

Dear Julie Hertzog,

This letter is being sent to representatives of the Minnesota Task Force on the Prevention of Bullying on behalf of the Minnesota School Psychologists' Association.

School psychologists are uniquely positioned to use their knowledge of psychology, education, and child development and their consultation and advocacy skills to affect policies and practices within the schools. Because school psychologists work directly with students, as well as with staff, parents, and administrators, practitioners are encouraged to take a leadership role in developing comprehensive approaches to bullying prevention and school-wide climate improvement. School psychologists can have a direct role in preventing bullying through direct and indirect services provided to children, families, and schools, including:

- Developing school-wide prevention activities (e.g., PBIS) or more targeted prevention activities to help students develop appropriate social skills;
- Counseling victims of bullying in all its forms to ensure that they do not internalize the effects of repeated harassment;
- Conduct informative social–emotional assessments of student perpetrators of bullying behavior at school;
- Develop interventions to help eliminate bullying behaviors and replace these with positive, prosocial behaviors;
- Provide consultation to the parents/guardians of bullies and targets to offer them effective resources, supportive interventions, and strategies for managing behavior.

The following anecdote is one example of the way in which taking into account these keys to effective anti-bullying programs can contribute to positive results.

Staff at the suburban Minneapolis elementary school at which I worked raised concerns about an increase they had observed in the number of discipline referrals among third graders. A review of discipline data determined that most of the incidents among third graders appeared to be occurring on the playground, and seven students were disproportionately involved.

The school crisis team, which included the school psychologist, social worker, nurse and administrators, met with teacher representatives from the third grade team and discussed the need to gather more information that could be used in creating a prevention and intervention plan. Specifically, they discussed the need:

1. to conduct a sociometric survey with all third grade students to see which students other students reported being most likely and least likely to play with on the playground; and
2. for individual adults on the team to review files on and interview the seven identified students and their parents and observe the behavior of the students on the playground

Results of the sociometric survey confirmed that the seven students disproportionately involved in discipline referrals were also most often cited as students other students were least likely to play with

on the playground. In addition, file reviews, interviews and observations revealed that the seven students

1. all lived in the same low-income housing project
2. did not feel safe playing outside around the housing project; and
3. did not engage in play at recess, instead spending their time walking around the edge of the playground and picking fights with other students

Using this information, the team designed a bullying prevention and intervention plan that involved working with the school physical education teachers to:

1. identify cooperative games that could be played at recess
2. teach the games to all third grade students during physical education class; and
3. facilitate all students, especially the seven identified students, engaging in cooperative games during recess

Implementation of this comprehensive prevention and intervention plan contributed to a notable decrease in bullying and discipline referrals among all third graders at the school, including the seven identified students.

For more information supporting this comprehensive approach to bullying prevention and intervention, see the link below to a position statement from the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP).

[National Association of School Psychologists Position Statement on Bullying Prevention and Intervention in Schools](#)

Please feel free to contact me at 507-452-1200, ext. 119, or [dhyson@hved.org](mailto:dhyson@hved.org) with any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Daniel M. Hyson, Ph.D., NCSP

President, Minnesota School Psychologists Association