerging trend that puts students' cyber security at risk: Password sharing among teen couples.

It's something that experts in the Dallas-Fort Worth area say teen couples are doing to show their love and affection, KDAF-TV of Dallas reports. But they also say it can come with some serious long- and short-term consequences.

"They feel like it is another level of status in their relationship," said Teen Contact Director Missy Wall, who added that it's something many teens tell her they're doing. She said it often causes problems.

"Relationships change, and in schools what happens with bullying and the stakes get higher with Facebook," said Wall.

Teens admitted to sharing passwords on the KDAF-TV Facebook page. One girl wrote, "I share my password to everything with him."

Wall said it actually could be a sign of an unhealthy dating relationship.

"If they say, 'If you really trust me, you'll let me have your password,' well that is a control mechanism," she said.

The folks behind EyeGaurdian, a tool designed to help parents track their kids' online behavior, say password sharing can lead to even bigger problems long-term.

"That person could easily give out information that maybe they didn't want to share, so then they're prone to identity left, they're prone to cyber bullying," said ImageVision Social Media Director Stephanie Ochoa.

Both experts suggest that teens think through the consequences before granting anyone else unlimited access to their online identity.

"I would be really weary of my child sharing her Facebook page password with someone

she's dating or even a friend, because you just don't know what a person may really use that for," said Wall.

Wall and Ochoa suggest that teens change their passwords often, especially if they've given it out to someone. Educators, too, should spread the message that sharing passwords is dangerous behavior.

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Fake Facebook identities are real problem for schools

The impersonator posed as a real Cottage Grove, Minn., sixth-grader, created a Facebook page, and posted threats that he would bring a gun to school and shoot three students.

Fights broke out in school as students argued over who created the fake profile that ridiculed the boy, a special-education student. It was not only the viciousness of the lies and threats that caught the attention of Cottage Grove police, but the youthfulness of those involved, only 11 and 12.

Amid a wave of proliferating Facebook fakes and cyber-attacks like this one—including children too young for Facebook's minimum age of 13—Cottage Grove police and other law enforcement agencies find themselves coping with outdated state laws, limited resources, and a steep learning curve on children's use of social media.

"There are so many cases like this, where somebody's being harassed over Facebook, with school-age kids," said Sgt. Randy McAlister, head of Cottage Grove investigations. "Even if you could charge them all, you probably couldn't send them to the county attorney, because they'd get overwhelmed very quickly. It definitely is an emerging issue."

Numerous Minnesota police departments, like Cottage Grove, are now sending officers for training in computer forensics. The Washington, Dakota, and Hennepin county sheriffs' offices have dedicated specialists to work cybercrimes. Washington County Attorney Pete Orput has assigned senior prosecutor Sue Harris to work in the schools and learn how kids use social media to hurt each other.

"It does pose a significant problem for law enforcement," said Washington County Sheriff Bill Hutton. Last week, deputies charged a 13-year-old Washington County boy on suspicion of terroristic threats after he used Facebook to threaten other kids with explicit violence at school, Hutton said. The charge is a felony.

In another recent case, disorderly conduct charges were filed against two Tartan High School girls after their Facebook feud erupted into a fight at school.

Police walk a fine line in respecting kids' First Amendment rights to express themselves

on social media outside of school, while dealing with problems that result, Orput said.

"None of that is being generated at the school," Gail Griffith, a Cottage Grove school resource officer, said of the Facebook case and a second cyber case she investigated. "It's all outside in the community, at home, but it filters into the school, where they're all there together, and we end up dealing with it."

The digital cases take bullying to new heights and challenge police trying to arrest offenders and prevent violence from escalating—or even leading to potential suicide. Officials say they need a law outlawing impersonations, as well as closer supervision by parents. They also need faster turnaround for records subpoenaed from social media, said Hutton, who said deputies sometimes wait weeks.

The state has laws against harassing, threatening, or stealing identities for financial gain, but none specifically against online impersonation. In Cottage Grove, police are looking at invoking a rarely used state law on criminal defamation.

"All the laws out there are 20 years behind where we are technologically, and it's very, very frustrating," Orput said.

California on Jan. 1 outlawed online impersonation, making it a misdemeanor punishable by up to a year in jail and a $1,000 fine. Texas moved to put a law on the books, too. Orput and Dakota County Attorney James Backstrom said such a law is needed in Minnesota.

"We are seeing increased use of the internet for making threats or bullying other children," Backstrom said. "It's on the rise. Cyber bullying is a serious problem in our country."

Minnesota Attorney General Lori Swanson proposed a law in 2007 that would have outlawed impersonating someone on a social media site. The bill failed.

"Because of the 24-7 nature of the internet, online bullying can be difficult for kids to escape," Swanson said. "The words may or may not be true, but they are up there for everyone to see and can be malicious."

"Seven years ago, I never dealt with this, and now I deal with it at least weekly where there's something that comes from a Facebook issue outside of school and trickles into school," Griffith said. "It spreads so fast. It's instantaneous. They are communicating as soon as the bell rings, and they're out the door. They text all night and use social networks, and then they come to school again."

Although the Cottage Grove Middle School assistant principal helped Griffith interview students in her two current cases, she's heard of other school officials saying that what happens outside of school is not their problem.

If schools do take action, they walk a fine line, as well.

On March 7, the American Civil Liberties Union of Minnesota filed suit against Minnewaska Area Schools and the Pope County Sheriff's Office. The suit claims school officials violated a 12-year-old girl's constitutional and privacy rights when they disciplined her and made her give them her Facebook log-in information because she allegedly posted messages about hating a hall monitor.

The school denies wrongdoing.

Sheriff Hutton said the first responsibility rests with parents to supervise children on the internet and to stop online behavior that's inappropriate and possibly illegal.

When bullying goes digital, it can be tough to stop, said Dave Marcus, director of security research for McAfee Labs of Santa Clara, Calif., a national research firm providing security technology for digital users.

"Kids are kids," Marcus said. "They'll gang up on people in the schoolyard, and they'll do the same through the digital media."

Teen's suicide after repeated bullying sparks debate

A teen's suicide in bucolic Western Massachusetts has resulted in several of her former classmates being charged with crimes ranging from disturbing a school assembly to civil-rights violations, harassment, and statutory rape. And now the school system finds itself at the center of a heated controversy over its response to the ongoing abuse.

Tormented daily at school and online by a group of "mean" girls and boys, 15-year-old Phoebe Prince hanged herself in January, just two days before the school's winter cotillion.

"It appears that Phoebe's death on Jan. 14 followed a tortuous day for her, in which she was subjected to verbal harassment and threatened physical abuse," said Northwestern District Attorney Elizabeth Scheibel. "The events were not isolated, but the culmination of a nearly three-month campaign of verbally assaultive behavior and threats of physical harm."

Sadly, the bullying didn't stop with the pretty Irish immigrant's death. Even after Prince committed suicide, students reportedly continued to mock Prince and make hateful comments about her on social media sites—even to the point of disrupting an online memorial set up in her honor.

Prince's crime? Apparently, per news reports, the teen queens ruling the school's social scene didn't think a newcomer like Prince should date a popular football player. As a result, she was repeatedly referred to as an "Irish slut," among other nasty names.

While school officials weren't charged with any crimes, Scheibel said that Prince's abuse was "common knowledge" and criticized teachers and administrators for not doing more to intervene.

"The actions or inactions of some adults at the school are troublesome," said Scheibel, noting that the police investigation "revealed that certain faculty, staff, and administrators also were alerted to the harassment of Phoebe Prince before her death."

The issue of who knew what, and when, has spawned outrage in South Hadley, Mass. Security at the school has been increased. Some are calling for the principal, superintendent, and school board chairman to resign.

School officials maintain they found out about the bullying shortly before Prince's death. The district attorney seemed to refute these claims during the press conference announcing the criminal charges against the four girls and two boys involved in harassing Prince.

Statements issued by Christine Sweklo, South Hadley Public Schools assistant superintendent, indicated district officials had not been given the opportunity to review new information gleaned from the criminal investigation prior to the district attorney's press conference.

With the superintendent away on vacation and pressure mounting, the district seemed to struggle to tell its side of the story.

Statements were issued to the news media but weren't posted online, even though the district's web site was touted as new and improved.

After days of silence, the superintendent, school board chairman, and principal stumbled badly during interviews, particularly on television.

Sounding dismissive, defensive, and insecure, these individuals reinforced rather than refuted the stereotypical view of aloof, out-of-touch bureaucrats.

Yet a closer read of written materials released by the school and district reveal a more caring, competent, and compassionate response.

"It's very clear that we need a district and community-wide focus on developing civility in our young people," wrote South Hadley Principal Dan Smith in his February newsletter. "A number of people spoke about the need for parents, students, and school personnel at all grade levels to work together to proactively address this issue."

I suspect that South Hadley's poor showing in the media and underutilized web site

are owing as much to a lack of high-pressure television news experience and a dearth of professional communications staff as they are to a lack of caring.

School and district officials maintain that all personnel intervened swiftly and appropriately to any and all reports they received about Prince's torment.

Although it's a typical crisis response, the rush to blame someone—anyone—for Prince's suicide won't bring her back or make the last few days of her life any less painful. It's also not fair to anyone involved, including Prince.

Teen suicide is always disturbing and heartbreaking. However, most psychiatrists will tell you that it's very difficult, if not impossible, to pinpoint exactly why an individual chooses to end his or her life. Typically, there's a complexity of mental health issues involved—issues that might or might not be explained fully by bullying.

In a classic case of perception becoming reality—and not just shaping it—the worldwide view of South Hadley High and its surrounding community is overwhelmingly negative. It will take years, if not a decade or more, for the school to rebuild its reputation.

The district has a number of proactive plans in place to address bullying concerns district-wide and in the community.

These include the formation of a citizen task force, reviewing policies and procedures, offering more training, and communicating more openly with all key publics, starting with students.

While these efforts are commendable and underreported in the news media, the district might want to consider making a clean break with the past by apologizing (verbally as well as in writing and on the web site) for not intervening sooner or more effectively.

Although overdue and likely to cause the district's legal counsel heartburn, research has shown that apologizing when mistakes are made (including sins of omission as well as commission) tends to reduce litigation.

If the district's review of the facts shows that school personnel did everything human-ly possible to prevent such a tragedy from occurring, or that additional intervention likely wouldn't have changed the outcome, and if district officials are confident that all policies and procedures were followed to the letter and need no improvement, and if they believe that South Hadley High School has no systematic climate or cul-tural concerns that need to be addressed, then they might get by with simply express-ing care and concern for the victim.

All of those "ifs" create a pretty high bar to leap over, however. Assuming for a moment that South Hadley High School and South Hadley Public Schools are like most public schools and districts nationally, they probably have some additional work to do. And even if everything was done perfectly every single time in response to Prince's bullying, the fact remains that a young girl decided that dying was better than living.

With about one-third to one-half of all children experiencing bullying as some point during their school years, it's time for all of us who care about children to take more proactive and assertive action in responding to reports of bullying. This includes other students, parents, mental health professionals, business leaders, elected officials, and other community members, along with educators. Schools can't bear the sole respon-sibility for eradicating bullying and other social ills.

Bullying often is seen as the first step on a continuum of escalating mental health con-cerns, including violence to self or others, according to child and adolescent psychia-trists. Depression, anxiety, insomnia, digestive problems, low self-esteem, and other symptoms consistent with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder are common after-effects of bullying in children, teens, and adults.

Girls are more likely to engage in verbal or relational bullying, in which the victim is denigrated and ostracized by a social group or clique. Boys are more likely to engage in verbal and physical bullying. In some cases, bullying and harassment turn into phys-ical or sexual assault.

While many bullying victims don't commit suicide, thoughts of suicide are common,

according to researchers and child psychiatrists. Victims often carry permanent scars from the emotional, relational, verbal, physical, and online abuse they endure from bullies, experts say.

Although Prince's abuse occurred primarily at school, the young teen did experience electronic harassment as well. Cyber bullying and cyber stalking can be particularly painful for teens.

The 24-7, constantly connected nature of their lives makes it difficult to escape or find a safe haven. Hateful text messages, humiliating Facebook comments, and online threats don't stop just because the bullies and victims aren't in close proximity to each other anymore.

The anonymity afforded by many social media sites and other digital communications only makes matters worse, as bullies feel free to say and do things online they'd never do in person or at school.

A 2007 Pew Research Center study shows that 32 percent of online teens have experienced some form of electronic bullying. Tactics range from posting embarrassing photos without permission (6 percent) to having private material forwarded without permission (15 percent).

About 13 percent of online teens also report receiving threats or have been the victims of digital rumor-mongering, the same study showed. Similar to bullying that occurs at school or in the community, perpetrators of online bullying tend to be the same age as their victims.

For Phoebe Prince and other victims of abuse by bullies, where and how the bullying occurs matters little. They just want it to stop.

As educators charged with helping keep students safe from emotional and physical harm, we can and should do more.

As community leaders charged with creating a more just society by forming future citizens, we can't dismiss cruelty as "normal" teenage behavior. It's not.

eSM STAR   Tackling School Bullying

Recognizing the warning signs for teen bullying, suicide

Mainstream media outlets have coined a new term to describe the rash of student suicides committed in the wake of persistent school bullying and harassment: "bullycides."

The issue has spawned significant new research to determine whether the phenomenon is really new, or simply being reported more often. Either way, school officials need to do more to make parents aware of the stress that today's teens and tweens face.

According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), 12 percent of all deaths among youth and young adults in the U.S. result from suicides.

Nearly 20 percent of high school students surveyed by the CDC report being bullied on school property during the previous 12 months; 5 percent report not going to school on a least one day during the past 30 days as a result of safety concerns.

Perhaps even more telling, 26.1 percent of the CDC survey respondents felt so sad or hopeless for a two-week period or more that they stopped doing their usual activities—a clear sign of teenage depression.

Nationwide, 13.8 percent of students reported they had seriously considered committing suicide. The numbers are particularly bleak for female students, 17.4 percent of whom reported suicidal tendencies.

Another recent CDC study might point to some possible causes. According to the CDC, adverse childhood experiences (called ACEs) are common across racial/ethnic groups and states.

For example, 22 percent of adult women and 16.7 percent of adult men in the study reported having grown up with a mentally ill household member. When substance abuse is included, the number skyrockets to 30.6 percent for women and 27.5 percent for men.

Women are also more than twice as likely as men to become victims of sexual abuse while growing up, 17.2 percent for women as compared to 6.7 percent for men.

Because the CDC identifies a family history of suicide, mental illness, and alcohol or drug abuse as major risk factors for suicide, school personnel need to stay alert for signs of trouble and recognize that bad behavior might just represent a cry for help.

No wonder a recent article in the Washington Post cited bullying and abuse at home by older siblings or parents as a primary cause of school bullying.

"Domestic violence and bullying feed each other," wrote Susan M. Swearer, an associate professor of school psychology at the University of Nebraska at Lincoln.

According to Swearer, a 2007 study indicated that "72 percent of children who were physically abused by their parents became a bully, a victim of a bully, or both."

Both bullies and victims are at risk for significant mental health issues, from low self-esteem to anxiety and teenage depression.

So, while bullying might serve as a triggering event, or increase a young person's tendency for "self harm," other risk factors also likely are involved, according to Swearer.

"Interpreting a teenager's suicide as a reaction to bullying ignores the complex emotional problems that American youth face," writers Swearer, author of Bullying Prevention and Intervention: Realistic Strategies for Schools and co-director of the Bullying Research Network. "To understand the complexity of suicidal behavior, we need to look beyond one factor."

In addition to mental illness, Swearer says easy access to firearms and medication, exposure to the suicidal behavior of others, and isolation might all contribute to a child's feelings of hopelessness and despair.

Major shifts or changes in behavior, such as isolating former friends, changing peer groups, dropping grades, and losing interest in favorite activities, should raise red flags for educators, parents, neighbors, friends, or other individuals concerned about a child's well-being.

Other warning signs include difficulty sleeping or over-sleeping, changes in body weight

or appetite, irritability, sadness, lethargy, and difficulty concentrating. Younger children might report vague physical symptoms or have more frequent emotional outbursts.

For most young people, developing resiliency and responding well to adversity represent learned skills. As such, we need to help students develop these characteristics and not simply judge them for not having them.

The National Association of School Psychologists offers several tips for parents and educators for increasing student resiliency, from encouraging students to express negative emotions to modeling positive attitudes and getting more physically fit.

Connect with Kids, a video production company, offers documentary-style programs on a wide range of social and emotional health concerns, including teen stress, over-scheduled children, school bullying, teen suicide, cutting, and other often taboo subjects.

These programs are available online for a subscription or may be purchased for use in training and informational sessions.

Connect with Kids also will create videos and other custom-made content using local talent, or help school leaders plan town hall forums to get more parents and community members talking about issues of concern to educators.

North Carolina's Guilford County Schools is using Connect with Kids' digital content as part of its recently launched Parent Academy program. Parents can view the content online or via GCSTV-2, the district's public access cable channel.

As economic woes create more burdens for American families, we'll continue to see more signs of stress in the students we serve. Providing more resources for parents and educators to help them cope with the increase is an important first step.

Litigation and free speech

Where does the line exist between students' free-speech rights and the rights of educators to protect their students' safety? This collection of reports aims to help.

Police: No charges in gay teen's bullycide

Police investigating the suicide of a bullied gay teenager said Nov. 22 that offensive comments he endured online and at school couldn't be considered criminal and that no charges would be filed.

Amherst, N.Y., investigators last month sent 14-year-old Jamey Rodemeyer's computer and cell phone to a forensics lab to help determine whether anyone should be prosecuted for the bullying he often talked about before taking his life Sept. 18. They also interviewed Jamey's family, friends, and peers, uncovering five bullying episodes at Williamsville North High School, where he'd just begun his freshman year, Chief John Askey said.

"He was exposed to stresses in every facet of his life that were beyond what should be experienced by a 14-year-old boy," Askey told reporters during a news conference at police headquarters.

But neither the in-school bullying episodes, one of which involved pushing and an anti-gay remark, nor "insensitive and inappropriate" online comments were found to be prosecutable, Askey said, in part because the victim is dead and unable to help prove harassment or other charges that might have been filed.

"I'm not satisfied, to be honest," said Askey, adding that officers had devoted hundreds of hours to the investigation. "I would like to have seen something we could have done from a prosecution standpoint."

Jamey's father, Timothy Rodemeyer, had a similar response.

"We're not satisfied, but we somewhat expected this outcome," he told The Associated Press by phone after the press conference. "That's why we've taken on a mission trying to get laws passed that will make people accountable."

The investigation determined that three students had targeted Jamey in high school, one of whom hired a lawyer after Jamey's death. Those students weren't the ones commenting inappropriately in online forums, the investigation determined.

Anonymous posts on a Formspring account Jamey opened said "Kill your self!!!! You have nothing left!" and "Go kill yourself, you're worthless, ugly and don't have a point to live."

While Jamey had told his parents the taunting he'd endured in middle school had not carried over to high school, he posted online notes ruminating on suicide, bullying, homophobia, and pop singer Lady Gaga.

"People would be like 'faggot, fag,' and they'd taunt me in the hallways and I felt like I could never escape it," he said in a YouTube video posted in May as part of columnist Dan Savage's "It Gets Better" project, which seeks to give voices and hope to bullied gay and lesbian teenagers.

After he hanged himself outside his home in suburban Buffalo, activists, journalists, and Gaga herself seized on the suicide, decrying the loss of another promising life to bullying.

Even though no criminal charges will be filed, Askey said there have been other consequences.

"The fact that it can't be prosecuted shouldn't be the measuring stick here. I think people know that it's inappropriate, know that it's unacceptable. … I think a message has been sent," Askey said. The bullies' "friends know who they are and their peers know who they are, and they know that it's completely unacceptable in the eyes of this community, this police department, and their peers."

Jamey's death followed other prominent teenage deaths linked to bullying or intimidation—notably Phoebe Prince, an Irish immigrant in Massachusetts taunted by classmates after she dated a popular boy, and Tyler Clementi, a Rutgers University freshman whose roommate is accused of spying on his same-sex encounter via webcam.

Former Rutgers student convicted in webcam spying case

A former Rutgers University student accused of using a webcam to spy on his gay room-mate's love life was convicted of invasion of privacy and anti-gay intimidation March 16 in a case that exploded into the headlines when the victim of the snooping committed suicide by throwing himself off a bridge.

Dharun Ravi, 20, shook his head slightly after hearing the guilty verdicts on all 15 counts against him.

He could get several years in prison—and could be deported to his native India, even though he has lived legally in the U.S. since he was a little boy—for his part in an act that cast a spotlight on teen suicide and anti-gay bullying and illustrated the internet's potential for tormenting others.

Prosecutors said that Ravi set up a webcam in his dorm room in September 2010 and captured his roommate, Tyler Clementi, kissing another man, then tweeted about it and excitedly tried to catch Clementi in the act again two days later. About a half-dozen students were believed to have seen the live video of the kissing.

Within days, Clementi realized he had been watched and leaped from the George Washington Bridge after posting one last status update on Facebook: "Jumping off the gw bridge, sorry."

At a courthouse news conference after the verdict, Clementi's father, Joe, addressed him-self to college students and other young people, saying: "You're going to meet a lot of people in your life. Some of these people you may not like. Just because you don't like them doesn't mean you have to work against them."

Rutgers said in a statement: "This sad incident should make us all pause to recognize the importance of civility and mutual respect in the way we live, work, and communicate with others."

During trial, Ravi's lawyer argued that the college freshman was not motivated by any mal-ice toward gays—a necessary element to prove a hate crime—and that his actions were just

those of an immature "kid." The defense also contended Ravi initially set up the camera because he was afraid Clementi's older, "sketchy"-looking visitor might steal his belongings.

The jury found Ravi not guilty on some subparts of some of the charges, but guilty of all 15 counts as a whole.

The most serious charges—bias intimidation based on sexual orientation, a hate crime—carry up to 10 years behind bars each. But legal experts said the most Ravi would probably get all together at sentencing May 21 would be 10 years.

Before the trial, Ravi and his lawyers had rejected a plea bargain that would have spared him from prison. He would have gotten probation and 600 hours of community service and would have been given help in avoiding deportation.

Ravi was not charged with causing Clementi's death, and the suicide remained largely in the background at the trial, though some witnesses mentioned it and the jury was told Clementi had taken his life.

Prosecutors were not allowed to argue directly that the spying led to his death; defense lawyers were barred from saying there were other reasons he killed himself.

Each bias intimidation charge included five questions. A finding of guilty on any of them made Ravi guilty of the entire charge. The jury issued a split verdict on those subquestions.

It found, for example, that Ravi did not try to intimidate Clementi's romantic partner, identified in court only as M.B., and that Clementi reasonably believed Ravi was trying to intimidate him because of his sexual orientation. It split on questions of whether Ravi knowingly or willfully intimidated Clementi because of his sexuality.

Clementi's death was one in a string of suicides by young gays around the country in September 2010. President Barack Obama commented on it, as did talk show host Ellen DeGeneres.

New Jersey lawmakers hastened passage of an anti-bullying law because of the case, and Rutgers changed its housing policies to allow people of the opposite sex to room together in an effort to make gay, bisexual, and transgender students feel more comfortable.

Testimony came from about 30 witnesses over 12 days, including 32-year-old M.B. Ravi himself did not testify, though the jury watched a video of his interrogation by police.

Ravi and Clementi, both 18-year-old freshmen from comfortable New Jersey suburbs, had been randomly assigned to room together, and Clementi had arrived at college just a few days after coming out to his parents as gay.

A string of students testified they never heard Ravi say anything bad about gays in general or Clementi in particular. But students did say Ravi expressed some concern about sharing a room with a gay man.

On Sept. 19, according to testimony, Clementi asked Ravi to leave their room so that he could have a guest. Later, Ravi posted on Twitter: "Roommate asked for the room till midnight. I went into molly's room and turned on my webcam. I saw him making out with a dude. Yay."

Ravi told police that he watched only seconds of the encounter via computer.

His friend Molly Wei testified that she and a few other students also watched the live stream of the men kissing. (Wei was initially charged in the case but was later accepted into a pretrial program that will allow her to keep her record clean.)

Two nights later, Clementi asked for the room alone again. This time, Ravi tweeted: "I dare you to video chat me between the hours of 9:30 and 12. Yes, it's happening again." He also texted a friend about a planned "viewing party" and, two students said, went to friends' rooms to show them how to access the feed.

However, there was no evidence the webcam was turned on that night. Ravi told police he had put his computer to sleep. Prosecutors argued Clementi himself unplugged the computer.

According to testimony, Clementi submitted a room-change request form and talked to a resident assistant about what happened. He also used his laptop to view Ravi's Twitter site 38 times in the last two days of his life. He killed himself Sept. 22.

Court: Teens can't be suspended for MySpace parodies

Two Pennsylvania teens should not have been disciplined at school for MySpace parodies of their principals created from off-campus computers, a federal appeals court ruled June 13.

The postings, however lewd or offensive, were not likely to cause significant disruptions at school and therefore are protected under previous Supreme Court case law on students' rights to free speech, the 3rd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals found.

"Today's court decision states that you cannot punish students for off-campus speech simply because it offends or criticizes [school officials]," said Witold Walczak, legal director of the American Civil Liberties Union of Pennsylvania, which represented both students.

However, six judges who dissented in one case said they feared salacious online attacks against school officials would go unpunished.

"It allows a student to target a school official and his family with malicious and unfounded accusations about their character in vulgar, obscene, and personal language," Judge Michael Fisher wrote in the ruling involving the Blue Mountain School District in eastern Pennsylvania.

In that case, an eighth-grade girl created a MySpace page using an actual photo of the principal with a fake name, and purported that it was posted by a 40-year-old Alabama school principal who described himself—through a string of sexual vulgarities—as a pedophile and sex addict. The internet address included the phrase "kids rock my bed."

"Though disturbing, the record indicates that the profile was so outrageous that no one took its content seriously," the 3rd U.S. Circuit majority wrote June 13, overturning its own prior ruling. "[The girl] testified that she intended the profile to be a joke between herself and her friends."

In the other case, Hickory High School senior Justin Layshock created a parody that

said his principal smoked marijuana and kept beer behind his desk. The Hermitage School District said it substantially disrupted school operations and suspended him, but the suspension was overturned by a district judge, the appeals panel, and now the full 3rd Circuit.

In a rare move, the full court had heard oral arguments last year after separate three-judge panels issued conflicting rulings in the twin cases.

Such disparities are common around the country as school districts wrestle with how to address online behavior that can range from pranks to threats to cyber bullying. The New York-based 2nd U.S. Circuit has upheld school discipline in two similar cases, but neither has reached the Supreme Court.

Supreme Court passes on chance to define students' online free speech rights

The U.S. Supreme Court has declined to take up a set of cases for the digital age—whether schools may censor students who are off-campus when they create online attacks against school officials and other students.

The court let stand the suspension of a West Virginia high school's "Queen of Charm," who created a web page that suggested another student had a sexually transmitted disease and then invited classmates to comment.

The court also left alone rulings that said schools could not discipline two Pennsylvania students for MySpace parodies of their principals that the students created at home. An appeals court, following 40-year-old case law on student free speech, said the posts did not create substantial disruptions at school.

Lawyers on both sides were disappointed that it will be at least another year before the high court wades into the issue. Federal judges have issued a broad range of opinions on the subject, which has muddied the waters for school administrators as they consider whether it's appropriate to discipline students for such online transgressions.

"We've missed an opportunity to really clarify for school districts what their responsibility and authority is," said Francisco Negron, general counsel of the National School Boards Association. "This is one of those cases where the law is simply lagging behind the times."

The American Civil Liberties Union expects the Supreme Court to examine the question "sooner rather than later," according to Witold Walczak, legal director for the ACLU of Pennsylvania. Still, he is relieved the Pennsylvania students represented by the ACLU have been exonerated after their long legal fights.

"When kids go to school, the parents give up control. But once the kids leave the school, the parents again are the primary custodians and have decision-making authority over those kids," Walczak said.

With the cases settled, Justin Layshock of western Pennsylvania will receive $10,000 in damages plus legal fees, while an eastern Pennsylvania girl, identified only as "J.S.," can pursue damages and legal costs.

Layshock in 2005 created a parody that said his principal smoked marijuana and kept beer behind his desk. The Hermitage School District argued that Layshock's website substantially disrupted school operations. Layshock was suspended, but the suspension was overturned by a district judge and upheld by the 3rd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Philadelphia.

In the other Pennsylvania case, an eighth-grader in the Blue Mountain School District used her principal's photograph in a fake profile, described him as a pedophile, and mentioned a sex act. The girl was suspended for 10 days.

"Though disturbing, the record indicates that the profile was so outrageous that no one took its content seriously," a 3rd Circuit majority wrote last year. But the court was divided 8-6.

Such disparities are common around the country as school districts wrestle with how to address online pranks, threats, or cyber bullying.

In the West Virginia case, the 4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Richmond unanimous-

ly refused to reinstate Kara Kowalski's lawsuit against school officials in Berkeley County. She claimed her five-day suspension from Musselman High School in 2005 violated her free speech and due process rights.

A new statewide anti-bullying policy that goes into effect July 1 extends rules about student conduct beyond the school yard, holding students accountable for "vulgar or offensive speech" online if it disrupts school.

Although sexual orientation was not an issue in the legal case, the West Virginia Board of Education policy specifically noted that lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender students are often bullied. That sparked opposition to the policy from certain groups.

Kevin McCoy, president of the West Virginia Family Foundation, said the high court's ruling is a setback but not a blockade to those who oppose the policy. The group says the policy intrudes on the private lives of children.

"Does this make it a little more difficult for us? A little," McCoy said. "But it definitely does not close the door to any future challenge."

Federal action and policy

In the last few years, bullying has gone from an almost accepted child-hood rite of passage to a national issue warranting immediate attention—spurred by a number of high-profile teen suicides. While federal policies exist to help combat bullying, some state and district leaders say they're having a hard time enforcing those policies.

Dept. of Ed: Some bullying violates federal law

The U.S. Department of Education (ED) is warning schools: Tolerating or failing to adequately address ethnic, sexual or gender-based harassment could put them in violation of federal anti-discrimination laws.

After several high-profile cases of bullying, ED is sending letters to schools, colleges and universities across the country on Oct. 26, reminding them of their federal obligations.

Russlynn Ali, assistant secretary for civil rights, said ED was responding to what it senses as a growing problem within schools.

She said the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) had received 800 complaints alleging harassment over the last fiscal year, and that reports from the field indicate an increase of harassment against certain groups — including gays and lesbians, as well as Muslim students after the 9/11 attacks.

In September, 18-year-old Rutgers University student Tyler Clementi committed suicide after his roommate secretly webcast his dorm-room tryst with a man, police said. The roommate and another student have been charged with invasion of privacy, and authorities are considering whether to add a hate-crime charge.

In January, a 15-year-old Massachusetts girl, Phoebe Prince, took her own life after being relentlessly bullied by her classmates, prosecutors said. Six teenagers have been charged.

"Certainly the unspeakable tragedies over the past several weeks contribute to our sense of urgency, and it's important that the public know there are things schools and universities can and should be doing," Ali said.

OCR has issued similar guidance letters to educators in the past. But this is the first time the agency is addressing all statutes, not just those protecting against gender or sexual offenses, and in the context of bullying and harassment, Ali said.

The letter also clarifies protections for students of religious groups and gay and lesbian individuals.

While the laws the OCR enforces do not protect against harassment based on religious or sexual orientation, there are protections for students from religious groups that share ancestry or ethnic characteristics, as well as gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender students based on gender stereotypes.

Tolerating, not adequately addressing, encouraging or ignoring harassment based on race, color, disability, sex, or national origin can indicate the violation of civil rights statutes.

Education Secretary Arne Duncan sought to assure students that action will be taken.

"No one should ever feel harassed or unsafe in a school simply because they act or think or dress differently than others," Duncan said. "To every student who feels threatened or harassed, for whatever reason, please know that you are not alone. Please know that there are people who love you. And please know that we will protect you."

States struggle with appropriate cyber bullying laws

With awareness of the dangers of cyber bullying on the rise, many states are working to revise their laws on harassment to bring them in line with the digital era. But the struggles of two states in particular show how hard it can be for lawmakers to find a middle ground between protecting student safety and honoring free-speech rights.

In Arizona, critics of a new bill to combat cyber bullying fear it could make being annoying, offensive, or maybe even provocative online a criminal offense. In Connecticut, similar concerns exist about a bill proposed by state prosecutors that would make "electronic harassment" a crime.

Arizona House Bill 2549 would amend the telephone harassment section of the state's anti-stalking law to include the communication technology of the day.

The portion in question reads: "It is unlawful for any person, with intent to terrify, intimidate, threaten, harass, annoy, or offend, to use any electronic or digital device and use any obscene, lewd, or profane language or suggest any lewd or lascivious act, or threaten to inflict physical harm to the person or property of any person."

"Electronic or digital device" would supplant "telephone." But the substitution might alter the focus of the law, some contend.

"Telephones are basically one-to-one devices, so a phone call that uses profane language to offend is likely meant only to offend the one recipient, rather than to persuade or inform anyone," writes Eugene Volokh, who teaches free-speech law at UCLA. "But computers used to post Facebook messages or send Twitter messages or post blog items can offend some listeners while persuading and informing others."

Volokh notes that interpretations of "profane language" could extend to material someone deems religiously offensive, potentially rendering the statute unconstitutional.

The Media Coalition, which is focused on First Amendment issues, has sent a memo to Arizona Gov. Jan Brewer, saying the changes expand the bill to cover more than was probably intended.

As the note points out, nothing in the bill explicitly states that the objectionable communication must be directed at an individual, something that could be assumed when it focused on telephone communication.

The group goes on to say, "There is no requirement that the recipient or subject of the speech actually feel offended, annoyed, or scared. It is unclear if the communication must be intended to offend or annoy a specific person or if a general intent to do so is sufficient."

The bill was stopped in the state House by one of its sponsors after having been unanimously approved by the state Senate. According to the Phoenix New Times, state Rep. Vic Williams spoke with Media Coalition and is willing to get input and suggestions to help clarify the bill.

Meanwhile, the American Civil Liberties Union of Connecticut on April 5 blasted a bill proposed by state prosecutors that would make "electronic harassment" a crime—including such acts as posting information online that "has the effect of causing substantial embarrassment or humiliation to [a] person within an academic or professional community."

"We have the Connecticut legislature proposing to criminalize speech that has long been protected" by the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, Sandra Staub, legal director for the state ACLU, said at a public hearing by the General Assembly's judiciary committee.

"It's vague. It's over broad," Staub said of the bill in an interview with the Hartford Courant. For example, she said, the bill contains "no standards for substantially interfering with someone's academic performance."

As the bill is written, someone could be charged with electronic harassment—and, theoretically, jailed for up to a year and fined $2,000, because the crime would be a "class A" misdemeanor—even if he or she posted information about a person that was true, Staub said.

For instance, she said, even if a student posted accurate information on Facebook saying

that a certain professor had committed misconduct in the past, and that professor found it embarrassing or humiliating, the professor could ask police to arrest the student.

Long-established civil laws deal with allegations of defamation—a person can sue for slander or libel if his or her reputation is damaged by untrue information—and there's no need to criminalize the issue, Staub said.

Besides, Staub said, in a free society, citizens should be able to offer negative opinions that might not be absolute fact. Students should be allowed to rate the performance of professors, for example, by offering criticisms that they are inept or seem to take their lectures right out of some textbook. "We have a constitutional right to annoy, bother, and offend, basically," she said.

Moreover, there are already criminal laws under which people are arrested for threatening and harassing, she said. These laws contain well-established standards for what constitutes a crime—such as making statements that cause a person to fear physical harm. Those criminal laws can be used now, Staub said, because if the criminal standard is met, it doesn't matter if the threat or harassment was spoken or transmitted on Facebook or through eMail.

Several women, including representatives of sexual assault crisis organizations, testified in favor of the bill and said Connecticut's stalking statutes are outdated.

"Technology has made it easier for stalkers," said Heather Francisco, adult advocate and legislative liaison of Safe Haven of Greater Waterbury, Conn. "We must update the language" to include electronic and internet communications used to "harass, follow, and possibly attack," she said.

One of the judiciary committee's co-chairmen, Rep. Gerald Fox, D-Stamford, said that the committee had merged suggestions from Chief State's Attorney Kevin Kane and Richard Colangelo, senior assistant state's attorney in the Stamford-Norwalk judicial district, into a single bill. The electronic harassment provisions that drew the heaviest objections apparently come from Colangelo and might have been modeled after other states' laws, Fox said.

Fox said he recognizes that some of the language is a concern—"someone's threshold for harassment might be much lower than someone else's." But he added that new technology makes some harassment and threatening cases harder for law enforcement officials. He said if the committee approves any bill, it probably would be a modified version designed to pass "constitutional muster."

Federal officials aim to prevent bullying during national summit

In day two of the federal Bullying Prevention Summit in Washington, D.C., policy experts from the Department of Justice (DOJ) and school leaders shifted their conversations from the scope of bullying across the country to the practical steps schools can take right now to help prevent bullying in the classroom.

While most of the sessions were helpful, federal officials were short on answers to questions about cyber bullying.

Read about Day One here.

The day's session began with a description of the specific actions the DOJ is taking in partnership with the Education Department (ED) to combat bullying, as well as the resources that will be available this year.

"The biggest focus of the DOJ right now is on prevention programs in schools. Punishment, while in some cases appropriate, is not the only thing the DOJ is about," said Associate Attorney General Thomas Perrelli.

According to Perrelli, the DOJ has conducted numerous studies on youth violence, most recently a report called the "National Survey of Children's Exposure to Violence," which found that 60 percent of children in the U.S. are at some point exposed to crime, abuse, and/or violence.

In light of these and other findings, Perrelli said the DOJ understands the importance of a partnership with ED. Perrelli said both agencies are looking at prevention strategies that focus first on getting everyone in the community (business executives, school leaders, parents, and students) united to prevent bullying, and second on fostering a sense of responsibility in youth to intervene and report on bullying.

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) also has a Model Programs Guide, which is an online portal to scientifically tested and proven programs that address a range of issues across the juvenile justice spectrum. The Guide profiles more than

175 prevention and intervention programs and helps communities identify those that best suit their needs. Users can search the Guide's database by program category, target population, risk and protective factors, effectiveness rating, and other parameters.

OJJDP also will begin a five-bulletin series dedicated to bullying issues and research, starting in late 2010 or early 2011.

Although prevention programs can pave the way for bully-free school environments, there are also many legal steps students and parents can take to combat bullying, said Russlynn Ali, assistant secretary for civil rights at ED.

"So many times students and parents don't know that bullying can fall under the protection of their civil rights, and that they have options that go beyond local law enforcement," Ali said.

The Office for Civil Rights (OCR), which has 12 offices around the country, enforces Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (which prohibits discrimination based on race, color, or national origin), Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 (which prohibits discrimination based on sex), and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (which prohibits discrimination based on disabilities).

The OCR receives and resolves complaints, which Ali said this year will reach upwards of 7,000—and about 70 percent of those complaints will be from middle and secondary school students.

"What we do is deal with each case and how that case relates to what's happening in schools. In many cases, we review the school culture as a whole and mandate programs, have schools provide counseling for the student, raise community awareness, and much more," explained Ali.

To learn more about filing a complaint with the OCR, **go here.**

However, while the DOJ and OCR are making strides in combating bullying, some issues have yet to be resolved.

For example, Perrelli was asked by a summit attendee how schools can combat cyber bullying, because most of it happens off school grounds.

"Some of the most aggressive and vicious bullying happens through the web when students are out of schools, and many schools are asking if, and how, they can step in and stop this bullying. It seems that perhaps the DOJ should take more of a leadership role in this area," said the attendee.

In response, Perrelli said the DOJ will step up its work on this issue.

Parry Aftab, a lawyer with a specialty in cyberlaw and cyber bullying and creator of WiredSafety.org, asked Ali how civil rights could affect cyber bullying.

"While we wait for the Supreme Court's ruling on school involvement in cyber bullying, perhaps the OCR could intervene," said Aftab.

Aftab gave the example of a student posting a KKK web site link on a black student's Facebook page.

In response, Ali told Aftab that the OCR has no answer on this issue at this time, but is working on the complicated issue of balancing First Amendment rights and state policies.

Another question posed by an attendee addressed bullying on the basis of religion.

"Sex, race, and disability statutes are great, but are there any laws the OCR uphold that deal with religion or assumed religion?" the attendee asked.

The attendee represented what he said was New York City's Sikh community, which, since 9/11, has been the target of hate crimes and bullying.

"So many students in schools, whether they're Middle Eastern or not, are bullied. What can the OCR do for them?" he asked.

Ali said that while religion is not covered under Title VI, the OCR is working with the DOJ to find a solution.

What schools are doing now

Although the DOJ and OCR are focusing their efforts to help schools and students with bullying, schools are ultimately responsible for the issue.

From a school perspective, Jim Dillon, educational consultant and former elementary school principal for 17 years, said the easiest way to combat bullying is to get the facts out to the community.

"For example, what is bullying? What are its effects, the role of the bystander, and the difference between bullying and conflict?" he said.

According to Dillon, education leaders must ask for help and be open to ideas, use the energy of parents to help with efforts, replace cynicism with hope, and be the change they want to see.

From a district perspective, Jack Barnes, superintendent for Sullivan County Schools (SCS) in Tennessee, said his district was recently under a DOJ Consent Decree for peer-on-peer racial harassment, meaning that a federal lawsuit was filed by a student under Title VI.

As a result of this decree, SCS had everyone in the district undergo racism and anti-harassment training, developed new policies and infrastructure, required school climate assessment and data analysis, and developed student leadership and mentoring teams.

"We found that involving kids in the process is the best solution," said Barnes. "The school climate occurs when adults are not around and students can see, hear, and understand school climate issues in ways adults cannot. Diverse student leadership teams are the key to success."

SCS' student leadership process happens in five stages:

1. An adult team forms and meets to select members of a student leadership team.
2. Students collect school climate data based on surveys.
3. Student leaders and adults set school climate improvement goals.

4. Student leaders and adults develop and implement action projects.
5. Formative assessment occurs; leaders work to ensure systemic changes and sustainability.

Thanks to the hard work of every member of SCS, the decree was lifted by the DOJ and two-thirds of SCS students showed significant improvement in school climate.

Also, every school developed School Improvement Plans that linked school climate to academic goals.

Academic achievement also improved significantly, as measured by improvement in Tennessee state test scores in those schools that showed improvement in school climate.

From a state perspective, Amy Williamson, education program consultant at the Iowa Department of Education, said Iowa has a Safe School Law, which became part of the Iowa Code in 2007.

The law prohibits bullying and harassment by employees, students, and volunteers and is based on 17 protected categories (race, sex, religion, gender identity, nationality, political beliefs, age, socio-economic status, etc.).

The law also requires schools to adopt a policy that defines consequences and procedures for investigating incidents, as well as data collecting and reporting.

"The Safe Schools Law was an unfunded mandate that needed both guided implementation and monitoring. Implementation was not successful at first, because the mandate was not specific. It's hard to mandate behavior," said Williamson. "It takes new skills, behavior, and belief."

In an effort to change behavior, Williamson started a grassroots effort to help shape state policy.

Schools also must complete a standardized report form on bullying and have a data collection system in place. The state is currently in the process of altering its data collection to meet the needs of Civil Rights Data Collection.

The state also created a Safe School Certification Program. The program focuses on law compliance and elements that make a school safe, such as trainings for students and teachers about the law and programs that combat bullying. The certification is given by a coalition of diverse nonprofit organizations and state agencies that represent the 17 protected categories within the law.

"The program is important because nationally, states that see unenforced laws are less likely to want to pass comprehensive Safe School Laws," explained Ryan Roemerman, co-founder and executive director of the Iowa Pride Network, a nonprofit organization that works with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) youth.

"Knowing what it takes to pass, implement, and enforce laws allows for better law creation. Ultimately, this is a transition that many states will face; this program will provide a much-needed framework."

From a national perspective, Dr. Ken Seeley, president of the National Center for School Engagement (NCSE), pointed schools to the organization's recently released "National School Climate Standards," which provide a standards-based approach to governance.

The five standards measure whether or not the school community:

1. Has a shared vision and plan;
2. Sets policies specifically promoting the development and sustainability of social, emotional, ethical, civic, and intellectual skills; knowledge dispositions and engagement; and a comprehensive system to address barriers to learning and teaching and re-engage students who have become disengaged;
3. Identifies, prioritizes, and supports best practices;
4. Creates an environment where all members are welcomed, supported, and feel safe in school; and
5. Develops meaningful and engaging practices, activities, and norms that promote social and civic responsibilities and a commitment to social justice.

Best practices and advice

As students, schools, and states struggle to combat bullying and cyber bullying, many have forged ahead and implemented policies and laws to protect student rights safety. From teaching internet safety to using technology for prevention, here are some best practices from around the nation.

10 ways schools are teaching internet safety

As internet use has become a daily part of most students' lives, students must know how to protect themselves and their identity at all times—especially when teachers and parents aren't there to help them.

Teaching students about internet safety has been important for as long as the internet has existed, but it's in the spotlight this year in particular as schools get ready to apply for 2012 eRate discounts on their telecommunications services and internet access. That's because applicants must amend their existing internet safety policies by July 1, 2012, to include information about how they are educating students about proper online behavior, cyber bullying, and social networking sites.

To get an idea how educators are approaching this issue, we recently asked readers: "Do you teach internet safety at your school or district? If so, how?"

With thanks to our knowledgeable readers, we've compiled some of the most innovative and detail-rich answers here.

1. Through gaming
"Some of the classes I teach are in an online environment. The first week of the class [addresses] internet safety and time management. I feel that, since I send the students to many sites, and they are working from home, this is a very important part of the class. I use material from CyberSmart! for my content classes. I also teach a 3D game for the middle school called Quest Atlantis out of Indiana University, and internet safety is the first requirement … before the students are granted full rights in the game. I also include three additional internet safety classes that are available as part of the game. Information about it can be found at http://atlantis.crlt.indiana.edu/. They do, however, require that teachers go through [professional development] before allowing them to register a class in the program." —Zena Johnston

"I teach internet safety through the technology curriculum. I use a trio of internet safety games from WebWiseKids: Missing, It's Your Call, Mirror Image. These games cover cyber bullying, sexting, and predators. It keeps the students engaged as well as offering them hands-on work." —*Debra Smith, Gracemont High School, Okla.*

"I teach lessons on internet safety using the FBI-SOS scavenger hunt and on internet privacy using the Jo Cool Jo Fool website. Jo Cool Jo Fool has some dated areas, but the same concepts covered apply today. During the FBI-SOS scavenger hunt, we have commercial breaks periodically and I show the old Citibank identity theft commercials from YouTube. **I also have my students figure out how to locate my college-age son via the information that can be found online.** Creepy! I am a middle school librarian who co-teaches these lessons with our keyboarding teachers. It gives the kids vital knowledge and little breaks from the keyboarding class." *—Miriam Rone*

2. Through analogies and student-generated projects
"I am an Elementary Instructional Technology Specialist for South Jefferson Central School in New York State. I prepare, facilitate, and present an internet safety lesson yearly for all of our kindergarten through 6th grade students. I like to use analogies in my lessons, giving students a hook to … remember. **This year, I used the analogy of Little Red Riding Hood—[that] things aren't always as they seem, there are people who try to pretend they are something they are not, etc.** I also create SMART Notebook lessons to engage our digital natives so that they are active participants in their own learning experience. … In grades K-2, emphasis is on computer parts, computer care rules, always telling an adult when there is a problem (I use the book *Arthur's Computer Disaster* as an example), [not giving out] personal information, … being nice on the internet, and what to do if someone isn't being nice. In grades 3-6, emphasis is on rules, cyber bullying, personal and private information, think before you post, … predators, password protection, etc. A safety pledge is signed and filed for grade 3-5 students, and an AUP is completed for [sixth graders].

"Every year, we complete a project after the internet safety lesson to 'bring home' the lesson material. I believe this project allows students to take ownership of internet safety and allows what they have learned to be shared by others. [One such project was an] internet safety calendar: Each student's assignment was to create a drawing of an internet safety rule, … then they divided into groups of two to create a calendar page … using Microsoft Publisher. The calendars are printed and distributed to students at school. The file is put on our school website for parents to print at home. [In another project,] using Visual Communicator and a green screen, students have created their own script, their own backgrounds, and completed short [public service announcements] on internet safe-

ty, cyber bullying, think before you post, etc. These movie files are posted online on our school webpage for the community. After the lesson with the fifth grade students, I bring those students to the elementary classrooms and they help facilitate the lesson for another classroom. Here is the link to all of my resources and student files: http://www.spartanpride.org/webpages/tgroff/." *—Tina Groff, South Jefferson Central School*

3. Through investigative role-playing

"I teach about internet safety by having fifth grade students act as detectives. Students are assigned three web sites to look at. [They analyze information such as the site's] author, sponsoring organization, copyright date, contents, [and] purpose … and compare the information on the website to information in nonfiction reference sources [and] online databases. **The catch is that one of the three websites is a hoax! The student's job is to figure out which website is the hoax.** After students have looked at all three websites and figured out which one is the hoax, they share what they found with their classmates about the hoax site that made them question its authenticity. While many of our students (and adults) are tech savvy, thinking critically about what they see on the internet is still something they need to be taught to do and how." *—Joan Curtis, teacher librarian, Information Literacy Education, Schwenksville Elementary School, Pa.*

4. With the help of guest speakers

"I am a middle school Technology Education teacher at Tuttle Middle School in South Burlington, Vt. I am teaching a pilot class called Media in Action. The goal of the class is to demonstrate how social media can be used for learning and also just as importantly online safety and etiquette. This is an eighth grade class. Students and parents sign a release/permission form in order to participate fully. I am a teacher trainer for the [National Education Association], teaching school district staff all around Vermont about bullying and harassment. I also partner with a national organization called Child Lures Prevention/Teen Lures Prevention. [Representatives from this organization] come in as our visiting guests and speak to the kids. **My students video tape them, blog about them, summarize [their talk] on Facebook [and] Twitter, and take still pics to upload to our class blog. I also invite a state special online investigation detective.** We carry the same routine for him. We then post our video on YouTube and link it to our blog. One special event involved an eighth grade girl from a neighboring school district who visited our studio. We did a live spot with her as she shared how she had been

bullied and harassed since fourth grade and came close to taking her own life. She gave us permission to [record] her. We produced the segment and named it: "Sarah's Story." Here are a few links to our specials: (Sarah's Story) http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FKOxyUcTYdk; (Online safety with Teen Lures Prevention) http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QX9iUnyV55Y; (A New Way for Learning Socially Speaking) http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tj0wDSoQF3I; (Casting The Social Net for Learning) http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qydf5IHBtNM; (Our class blog) http://fhtmsmediainaction.blogspot.com/." *—Jay Hoffman*

"Internet safety is a very important part of the computer/technology curriculum at St. Augustine School. Students learn safety tips, as well as ways to prevent/stop cyber bullying, and how to use netiquette when communicating online. A wonderful website, www.netsmartz.org, is a great resource for students of all ages. Through the use of interactive games and videos, the website offers a wide range of information to keep students safe in cyberspace. I also have my students design 'anti-cyber bullying' posters to display around our school, as well as PowerPoint presentations on internet safety tips. We have also had speakers from the Maryland Center for Missing and Exploited Children and the FBI as guest speakers on internet safety." *—Sherry Mobley, preK-8 computer teacher, St. Augustine School, Elkridge, Md.*

5. By having students be the teachers
"I use a combination of the Common Sense Media curriculum, Netiquette by Edutopia, and videos by BrainPOP (Digital Citizenship, Internet Safety and Cyber Bullying). After the knowledge acquisition segment, **students make a keynote presentation with the purpose of teaching their audience the meaning of Digital Citizenship and internet Safety.** It is a subject that is extremely appealing to our students, and therefore the unit of study has been very successful in both fourth and fifth grades. For younger grades, I use elements from these sources and additionally, Webonauts by PBS Kids for second and third grades. Common Sense Media has a very good age-appropriate video that I've used for kindergarten and first grades." *—Judy Havens, elementary computer specialist, Seoul International School*

6. Through third-party resources

"I teach internet safety to first through fifth graders using the CyberSmart! curriculum. I have used it for several years and feel that it exposes students to many aspects of online safety and courtesy. The students enjoy the activities and are enthusiastic about the lessons. I will be using it again this year and especially like that it is a free resource for teachers, easily available and adaptable to the needs of my school." —*Heidi L. McDaniel, technology teacher, University School of Jackson Lower School*

"We use the I-safe curriculum, which was recently revised. Additionally, we had a presentation for the parents at the Home and School meeting entitled: "Keeping God's children safe on the internet." It's essential to teach manners and procedures." —*P. Keenaghan, principal, Academy of Our Lady*

"As a part of the Information and Technology Essential Standards, I teach Safety and Ethical Issues: understanding issues related to the safe, ethical, and responsible use of information technology resources, understanding ethical behavior (copyright, plagiarism, and netiquette), as well as understanding internet safety precautions. These are a series of lessons I teach in the media center as an information specialist in August/September each year. The best resources I have found are free and are [available] through the Federal Trade Commission [at] bulkorder.ftc.gov. The 'Net Cetera Community Outreach Toolkit' has videos for viewing and discussion (Heads Up: Stop, Think. Click.; The Protection Connection; Share with Care; and Stand Up to Cyber Bullying). Also, I received free books for my entire population to send home to parents (in both English and Spanish): Net Cetera: Chatting with Kids About Being Online/Net Cétera: Cómo charlar con sus hijos sobre su comportamiento en línea, as well as the brochure in English, 'Heads Up: Stop. Think. Click.' The students really responded well to the discussion and the video clips!" —*Cathy DuPre, Media Coordinator, Merry Oaks International Academy (Courier No. 453), Charlotte, N.C.*

"We utilize a combination of direct communication at our orientation sessions plus a required safety course we purchase through Learning.com's Easy Tech." —*Michael H. Harris, principal/CEO, Gresham-Barlow Web Academy, Ore.*

7. Through self-created curriculum

"Being of the same generation as my students (for whatever that's worth) meant that I saw the digital world through a similar lens, rather than taking the traditional method of 'don't ask, don't tell' that many of my older colleagues preferred, or at least defaulted to. **I have spent the past couple of years attempting to aggregate and curate some of the best resources I could find** to develop my own method of presenting internet safety/digital citizenship to a group of students that are already, at the age of 13-14, heavily invested in the digital realm. The resulting product(s) have changed so quickly that I have literally revamped and reconstructed everything with each new semester-long class. We dig deeply into the ideas of privacy, permanence (is anything ever really deleted online?), and being considerate of others. Truthfully, my lessons on digital citizenship and online safety more strongly resemble character lessons than nerdy/geeky tech lessons. Interestingly, this 'hot topic' is in high demand as educators everywhere begin to realize how truly important this issue is, and it's one that we can't afford to get wrong. As the statistics of cyber bullying, sexting, scandals, predators, and privacy invasions continue to rise, we realize just how vital it is for us to address these issues and coach our students through the Wild West of the internet. I have presented to other educators and business professionals regarding this topic. If you would like, feel free to view, use, and share my presentation as it helps this cause. I am passionate about evangelizing this topic and feel very strongly about its message and necessity." *—Greg Garner, eighth grade technology teacher, Texas*

"I work for a BOCES (Board of Cooperative Extension Services) that supports 23 districts in upstate New York. I have read extensively about internet safety, bullying, cyber bullying, digital citizenship, and other related topics. After collecting resources and data almost daily, I have developed several different programs that I offer to districts through our BOCES to component districts and beyond. When a district requests these services, I ask what issue(s) there are in the district, and I tailor the program to their needs. Each district has its own issues, and I update the program almost daily as new facts, statistics, and thoughts about internet safety and everything in that realm change. My resources are from other educators, developed programs currently in use (NetSmartz, CyberBee, athinline.org to name a few), with some recent articles and information about social media as it becomes available. I also offer this information to adults as well as students, as they also need to be aware of their safety." *—Kelly Schermerhorn, Questar III-Model Schools, Office of School Improvement, Castleton, N.Y.*

8. Through a department citizenship program

"The New South Wales Department of Education and Communities has developed a series of online resources for students, teachers, and parents to support the digital citizenship program. The program aims to teach what it means to be a good digital citizen, how to use the internet responsibly, and how to keep yourself and others safe and healthy in an online world. The student activities are based on the domains of digital conduct, digital footprint, digital relationships, digital health and well-being, digital law, and digital financial literacy. The themes of cyber safety and how to deal with cyber bullying run through all activities. Links are included to other Australian sites, such as CyberSmart from the Australian Communications and Media Authority, as well as international sites such as Think you know and Dizigen. The teacher resources include a professional learning course and support for implementing digital citizenship programs in schools. There are also links to videos and student games. The parent resources focus on staying safe online. The current site, designed for secondary students in Years 9 and 10, will be expanded in late November to cater for students from kindergarten to Year 10." *–Leonie Wittman, project leader, Learning Design, New South Wales Curriculum & Learning Innovation Centre*

9. As part of a research lesson

"I am the school media specialist, and I teach internet safety through my Media course. It has been bounced around as to grade level (7th, 8th, both) but this year is being offered only to 8th graders. It is a trimester course, and I cover the basics of doing research, including internet safety. I use some of my own content, especially current articles in our newspapers, but I also heavily use the curriculum from Common Sense Media. I see a real need to do a formal curriculum at a younger level, but my time with the elementary students is very limited, as is our technology teacher's." *–Sharon Gunkel, Nevis Public School*

10. Through a school-wide program

"We teach internet safety at Helena Flats School through our Olweus program, and I spend a great deal of time with the students throughout the school year talking about how to keep safe. I have a doctorate from the University of Montana and conducted my study on internet predation." *–Ann Minckler, Ed.D., superintendent, Helena Flats School*

Survey reveals teens' experiences on social networking sites

As social media use has become pervasive in the lives of American teens, a new study finds that 69 percent of the teenagers who use social networking sites say their peers are mostly kind to one another on such sites. Still, 88 percent say they have witnessed people being mean or cruel to another person on the sites, and 15 percent say they have been the target of mean or cruel behavior themselves.

The findings are detailed in a new report called "Teens, Kindness and Cruelty on Social Network Sites: How American teens navigate the new world of 'digital citizenship,'" from the Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project.

Adult social network users are less likely to say they witness or experience this type of behavior, but they still report that it is prevalent. In fact, 69 percent of the adults who use social networking sites say they have seen people be mean and cruel to others on those sites.

The study, released Nov. 9, examines teens' behavior and experiences on social network sites, their privacy and safety practices, and the role of parents in digital safekeeping.

Social media use is widespread among teens. Fully 95 percent of all teens ages 12-17 are now online, and 80 percent of online teens are users of social media sites. Teens of all ages and backgrounds are witnessing these mean behaviors online and are reacting in a variety of ways:

- Ninety percent of teen social media users say they have ignored the mean behavior they have witnessed on a social network site.
- Eighty percent say they have personally defended a victim of meanness and cruelty.
- Seventy-nine percent say they have told someone to stop their mean behavior on a social network site.
- Twenty-one percent say they have personally joined in on the harassment of others on a social network site.

"Social networking sites have created new spaces for teens to interact, and they witness a mixture of altruism and cruelty on those sites," said Amanda Lenhart, lead author of the

report. "For most teens, these are exciting and rewarding spaces. But the majority have also seen a darker side. And for a subset of teens, the world of social media isn't a pretty space, because it presents a climate of drama and mean behavior."

In addition to probing the behaviors that teens witness or experience on social network sites, the study also examines instances of bullying that happen online and offline. Among teens, 19 percent report having experienced bullying anywhere—in person, by text message, by phone call, or online—in the last 12 months.

Some statistics include:

- Twelve percent of all teens report being bullied in person in the last 12 months.
- Nine percent of all teens say they were bullied by text message in the last 12 months.
- Eight percent say they have experienced some type of online bullying—such as through eMail, a social network site, or instant messaging.• Seven percent of teens say they've been bullied by voice calls over the phone.

Teens' actions and interaction within these social networks produce positive and negative outcomes. A majority of teens who use social network sites (78 percent) reported a positive outcome from their social media interactions, such as feeling good about themselves or deepening a friendship with another person.

At the same time, some 41 percent of social media-using teens reported at least one negative outcome:

- Twenty-five percent of social media-using teens had an experience on a social net work site that resulted in a face-to-face argument or confrontation with someone.
- Twenty-two percent had an experience that ended their friendship with someone.
- Thirteen percent had an experience that caused a problem with their parents.
- Thirteen percent felt nervous about going to school the next day because of an experience on a social network site.
- Eight percent got into a physical fight with someone else because of something that happened on a social network site.

- Six percent got in trouble at school because of an experience on a social network site.

Teens say they receive advice about online safety from a wide variety of people in their lives. Parents are the top source, with 86 percent of teens saying they have received advice from their parents about how to use the internet safely and responsibly. Seventy percent have received advice from a teacher or other adult at school.

Teens report that their parents are the biggest influence on shaping what they think is appropriate or inappropriate behavior when going online or using a cell phone. At the same time, 18 percent of teens say that "no one" has influenced them about their attitudes toward online behavior.

When teens have a specific problem, such as seeing mean or cruel behavior on a social network site, 36 percent seek advice on how to cope. Those teens who do reach out for advice in these situations tend to gravitate toward their friends and peers (53 percent) and parents (36 percent), and they almost universally say the advice they get is helpful.

Most teens with social networking profiles (62 percent) say that the profile they use most often is set to private, so only their friends can see the content they post. One in five (19 percent) say their profile is partially private, meaning that only friends of friends or a network can see what they post, while 17 percent say their most-used profile is fully public.

Families have adopted a number of approaches to modern digital parenting. Many parents talk with teens about online safety or "friend" their children on social networks, while others have adopted a more technical approach toward monitoring their child's online behavior:

- Eighty percent of parents who use social media and who also have a child who uses social media have friended their child on these sites.
- Seventy-seven percent of parents of internet users have checked which websites their child visits, up from 65 percent of parents who did so in 2006.
- Sixty-six percent of parents have checked to see what information is available online about their child.
- Fifty-four percent of parents of internet users report using parental controls or other means of filtering, monitoring, or blocking their child's online activities.

While many parents have become friends with their children on social media sites, problems still can crop up. One in five teens who have been friended by their parents (18 percent) have experienced a problem with their parents because of something that happened on a social networking site, compared with 5 percent of such teens who are not friends with their parents on a social networking site.

"When a child accepts a parent's friend request, it doesn't necessarily mean that the parent has a backstage pass to their child's social life," said Mary Madden, co-author of the report. "Teens can present a limited profile to certain friends and are active users of private messaging channels, so the content that parents see may represent just a small fraction of the activity on their teen's profile."

The report, which is based on seven focus groups with teens and a nationally representative survey of 799 youth ages 12-17 and their parents, was conducted by the Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project in partnership with the Family Online Safety Institute (FOSI) and with the support of Cable in the Classroom.

Dept. of Ed provides tips online to address school bullying

It's not the kind of letter you would think the secretary of education would get, but Arne Duncan said he gets them all the time.

"I'm being bullied at school and on the bus, and I'm afraid of telling somebody because they might hear about it and do something bad to me," a girl from Texas wrote in a letter to the Obama administration's top education official.

"I don't really like telling on somebody, but I've told the principal and [he] didn't do anything about it. I've considered suicide but that won't help anything; that will only hurt my family. Please give me advice about what to do."

Such things are happening in schools across the country, Duncan said during a Sept. 21 summit on bullying prevention.

In the wake of the suicide of 14-year-old Jamey Rodemeyer of Amherst, N.Y., Duncan and other education experts said schools must confront the bullying problem head on, lest they risk more young lives.

"You have to take these tough issues on openly and honestly," Duncan said in a brief interview with the Buffalo News during the conference. "It's painful. It's difficult work. It's tough stuff. But ultimately it saves lives."

What's more, the Education Department (ED) can help school districts do just that.

"We work very directly with districts that want our help," Duncan said. "We've had some pretty significant success with working with districts, working on preventing this and dealing with the aftermath of these devastating tragedies. If that is something the [Williamsville] district is interested in, we would love to be helpful."

Duncan told a crowd of several hundred at the summit that the Obama administration had made bullying a priority. In addition to setting up an informational website, www.stopbullying.gov, the administration is also working on developing a uniform definition of bullying that aims to help schools confront the problem.

"Changing the culture and changing the climate is very important" to preventing bullying, said Jamie M. Ostrov, an associate professor of psychology at the University at Buffalo who is serving the panel that's coming up with that uniform definition.

Rodemeyer was the victim of several hateful anonymous comments left on his Formspring blog. ED's "Stop Bullying" website includes the following advice on preventing cyber bullying…

- Educate students, teachers, and other staff members about cyber bullying, its dangers, and what to do if someone is cyber bullied.
- Discuss cyber bullying with students. They might be knowledgeable about cyber bullying, and they might have good ideas about how to prevent and address it.
- Be sure that your school's rules and policies address cyber bullying.
- Closely monitor students' use of computers at school. Use filtering and tracking software on all computers, but don't rely solely on this software to screen out cyber bullying and other problematic online behavior.
- Investigate reports of cyber bullying immediately. If cyber bullying occurs on campus or through the school district's internet system, you are obligated to take action. If the cyber bullying occurs off campus, you can still help. Even cyber bullying that occurs off campus can affect how students behave and relate to each other at school.
- Closely monitor the behavior of the students involved at school for all forms of bullying.
- Investigate to see if those who are cyber bullied need support from a school counselor or school-based health professional.
- Notify the parents of students involved in cyber bullying.
- Talk with all students about the negative effects of cyber bullying.
- Contact law enforcement. Notify the police if the aggressive behavior is criminal. The following might constitute a crime: threats of violence; child pornography and sexting; taking a photo image of someone in a place where he or she would expect privacy; harassment, stalking, or hate crimes; obscene or harassing phone calls or text messages; sexual exploitation; and extortion.

About 80 percent of gay and lesbian youths in New York reported experiencing verbal

harassment in 2009, the Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network found in a statewide survey, and 33 percent reported physical harassment.

To prevent such bullying, said Eliza S. Byard, executive director of the network, schools should:

- Establish a policy that specifically bars harassment based on sexual orientation.
- Encourage the establishment of Gay-Straight Alliances at schools.
- Urge adults to be supportive of GLBT students.

Community: 'It take a village' to stop bullying

In a recent story, titled "Obama pledges crackdown on cyber bullying," we reported on new efforts by the Obama administration to help curb bullying and cyber bullying. But many readers say these efforts don't go far enough—and to change hurtful behavior, it's going to take more than school policy.

(Comments are edited for brevity.)

"I do believe the president means what he says about getting behind an initiative to curb bullying, but the fact remains that not enough is being done at the local level or within individual households," writes **F. Maisey.**

"I have four children ranging in age from 27 to 11, and three of those four have been bullied. … We reported; complained; preached; shared info; called parents, teachers, and school officials; and no one seemed to know how to make it stop. Parents continue to promote the ideology of 'not my child,' while administrators are powerless against activities outside school.

"Luckily, my youngest is in the classroom of a friend of mine. This teacher is on the ball, and when I shared the info with her, she jumped on it, using no-tolerance activities, bully experts, and dedicating several aspects of the curriculum in the 5th [and] 6th grades to curbing and ending bullying.

"I believe [in] the saying, 'It takes a village to raise a child,' and if parents were more aware and not so shallow, perhaps children would behave better as well. In addition, I think school officials need to make anti-bullying a way of life within and around the school—not just blather on as if they are doing something when they very often are not. I wonder how in tune [the president] is with school policy and what rules and programs he can support to save those kids who don't stand a chance. Many of the students who have killed themselves over bullying did not get help—they were too ashamed or scared to ask for it, and even when they did, no one did a collective right thing."

Many readers said that bullying is an end result, and more steps have to be taken for prevention.

"We have a major flaw in the 'solution,' because it still only deals with bullying as the 'end result,' but does nothing to address the root cause of bullying in the first place," explains **C. Gregory**. "And, as I've said repeatedly, cyber bullying isn't any 'special' kind of bullying, per se. … It comes from the very same place other types of bullying comes from; yet, we don't want to address that common core." **Join Gregory's discussion here**.

"Bullying is a very serious issue, and I agree with First Lady Michelle Obama that parents or concerned adults must be involved in the lives of their children," says **Seonlady47**. "Children need guidance in their early years to build their self-esteem, and then they need to be taught that it is not OK to hurt someone else because they do not look, dress, or talk a certain way. Manners and consideration for another person have gone by the wayside."

"We are still treating it as [if] the child being bullied is the one out of balance—the one who needs help, while the bullies just need a little reminder about their manners," says **ginarocks**. "Chances are that the school bully has a parent who was a school bully and is currently a workplace bully, but who has just become more socially adept at it. How dare we, as adults, think that this is some new phenomenon of the Internet Age? Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube have just replaced the cliques, phone calls, and note-passing of previous generations. People know that the socially acceptable thing to do is to feign empathy. Until people change their views on people who are different from them, the problem will remain, no matter how the government tries to suppress it. No amount of assertiveness or self-esteem workshops for the 'victims' will help, either."

"C. Gregory makes a good point about being concerned about calling cyber bullying unique—but cyber bullying expert Patricia Agatston does discuss in her book that it is easier to bully when one is behind a computer, not face to face," writes **lcallister1**. "Dr. Agatston talks about how we need to build a culture of good behaviors with each other, building empathy, and skills to make it unacceptable in our schools."

"The real issue is the breakdown of what bullying is," writes **wallace**. "It is a cry for help. It is, whether big or small, a viable cry for attention. Before I even attempt pointing a finger at anyone, I must mention the fact that it takes a village … you know the rest. We are all guilty of looking the other way and pretending not to notice. We do not know

how to react, act upon, or better yet, prevent. We cannot from the outside make much of a change. It goes deeper, to the heart or conscience. We need family to become a stronger force. We need each other to survive."

"The president's candid description of the bullying he experienced can give people hope and encouragement that life achievement and dream fulfillment can still occur despite being bullied. But unfortunately, it also places an overemphasis on the actions of bullies and the response of the victims, rather than the larger solution of creating kindness, generosity, character, and respect in our schools for all students," says **reycarr.** "What we need is greater emphasis on positive social skills; not just lip service as to the necessity, but curricula with experiential components, including service-based practicums where students can be peer helpers, peer leaders, peer tutors, peer mentors, and other roles to help develop the positive social skills."

Helping to advance the conversation, many readers gave best-practice tips and advice on how to combat bullying, at least at the school level.

"I am an 8th grade teacher at a middle school in Nebraska, and our school has addressed bullying numerous times," says **L. Fricke.** "We have a 'Citizenship Boot Camp' at the beginning of the year to address school rules, classroom conduct, bullying, and digital citizenship. Students meet in the auditorium for a welcome and general information for the first day. Then they go to assigned 'Boot Camp' rooms to discuss 'above the line and below the line' behaviors, social issues that affect students their age, grading systems and GPA, what is required for particular classes, and bullying. These classes rotate every thirty minutes, so all students receive the same sessions that first day. Throughout the year, all of these areas are reviewed in some way.

"Last week, our school lawyer gave a presentation about cyber bullying, bullying, and sexting. She gave [students] actual examples of what had happened in schools and the legal consequences students received because of some form of inappropriate communication on cell phones, Facebook, MySpace, and the internet. In order for behaviors to change, students need 'training' to learn how to behave and specific strategies to avoid caving in to peer pressure. It can't be a one-time shot; it needs to be an ongoing process throughout the school year.

"Right now, I have a group of students who have written several short plays about bullying. We will discuss the messages in the plays, select parts, practice, and then go to the local radio station to record them with sound effects and music to be used as PSAs that will continue to air throughout the summer. Students, teachers, administrators, and parents need to be a part of the anti-bullying process in order for this process to be successful. Student involvement can be in the form of role playing, creating iMovies, PowerPoints, posters, and other means of communication that can be 'visible' in some way throughout the school year. Do we still have bullies in our school? Yes. However, the communication we have created throughout our school has definitely improved student behavior."

"The federal Department of Education and Office of Civil Rights have sent out two informative directives to all school districts across the country in the past six months. These directives focused on Section 504/Equity Compliance and School Bullying. The problem of school bullying is ever changing, and with today's technology it gets easier for a child to be bullied and harder for schools to regulate bullying activity," says **R. Stellmaker.** "My company has worked hard to develop a tool 'EquityÇTM' that helps schools manage all forms of bullying along with their bullying policies. This system also helps school manage and maintain compliance with Section 504/Equity Compliance. To view a demo of this system, please visit www.rdeducationsolutions.com."

"Web Wise Kids crime-prevention games teach youth digital citizenship in schools and after school programs," says **marjieg**. "'It's Your Call' is our newest game for tweens and teens and effectively addresses cyber bullying and empowers youth to make wise and respectful choices in their digital lives and in society. 10 million youth, throughout the nation, have experienced our programs."

"The Center for Civic Education's School Violence Prevention Demonstration Program has a great visual/critical thinking activity that gets students to draw the connection between bullying/bullying prevention and concepts like privacy, justice, authority and responsibility," says **marcofp**. "Go to http://democracymosaic.net/."

However, some readers pointed out that bullying prevention in schools could lead to negative consequences if not handled correctly.

"No parent supports cyber bullying, but with the record of zero tolerance I would not support our schools getting involved and have concerns with the local DA's overzealous prosecutions toward children," says **F. Borakove**. "If common sense were the norm, than I would be approaching this differently. For example, a recent YouTube posting of a student being bullied and physically hit multiple times followed by his defending himself resulted in the bullied victim being suspended for five days because of the zero tolerance policy in schools. If the schools cannot effectively defend the students, then … what right do they have to punish the children for defending themselves? It is the school administrators who ought to be ashamed of themselves."

10 tips for educators on preventing bullying

This fall, there are new and revamped laws in many states that address K-12 bullying and cyber bullying. In Massachusetts, we have one of the most comprehensive and far-reaching laws in the country. As in many states, K-12 teachers in Massachusetts have new responsibilities to respond to, report, and address bullying and cyber bullying. Here at the Massachusetts Aggression Reduction Center (MARC), we've developed 10 tips to help faculty cope with what can seem an overwhelming task.

1. Keep "responding" and "reporting" separate in your mind.

What behaviors do you have to report for possible formal discipline? Also, how should you respond when you see inappropriate (possibly bullying or definitely bullying) behaviors? Always respond by making it clear that you are disturbed by what you saw. Should you respond to a behavior that you might not normally report (such as laughter at a child's expense)? The answer is yes. Remember that even if it's not a "reportable" behavior—respond to it. Ignoring even mild bullying behaviors is essentially the same as endorsing them.

2. Focus on the small stuff.

It's useful to understand the difference between "gateway" behaviors and blatant bullying. Gateway behaviors facilitate or reinforce bullying—they make disrespect seem normal (which facilitates bullying) or even rewarded (like laughing along with a bully). The difficulty is that there are usually no solid rules against gateway behaviors, so adults often ignore them. But research shows us how toxic they can be. In 2009 and 2010, MARC researchers found that it was the gateway behaviors that dominated victim reports.

Focusing on the small stuff means understanding that we need to educate kids about the impact of even small behaviors and react when we see them happening. How to respond? Explain that even small behaviors really affect others. Tell the child that you don't want to see behavior that might be interpreted as rude, and instruct the child to stop. Make it a classroom rule. Then, repeated instances become insolence towards you—which is a possible matter for school discipline.

3. The cyber stuff: Approach and coach.

Although kids are comfortable with technology, they are not necessarily knowledgeable about it—don't confuse the two. We all need to talk with kids about technology. Don't worry about how much you know or don't know. Ask kids what's happening online with them. Ask them to tell you (or show you) what they're up to online. And keep in mind that even if you might not know how to do a particular thing, you do know that even online they should watch what they say and be civil to others. Don't hesitate to make that message loud and clear.

4. The Rumor Mill is still the leader in social problems.

Online and offline, rumors today fly at an incredible rate. In our research, bullies tell us that spreading rumors online is the by far the most common thing they do to others. So if we do anything to stop bullying, let's be sure to focus on the rumors.

5. Talk to kids about how to handle things when they get mad at each other.

Kids today often vent electronically when they're mad, instead of trying to resolve the problem. Faced with the choice between a difficult face-to-face conversation, versus the ease of venting online, they might often conclude that it makes more sense to go electronic. The problem is that by doing so, they usually escalate the conflict instead of resolving it. In bygone days, kids didn't need to be coached on the benefits of talking face to face when they're upset—but today they often do. In our research, girls particularly showed a tendency to do this.

6. Don't neglect elementary school students.

Both bullying and cyber bullying start young. Although we tend to neglect these topics until middle school, the fact is that the seeds of bullying are sown at a young age. And that includes cyber bullying: In a study conducted in 2008, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting found that 72 percent of all first graders used the internet at least once a week during the summer. Anecdotally, at MARC we have seen cases of cyber bullying involving second graders.

The good news is that young elementary students are very willing and able to internalize rules about behavior. Thus, it is important to teach them that being a good person on the computer is just as important as being a good person on the playground. MARC offers a

curriculum on bullying and cyber bullying for grades K-5. You can read about it on our web site and request a copy online.

7. To get the kids to report, you must connect with them emotionally on some level.
We're not saying you should be best friends with your students; only that your students need to know that you care about them and their welfare. Kids today are still reporting bullying to adults at very low levels. Boys particularly, in our research, are not reporting to educators. Why aren't kids reporting? More than 80 percent of the boys and girls in our research revealed that when they did report, no action was taken as a result. They took a big risk in "telling," but as far as they knew, nothing was done.

Of course, confidentiality laws (both federal and, in many states, local) prohibit educators from telling a person specifics about any action taken against another student. But these laws don't prohibit you from telling a student, "We're not ignoring your report. We are working on it," and that's exactly what reporters need to hear.

8. Girls might need particular attention, socially.
In our research, male cyber bullies tended to attack strangers, acquaintances, or kids who were friends long ago. Girls, on the other hand, tended to attack their friends or those with whom they were recently friends. This is a finding of particular concern, because it means that girls are attacking the very foundations of their social support.

Adolescence is a time when kids are learning how to form the long-term friendships they will depend upon as adults. So be aware of the girls you teach: They might need your help in learning to appreciate and protect their social infrastructure—not attack it.

9. Take a moment to reinforce patient, kind, and friendly behaviors.
We all know that the carrot works better than the stick. When you notice a child being particularly good-hearted—especially in a potentially difficult situation, like when helping a classmate understand something, or sticking up for another child—be sure to let them know that you personally appreciate and admire their behavior. Better yet, use a classroom recognition system for the students who behave so well.

10. Enlist the kids in your efforts.
Although adults can be key players, it's the kids themselves who are the ultimate arbiters

of their group's social behavior. Ask your students what kinds of bullying problems they notice, and what rules they believe should address those problems. Then sit back and watch them enforce their own rules with enthusiasm!

The Massachusetts Aggression Reduction Center is an academic center at Bridgewater State University in Massachusetts. We offer K-12 schools in Massachusetts free programs and services by running a training program for graduate and undergraduate students in higher education. Everyone benefits: Future educators receive unique field training, and K-12 schools receive high-quality, no-cost programs and services. Our web site (www.MARCcenter.org) offers many free downloads, games, tips, and curricula for all schools, and parent downloads that are available in English, Spanish, and Portuguese.

School security expert: It takes technology to stop bullying, too

Data indicating that more children are being bullied in and out of school, along with news that a 15-year-old girl committed suicide after being bullied by classmates, have prompted new laws and school rules. Here are some important steps that school leaders and security officials can take to stop the bullying in schools Last fall, the American Public Health Association reported that 43 percent of American middle school students were bullied within the previous 30 days. Since then the topic of bullying has moved to the front pages of newspapers and led television newscasts–both locally and nationally.

Much of that recent interest was fueled in March by the tragic story of a 15-year-old Massachusetts schoolgirl who committed suicide after being unrelentingly bullied in person and online.

The state government took quick action and earlier this month the governor signed a bill designed to prohibit bullying on school property and at school-sponsored events. It also prohibits cyberbullying by eMail or social media networks such as Facebook or Twitter.

The new law requires school staff to report incidents of bullying to the principal, who must then investigate and take appropriate disciplinary action. Principals must also notify the parents of both the victim and the bully. Schools will also be required to add bullying prevention programs to the classroom, as well as provide training to faculty and staff.

Those are all good steps that should be followed in the other 49 states. But there are a couple of things missing here.

First, all schools should have hotlines that allow anyone to anonymously report incidents of bullying or violence. And schools need to make sure they have surveillance cameras in hallways, stairways, lunchrooms, locker areas, playgrounds and outside restrooms, where bullying is most likely to occur.

Often, charges of bullying get down to a "he-said, she-said" situation. Having recorded evidence of incidents can break that potential logjam.

Too often we minimize the deep emotional scars that bullying can leave on children. As adults, it's up to us to do our best to stop it from happening.

Teen's social media use inspires others

Too often, we hear stories about students using online anonymity to bully their peers. But one Illinois high school student is using social media to improve campus morale.

A rising sophomore at Lake Zurich High School created a Formspring page where middle and high school students can leave anonymous compliments for each other. The site's creator has chosen to remain anonymous herself, releasing only her grade and gender. She approves all comments before they are posted, often adding an emoticon or positive comment of her own.

Formed this past spring, "LZ Compliments" has received 3,164 postings as of press time. Students use the site to boost their classmates anonymously, posting such comments as "[student] is a babe and is cute with her braces," or "[student] is so sincere and an awesome person."

The creator of LZ Compliments says she made the site in response to the ugly negativity she usually saw on the internet.

"I didn't know what the reaction was going to be," she told Lake Zurich Patch. "I didn't know how popular it would be."

While initially the site received negative comments predicting its failure, the student moderator refused to post anything negative. Soon, positive sentiments came rolling in. She says she most likes posts that are well thought out and include more than just compliments on physical appearances.

The creation of LZ Compliments comes at a time when cyber bullying has led to a recent spate of highly publicized teen suicides, or "bullycides," across the nation. Randi Zuckerberg, Facebook's marketing director and sister of site co-founder Mark Zuckerberg, recently argued that putting an end to anonymity online could help curb bullying and harassment on the web.

"People behave a lot better when they have their real names down. … I think people hide behind anonymity, and they feel like they can say whatever they want behind

closed doors," Zuckerberg said during a panel discussion on social media hosted by *Marie Claire* magazine.

The idea of forcing an end to anonymity has met a great deal of controversy from privacy and free-speech proponents who argue that anonymity is sometimes necessary.

However, the student creator of LZ Compliments has said that the brand of anonymity used by that website has caused a wave of positivity at Lake Zurich High School since the site launched.

"People do treat each other differently," she said. "It made me view Lake Zurich in a different way."

Keeping her identity secret has been a major challenge. While she revealed herself to three close friends, she hasn't informed her brother, who receives compliments on the site. She often hears students discussing the site at school and chooses to avoid the subject.

However, the anonymous student does plan on revealing her identity at graduation, and she has considered the idea of passing the site down to another anonymous student at that time.

The site reportedly has inspired two neighboring high schools to start similar pages.

"I'm really proud of it, I have to say. It really shows the power of the internet," she told Patch.

Student pushes back against college gossip site

Hurling online insults is easy when you're anonymous. Putting a name to that invective changes everything—and that's what University of Southern California (USC) freshman Haley Winters is banking on.

Winters created an online petition March 21 asking college students to pledge to use their names in posts on the website CollegeACB.com, described by its creator as an "anonymous confession board" with more than 20 million monthly page views.

The petition asks students to sign their names and pledge to take "the anonymous out of CollegeACB."

Winters, a theatre major from New York City, said the website has fostered a culture of cyber bullying across the USC campus, but especially among members of the Greek community. Visitors are asked to rank sorority members by appearance, for example, and sexual exploits—real or imagined—are described in detail for all to see.

"I was really taken aback by the level of viciousness displayed on the site," said Winters, 19, a member of the university's Delta Delta Delta Sorority who first found CollegeACB when she came to the USC campus last fall.

The online petition comes after seven months of "wishing someone would do something about this site. And I realized that by me not doing anything, I'm basically just fueling it and accepting it."

Winters also created a Facebook page that serves mostly as a rallying point for 235 college students who see CollegeACB as a socially destructive force on campus. Winters' petition had about 150 signatures as of press time—a total she is "not satisfied with at all."

"This has become our version of Star Magazine—we get to rag on each other without any accountability," she said. "There are absolutely no consequences here … and it's starting to seep into the actual social life of the campus and affect the way people treat each other."

CollegeACB promotes itself as a rare online forum that allows students to converse openly without the risks that come on Facebook, where everything a user posts or writes can be found by parents, professors, and potential employers.

The site's facelessness—like many gossip sites that preceded it—has led to strings of sexist, homophobic, and racist rants, along with personal attacks that include students' full names and the names of their sorority or fraternity houses.

There are many CollegeACB posts that ask for advice on how to handle breakups with girlfriends and boyfriends. Thoughtful responses to personal questions can be found on any of the individual campus pages available on CollegeACB.

Peter Frank, the former manager of CollegeACB, said in a Jan. 11 blog post that he sold his stake in the site and new management had taken charge.

In an eMail message to *eCampus News,* a CollegeACB spokesperson who did not give his or her name said the site was working with campus leaders at various schools to clean up the strings of offensive comments that populate the site.

The spokesperson said CollegeACB officials have been in contact with student leaders at the University of Maryland (UMD), which until last week boasted a form "filled with hateful and disparaging posts" on CollegeACB.

"We have seen a dramatic improvement in content with no decrease in page views" on the UMD page, the spokesperson said. "We think that under the right environment and with the right encouragement, all college campuses can be like that."

CollegeACB's front page features a pledge to host a "more positive and productive place to have anonymous conversations," adding that visitors would have the ability to remove content they found offensive.

"Mostly these improvements have come from the fact that a core group of students have been much more vigorous in reporting posts," the spokesperson said. "While they still have a long way to go, we're confident that in a few months, their ACB will look much more positive."

Moving away from a website built on anonymous postings, however, is off the table.

"We think that anonymity is not only in the title of the site, but it is crucial to what we do," the spokesperson said.

"Why anonymity? Because everyone has something that they're afraid to say out loud," the site's management said in a mission statement posted to the front page. "We'll be there when you want to write without responsibility. For some of you, it'll be an excuse to be judgmental, petty, and mean. For others, it'll give you a chance to explore your imperfections without looking stupid, to be excited without looking lame, to examine yourself without looking weak …"

CollegeACB grabbed the attention of college students nationwide after another popular gossip site, JuicyCampus.com, shut down in February 2009. The site was banned on at least one campus, and student groups spoke out against vitriolic conversation threads that targeted student groups, individual students, and professors.

JuicyCampus was shuttered when its creator, Matt Ivester, ran out of funding. In the months before its closure, attorneys general from New Jersey and Connecticut questioned whether the site was complying with state laws that prohibit "libelous, defamatory, and abusive postings."

The petition for students to no longer hide behind their anonymity, Winters said, isn't an infringement upon free speech, but a call for accountability on a public and popular website. Several commenters on Winters' petition see it as an assault on basic First Amendment rights, and let her know it in unsubtle tones.

"I think people on the site have every right to say what they want to say," she said. "I don't want to shut it down. I want to lend support to the people who have been victimized by the site."

Winters' petition is filled with encouraging comments and notes of support from people applauding her stand against hateful anonymous posts. Interspersed within the positive remarks are personal attacks directed toward Winters and racist slurs that draw the ire of petition signers.

The anonymous insults, she said, were not unexpected.

"I knew it wasn't going to be easy," Winters said. "But when you see those horrible things said about you, it just makes our argument that much stronger. … So far, it hasn't been anything I can't handle."

Companies make a difference

Schools and states aren't alone in addressing bullying. Many companies and others are helping to bring the issue of bullying into the national spotlight, as well as providing resources to educators and school leaders.

New film examines bullying in U.S. schools

"I couldn't have been hit by a cool car…it had to be a minivan," laughs Kelby from Oklahoma, an openly gay teen who can't make the smile reach her eyes as she recalls the day she was hit by a van because of her sexuality. Kelby is one of five people and families documented over the course of a year in a groundbreaking new documentary that aims to shed light on American's bullying epidemic.

The documentary, called '**The Bully Project,**' which has a limited release March 30th in select theaters, was directed by producer/director Lee Hirsch, who admits to being bullied throughout most of his childhood.

"In many ways, those experiences and struggles helped shape my world view and the types of films I've endeavored to make. I firmly believe that there is a need for an honest, gutsy film which gives voice to kids who deal with such torments on a daily basis. Through this unflinching look, we will make a difference for other young people across our communities and improve our collective response to this crisis," said Hirsch in a statement.

Hirsch also explains that currently there is an attitude of "kids will be kids," and he intends for the film to reach not only those who have been the victims of bullying, but also those who still need what Hirsch refers to as an "empathy push."

Stories include two families who have lost children to suicide and a mother awaiting the fate of her 14-year-old daughter, who has been incarcerated after bringing a gun on her school bus.

The documentary also gives viewers an intimate glimpse into homes, classrooms, cafeterias, and principals' offices, offering insight into the often cruel world of the lives of bullied children.

As teachers, administrators, kids, and parents struggle to find answers, "The Bully Project" examines the dire consequences of bullying through the testimony of strong and courageous youth, say the filmmakers.

According to the project, 13 million kids are bullied each year, and 3 million are absent in school because they feel "uncomfortable."

"Bullying is not a normal stage of development," explain the project's leaders. "[Bullying] undermines the social and emotional development of our children, and too often leads to tragic consequences."

Starting with the film's STOP BULLYING. SPEAK UP! call to action, the Bully Project will try to catalyze audience awareness with a series of tools and programs supported by regional and national partners. More information about these partners and programs can be found **here.**

Facebook and Time Warner join to stop cyber bullying

A new partnership between Facebook and Time Warner aims to expand the companies' individual efforts to prevent online bullying. The initiative, called "Stop Bullying: Speak Up," will combine broadcast, print, online, and social media outlets to get parents, teachers, and youth speaking about cyber bullying prevention.

"Nothing is more important than the safety of the people [who] use our site," said Andrew Noyes, manager of public policy communications at Facebook. "Online safety is a responsibility shared among parents, teachers, teens, policy makers, and services like Facebook."

The announcement came after a recent White House Convention on Bullying Prevention. The campaign will include a town hall meeting with CNN's Anderson Cooper, which will focus on bullying issues and teaching adults how to cope with it. It also will coincide with Facebook's Social Media Pledge App that encourages educators, parents, and kids to make a personal commitment to help stop bullying. Also featured will be Cartoon Network's bystander-focused bullying prevention resources and expansive coverage of bullying from Time Inc. publications.

"I think it's important to remember that activity on Facebook mirrors what's going on offline—and we haven't 'solved' bullying in offline contexts—so it will take some time to address it online, too," Noyes said.

A 2007 study by Stanford University master's student Debbie Heimowitz found that more than 60 percent of students had been victims of cyber bullying, up from 42 percent in a 2004 study done by i-SAFE.org. Online bullying became nationally recognized after a number of teen suicides that stemmed from alleged harassment online, now termed "bullycides." According to the Centers for Disease Control, 23 percent of online bullying occurs via websites such as Facebook, while 67 percent of electronic aggression, the largest percentage, occurs through instant messaging.

This latest partnership is the next step after a series of initiatives from both companies this year. Facebook has released a "Family Safety Center" and "Social Report Tool" that allows

people to report bullies or harassment to parents, teachers, or other authority figures.

Time Inc. partnered with CNN and Cartoon Network last year in a multi-platform media campaign which included the Anderson Cooper hosted "Bullying: No Escape; an AC 360 Special Report with PEOPLE and Cartoon Network."

"We recently created the social reporting feature to help address bullying and other abuses on the site. We've always offered a comprehensive system for people to report content to us, which has been effective at keeping inappropriate content off the site," said Noyes.

"Now we've added a unique feature, developed with safety experts, that lets people also report content to someone more in their support system, like a parent or a teacher, who may be able to address the issue more directly. It is our hope that features like this will not only remove the offensive content but also help people get to the root of the problem."

Facebook regularly partners with groups that have an interest in the prevention of online bullying. Its Safety Advisory Board consists of the Family Online Safety Institute, Connect Safely, the National Network to End Domestic Violence, Childnet International, and WiredSafety. It also has an LGBT Network of Support and has worked with the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children and National Suicide Prevention Lifeline.

"We hope our tools, features, and awareness campaigns will make a difference," said Noyes. "You can block a bully on Facebook, which cuts all ties with them. There is no such mechanism to do this in offline world. We prioritize reports of bullying and we will disable the accounts of serious offenders."

Free cyber bullying toolkit from Common Sense Media

Common Sense Media, an independent nonprofit organization that helps parents and educators teach children how to be savvy users and consumers of media and technology, has created a free toolkit to help educators address the issue of cyber bullying in their schools.

For each grade level (elementary, middle, and high school), "Stand Up, Don't Stand By" contains two of the organization's best lessons on cyber bullying from its digital literacy and citizenship curriculum. The toolkit also includes a parent-focused "workshop in a box" to help incorporate parents into the conversation.

Research from the Pew Internet & American Life project suggests that one in three kids is a target of cyber bullying—which leaves two in three who play a different role, Common Sense Media says. "Stand Up, Don't Stand By" is part of the group's upcoming campaign to encourage parents and teachers to start a conversation about cyber bullying with their children and students, and support kids in taking a stand against digital harassment.

http://www.commonsensemedia.org/educators/cyberbullying-toolkit

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About

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