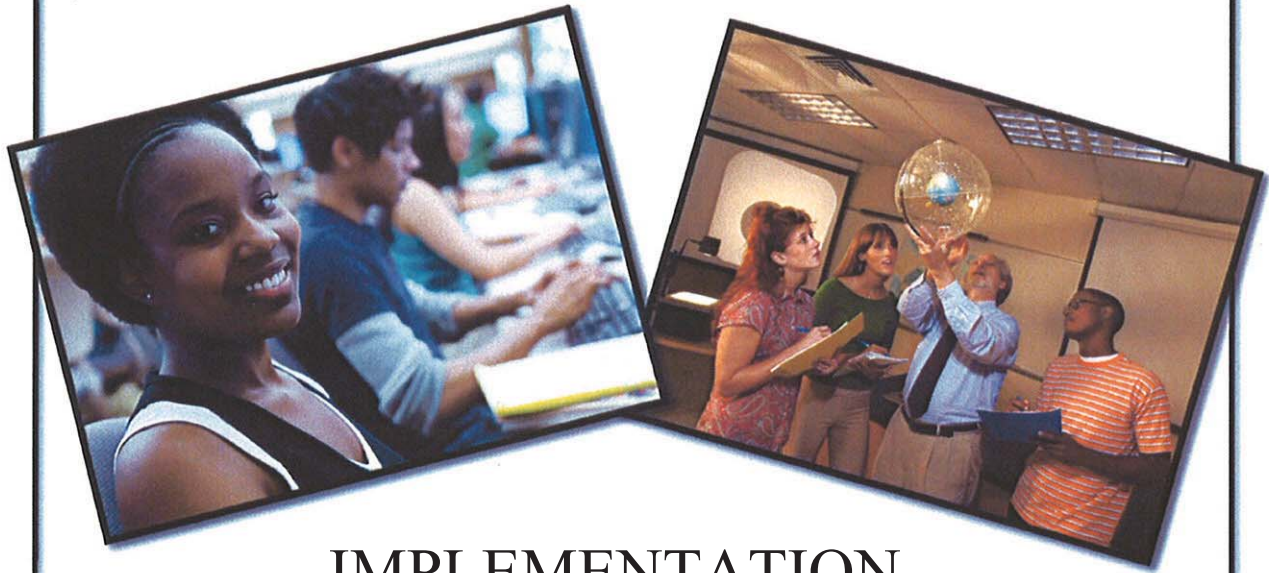


# BULLYING IN CONNECTICUT'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS:



## IMPLEMENTATION OF PUBLIC ACT 08-160



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**BULLYING IN CONNECTICUT'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS:  
IMPLEMENTATION OF PUBLIC ACT 08-160**

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**BULLYING IN CONNECTICUT'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS:**  
**IMPLEMENTATION OF PUBLIC ACT 08-160,**  
***AN ACT CONCERNING SCHOOL LEARNING ENVIRONMENT***

**I. INTRODUCTION AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Connecticut Appleseed is a statewide, non-partisan 501(c) 3 organization that works to help make systemic changes in the delivery of services to enhance social and economic justice in our state. We mobilize the skills and resources of pro bono lawyers and other professionals to improve access to education, health care, financial and other services for broad segments of the state's population.

Consistent with that mission, and in response to an April, 2010 request by the Governor's Prevention Partnership, Connecticut Appleseed recruited a team of volunteer attorneys and other staff from Travelers to research successful practices and strategies among public school districts to confront and reduce bullying. By giving school districts timely and comprehensive information on how their peers are handling the challenges related to bullying, we seek to help improve implementation of the 2008 Connecticut Act cited at the top of this page. (A copy of the 2008 Act follows as an Appendix to this report.)

By interviewing school administrators, principals, teachers, psychologists and other school staff across a representative sample of Connecticut districts, our pro bono team searched for effective anti-bullying practices that districts have adopted. This report therefore describes programs and techniques that were revealed by these interviews that could be shared with districts across the state. While the interviews touched on cyberbullying, they predate Connecticut's July 13, 2011 enactment of Public Act 11-232, *An Act Concerning the Strengthening of School Bullying Laws* which was implemented on January 1, 2012.

Improving a child's sense of safety and personal well-being improves their ability to concentrate and learn. By finding and showcasing model policies, strategies and training practices that districts are using successfully to minimize and manage bullying – and which can be brought to scale - this report aspires to help students and their families.

When schools fail to prevent bullying, the educational impacts are significant and negative, yet bullying is a highly sensitive subject in Connecticut's public schools. Many people feel that more responsibility should rest with the schools to protect their children and assume that school administrators and teachers are particularly well-positioned to discourage and manage bullying. However, educators typically feel that such responsibilities may distract from their core educational role.

With steadily increasing demands upon school officials and teachers, even finding the time to discuss how they might manage bullying from a school bus ride in the morning through extracurricular activities and concluding bus trips in the afternoon can be very challenging. In

return for their cooperation, we hope that publicizing these strategies and practices will help to drive down the cost for districts to implement their own anti-bullying programs.

### **A. The 2008 “Anti-Bullying Act”**

In 2008 Governor Rell signed into law “An Act Concerning School Learning Environment” (Public Act 08-160, hereafter the “Anti-Bullying Act”) which required, in part, every school district to develop and implement both a bullying policy and a prevention and intervention strategy and that school personnel be trained in bullying prevention.<sup>1</sup> In February, 2010 Commissioner McQuillan of the State Department of Education (“SDE”) reported that much remained to be done within many school districts to comply with the new law and ensure an emotionally safe school climate for all children, and that his department had no mechanism for finding out what works in districts to stop bullying.

### **B. Executive Summary**

In April, 2010 hundreds of educators and school officials attended The Governor’s Prevention Partnership’s conference on Positive School Climate because they sought help in developing and implementing anti-bullying programs to comply with the 2008 Anti-Bullying Act. They attended because 30% of high school students are bullied and because bullying obstructs learning, destabilizes victims and endangers young lives. At that conference The Governor's Prevention Partnership, which is dedicated to prevention issues affecting youth and regularly engaged in consulting with school districts about bullying, sought help from Connecticut Appleseed to do what SDE did not have the resources to do - to find out what works in districts to reduce bullying.

Our team conducted interviews in 11 diverse school districts to find and showcase imaginative and effective ideas to help implement the changes mandated by the 2008 Anti-Bullying Act. While professional titles and school levels varied by district, our volunteers typically interviewed administrators, principals, teachers and guidance counselors in each district. By publicizing effective and “model” practices, this report aims to give school districts timely and comprehensive information on how their peers are handling the challenges related to bullying.

Lisa Tregoning and Celine Provini from the Governor’s Prevention Partnership developed draft interview questions and shared the drafts with both the Travelers volunteers and Connecticut Appleseed. After mutually agreeing on the interview questions and format, Lisa and Celine then conducted two training sessions for the interviewers.

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<sup>1</sup> An exception to the requirement for in-service training on prevention of bullying is permitted if the local board of education implements an evidence-based model approach, consistent with P.A. 08-160. (P.A. 08-160, Section 6)

## II. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report gratefully acknowledges the superintendents who agreed to open their districts as laboratories by allowing extensive interviews of themselves and their staffs. These districts are appropriately proud of their foresight and fortitude in tackling issues related to bullying, particularly without having been provided any direct funding to do so by the state.

We are immensely grateful for enthusiastic and generous support from our lead pro bono partner, Travelers, which provided a deep bench of attorneys and staff to conduct and write up the district interviews. We are, of course, deeply indebted as well to Lisa Tregoning of the Governor's Prevention Partnership and her former colleague, Celine Provini. We salute The Partnership's "Operation Respect" initiative which focuses on giving schools and communities the tools to create positive school climates and bully-free communities.

Connecticut Appleseed invited school districts to participate in this study, coordinated our talented team and wrote this report. Travelers' team members were also terrifically helpful in securing the involvement of three school districts.

Additionally, we are most grateful that Bingham McCutchen counsel Michael D'Agostino, chair of the Hamden Board of Education and a member of Connecticut Appleseed's Board of Directors, has offered to share these findings with his fellow board chairs across the state. Mr. D'Agostino will also distribute copies of this report to the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education (CABE), the Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents (CAPSS) and the Connecticut Board of Education.

Finally, this report simply would not have been made possible but for the support and backing of the William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund.

## III. OVERVIEW OF THE ISSUE

An informal definition of bullying is when a person is repeatedly cruel to one or more people. That is, one way of distinguishing it from mean behavior is repetition.<sup>2</sup>

Targets of bullying often feel isolated, lonely and/or depressed. Suicides, and attempted suicides, are all too frequently reported in the media. Too often, learning is jeopardized in public

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<sup>2</sup> Note that Public Act 08-160, *An Act Concerning School Learning Environment*, includes the word "intent" in the definition of "bullying" and defines the term to mean: "any overt acts by a student or a group of students directed against another student with the intent to ridicule, harass, humiliate or intimidate the other student while on school grounds, at a school-sponsored activity or on a school bus, which acts are committed more than once against any student during the school year." However, Public Act 11-232, *An Act Concerning the Strengthening of School Bullying Laws* redefines the term "bullying" without using the word "intent".

schools because children feel unsafe from bullying. Simply, children who are haunted by fear cannot focus on their studies. While bullying stresses the mental health and well-being of students in general, it may most dangerously threaten those students struggling with some aspect of mental illness.

That is why "An Act Concerning School Learning Environment", required every school district to develop and implement both a bullying policy and a prevention and intervention strategy, that the SDE develop model policies and that school personnel be trained in bullying prevention. While Connecticut's public schools have been given a clear responsibility to provide a safe learning environment, bullying is unavoidably both a highly sensitive and challenging subject.

Under Connecticut law, local and regional school boards of education must include information on how bullying will be handled in their school codes of conduct. The school policy must:

- 1) Allow students to anonymously report bullying incidents and require students to be notified annually of the process for making such reports.
- 2) Enable parents or guardians of students to file written reports of suspected bullying.
- 3) Require school staff who witness acts of bullying or receive student reports of bullying to notify school administrators in writing.
- 4) Require school administrators to investigate all written reports of bullying filed by students, parents, guardians of students, or other school staff, and review any anonymous reports, except that no disciplinary action can be taken based solely on an anonymous report.
- 5) Include a prevention and intervention strategy for school staff to deal with bullying.
- 6) Provide for the inclusion of language in student codes of conduct concerning bullying.
- 7) Require each school to notify the parents or guardians of students who commit verified acts of bullying and the children who are being bullied and extend an invitation to at least one meeting. The notification must include a description of the response to the bullying and any consequences if there is more bullying.
- 8) Require schools to maintain a list of the number of verified acts of bullying in school, make the list available to the public, and annually report the number to the Department of Education.
- 9) Direct the development of a case-by-case intervention strategy that may involve counseling and intervention, to address repeated incidents of bullying against a single child or by the same child.
- 10) Identify the appropriate school personnel, which cannot be limited to pupil services personnel, responsible for taking a bullying report and investigating the complaint.

This report therefore has multiple purposes. While it documents what a representative sample of school districts are doing to implement the 2008 Anti-Bullying Act, it also strives to illuminate Best Practices for preventing and minimizing bullying among public school students. By shining a light on some of Connecticut’s innovative school climate ideas and success stories that were evident in 2011, we hope to both inform and inspire the reader.

For example, the Bridgeport school district found in a survey of staff, students and parents that an increasing number of their children feel safe, and that three-fourths of the children feel that they have a positive connection with an adult in their school. The district attributes their progress, in part, to steps that they have put in place at the elementary level. Bridgeport’s success in improving the emotional and physical safety of students in their schools is not unique. The techniques described herein therefore briefly explain how Bridgeport and the other ten participating districts have confronted and surmounted the challenges related to bullying.

#### **IV. METHODOLOGY**

This report looks at the framework to ensure a safe school environment managed by public schools that has evolved in stages since the state first required school boards to adopt a bullying policy in 2003. The report’s primary source of information about successful initiatives and programmatic efforts was a total of approximately 60 interviews with administrators, principals, teachers, guidance counselors and psychologists from the following sample of Connecticut’s public school systems:

Bridgeport	Hamden	Hartford	Regional School District 13
Rocky Hill	Shelton	Simsbury	Stratford
Tolland	Waterbury	West Hartford	

#### **V. FINDINGS AND OBSERVATIONS**

**A. Reinforce Positive Behavior** – Encouraging positive behavior is an effective deterrent. Programs that reinforce positive behavior with rewards and recognition (e.g. stickers, “star” badges, symbolic colors and homework passes) are widely utilized with great success. Teaching kids core values - how they are supposed to treat each other and what behavior is expected of them - may seem unrelated to scholastics, but it clearly helps improve school climate and, therefore, improves academic and scholastic success.

**B. Involvement** - Involving all school personnel, including bus drivers, cafeteria staff and custodians, helps to foster a positive school climate. This is because bullying is more likely to take place during less structured time periods and where there is less supervision than in classrooms, such as during recess, or in hallways, stairwells, the cafeteria and on buses.

**C. School Culture** – Mutual respect is at the heart of a positive school climate. Relatively safer schools have programmed a sensitivity to bullying right into their school culture, while simultaneously empowering each child to stand up for what is right.

**D. Setting Expectations** – A Board of Education should establish clear and consistent behavioral expectations across all schools within its district. This includes explicit guidelines

and protocols, perhaps located in the student handbook. Students need to know that no matter where they are on school grounds, they are subject to the same rules and consequences. In quite a few of the districts that we studied, this is accomplished with an annual PowerPoint presentation regarding bullying at the beginning of the school year which also tells students where to go for help and how to report incidents. Parallel presentations on bullying at a PTA/PTO meeting early in the school year help attune parents to signs that their children may either be bullies or suffering from bullying.

Within an individual school, a principal should similarly establish and communicate clear expectations. A principal's leadership role in defining and communicating their vision cannot be overstated. After Shelton High's Mission Statement was reviewed and updated by a broad committee, the principal made it a point to regularly remind students and teachers of their responsibilities pursuant to that Mission Statement ("a safe environment characterized by respect"). Since then, bullying incidents have been exceedingly rare at Shelton High.

This improvement may also have resulted in part from difficult incidents in 2008 and 2010 that seem to have motivated students and community alike to reestablish order and restore a focus on academics at the high school. Students in general have stepped up to take more responsibility for the school's climate, and they also have become less likely to remain bystanders at bullying incidents. Peer pressure has developed among the students to support intervention rather than passivity.

**E. "Little Things"** – Little things help more than one would think. For example, since mean behavior often happens in hallways, Waterbury teachers have reduced the frequency of bullying incidents simply by stepping out of their classrooms into the hallways when classes change. Often, more than one teacher will help to intervene when trouble occurs. Similarly, details that can improve safety include placing cameras on buses and carefully assigning bus seating to avoid problematic student pairings. For the same purpose, Stratford teachers review class lists at the beginning of the school year to identify student combinations that might need to be separated.

Students who have more exposure to social/psychological support staff seem more likely to report bullying incidents and seek consultation from these professionals. Unsurprisingly, students who feel more comfortable with those professionals are more likely to take advantage of their support in response to bullying. To foster this in Rocky Hill, the social worker or school psychologist facilitates and hosts "Lunch Bunch" groups to encourage smaller groups of students to speak more openly and interact with teachers.

**F. Multi-faceted Role of Teachers** – It is an understatement that the role of teachers today is much broader than simply teaching an academic discipline. With single parent households and economic stress requiring parents to take multiple jobs, teachers are stepping into the role of surrogate parent, friend and disciplinarian. If good manners are not taught at home, they must belatedly be taught at school.

The importance of multi-dimensional teacher training in relation to bullying is great. Simple techniques like stopping a class immediately to address bad behavior in a class meeting can readily be taught. Teachers and other staff also benefit from training to recognize signs of being



victimized by bullying, such as moodiness, withdrawal, poor attendance, self-abuse, changed appearance or loss of items like cell phones.

**G. Parent Involvement** – Getting parents more on board “would help a lot”, according to a Waterbury teacher. One Rocky Hill principal asserted that individual counseling of students with the involvement of their parents is the most effective solution to bullying behavior. Numerous other interviewees commented on the importance of educating parents about safety issues related to social networking and bullying.

Another principal commented that parents are really the missing link in controlling bullying. The 2008 Anti-Bullying Act has assigned ownership for preventing bullying to the schools, but parents also have responsibilities to establish and monitor standards for behavior. Even if the schools do everything that they can, they realistically cannot be expected to be fully responsible for character education.

Enhanced parent education (in terms of what constitutes “bullying” and “mean behavior” for School Climate purposes) may be more critical to reducing bullying in one environment than another in that the 2008 Anti-Bullying Act’s definition of “bullying” may be different from or at odds with a community’s definition or view of that term. The result of this incongruence is that the student is left in the unenviable position of ‘serving two masters’. The example provided during one interview was that if “Student A had a younger cousin in another classroom and someone in the cousin’s class was picking on their cousin, then Student A would be expected by the family to intercede and “settle it”. “Settling it” (depending on the method and number of times the method was employed) might have meant that Student A’s behavior although acceptable to the family, might have constituted bullying under the 2008 Anti-Bullying Act.

Therefore, it is important for parents, students and school officials to all understand (really understand) that the School’s definition of “bullying” will override what might be viewed as acceptable (or expected, for that matter) behavior outside of school.

## **VI. INNOVATIVE PRACTICES TO IMPROVE SCHOOL CLIMATE AND MOTIVATE POSITIVE BEHAVIOR**

**A. RAMS in Waterbury** – “RAMS” stands for Respect, Attitude, Motivation and Success. These values are reinforced with positive goal-setting. The program is premised on the belief that kids know what to do, and need to know what the consequences are if they do not behave. RAMS is in its third year of use at the North End Middle School.

**B. Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (“PBIS”) in Bridgeport, Hartford, Rocky Hill, Tolland, Waterbury (Elementary and High School)** – Rewarding positive behavior is clearly PBIS’ overarching purpose, but it also includes classroom management skills that help teachers relate more effectively to their students. After public announcements each morning, Bridgeport students repeat “Be Responsible, Be Respectful, Be Safe”. Students at Bridgeport’s K-8 Luis Muñoz Marin School can earn merit points for positive behavior redeemable at the school store for school items, or earn privileges such as movies and dances. Rewards for good behavior at

Waterbury's Wilby High School include breakfasts, certificates for milestones and "Paws" for showing extraordinary kindness to other students.

C. "Names Can Really Hurt Us" in Tolland and West Hartford – This established program from the Anti-Defamation League gives high school students a chance to talk about what it feels like to be different, and provides an opportunity to express their feelings in an "open mic" forum.

D. "Capturing Kids Hearts" in Regional School District 13 – The program promotes positive, productive and trusting relationships among administrators, teachers and students that foster a high-performing learning environment. Three days of staff time as well as professional development days are used to prepare staff to deal with misbehavior and disrespect, and to connect better with their students.

E. Small Student Group Relationship-Building in Waterbury – Waterbury's Wilby High School has launched a new curriculum that specifically targets improvement in school climate. Each week, every student meets in a small group setting with 9 classmates and a single teacher or social worker to discuss topics relevant to their grade. Topics range across all aspects of student life – from how to study to how to find a job - but also touch on bullying, tolerance and appropriate online behavior.

Importantly, rather than just focusing on the information discussed, the intention is to foster comfortable relationships that will help students reach out to the teacher and to share their concerns openly with their peers.

F. Diversity Training Activities in Regional School District 13 – The "Best Buddies" program encourages students to stand up for one another, particularly those who have disabilities or are different from themselves.

An activity facilitated by the Vinal Technical High School Diversity Club distributes lemons to a majority of fifth-grade classes and asks them to comment on their appearance and characteristics, while one or two students are given limes. Questions are asked of students relating to how they should act towards the "limes". Additional scenarios employing feelings of exclusion and being different are used to improve mutual respect and tolerance.

G. "Climate Committee" at Memorial Middle School in Regional School District 13 – In the summer of 2010, a "climate committee" was formed. The committee meets monthly and discusses implementation of the STAR bullying prevention program and development of the building school climate mission statement and school plan. The committee also discusses upcoming school climate initiatives and priorities and staff feedback regarding current activities. While the principal is the point person, the school psychologist and social worker play major roles. The principal believes that the implementation of the committee's ideas has assisted in measurably reducing bullying. Prior to the 2011 Connecticut Act strengthening the anti-bullying law which requires designation of a "safe school climate committee", Waterbury's Wilby High School similarly assembled an advisory staff team to address various issues related to school climate - and bullying in particular.

**H. “RULER” in Hamden** – “RULER” is a social/emotional learning program that tries to foster “emotionally literate schools”. It intends to give students tools to better understand their emotions so that they are able to regulate them. For example, students who can understand and express their sadness are less likely to express it as anger. RULER also helps increase student use of the services of school psychologists by familiarizing students with these valuable on-site professionals.

During the 2011-2012 school year, four professional training sessions, each based on an “anchor tool” that relate to school climate (such as “The Emotional Charter” or the “Mood Meter”) are being provided to all Hamden K-8 teachers. Afterward, students are introduced to each anchor tool by means of related lessons that are intended to prompt discussion. School-wide teams were formed this Fall to develop the Emotional Charter.

In Hamden’s middle school, any student who is disciplined with in-school suspension for any reason (including conflicts with fellow students like bullying) is assigned to take 4 training sessions in RULER skills.

**I. “CLIMB” in Simsbury’s Tariffville Elementary School** - CLIMB stands for Character Lives In My Behavior. By focusing on Caring, Respect, Responsibility and Citizenship, CLIMB is designed to build character and encourage kids to make good decisions.

A student’s consistently good or improving behavior (e.g., befriending a new student) is rewarded with plastic charm “feet” that symbolize climbing. Awarded “feet” are mentioned in both the principal’s and classroom newsletters and celebrated in CLIMB assemblies. CLIMB is also discussed in morning classroom meetings where students discuss both in and out-of-school situations where they could have made a better choice. During school, when a student does not follow character ideals, a form called “Marking A Better Choice” is completed and discussed. It includes what actually happened and what could have happened if the character traits were followed. Parents are contacted when these slips are issued, allowing for appropriate follow-up. In combination, these conversations, awards and publicity have resulted in a significant reduction in the number of office referrals. The increased communications to home have also increased parental interest, involvement and connectivity.

**J. “SHINE” in Simsbury’s Squadron Line Elementary School** – Like the awarding of “feet” at Tariffville, Squadron Line gives out Shine “sun” awards for good behavior. Student leaders award orange suns, while faculty and staff give out yellow suns. The “suns” are then posted on a wall in a hallway and recipients randomly receive rewards including video game playing time or lunch with friends in the principal’s office. Each “sun” recipient also signs the “Squadron Line Shines” book and picks an item from the treasure chest in the office. During each lunch session each day, one student is awarded a “Shining Ticket” which entitles him/her to free lunch. Both faculty and parents sit on a Shine Committee which oversees the program. “Making A Better Choice” slips are also used at Squadron Line.

**K. Blue Ribbons in Rocky Hill** – In Rocky Hill, positive behaviors are rewarded with blue ribbons. Recipients are recognized on the intercom and their pictures are taken and showcased throughout the school. Issued “YES” tickets are put into random lotteries whereby teachers can

redeem a prize of books or pizza lunch for the classrooms that exhibited positive behaviors. One “Bus of the Month” is also recognized for positive behavior. These positive reinforcements have been reported to be very effective.

L. “Great Body Shop” Curriculum for 5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> Graders in Stratford – While focused on issues like puberty and drugs, this health program addresses bullying, peer pressure, how to deal with being picked on and how to resolve conflicts. It also covers where to go for help at school and cell phone/social networking issues. In combination with role playing to address bullying, Stratford has found that this curriculum helps to reduce student-to-student mean behavior.

M. Responsive Classroom in Stratford and Hamden – Responsive Classroom” is a structured teaching program that emphasizes social, emotional, and academic growth in a strong and safe school community. Among its seven guiding principles are:

- a. The social curriculum is as important as the academic curriculum;
- b. How children learn is as important as what they learn;
- c. The greatest cognitive growth occurs through social interaction; and
- d. To be successful academically and socially, children need a set of social skills: cooperation, assertion, responsibility, empathy, and self-control.

This approach includes ten classroom practices, including:

- a. Morning Meeting – gathering the class each morning to greet one another, as well as to assess moods and share feelings;
- b. Rule Creation – helping students create their own classroom rules that allow class members to meet their learning goals;
- c. Interactive Modeling – teaching children to notice expected behaviors - and make them an integral part of their own behavior - through modeling;
- d. Positive Teacher Language – using words and tone to promote learning and self-discipline; and
- e. Logical Consequences – responding to misbehavior in a way that allows children to fix and learn from their mistakes while preserving their dignity.

Responsive Classroom can be instituted as a school-wide behavior system. A Stratford school principal believes that Responsive Classroom has reduced the number of referrals to the administrators. Hamden believes that Responsive Classroom improves school climate.

Some of Stratford’s schools sent a portion of their teachers for formal training. These teachers in turn trained other staff at their own schools. This type of educational sharing has also been incorporated into other professional development activities for teachers at off-site meetings (e.g., to address Cyber Bullying, to hear speakers such as SDE Educational Consultant Dr. Jo Ann Freiberg). Additionally, books such as Jane Bluestein’s “Creating Emotionally Safe Schools” and “The Respectful School: How Educators and Students Can Conquer”, by Stephen Wessler and William Preble, have been presented by individual teachers to their colleagues during staff meetings for purposes of discussion and training on bullying related topics.

N. “Make Your Day” Team in Stratford – A team comprised of 1 administrator and 7 teachers meets monthly to discuss and address student behavior issues.

Make Your Day is a citizenship program emphasizing free will and choice, in which expectations are clearly established and consequences are consistent, logical and predictable. Students can expect a physically and emotionally safe school environment that is enhanced by a focus on learning. Premises are that the teacher has a right to instruct and students have a right to learn. When a student’s behavior interferes with either right, behavioral interventions are couched in terms of a violation of those rights. Students are encouraged to help each other by communicating politely with the other person when an interfering behavior occurs.

O. Social Skills Focus in Bridgeport – Students who have been identified as having impulsive behaviors are observed by the school’s social worker or guidance counselor either over lunch, during a conversation between the observer and the student about a particular topic or while the student is interacting in some other capacity with other children (e.g., while playing a game). Based on the observations, the social worker or guidance counselor will have one on one discussions with the student about the impulsive behavior they observed (e.g., while you were having lunch with student B, you kept touching their food or while you were playing that board game with "Susie" you kept moving her marker... and this is why you are not selected by other kids to be on their team or why "Susie" does not want to play with you). The social worker/counselor will also discuss where the behavior comes from (why do you touch other people’s food, why did you keep moving the marker?). Thus, the purpose of the conversation is to bring the impulsive behavior to the attention of the student and to work with them in an effort to control, minimize and ultimately to eliminate it.

## **VII. INNOVATIVE PRACTICES SPECIFIC TO PREVENTING BULLYING**

A. Bully Box – Placing a box where students can anonymously propose subjects for discussion, report bullying incidents in confidence, or even just bring attention to what’s going on, can help bring bad behavior to broader view. In Rocky Hill, a Bully Box is kept in the guidance office. In the absence of a physical box, staff can make certain, if the situation so requires, to assure confidentiality to students stepping forward to report a bullying incident.

B. Curriculum (e.g., Social Studies and Literature Classes) that Incorporates Behavior Lessons – Hamden literature classes choose literature that helps to teach specific behavioral lessons. West Hartford’s new “Second Step” elementary curriculum teaches positive behavior and social skills through role playing and modeling. Stratford has found mini-lessons and cultural arts programs to be two especially effective methods for incorporating education regarding bullying into the elementary school curriculum.

C. Team Teaching and Focus Groups (at the Freshman Level) in Hamden – A weekly class coaches students in character-building and socially/academically-appropriate behavior. It provides a forum that allows students to vent their feelings and express frustration with negative attention-seekers. Social workers and psychologists also offer a focus group for “at risk females”.

D. Social Work Pass in Stratford – Students feeling anxious about being bullied can ask for a “social work pass” to remove themselves from class and visit a social worker at the school.

Similarly, students who feel that they may be on the verge of bullying someone can ask for such a pass. Both students being bullied and students who feel as though they are on the verge of bullying someone can turn to the school's social worker for support by means of this pass.

## **VIII. BEST PRACTICES INTERVENTIONS AFTER BULLYING OCCURS**

**A. Peer Mediation** – Bridgeport, Hamden, Hartford, Rocky Hill and West Hartford all report that they use peer mediation. Hamden has a formal mediation process which brings in family members and includes social/psychological professionals. In Rocky Hill, mediations between students that are facilitated by school counselors are viewed as pretty effective because they get issues out in the open for discussion.

Typically, students are trained on how to help resolve conflicts between each other and among students in general and then proceed to train their peers. It is valued for preventing conflicts from escalating into something more serious - such as an incident that would trigger an out-of-school suspension or expulsion. Peer mediation is often overseen by guidance counselors who provide feedback to the student mediators – who then help other students contract with each other to improve their behavior. Students thereby become responsible for both their own behavior and for raising the level of behavior throughout the entire school.

Bridgeport's goal is to implement peer mediation at all levels, and has made the program available in approximately fifteen of the district's thirty-nine schools. Teachers select students in grades 6-8 to be trained and to serve as mediators, while guidance counselors often facilitate the mediation sessions. The program appears to have reduced the number of repeat offenses for name-calling and teasing. The schools seek a diverse group of student peer mediators; these mediators are not limited to 'successful' student leaders, but include students of all academic levels. School administrators perceive the program as a success that helps them reach out to a wider range of students.

**B. Written Student Contracts in Rocky Hill and Bridgeport** – Students contract with each other to modify their behavior after an incident. The contracts help to resolve the incident and commit the individuals to anti-bullying behavior. Bridgeport students sign agreements at the end of mediation regarding the matter and how it was resolved.

**C. Uniform Web-Based Reporting in Stratford** – Stratford uses a program called "Power School" to track and log incident data. They find it to be a useful tool for noting which students were removed from class and why – and for identifying patterns.

In an example from a smaller district, Regional School District 13 devised a Confidential Student Behavior Form that documents bad behavior and consequences for principals and school psychologists. It is sent to all impacted teachers and helps staff to understand reasons for an incident and possible ways to avoid similar occurrences.

**D. Bully Book in Waterbury and Bully Log in Rocky Hill** - Formal reporting tools that can provide monthly reports to SDE.

E. Staff Involvement– Periodic and casual meetings between staff and students may be used to provide insight into how a bullied student may be coping or failing to cope. A school counseling team, headed by the school psychologist and social worker and including administrators and teachers, is part of Continuing Education in one district. In another, the teachers who see the broadest cross-section of students (e.g., music teachers, physical education teachers, social workers and guidance counselors) are also good sources of anecdotal evidence about how students are getting along in the aftermath of bullying incidents.

F. Community Involvement– Hartford’s K-8 Kennelly School relies in part on external (business, university, and community) resources to support the PBIS approach. By way of example:

- a. Pratt & Whitney engineers have come in to speak with students.
- b. The school has received consistent support from the Social Work programs at UConn and Springfield College.
- c. The Hartford Knights (a youth sports mentoring program) have participated in all aspects of the PBIS program, from Tier 1 educational presentations through Tier 3 interventions with repeat offenders. Representatives of the Hartford Knights are especially credible, and often more effective than school personnel, because of their presence and reputation in Hartford neighborhoods.

## IX. LOOKING FORWARD

Since quite a few of our interviewees said they need best practices to handle bullying “off campus”, and with implementation of Public Act 08-160 now fully underway, Connecticut school districts are also moving on to address cyber-bullying and the round-the-clock challenge of mean behavior. It is therefore timely that the January 1, 2012 implementation of Public Act 11-232, *An Act Concerning the Strengthening of School Bullying Laws*, coincides closely with the publication of this report.

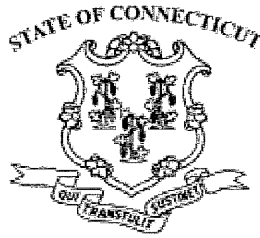
While the two acts are discrete, school district efforts to manage the responsibilities assigned by both laws have already begun overlapping. For example, Shelton High School’s principal started the 2011-2012 school year with a Day 1 assembly that not only communicated her expectations for student behavior, but alerted students to passage of the more recent act and its heightened attention to bullying.

Shelton High is also trying to enlist cooperation by custodians, lunch personnel and bus drivers in an all-out effort to extend its “safe environment characterized by respect” to more hours of the day. All four members of the school’s top administrative team help to send buses off at the end of each day and remind bus drivers of their pivotal role. Similarly, Bridgeport has already established a Cyber Bullying Task Force at the district level which is giving safety tips to parents and providing guidance about the use of social networking.

Connecticut Appleseed respectfully submits this report to help advance the vitally important school climate transition underway - one which is already helping to promote a safer learning environment for all students.

## **Appendix**





**Substitute House Bill No. 5826**

**Public Act No. 08-160**

**AN ACT CONCERNING SCHOOL LEARNING ENVIRONMENT.**

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Assembly convened:

Section 1. (*Effective from passage*) Section 1 of public act 07-66 shall take effect July 1, 2009.

Sec. 2. Subsection (g) of section 10-233c of the 2008 supplement to the general statutes, as amended by section 2 of public act 07-66, is repealed and the following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective July 1, 2008*):

(g) [Suspensions] On and after July 1, 2009, suspensions pursuant to this section shall be in-school suspensions, unless during the hearing held pursuant to subsection (a) of this section, the administration determines that the pupil being suspended poses such a danger to persons or property or such a disruption of the educational process that the pupil shall be excluded from school during the period of suspension. An in-school suspension may be served in the school that the pupil attends, or in any school building under the jurisdiction of the local or regional board of education, as determined by such board.

Sec. 3. (*Effective from passage*) Not later than October 1, 2008, the Commissioner of Education shall issue guidelines to aid local and regional boards of education in making the determination as to whether a suspension of a pupil should be an out-of-school suspension or whether the suspension should be an in-school suspension pursuant to the provisions of section 10-233c of the 2008 supplement to the general statutes, as amended by this act.

Sec. 4. Section 10-222d of the general statutes is repealed and the following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective July 1, 2008*):

Each local and regional board of education shall develop and implement a policy [ for use on and after February 1, 2003,] to address the existence of bullying in its schools. Such policy shall: (1) Enable students to anonymously report acts of bullying to teachers and school administrators and require students to be notified annually of the process by which they may make such reports, (2) enable the parents or guardians of students to file written reports of suspected bullying, (3) require teachers and other school staff who witness acts of bullying or receive student reports of bullying to notify school administrators in writing, (4) require school administrators to investigate any written reports [filed pursuant to subdivision (2) of] made under this section and to review any anonymous reports, except that no disciplinary action shall be taken solely on the basis of an anonymous report, (5) include [an] a prevention and intervention strategy, as defined by this act, for school staff to deal with bullying, (6) provide for the inclusion of language in student codes of conduct concerning bullying, (7) require each school to notify the parents or guardians of students who commit any verified acts of bullying and the parents or guardians of students against whom such acts were directed, [to be notified] and invite them to attend at least one meeting, (8) require each school to maintain a list of the number of verified acts of bullying in such school and make such list available for public inspection, and, within available appropriations, report such number to the Department of Education, annually and in such manner as prescribed by the Commissioner of Education, (9) direct the development of case-by-case interventions for addressing repeated incidents of bullying against a single individual or recurrently perpetrated bullying incidents by the same individual that may include both counseling and discipline, and (10) identify the appropriate school personnel, which may include, but shall not be limited to, pupil services personnel, responsible for taking a bullying report and investigating the complaint. The notification required pursuant to subdivision (7) of this section shall include a description of the response of school staff to such acts and any consequences that may result from the commission of further acts of bullying. For purposes of this section, "bullying" means any overt acts by a student or a group of students directed against another student with the intent to ridicule, harass, humiliate or intimidate the other student while on school grounds, at a school-sponsored activity or on a school bus, which acts are [repeated against the same student over time] committed more than once against any student during the school year. Such policies may include provisions addressing bullying outside of the school setting if it has a direct and negative impact on a student's academic performance or safety in school. Not later than February 1, 2009, each local and regional board of education shall submit the policy developed pursuant to this section to the Department of Education. Not later than July 1, 2009, each local or regional board of education shall ensure that the policy is included in the school district's publication of the rules, procedures and standards of conduct for schools and in all student handbooks.

Sec. 5. (NEW) (*Effective July 1, 2008*) For the purposes of section 10-222d of the general statutes, as amended by this act, the term "prevention and intervention strategy" may include, but is not limited to, (1) implementation of a positive behavioral interventions and supports process or another evidence-based model approach for safe school climate or for the prevention of bullying identified by the Department of Education, (2) a school survey to determine the prevalence of bullying, (3) establishment of a bullying prevention coordinating committee with broad representation to review the survey results and implement the strategy, (4) school rules prohibiting bullying, harassment and intimidation and establishing appropriate consequences for those who engage in such acts, (5) adequate adult supervision of outdoor areas, hallways, the lunchroom and other specific areas where bullying is likely to occur, (6) inclusion of grade-appropriate bullying prevention curricula in kindergarten through high school, (7) individual interventions with the bully, parents and school staff, and interventions with the bullied child, parents and school staff, (8) school-wide training related to safe school climate, and (9) promotion of parent involvement in bullying prevention through individual or team participation in meetings, trainings and individual interventions.

Sec. 6. Subsection (a) of section 10-220a of the general statutes is repealed and the following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective July 1, 2009*):

(a) Each local or regional board of education shall provide an in-service training program for its teachers, administrators and pupil personnel who hold the initial educator, provisional educator or professional educator certificate. Such program shall provide such teachers, administrators and pupil personnel with information on (1) the nature and the relationship of drugs, as defined in subdivision (17) of section 21a-240, and alcohol to health and personality development, and procedures for discouraging their abuse, (2) health and mental health risk reduction education which includes, but need not be limited to, the prevention of risk-taking behavior by children and the relationship of such behavior to substance abuse, pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV-infection and AIDS, as defined in section 19a-581, violence, child abuse and youth suicide, (3) the growth and development of exceptional children, including handicapped and gifted and talented children and children who may require special education, including, but not limited to, children with attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder or learning disabilities, and methods for identifying, planning for and working effectively with special needs children in a regular classroom, (4) school violence prevention, [and] conflict resolution and prevention of bullying, as defined in subsection (a) of section 10-222d, as amended by this act, except that those boards of education that implement an evidence-based model approach, consistent with this act, shall not be required to provide in-service training on prevention of bullying, (5) cardiopulmonary resuscitation and other emergency life saving procedures, (6) computer and other information technology as applied to student learning and classroom instruction,

communications and data management, (7) the teaching of the language arts, reading and reading readiness for teachers in grades kindergarten to three, inclusive, and (8) second language acquisition in districts required to provide a program of bilingual education pursuant to section 10-17f. The State Board of Education, within available appropriations and utilizing available materials, shall assist and encourage local and regional boards of education to include: (A) Holocaust education and awareness; (B) the historical events surrounding the Great Famine in Ireland; (C) African-American history; (D) Puerto Rican history; (E) Native American history; (F) personal financial management; and (G) topics approved by the state board upon the request of local or regional boards of education as part of in-service training programs pursuant to this subsection.

Sec. 7. (NEW) (*Effective July 1, 2009*) (a) The Department of Education shall, within available appropriations, (1) review and analyze the policies submitted to the department pursuant to section 10-222d of the general statutes, as amended by this act, (2) examine the relationship between bullying, school climate and student outcomes, (3) document school districts' articulated needs for technical assistance and training related to safe learning and bullying, (4) collect information on the prevention and intervention strategies used by schools to reduce the incidence of bullying, improve school climate and improve reporting outcomes, and (5) develop model policies for grades kindergarten to twelve, inclusive, for the prevention of bullying. On or before February 1, 2010, the department shall, in accordance with the provisions of section 11-4a of the general statutes, submit a report on the status of its efforts pursuant to this section and any recommendations it may have regarding additional activities or funding to prevent bullying in schools and improve school climate, to the joint standing committee of the General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to education and to the select committee of the General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to children.

(b) The department may accept private donations for the purposes of this section.

Sec. 8. Subsection (d) of section 10-145a of the general statutes is repealed and the following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective July 1, 2009*):

(d) Any candidate in a program of teacher preparation leading to professional certification shall be encouraged to complete a school violence, bullying and suicide prevention and conflict resolution component of such a program.

Approved June 12, 2008