

School Safety Technical Assistance Council and Center 2017 Annual Report

The School Safety Technical Assistance Council (council) and the School Safety Technical Assistance Center (center) continue to build the capacity of Minnesota’s school districts and schools to create and sustain safe and supportive learning environments for Minnesota students. Council and center work focuses on bullying prevention and intervention set forth in the Safe and Supportive Minnesota Schools Act, Minnesota Statutes, section 121A.031. This report highlights work completed by the council and the center since October 15, 2016.

School Safety Technical Assistance Council

The School Safety Technical Assistance Council provides guidance to the School Safety Technical Assistance Center on multiple fronts, including:

- Establishment of norms and standards for prevention, intervention and support around the issues of prohibited conduct.
- Advancement of evidenced-based policy and best practice related to bullying issues.
- Development and dissemination of resources and training.
- Development of policies and procedures for services provided by the center.

During the last year, the council met on November 1, 2016, and May 2, July 19 and August 29, 2017.

Some of the council’s work happens in smaller workgroups created by the council to focus on emerging needs of schools, educators, school support staff, students, families and communities.

Ensuring that transgender and gender nonconforming students are safe and supported in school has been an emerging issue throughout the nation and in school districts and charter schools throughout Minnesota. An increasing number of school and school district administrators and staff members as well as students and families have contacted the center seeking technical assistance on how to ensure safe, supportive and inclusive environments for all students, including transgender and gender nonconforming students.

In response, the council formed a workgroup that developed a toolkit to help school districts and charter schools create school environments where transgender and gender nonconforming students are safe, supported and fully included, and have equal access to the educational opportunities provided to all students as required by federal or state law. The workgroup completed its task and the council voted to adopt the “Toolkit for Ensuring Safe and Supportive Schools for Transgender and Gender Nonconforming Students,” at their meeting on Wednesday, July 19.

School Safety Technical Assistance Center Work

Bullying prevention and intervention in schools is at the heart of the center's work. Growing national research and evidence confirm that school climate improvement is the optimal foundation for the prevention of bullying and harassment-related behaviors and is the most effective basis from which to foster student engagement and learning. School climate is how it feels to be in school. It refers to the quality and character of the school. It is based on people's experience of school life.

The center's goal is to help schools promote positive school climates and improve student academic achievement. To do this, the center helps schools and communities develop and implement comprehensive, sustainable school climate improvement by providing training and professional development to school administrators, teachers and school personnel; providing technical assistance to districts, schools, parents, students and community partners; developing materials and sharing information about effective programs, tools and resources to support districts and schools and establishing and strengthening partnerships to further efforts to create safe and supportive schools.

Under the Minnesota Department of Education's Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) plan, center staff play an important role in supporting implementation of ESSA. A provision in ESSA asks how states will support school districts in improving school conditions for student learning, including reducing bullying and harassment incidences, limiting discipline practices that remove students from the classroom, and addressing behavioral interventions that compromise student health and safety.

With expertise in bullying prevention and intervention, school climate and student health, center staff will provide valuable support to the department's and schools' work to implement and sustain school climate improvement efforts. This includes using specific strategies to reduce bullying and harassment and helping schools implement preventative and positive approaches to discipline.

Restorative Practices

Restorative practices and social emotional learning (SEL) are central strategies for creating positive school climates. To help school districts and schools use restorative practices, the center is developing implementation guidance, creating best practice resources, providing training and technical assistance and building the state's capacity to support schools with implementation by increasing Minnesota's train-the-trainer network.

Social Emotional Learning

The center is leading the development of SEL guidance to provide school districts and schools with a framework for integrating SEL into teaching and learning practices. Minnesota's bullying prevention and intervention law, the Safe and Supportive Minnesota Schools Act (Minnesota Statutes, section 121A.031), explicitly calls for school districts and schools to use evidence-based social emotional learning practices to prevent and reduce bullying, discrimination and harassment. The council identified SEL as an important strategy for bullying prevention and school climate improvement and formed a work group in 2015 that focused on finding and developing SEL resources. Since these initial efforts, center staff have been working with experts in the field to develop SEL guidance. The Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) awarded the center a grant

and selected Minnesota to participate in its Collaborating States Initiative. As a participant in the Collaborating States Initiative, the center has access to CASEL's national team of expert advisors, ongoing consultation from CASEL, resources from CASEL and other states and districts, including evidence-based teaching practices and guidelines for creating a positive school climate and classroom environment. Center staff have also received ongoing support from the Midwest Comprehensive Center to develop SEL resources.

An increasing number of school districts and schools have been seeking technical assistance on SEL from the center as center staff have been developing the resources. Once completed, the guidance and resources will be posted on the center's website.

Center Provides Technical Assistance

The center provides parents, families, guardians, students, teachers, school personnel, principals, superintendents, school board members and community members with the guidance and technical assistance they need to address bullying issues and improve school climate.

Center staff members also provide parents and families with resources to help them work with schools to address any bullying or harassment that has happened as well as resources that will help them support their child if the child has been bullied or harassed.

Four center staff members connect with people who contact the center for assistance. From Oct. 15, 2016, to Oct. 16, 2017, about 230 people contacted the center seeking technical assistance. Many of the calls and emails come from parents/families. Many people who contact the center are parents whose child or teen has experienced bullying.

Once learning details of bullying incidences, center staff members outline specific approaches or resources that can be used to resolve bullying issues and support the student who was bullied.

Working in partnership with a student's school is usually the most effective and successful way for parents/families to address bullying. To help parents do this, center staff developed the tool ["How to Work With the School to Address Bullying."](#)

In most cases, the technical assistance the center provides helps parents and families resolve the problems. Some parents have sought further help in addressing bullying issues or concerns. In some instances, families have indicated that they believe a school district or school is not complying with the school's bullying prohibition policy. A process is in place that gives students, parents and educators the option of filing a complaint with the education commissioner if they believe the school is not complying.

During the 2016-17 school year, five formal complaints were filed. The center director investigated the complaints and, in all five cases, issued letters stating that the school districts were in compliance with the law.

Throughout the year students, families, teachers, school support staff members, schools, school districts and school administrators contact the center asking for technical assistance. Center staff have provided an estimated 1,786 hours of technical assistance during the last year.

Center Provides Training and Tools Schools Need to Prevent and Intervene in Bullying

The center provides comprehensive training and professional development that help educators and schools move forward in creating positive climates and improving conditions for learning. School climate improvement is the foundational strategy for bullying prevention and intervention. The center delivers training and professional development through videos, webinars, institutes, conferences, workshops and presentations. Many presentations and trainings are given at conferences for professional education associations, including the Minnesota Social Workers Association, the Minnesota Education Association, the Minnesota Association of Secondary School Principals (MASSP), the Minnesota School Boards Association and Minnesota Association of School Administrators (MASA). Center staff also develop materials, tools and resources that can help school districts and schools take steps to create and maintain safe and supportive school environments for students.

Between Oct. 15, 2016, and Oct. 15, 2017, the center has provided nearly 500 hours of training and presentations attended by nearly 3,000 people. Center staff provide trainings in the Twin Cities metro area and in areas throughout the state, including Cass Lake-Bena Schools, St. James Public Schools, Red Lake School District, Red Wing Public Schools, St. Cloud, Fergus Falls, Bemidji and Mankato.

Center staff have conducted trainings on a wide range of topics. Examples of the trainings include:

- School Climate 101 – Center staff provided a foundational overview of school climate to the St. Cloud School District, the Regional Centers of Excellence Advocates, the Northwest Service Cooperatives and the South Central Cooperatives.
- “Making Meaning of Multiple Measures: Using Minnesota Student Survey (MSS) Data to Inform Improvement Planning” – School district leadership teams learn how to use data in school district improvement planning in the workshops.
- “Five Evidence-Based Practices that support LGBTQ students” – This training focused on bullying prevention based on gender or sexual orientation.
- “Bullying and Harassment Trainings: From Intake through Investigation” – This training addresses formal investigations, which include multiple witnesses and disputed facts, with possible significant harm. During this training, participants will walk through all the steps of intake, inquiry and investigation.
- LGBTQ Webinars on Student Well-Being, Safety and Inclusion – The center provided these online trainings in partnership with the University of Minnesota and Advocates for Youth.
- Achievement and Integration (AI) School Climate Session – Center staff help AI-funded districts think about school climate improvement as a strategy to address academic disparities in their schools and districts.
- Understanding Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) Workshops – Center staff members are part of a department team that gives workshops to help school personnel learn about Adverse Childhood Experiences and the negative effects that such traumatic experiences have on a child’s developing brain and promoting resiliency in students. In the ACEs workshops, staff go over strategies that can be used to reduce trauma and build resilience in children.
- Discipline Scenarios Webinars – School discipline policies and practices have a significant impact on individual students as well as the school’s climate. Center staff collaborate with colleagues throughout the department to hold webinars that help school leaders and educators rethink discipline policies and practices.

Training Educators on Using Restorative Practices in Schools

Restorative practices emphasize the importance of inclusiveness and establishing positive relationships as central to building community in school. Incorporating restorative measures such as the use of circles to re-affirm relationships, restorative conversations as an intervention to restore relationships and circles or conferences to repair harm and re-build relationships help create, build and sustain a safe and healthy school climate. Restorative practices provide a process for holding students accountable for their behavior while also teaching them the skills of pro-social behaviors in the context of community and relationships.

During the last year, center staff led workshops throughout the state. In partnership with the Legal Rights Center and Robbinsdale Area Schools, the center held its yearly “Restorative Practices in Schools June Training” workshops. Riestenberg and 20 other trainers provided 10 sessions, and about 360 people participated in the workshops, which included:

- Restorative Practices Foundations.
- Circle Training.
- Restorative Language and Chats.
- Circle Networking Day.
- Using Circle to Teach.
- Conferencing to Repair Harm.
- Circle to Repair Harm.
- Restorative Practices and Special Needs.
- Advanced Circle Keepers’ Training.
- Restorative Family Group Conferencing in Schools.

To assist educators, school staff, school administrators and community practitioners in their restorative practices work, the center has created and will continue developing resources and sharing best practices.

Adolescent Health and Academic Equity Project

Having safe and supportive environments in schools is a risk-reduction and health-promotion strategy. If a school or school district does a good job creating safe and supportive school environments, it not only reduces bullying behavior but it protects against other student risk behaviors.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Division of Adolescent and School Health, gives the center additional support to provide ongoing technical assistance to eight Minnesota school districts participating in the Adolescent Health and Academic Equity Project. The Adolescent Health and Academic Equity Project’s goal is to build the capacity of schools to develop and implement sustainable program strategies and activities to improve the health of students. This includes delivering exemplary sexual health education, increased access to sexual health services and establishing safe and supportive environments for students and staff.

Based on student needs, the district teams have developed comprehensive school district implementation plans focused on increasing capacity to address student health needs as well as strategies to address bullying and harassment. Center staff provide ongoing training as well as technical assistance to the district teams as they

work on plan details involving resource allocation, stakeholder engagement, policy development and professional development.

School districts and partners working with the center on this project include Brooklyn Center Schools, Cass Lake-Bena Schools, Northeast Metro 916, Minnesota Internship Center, Red Lake School District, Red Wing Public Schools, Richfield Public Schools and St. James Public Schools.

During the last year, the center staff work has revolved around developing strategies that identify the particular needs of each individual school district. Staff have also tailored their intensive technical assistance and training to the individual district. As a result of the center staff's individualized planning and focused technical assistance, performance data show that all the school districts involved have made progress in implementing an evidence-informed approach to exemplary sexual health education and sexual health services.

In addition to the work with the eight partner school districts, the center is developing resources and tools to help all school districts in their work to increase school safety and reduce disparities among youth in HIV infection, unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases experienced by young people.

Nearly 350 People Attend Safe and Supportive Schools Conference

Governor Mark Dayton and Education Commissioner Brenda Cassellius spoke to nearly 350 people who attended the center's Minnesota Safe and Supportive Schools Conference January 25, 2017. Teachers, school support staff, school administrators, students, parents, education stakeholders and community members convened in St. Paul to learn the latest strategies in bullying prevention, bullying intervention and school climate improvement.

The one-day conference was designed to help schools and communities in their efforts to implement the Safe and Supportive Minnesota Schools Act. More than 20 national and local experts presented on evidence-based practices for improving school climates. The conference sessions helped participants build skills they could use to prevent bullying and intervene in bullying and to create school climates where all students learn in schools free from bullying and harassment based on race, religion, gender, national origin, gender identity, socio-economic status, disability and sexual orientation.

Karen VanAusdal, director of practice, Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL), delivered the conference keynote "CASEL's Theory of Action for Districtwide Social Emotional Learning (SEL)."

Conference breakout sessions included:

- Working Effectively with Your Muslim Students and Parents.
- Youth-Led Bully Prevention Efforts: Lessons from the Field.
- McGrath Bullying and Harassment Training.
- Restorative School-based Family Group Conferences (FCG).
- Supporting Staff Social Emotional Learning Skills: Practical Strategies and Tools.
- Multi-Tiered School Social Work Interventions to Address Bullying in Elementary Schools.
- Making School Climate Improvement Last: Best Practices for Implementation.
- Developmental Skills, Supports and Challenges from the 2013 and 2016 Minnesota Student Survey.
- Roseville Area Schools – Restorative Practices Districtwide.

- LGBTQ: Early Conversations Promote Healthy Identities and Build Allies.
- Culturally-Responsive Classrooms as “Islands of Decency.”
- Exploring the Spectrum of School Bullying, Harassment and Hostile Education Environments.
- Social and Emotional Competence for Academic and Life Success.
- Creating a Student-Led Culture of Inclusion in Your School.
- Ally Behavior and Empathy Skills: Keys to Safe and Welcoming Schools.
- The 11 Principles: A Framework for Improving School Climate and Culture.
- Student Panel Student Voices: Youth-Led Bullying Prevention Efforts.

Conclusion

In the first three years of existence, the council and center established the framework for school climate improvement in Minnesota. Council members and center staff developed tools, training and resources that helped school districts and schools improve the educational environment for students and meet the expectations of the Safe and Supportive Minnesota Schools Act.

With the creation of each tool and resource and the delivery of each training, the council and center continues to build and expand the capacity of educators to implement school climate improvements that will bolster students’ ability to learn, and lead to increased academic achievement.