

January 2012

Effective July 1, 2011, there have been major changes to the State's statutes regarding bullying. Public Act 11-232 revamps bullying statutes in a number of ways. The new definition is more expansive and focuses on the impact of the bullying on the victim and school environment. Given this new definition and our efforts at every school in Plainville, it is expected that there will be more reports of bullying this year.

The revised definition of bullying describes this behavior as the repeated use of written, verbal, or electronic communication or physical acts or gestures that causes physical or emotional harm, places the student in fear of harm to himself or property, or creates a hostile climate at school. It can also refer to behaviors that infringe on the rights of students at school or substantially disrupt the educational process. It is important to note that school administrators must consider off campus bullying behavior between students if it impacts the orderly operation of the school.

Some examples of possible bullying behavior include physical violence and attacks, verbal taunts, name calling, and put downs. They can also include threats and intimidation, extortion or stealing of money and/or possessions, or exclusion from a peer group. Any of these actions could be classified as bullying if they were repeated and the victim felt threatened or if the school climate were negatively impacted.

There are many new obligations for school districts and schools as a result of these legislative changes. For example, all staff that has contact with students such as bus drivers, cafeteria workers, coaches, and consultants are now obligated to report bullying behavior. Schools must also provide in-service training to all staff regarding these changes and appoint a safe school climate specialist at each school. Each district must also develop a Safe School Climate Plan prior to Jan 1, 2012. The Plainville Board of Education approved our Safe School Climate Plan in December and it has been submitted to the State Department of Education.

The Safe School Climate Plans which were developed at every school with parent input, outline prevention and intervention strategies. Bullying language is also included in every code of conduct at schools so students are aware that these behaviors will not be tolerated and will result in consequences. If there is a bullying allegation made at a school, parents and guardians must be notified in writing within 48 hours of the conclusion of the investigation. Parents must also be invited to a meeting to discuss the outcome of the investigation. When it is determined that bullying has occurred, the student and their parents/guardians are notified of the consequence in writing and of any future consequences should the bullying continue.

Plainville Community Schools launched the Positive Behavior and Intervention Supports (PBIS) program in 2006 at our middle school. Last May the middle school was honored as a model demonstration school for PBIS. This model has expanded to all our schools and as of 2010 it is implemented district wide. In addition to the positive climate created by our PBIS efforts, the district has undertaken many other activities in an effort to prevent bullying behavior.

The Middle School of Plainville hosted the Looking in Theatre group in December for an assembly that focused on adolescent issues such as name calling and bullying. In January, the Anti Defamation League (ADL) conducted an assembly to help students develop a common language for discussing issues of diversity, prejudice, and name-calling. Later this year the ADL will return to our middle and high schools and present the program entitled, From Bystander to Ally: Interrupting Name-Calling and Bullying Student Training. This program will train a group of students who will then engage their peers in developing and practicing skills to respond to bullying incidents.

Additional efforts that address the issue of bullying are also in place across the school district. Project H.O.P.E. (Helping Our Peers Excel) began in 2005 as an initiative developed by School Psychologist, Suzanne Schweitzer. This program is a half-day workshop where fifth grade students spend time in small groups led by high school mentors. The mentors participate in skits that include topics such as tolerance, substance abuse, and bullying. School psychologists are also developing a

series of lessons for our younger elementary students, which will be delivered in the spring.

For additional information regarding Plainville Community Schools' efforts to prevent bullying, please contact Assistant Superintendent, Dr. Maureen Brummett.