

# BULLYING

## PREVENTION

1 in 3 teenagers is involved in bullying, either as a bully or as a victim.



Every seven minutes, a child is bullied in the United States. Bullying in schools across the nation and within Pennsylvania leaves too many children and teenagers taunted, isolated, alienated and alone. With 160,000 children in the country missing school every day from fear of being bullied, the issue can't be ignored. Furthermore, 30 percent of U.S. students in grades 6-10 are involved in moderate or frequent bullying, as bullies, victims or both.

Pennsylvania is no exception. The state has been ranked as one of the worst states for bullying. In Pennsylvania schools, one in four students—on a school bus, going to their locker, in a lunchroom or during recess—report they've been a victim of repeatedly being teased or harassed by classmates. More than 70 percent of kids across the nation have been mentally, physically or emotionally bullied, and cyber-bullying is approaching the same rates of harassment.

Bullying can have a toxic impact on schools and communities because it doesn't just stop at the schoolhouse doors, says Susan Limber, a developmental psychologist from Clemson University and national director of a bullying prevention program. She adds that bullying, however, "need not be a rite of passage that children have to endure." Her work with the Highmark Foundation has provided a rich database of information on bullying, which schools, parents and neighborhood groups can use to reduce bullying and improve peer relations in schools and communities.

Given the widespread, public health nature of bullying, the Highmark Foundation decided to tackle it head-on in the Keystone State, while empowering families, students and schools, which had no resources or ideas of where to start, to do the same. As part of the Highmark Healthy High 5 initiative, the Foundation supported the school-based HALT!® A Bullying Prevention Program and PA CARES bullying prevention programs and launched the Bullying Prevention Institute to track progress, and to provide continuing prevention education to schools adopting the bullying prevention programs.

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For as significant a problem as bullying is, stopping it isn't easy. Susan Limber, United States director of the internationally renowned Olweus Bullying Prevention Program, believes the greatest challenge involves the nature of bullying. No single factor starts a child bullying or causes a child to be bullied. Since there are so many aspects, the Olweus program provides a comprehensive solution through restructuring the school environment, reinforcing rewards for civil behavior, and emphasizing that all behaviors have consequences, some positive and some negative. Research has shown that students not even directly involved with bullying still worry about it, which only adds to the issue's severity.



An Initiative of the Highmark Foundation





**Woodland Hills School District**

*Dr. Walter Calinger,  
Superintendent*

**S**uperintendent Walter Calinger describes the bullying prevention efforts used in the Woodland Hills School District as a "miracle." HALT!® A Bullying Prevention Program, in place now for three years, was for all 4,000 of the district's students. Implemented from the heart, it changed school culture and helped the bullies not to be bullies anymore, which is as important as saving the kids who are bullied. The Highmark Foundation's initiative has allowed Woodland Hills to focus on its core values, which include providing a safe and secure environment. Anti-bullying teaches positive behavior and a positive outlook. Thanks to the school-by-school training with teachers, students and parents, the kids now have a place to dream.

## Bullying Prevention

### Help kids deal with aggressive behavior

**A**s endemic a problem as bullying is, the Highmark Foundation knew that it was going to take a concerted and comprehensive effort for the initiative to be successful. As such, the Foundation sought to increase awareness of the problem of bullying not just in the schools, but across whole communities. Next it strove to educate school administrators, teachers, staff, parents and families on bullying. And finally, it armed the students themselves with the tools to combat bullying right when it was happening. Through this multifaceted approach, addressing the root causes and consequences of bullying across all levels of the community, Highmark Healthy High 5 hoped to not only decrease instances of bullying, but to have these efforts be self-sustaining, becoming part and parcel of the culture of the communities and schools

where it was instituted. Woodland Hills School District is one such example.

A few years ago at Woodland Hills High School, students' behavioral issues marred the entire school's reputation. School spirit faltered, fights grew too common and incidents of bullying left some students afraid to attend school. Homecoming Week was reduced to only the football game and dance events. Behavior wouldn't permit events such as a pep rally or bonfire.

Woodland Hills found a solution through the Foundation's initiative to prevent bullying.

HALT! brings students, teachers, staff and parents together to fight bullying within entire school districts, while PA CARES (Creating an Atmosphere for Respect and Environment for Success) affords individual schools the ability to implement bullying prevention.



Based on the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (OBPP), students don't follow a curriculum but take a schoolwide approach to changing behavior. The OBPP is used at schools around the world. More than 35 years of research demonstrates schools can realize up to 50 percent decreases in bullying among students, and the longer a school practices the Olweus model, the better the results.

During the 2009-2010 school year, changes at Woodland Hills quickly took hold through HALT!® A Bullying Prevention Program. The school began to recognize that bullying was the root cause of many conflicts, and 60 expulsions annually shrunk to only two.

The Highmark Foundation relied on renowned bullying prevention experts in developing its initiative. A broad coalition resulted that includes the Center for Safe Schools, the Windber Research Institute and Clemson University. The Foundation's efforts have led to ground breaking enhancements to the OBPP model such as validation of the effectiveness of OBPP at the high school level.

The Foundation's programs have

reduced bullying and increased capacity statewide to further combat bullying. There has been a 28 percent increase in the number of qualified OBPP certified trainers, bringing the total to 127. Trainers and school personnel also have professional development opportunities to build skills through the Bullying Prevention Institute.

HALT! delivers bullying prevention strategies to students in the 159 schools using the program and to entire communities. The PA CARES program has provided support, resources and assistance implementing the OBPP in individual schools, helping to solidify efforts that were once fragmented, impact-isolated and without full resources for technical assistance.

"What has happened is significant," says Matt Masiello, M.D., director at the Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention at the Windber Research Institute. Because of the Foundation's support, this "is the largest implementation of an evidence-based bullying prevention program in the country and now probably internationally."

#### Decreases in bullying behavior and creating positive change in school climate affected:

- approximately 210,00 out of 1.77 million schoolchildren in Pennsylvania (13% of the total student population)
- 427 out of 3,280 schools (13% of all schools)
- more than 17,000 teachers
- approximately 345,000 parents

## PA CARES

### A bullying prevention program



**ADDITIONAL PROGRAMS**

### PA CARES

"As a result of Highmark's investment, significant infrastructure and technical assistance capacities have been built that will support the ongoing implementation of the OBPP in Pennsylvania in years to come."

— Lynn Cromley  
Director of the Center for Safe Schools

### Windber Institute

"In addition to reducing the bullying rate, we wanted to increase teacher awareness, increase parent involvement, increase teacher involvement and increase the number of bystander children who will now get involved in bullying [prevention] where previously they wouldn't. That one issue of children now coming to school saying they have a friend is, to me as a pediatrician and a parent, monumental."

— Matthew G. Masiello, M.D., M.P.H.  
Director, The Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention

