

Missouri educators commit to bully-free schools

BY ANN JARRETT, MNEA TEACHING AND LEARNING DIRECTOR

The statistics are startling. One in three American schoolchildren in grades six through 10 are affected by bullying. Eighty-three percent of girls and 79 percent of boys report experiencing either bullying or sexual harassment. Students who are targets of repeated bullying behavior experience extreme fear and stress, which can be expressed as fear of going to school, fear of using a public bathroom, fear of the bus ride to and from school, physical symptoms of illness and diminished ability to learn.

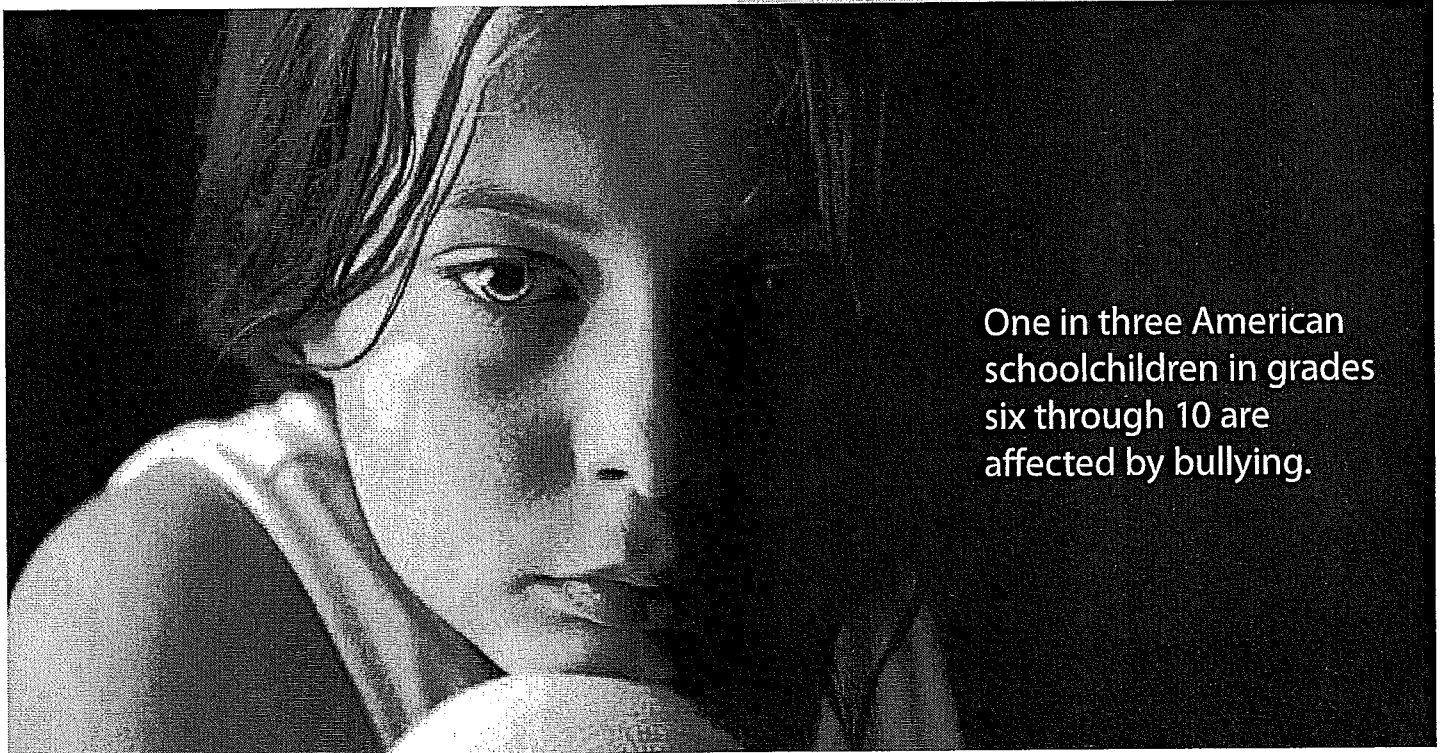
"Schools, above all, need to be safe havens for students — places where students can learn and realize their full potential," says Missouri NEA President Chris Guinther. "MNEA members realized a decade ago the need for a comprehensive program to counter the bullying culture in public schools in Missouri. That's when we invested in developing the No MOre Bullying program."

MNEA has trained thousands of educators in the No MOre Bullying program, which it offers at a low cost to Missouri school districts where MNEA members work. MNEA trainers work first with your building steering committee or other standing committee to identify building-specific needs and procedures, including meaningful ways to get staff on board. Then a member of the No MOre Bullying training cadre trains all school staff in a two- to three-hour session. Trainers provide follow-up assistance through the standing committee. For information on MNEA's No MOre Bullying training, call or email MNEA Teaching and Learning Director Ann Jarrett at (573) 634-3202 or Ann.Jarrett@mnea.org.

The NEA provides guidance to caring adults in schools and communities nationwide who are willing to stand up and pledge to help bullied students. To help these concerned adults, the NEA launched the "NEA's Bully Free: It Starts With Me" campaign. These caring adults agree to listen carefully to the bullied student who comes to them and take action to stop the bullying. Take NEA's Bully Free Pledge and find helpful resources at www.nea.org/bullyfree.

Take the NEA's Bully Free Pledge @ www.nea.org/bullyfree

I agree to be identified as a caring adult who pledges to help bullied students. I will listen carefully to all students who seek my help and act on their behalf to put an immediate stop to the bullying. I will work with other caring adults to create a safe learning environment for all the students in my school.



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>>> How to stop bullying on the spot

When adults respond quickly and consistently to bullying behavior, they send the message that it is not acceptable. Research shows this can stop bullying behavior over time and keep kids safe. StopBullying.gov offers the following tips:

Do:

- Intervene immediately.
- Separate the students involved by getting between them if possible.
- Meet any immediate medical or mental health needs.
- Stay calm. Reassure the students involved, including bystanders.
- Model respectful behavior when you intervene.

Avoid these common mistakes:

- Don't ignore bullying. Don't think students can work it out without adult help.
- Don't immediately try to sort out the facts.
- Don't force other kids to say publicly what they saw.
- Don't question the students involved in front of other kids.
- Don't talk to the kids involved together; only discuss the incident with each student privately.
- Don't make the students involved apologize or patch up relations on the spot.

>>> The quick four-step response to bullying

How to Stop Bullying and Social Aggression: Elementary Grade Lessons and Activities That Teach Empathy, Friendship, and Respect by Steve Breakstone, Michael Dreiblatt and Karen Dreiblatt, offers the following quick-reaction advice for school staff members who encounter student bullying.

When school staff members see or hear bullying and other hurtful behavior, they need to:

- Stop the bullying behavior.
- Identify the specific behavior that is hurtful and unacceptable.
- Remind the student of the school's expectation.
- Remind the student of the behavioral expectation.

For example, if a staff member heard a student belittling another student, the staff member might state, in an authoritative yet respectful tone, the following:

- Stop talking right now.
- The way you were talking was insulting.
- In this school, we don't talk to people in a mean way.
- When you talk to someone, say positive things. Do you understand? Good, let's get to class.

This strategy won't solve every problem, and staff members need to know how to respond if a student continues to be hurtful. However, most students do respond to strong, responsible leadership by adults. ❖

