

# Committed Stakeholders

## Addressing Bullying, Harassment and Hate Crimes

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School climate is  
much like the air we  
breathe -- it tends to  
go unnoticed until  
something is seriously  
wrong.

Jerome Freiberg, 1998



# School Climate Equity Framework

<i>System Maintenance and Change</i>	<i>Personal Relationships</i>	<i>Personal Growth</i>
<b>Active Promotion of Equity</b>		
<b>High Workplace Morale</b>		
	<b>Positive Peer Relationships &amp; Interactions Supporting Continuous Social Growth</b>	
<b>Fair, Inclusive Decision-Making Process</b>	<b>Supportive, Caring Teacher-Student Relationships</b>	<b>Student Commitment to Achievement with Continuous Academic Growth</b>
<b>Positive Disciplinary System with Fairness and Trust</b>	<b>Parent, Family, and Community Engagement</b>	
<b>Emotionally &amp; physically safe &amp; orderly environment</b>		
<b>School/Classroom Structure, Instruction, and Curriculum to Enhance Student Engagement</b>		

# What Is the Safe Schools Initiative?

- Collaboration led by the Massachusetts Office of the Attorney General (OAG)
- Strategies to support positive school climates by addressing root causes of violence
- 60+ member, multidisciplinary technical assistance team
- Information and tools to promote safe school environments

# What Is the Safe Schools Initiative?

- Builds on existing work of the OAG and partners
- Awareness of current tools and resources
- New or enhanced response and prevention policies, procedures, and programs
- Pilot project engaging school districts

# OAG Experience

- Civil Injunctions by the Civil Rights Division (CRD)
- Conflict Intervention Team (CIT) response for large-scale conflict
- Children, Youth & Communities Division (CYC) funding and oversight of peer mediation programs across Massachusetts
- Awareness and response training for schools with partners
- New collaboration between CRD and CYC better identifies common risk factors for bias-based violence

# Equity Assistance Center Experience

- New England Equity Assistance Center (NEEAC) is one of ten regional centers
  - Funded by USDOE
  - Created under 1964 Civil Rights Act
  - Mandated to work in schools on issues of race, national origin, and gender
- Conducts needs assessments and provides technical assistance and professional development
- Experience with impact of school climate on academic achievement gap

# Common Issues Contributing to School Violence from OAG and NEEAC Experiences

- Lack of recognition and clear response to bullying, harassment and hate crimes
- Unclear, inconsistent discipline
- Lack of a comprehensive prevention program to foster respect and acceptance
- Lack of curriculum and instructional methods that increase student engagement

# Why an SSI?

- 23% of Massachusetts high school students reported being victims of bullying (MA YRBS, 2004)
- 5% stayed home because of safety concerns
- 7.7% of 10<sup>th</sup> grade students reported being victim of bias incident (Northeastern University, 2002)
- Over 80% of large-scale conflicts CIT mediated involved bias-related incidents
- Increase in number and serious nature of cases handled
- Negative school climate correlates with low academic achievement

# Genesis of the SSI

- The need to identify common circumstances contributing to the escalation of conflict in schools
- The need to move from a reactive to an active approach
- The need to apply a multi-sector, collaborative approach to address multiple dimensions of school safety

# A Two Year Pilot Project

- Assess the nature and scope of school violence in three pilot districts
- Identify underlying causes of bullying, harassment and hate crimes in these schools
- Implement and evaluate targeted interventions in the field

# Why a Pilot Project?

- Opportunity to develop and field test new tools and strategies
- Tools and strategies based on real world needs and resources
- Pilot districts implement new tools and strategies with expert technical assistance
- Field testing produces practical, school-friendly solutions
- Pilots generate knowledge of effective practices

# Pilot Project

- Twenty districts applied to participate
- Selection based on:
  - Need to select three distinct types of districts, geographically and demographically
  - Demographic changes in schools and community
  - Number and type of reported incidents of bullying, harassment and hate incidents in schools
  - Willingness to adopt OAG civil rights policy
  - Commitment to a two-year project
  - Commitment to implementing strategies that address root causes

# Pilot Communities

- **A**, borders a large urban center, with significant demographic changes as white families move out and African American, Asian, Caribbean, and Cape Verdean families move in
- **B**, suburban, with significant changes as immigrants from Central and South America move into community
- **C**, rural, with little racial/ethnic diversity, experiencing harassment and hate incidents directed at other legally protected groups

# Widely Ranging Skill Sets in the Collaboration

- Civil Rights
- Communication and Mediation
- Law Enforcement
- Education
- Mental Health
- Planning
- Community Organization and Development
- Victim Rights

# Making the Collaboration Work



# Strengths of the Collaboration

- Open, trusting relationships
- High stakes
- Organizational support for collaboration
- Collaborative leadership
- Continuity of leadership
- Partners playing to strengths
- Voluntary collaboration
- Measures and communicated results\*
- Balance between planning and action\*

\* critical to ongoing success

# Obstacles to Effective Collaboration

## ➤ Minor obstacles

- Partner-specific interest
- Turf concerns
- Clarity of investment/unclear benefits
- Differing rules and operating cultures

## ➤ Major obstacle

- Funding to support project activities in future
  - Project Coordinator
  - Social Marketing campaign

# Year I: Putting the Collaboration Together for First Steps

- Application and pilot selection
- Organizational analysis and relationship building with districts
- Needs assessment
- Action planning

# Needs Assessment

- Organizational analysis
- Review of existing data and information
- Generation of new data and information
- Analysis of data and information
- Identification of strengths and challenges

# Organizational Analysis and Relationship Building with Districts

## ➤ Organizational Analysis

- Communication
- Leadership
- Relationships among administrators
- Relationships between administrators and teachers
- Staff relationships with students and parents

## ➤ Relationship Building

- Role of outside interveners
- Meetings with administrators
- Building trust with staff

# Existing Data Disaggregated

- Standardized testing results
- School safety and discipline
- Civil rights and bullying complaint reports
- Composition of staff
- Student participation in clubs and organizations
- Policies, protocols, and practices

# Existing Data Disaggregated

- Police interventions
- Attendance, promotion and retention rates
- ELL, SPED and AP reports
- Prevention-based activities, practices, programs, curricula
- Collaborations with community organizations

# Obstacles in Collection of Existing Data

- Data often not maintained so that it can be disaggregated
- Heavy workload on staff to collect existing data

# What Existing Data Revealed

- Need to revise data collection systems
- Nature and rates of bullying and harassment and how schools responded
- Integration of diverse students in extracurricular activities
- How district uses resources
- Staff training needs
- Need for new district policies or revision of existing policies to support safe schools

# Generating New Quantitative and Qualitative Data

## ➤ Surveys

- All staff
- 7<sup>th</sup> grade students
- 10<sup>th</sup> grade students

## ➤ Focus Groups

- staff
- students
- parents
- community members

## ➤ Interviews with key administrators and others

# Surveys

## What surveys can accomplish

- Allow everyone in the school to have a voice, especially if you leave space for write-in comments
- Show school-wide trends, as well as trends among particular groups of students or staff
- Give more definitive and comprehensive data than qualitative data tools
- People are less likely to protest the results if you have the quantitative data to back them up!



# Sample Survey Questions: Students

- How safe do you feel from harassment and bullying in your school?
- How often have you seen websites, emails or Instant Messages of prejudice or hate about others?
- How often do students take a stand against students who harass or bully other students?
- Do you believe that at least one of your teachers takes a special interest in your doing well in school?

# Sample Survey Questions: Staff

- Which response best describes social interaction among students at your school with regard to race/ethnicity?
- How safe do you think students are from harassment and bullying?
- How often do you believe that students put up with harassment as just a part of school culture?
- When students are the victims of harassment, bullying or hate crime, how likely are they to report it to a staff person?

# Staff and Student Surveys

- Partnering to develop SSI surveys
- Structure of and content of the surveys
- Obstacles to conducting surveys
- Common lessons learned from administering the surveys

# How Do Focus Groups Work?

- Usually 8-12 people recruited for each focus group
- Questions designed to elicit conversation and participation
- Facilitator/moderator skills critical to success
- Confidentiality should be requested
- Data can be recorded (with permission) or notes taken (laptop preferably)

# What Focus Groups Are NOT

- Dialogue groups
- Decision-making groups
- Conflict resolution groups
- Brainstorming groups
- Training groups
- Therapy groups



# Sample Focus Group Questions

## ➤ Students

- What are the different groups or cliques at this school?
- If you have a problem in school, to which adult do you turn for help?
- If you could change one thing about your school to make it safer and more welcoming for all, what would it be?

## ➤ Parents

- Has bullying or harassing behavior been directed at your child?  
How did the school react to the behavior?
- What classroom practices, programs or activities does your school provide that helps students appreciate differences?

## ➤ Staff

- To what extent do students touch other students inappropriately or say or do things of a sexual nature?
- If you could change one thing about your school to make it safer and more welcoming for all students and staff, what would it be?

# Conducting a Needs Assessment: Focus Groups

- Design of the SSI focus groups
- Staffing the focus groups
- Common obstacles
- What we learned

# Interviews

- Key administrators
- Key staff
- Representative(s) of school committee
- Community leaders
  - Business community
  - Youth-serving organizations
  - Law enforcement
  - Government leaders

# Interviews



- Opportunity for more openness (with confidentiality) that may not occur in focus group
- Structured interview questions allow easier comparison of responses
- Particularly useful with administrators or individuals with special concerns

# Sample Interview Questions

## ➤ Administrators

- How do you characterize the school (community) climate and culture ?
- What effects do you think the change in demographics and other changes have had on students, staff, the school, school district, community?

## ➤ Community Leaders

- How do you describe the leadership and support for addressing the needs of students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds?
- What is the community perception of whether the schools are educationally excellent, safe? What reasons do you attribute to these attitudes, perceptions?

# What New Quantitative and Qualitative Data Revealed

- Bullying and harassment occur with more frequency than staff perceive
- Students experience pressure from other students not to socialize with students from other racial/ethnic groups
- A significant number of students do not report bullying or harassment because of fear of retaliation
- Staff and students need training to better understand how to report and respond to bullying and harassment
- Resources exist in the community that will support efforts to promote safe schools – for example, faith community

# From Needs Assessment to Action Planning

- Presenting and framing existing data and results of surveys, focus groups and interviews
- Reaching consensus with districts about challenges
- Identifying strengths and resources
- Drafting an action plan based on needs assessment data
- Setting priorities for actions and deploying resources

# Common Pilot District Needs

- Shared philosophy of discipline that clearly communicates and reinforces expectations and consequences
- Policies and procedures for effectively recognizing and responding to bullying, harassment and hate crimes
- Comprehensive, K-12 prevention approaches that foster tolerance and appreciation for diversity

# Year II: Summer Activities

- Summer leadership conference to introduce district teams to strategies and resources
- Training for administrators and staff to support implementation of new OAG civil rights policy in each district

# Year II: Putting the Collaboration to Work

## Implementing strategies

- Establish system for tracking incidents and disciplinary actions to identify trends and plan intervention
- Positive Behavior and Intervention Supports discipline system
- Diversity training for school staff
- Review curriculum
- Focus prevention curriculum

# Year II: Putting the Collaboration to Work

- Supporting development of enhanced collaboration in pilot district communities
  - Team building within districts
  - Encouraging partnerships with outside groups and organizations
- Evaluation
  - Framework for evaluation and monitoring interim progress