



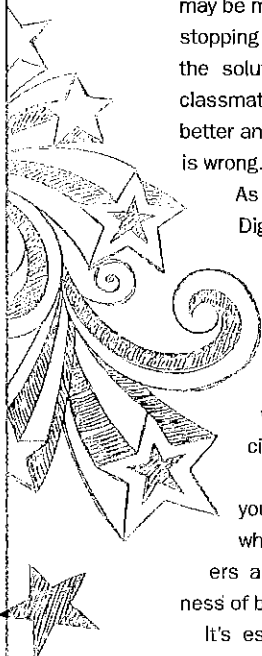
Bullying STOPS

when solutions come from students



WAYS YOU CAN COMBAT BULLYING

- Recognize that cyberbullying often takes place off school grounds, and that the "of the moment" aspect of social media sources such as Twitter can make it difficult to address. By the time the victim realizes he or she has been the target of a vicious rumor or cyber slur, the individual who engaged in the bullying (and those who followed it) may have moved on to their next victim. Identifying the perpetrators may be difficult or even impossible, especially if they post comments on a website that allows them to remain anonymous. Encourage students to start a movement — their own zero-tolerance response to cyberbullying.
- Get kids to talk about stereotypes. Sexism is at the heart of bullying, says activist Jamie Nabozny. Encourage discussions and projects in which students explore their concepts of femininity and masculinity and individualism. Help create an environment in school where no one is forced to march to a stereotype.
- Reach out to the bullies, and instead of isolating them, draw them into discussions, activities and projects. Punishment can backfire and make bullies feel angry and isolated; instead, surprise them by giving them responsibility and recognition for positive changes and actions.



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There's a whole new school of thought about how to handle bullying.

As researchers are learning, kids may be more effective than adults at spotting, stopping and preventing bullying. And when the solution comes from their friends and classmates, students are likely to respond better and faster to the message that bullying is wrong.

As implementation of New York's new Dignity for All Students Act unfolds in schools throughout the state, the time has never been better to encourage students to take a stand against bullying, says NYSUT's Secretary-Treasurer Lee Cutler, whose office oversees the union's social justice initiatives.

"Where I've seen it work best is when you empower students," says Cutler, who has spoken to students and teachers around the state to heighten awareness of bullying.

It's especially important now for schools to encourage student-led anti-bullying efforts, Cutler says, because instruction and mandates that are driven by school administrations in response to the new law run the risk of becoming what he called "cookie-cutter programs" that students tune out even as they sit through presentations that aim to change

their behavior.

NYSUT advocated strongly for passage of the Dignity act, which became law last July. It effectively outlaws bullying of students during the school day by other students or by school personnel. The challenge now, Cutler says, is to keep the effort moving forward.

"For kids now, this is like the Civil Rights movement — 'How do we change our attitudes?'" he asks.

Cutler recently spoke during a day-long forum for students, teachers and community activists at SUNY Geneseo called "Wipe Out Bullying." The conference was sponsored by NYSUT, United University Professions and several organizations on campus that deal with community service and social justice. It's part of the union's ongoing efforts to help prevent bullying.

UUP member Tom Matthews, associate dean of leadership and service at Geneseo and a former NYSUT Higher Education Member of the Year, was a key organizer. Workshop leaders who drove home the message that change has to be driven by students themselves struck a strong, powerful note, Matthews said.

"The only way we're going to change the culture is at a peer level," he said. Matthews is a member of the NYSUT Board of Directors.

Psychologist Amanda Nickerson, a UUP member and director of the Alberti Center for Bullying Abuse Prevention at the State University of New York in Buffalo, recommends that teachers and other adults "teach kids to be upstanders, not bystanders." Adults can give kids positive, proactive ideas that allow



PHOTOS: STEVE JACOBS

Students and NYSUT members gather at SUNY Geneseo for a day-long community forum about bullying prevention and to learn ways they can help solve the problem.

the students to take action on their own by encouraging them to:

- refuse to join in bullying;
- band together to protect bullying victims by speaking out when bullying occurs; and
- reach out to classmates who are targeted.

And students come up with some pretty creative approaches. Cutler, Nickerson and nationally known anti-bullying activist Jamie Nabozny recently shared some of the ideas they've seen in action on and off school grounds. What stands out is that these ideas work against bullying wherever it takes place. That's critical, because with the rise of social media, bullying among adolescents and teens increasingly occurs away from hallways, locker rooms and playgrounds and instead unfolds in the often-anonymous world of the Internet.

Among the ideas that incorporate incentives and encouragement from adults but draw on the leadership and cooperation of students:

- The "Welcoming Allies and Mentors" (WAM) program at Lehman Alternative Community School in Ithaca, in which sixth-graders and new students are matched with

upperclass mentors during orientation under this entirely student-run initiative at the grade 6-12 school.

Students started WAM at Lehman 2 1/2 years ago under the guidance of social worker Celia Clement of the Ithaca Teachers Association. Clement encouraged the founders to include both shy and rowdy students in the organizing efforts to emphasize that WAM is all-inclusive. Participating students hold weekly meetings, fun outings and group activities that promote strong study skills.

Cutler has visited Lehman to learn more about WAM and says it works because "students run the program; students work to change the culture of the school."



Leadership and action can come from unexpected sources in a school. Nabozny said he has seen a popular top athlete in a high school start a zero-tolerance movement against bullying. This confident leader confided to Nabozny that his older brother had suffered horribly from bullying in the same school, and he had vowed he would make changes when he got to high school. He did just that, by looking beyond his immediate circle to see the kids who were struggling, and speaking up on their behalf.

Research shows that bullies have often themselves been the victims of bullying. This provides all the more reason to encourage other students to engage them, befriend them and invite them to help make positive changes.

From left: UUP member Tom Matthews, NYSUT Secretary-Treasurer Lee Cutler and anti-bullying advocate Jamie Nabozny were key players in organizing the forum on bullying at SUNY Geneseo. Cutler told participants that change had to be driven by students themselves in order to achieve a positive school culture.

Out of such courageous efforts by children, Cutler said, he believes that "it is not for us to lecture them; it's for us to stimulate them to help them find their voice."

Adults who work with children should reflect on their own use of power even as they encourage children to change their behavior, Nickerson recommends. If teachers always call on the eager, cooperative kids and only select the stand-out achievers for special recognitions, how can they expect students to adopt an all-inclusive approach to their peers?

- Resist making assumptions based on stereotypes or actions.