

The Monitoring and Implementation of a School District-Wide Grassroots Anti-Bullying Initiative: Because Nice Matters

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ABSTRACT

School community initiatives have the potential to not only address problems among youth but also to empower a school community during the process. Many anti-bullying evidence based programs are disseminated ‘top-down’ to schools and districts that may not have the need for such programs or the ability to implement them effectively (Benbenishty & Astor, 2007). This paper presents a process in which a school district used the California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS) to assess its needs. Based on the survey, the Temecula Valley Unified School District proposed a grassroots initiative approach to this issue, and developed Because Nice Matters (BNM) to increase bullying awareness district-wide. This program includes awareness raising activities such as: wearing purple and black to remind everyone that bullying can cause physical and psychological damage, or wearing white to signify making a fresh start. Additionally, the district painted a school bus with the slogan “BNM”, designed to raise community awareness. The BNM efforts contributed to the intervention literature because this school-community demonstrated the initiative to develop and implement a program based on local data to address their schools’ bullying issues.

METHODS

- The program was evaluated from the perspective of two school stakeholder groups—parents (n = 89) and teachers (n = 67).
- This was a mixed methods study that consisted of an internet-based survey with open and closed ended questions and interviews with district leadership.
- Descriptive quantitative analyses as well a thematic analysis of qualitative data were employed.



RESULTS

Quantitative and qualitative analysis reveal two most prominent themes among both parents and teachers:

- 1) BNM is a successful program that other schools can learn from (about 75% of teachers and parents)
- 2) BNM helped students understand that bullying is ‘very bad’ (about 80% of respondents).
- 3) Nearly 70% of parents (N=89) indicated that BNM helped students become more caring.
- 4) Parent participation in BNM efforts was lower (15%) than teacher participation (60%).
- 5) The qualitative analysis also indicated that teachers and parents valued participation in this program, and that parents supported the need for this program and the implementation of BNM.



“Our bullying rally really opened up people's eyes to what can happen. The rally left people in tears and many people in shock of the possibilities of bullying; Bullying is a complicated issue and should be addressed and controlled. The BNM program is a great way to call attention to this issue.”

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CONNECTIONS TO ANTI-BULLYING

- Anti-bullying evidence-based programs are often implemented “top-down” in schools with minimal participation from school community stakeholders.
- Often, schools and districts may not have the need for anti-bullying programs and/or the capacity to sustain successful anti-bullying initiatives.
- In the context of a military-connected public school district, this study examined a grassroots anti-bullying initiative spearheaded by multiple school stakeholder groups, including parents, teachers, principals, and students.
- Overall, the findings, showed that parents and teachers perceived that the main goals of the program—raising awareness of bullying and promoting kindness—were accomplished.
- Parents and teachers also recommended that BNM ideas and activities should be expanded district-wide in order to make more long-term changes.
- While parents still remained concerned about bullying, teachers in particular were concerned with social media-related violence and wanted to see continued attention to this issue.

CONNECTIONS TO WHOLE SCHOOL INTERVENTIONS

- Having a whole-school approach that does not target one subset population or individuals who are involved in bullying is different from having a problem-centered approach which is narrowed and reactive.
- BNM is focused on the entire school system, based on the belief that a positive and preventative approach, which includes the whole school, will not only provide better and more sustainable results but also will help in developing a sense of community and advance the social-emotional skills of the students and staff.
- Despite the fact that military-connected kids is a population at risk for bullying and at the heart of the grant, BNM relies on the understanding that improving the schools as a whole, based on grassroots programs and intervention, will benefit military kids and other vulnerable populations.
- Similarly, the evaluation process included all the parents and teachers in the school, while aiming to gain the most inclusive evaluation of the impact of BNM to all the different populations.
- Some of the responses specified the military connection, enabling learning more about the impact of the program for this specific population.

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