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Research Scenario

People in the school district are concerned about bullying in their elementary and middle schools. The school media specialists need to prepare an Executive Summary for the Board of Education assessing the awareness of, attitude toward, and instances of bullying in the schools and provide recommendations for how a bullying prevention program could be linked to scheduled library visits.

Research Question

How prevalent is bullying in the school district? How aware of bullying are teachers, staff, and parents and what are their attitudes towards bullying? How can school media specialists best address these issues?

Research Plan

The first step would involve a literature search to a) ascertain an accepted definition of bullying in current research, b) examine what other schools have done in response to issues with bullying and how successful they were in their given approach, and c) assess available bullying prevention programs, specifically looking at cost, time investment, evidence base, and practical experiences from schools that have utilized the specific program. The literature review would form the basis for our research, helping us interpret our results, and provide context for the study in the broader body of literature (Wallace & Van Fleet, 2012).

The second step would be to determine the level of awareness of bullying in teachers, staff, and parents, as well as their attitudes towards it. This would be examined through a survey

with both qualitative and quantitative questions. Surveying the teachers, staff, and parents would allow them to provide their honest feedback while remaining anonymous. It also places minimal burden on study participants as a short survey requires little time.

Parents of all K-8th grade students would be sent a survey through multiple channels. We would send a sealed envelope with a survey (example 1) and empty envelope home with all students addressed to their parents. A week later, we would also send out the same survey and empty envelope via USPS to all parents who had not yet responded to be sure as many parents receive the survey as possible. We would request that parents complete the survey immediately and send it back with their child in the sealed envelope; if they have multiple children in the K-8th grade schools, we would request that they fill out only one survey.

Teachers and staff would be sent a similar survey (example 2) and empty envelope via the school's mail system. Each teacher and staff member will receive the information in their individual mailbox. Each library will provide a drop box for completed staff surveys.

The third step would be to determine the level of bullying occurring in the elementary and middle school. Since the school became aware of the issue with bullying through their tracking of incident reports, we would examine the data available from the elementary and middle school administrators. Since there is a concern about the rise in bullying, it would logically follow that the schools have been keeping track of reported incidents for a number of years. The data should be available as an Excel spreadsheet or be easily entered into one. The data they collect would at minimum be split by school with the number of incidents reported each month. The data could be more granular than that, perhaps including information about which grades were involved. While not necessarily focused on bullying, data reflecting behavioral incidents does tap into the school district's general level of reported disciplinary

issues. Disciplinary issues can often overlap with incidents of bullying. This data would provide change over time in the number of behavioral incidents reported as well as which ages might benefit most from intervention.

The fourth step would be a qualitative study, examining the incidents of bullying that may not be severe enough to report students involved to administration for discipline but significant enough to be noted by teachers and staff. This would be achieved by asking teachers and staff to keep track of incidents of bullying they observe each day for one week. This request would be sent out along with the teacher/staff survey and would include five forms - one for each school day (example 3). The forms would remain anonymous but participants would be asked for school location and grade. This would allow us to obtain observational data for a full school week. This qualitative element would help us measure the degree of non-reported bullying that is occurring, locations of bullying, and other useful information.

After all the data was collected, the school media specialists would need to review the data, enter it into Excel spreadsheets, and calculate descriptive statistics. If needed, use of cross tabulation might be useful to provide information about subgroups. Once the statistics are complete, they would be used to build the Executive Report. We would also want to compile a database of all quantitative comments made in our surveys, separate from qualitative data, so we could include relevant participant quotes throughout the report.

While I would not include this information in the Executive Report to the Board of Education, I would take time to research the board member's suggestion of the Olweus program. The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (OBPP) looks like it has substantial evidence to support its claims to reduce bullying. It has had substantial success in both Norway and US schools with a diverse sample of students (Black & Jackson, 2007; Black, Washington, Trent,

Harner, & Pollock, 2010; Highmark Foundation, 2012). A study by Moffett found significant increases in standardized test scores among students in schools that had implemented the OBPP for two years or more (2011). However, it is important to note that the OBPP is designed as a whole-school intervention which addresses bullying at the school, classroom, individual, and community level (Highmark Foundation, 2011). The program is designed to include all teachers, staff, and administrators. While school media specialists can be an integral part of the intervention, they cannot be the only teachers providing and reinforcing the bullying prevention program, per the OBPP.

Discussion

By utilizing pieces of both quantitative and qualitative research in this mixed-methods study, we would be able to provide a well-rounded perspective of the issue, providing both conclusive and exploratory elements (Wallace & Van Fleet, 2012). The parent, teacher, and staff surveys provide us with data in regards to levels of bullying awareness and beliefs about bullying. In utilizing the school district's tracking of incident reports, we would be able to identify the long-term pattern of behavioral issues within the schools, which ages might most benefit from a bullying prevention program, and at which time of year a intervention might be most useful. The naturalistic observations would provide us with a point in time focused on the school district's current level of bullying, locations where bullying most often occurs, the core social elements involved, and degree of intervention currently occurring. We would be able to report on parental and teacher/staff attitudes regarding bullying and confidence in the school's competency with regards to bullying, as well as observations of bullying as reported by parents, teachers, staff, and administrators.

This study does not ask students directly about their experiences with bullying for a

number of reasons. First, bullying behaviors can substantially vary by age and developmental stage. It would be a challenge to create surveys that accurately pinpoint bullying behaviors for each subgroup while being understandable to the intended audience. We would also need to be mindful of students with learning disabilities and special needs in the creation of surveys to be sure the surveys are fully accessible to them or the data would only represent a subset of the schools' student body. Second, creating age appropriate, reliable, valid surveys for all students in K-8th grade would be a serious undertaking necessitating piloting and data analysis. This would be very labor intensive and would require a substantial amount of time and expertise. Third, surveying students in school would take up class time that is already quite limited. While this research plan does not ask students in the school district directly about their experiences, I believe the wide variety of data sources properly triangulates their experiences and provides the strongest evidence upon which to base administrative decisions regarding bullying prevention programming.

References

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Example 1

Bullying Survey - Parents and Guardians

As you may have noticed, in the past few years the topic of bullying has received a lot of attention by news media, politicians, activists, and schools around the country. Our school is considering adding a bullying prevention program to the curriculum. As we consider different programs, we would like to learn more about your views and experiences with bullying.

Your participation is voluntary. Please do not include your name when you fill out the survey; it is meant to be anonymous so everyone can answer without worrying about answers being linked to them. All survey answers will be pooled together before added to the report. The survey responses will be used as part of an Executive Report on bullying for the Board of Education. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Aubri Drake, Smith middle school library media specialist, at (860) 123-4567.

Even if you have more than one child in K-8th grade, please fill out only one survey. Once you fill out the survey, please have your child bring it to school, sealed in the envelope included.

Bullying is defined by the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) as "unwanted, aggressive behavior among school aged children that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. The behavior is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time" (2012). Bullying can be verbal (e.g. taunting, name calling, threatening harm), social (e.g. spreading rumors, public embarrassment, purposeful exclusion), or physical (e.g. tripping, breaking someone's things, pinching) (DHHS, 2012). Bullying can occur during school or after. It can happen in person, phone, text, or internet. Please keep this definition in mind as you complete this survey.

1. What grade is your child(ren)? *Check all that apply*

- ↪ Kindergarten
- ↪ 1st grade
- ↪ 2nd grade
- ↪ 3rd grade
- ↪ 4th grade
- ↪ 5th grade
- ↪ 6th grade
- ↪ 7th grade
- ↪ 8th grade

2. How often do you talk about bullying in general with your child(ren)?

- ↪ Very Frequently
- ↪ Frequently
- ↪ Occasionally
- ↪ Rarely
- ↪ Very Rarely
- ↪ Never

3. How often do you talk with your child(ren) about their experiences with bullying?

- ↪ Very Frequently
- ↪ Frequently
- ↪ Occasionally

- ↖ Rarely
- ↖ Very Rarely
- ↖ Never

4. Do you believe your child(ren)'s school provides adequate support for those experiencing bullying?

- ↖ Strongly Agree
- ↖ Agree
- ↖ Undecided
- ↖ Disagree
- ↖ Strongly Disagree

5. Do you believe your child(ren)'s school adequately intervenes when they hear of students being bullying?

- ↖ Strongly Agree
- ↖ Agree
- ↖ Undecided
- ↖ Disagree
- ↖ Strongly Disagree

6. Do you believe bullying is a major problem for children today?

- ↖ Strongly Agree
- ↖ Agree
- ↖ Undecided
- ↖ Disagree
- ↖ Strongly Disagree

7. In the past year, has your child(ren) told you about an incident where they were bullied by other students?

- ↖ Yes
- ↖ No

If yes, what was your response?

8. In the past year, have you been told about an incident where your child(ren) bullied other students?

- ↖ Yes
- ↖ No

If yes, what was your response?

9. If your child(ren)'s school formed a bullying prevention group that met regularly to discuss issues surrounding bullying in your local schools and coordinate bullying prevention events and activities, would you be interested in participating?

~ Yes

~ No

Example 2

Bullying Survey - Teachers and staff

As you may have noticed, in the past few years the topic of bullying has received a lot of attention by news media, politicians, activists, and schools around the country. Our school is considering adding a bullying prevention program to the curriculum. As we consider different programs, we would like to learn more about your views and experiences with bullying.

Your participation is voluntary. Please do not include your name when you fill out the survey; it is meant to be anonymous so everyone can answer without worrying about answers being linked to them. All survey answers will be pooled together before added to the report. The survey responses will be used as part of an Executive Report on bullying for the Board of Education. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Aubri Drake, Smith middle school library media specialist, at (860) 123-4567.

Once you fill out the survey, please return it to the provided drop box at your school library, sealed in the envelope included.

Bullying is defined by the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) as "unwanted, aggressive behavior among school aged children that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. The behavior is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time" (2012). Bullying can be verbal (e.g. taunting, name calling, threatening harm), social (e.g. spreading rumors, public embarrassment, purposeful exclusion), or physical (e.g. tripping, breaking someone's things, pinching) (DHHS, 2012). Bullying can occur during school or after. It can happen in person, phone, text, or internet. Please keep this definition in mind as you complete this survey.

1. Do you work in the:

- ✍ Elementary school
- ✍ Middle school

2. What grade do you teach? *If applicable, check all that apply*

- ✍ Kindergarten
- ✍ 1st grade
- ✍ 2nd grade
- ✍ 3rd grade
- ✍ 4th grade
- ✍ 5th grade
- ✍ 6th grade
- ✍ 7th grade
- ✍ 8th grade

3. How often do you talk about bullying in general with your students?

- ✍ Very Frequently
- ✍ Frequently
- ✍ Occasionally
- ✍ Rarely
- ✍ Very Rarely
- ✍ Never

4. How often do you talk with your students about their experiences with bullying?

- ⚡ Very Frequently
- ⚡ Frequently
- ⚡ Occasionally
- ⚡ Rarely
- ⚡ Very Rarely
- ⚡ Never

5. Do you believe your school provides adequate support for those experiencing bullying?

- ⚡ Strongly Agree
- ⚡ Agree
- ⚡ Undecided
- ⚡ Disagree
- ⚡ Strongly Disagree

6. Do you believe your school adequately intervenes when they hear of students being bullying?

- ⚡ Strongly Agree
- ⚡ Agree
- ⚡ Undecided
- ⚡ Disagree
- ⚡ Strongly Disagree

7. Do you believe bullying is a major problem for children today?

- ⚡ Strongly Agree
- ⚡ Agree
- ⚡ Undecided
- ⚡ Disagree
- ⚡ Strongly Disagree

8. In the past year, have you been told about or observed an incident where a student was bullied by others?

- ⚡ Yes
- ⚡ No

If yes, what was your response?

9. In the past year, have you been told about or observed an incident where a student was bullying others?

- ⚡ Yes

⚡ No

If yes, what was your response?

10. At what points do you believe the most bullying occurs? *Check all that apply*

- ⚡ Before school starts
- ⚡ During classes
- ⚡ Between classes
- ⚡ Recess
- ⚡ Lunch
- ⚡ After school ends
- ⚡ On the bus
- ⚡ After school activities
- ⚡ Online

11. Would you be interested in attending an in-school training focused on bullying, creating safe schools, and ways teachers and staff can intervene if they witness bullying?

- ⚡ Yes
- ⚡ No

Example 3

Bullying Observation form

Our school is considering adding a bullying prevention program to the curriculum. As we consider different programs, we would like to learn more about your observations of bullying.

Your participation is voluntary. Please do not include your name when you fill out the form; it is meant to be anonymous so everyone can answer without worrying about answers being linked to them. All answers will be pooled together before added to the report. The responses will be used as part of an Executive Report on bullying for the Board of Education. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Aubri Drake, Smith middle school library media specialist, at (860) 123-4567.

Please fill out a form for each day of the week for [Month] [Dates]. At the end of each day, please return the form to the provided drop box at your school library.

Bullying is defined by the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) as "unwanted, aggressive behavior among school aged children that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. The behavior is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time" (2012). Bullying can be verbal (e.g. taunting, name calling, threatening harm), social (e.g. spreading rumors, public embarrassment, purposeful exclusion), or physical (e.g. tripping, breaking someone's things, pinching) (DHHS, 2012). Bullying can occur during school or after. It can happen in person, phone, text, or internet. Please keep this definition in mind as you complete this form.

1. Do you work in the:

- ✍ Elementary school
- ✍ Middle school

2. What grade do you teach? *If applicable, check all that apply*

- ✍ Kindergarten
- ✍ 1st grade
- ✍ 2nd grade
- ✍ 3rd grade
- ✍ 4th grade
- ✍ 5th grade
- ✍ 6th grade
- ✍ 7th grade
- ✍ 8th grade

3. What day of the week is this form for?

- ✍ Monday
- ✍ Tuesday
- ✍ Wednesday
- ✍ Thursday
- ✍ Friday

3. Total number of incidents of bullying you observed today:

4. Locations of bullying you observed:

5. Range of the number of children involved in incidents of bullying:

6. Range of the amount of time the incidents of bullying continued:

7. What were the incidents of bullying about:

8. Did anyone step in to stop the bullying? If so, who:
