

New School Year, Reminder of Impact of Bullying & Continued Efforts Needed so Students Can Thrive

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As the new school year gets under way, and October is recognized as national bullying prevention month, this is an important time to redouble our efforts to prevent bullying in all forms. This includes creating culturally sensitive and safe environments for our students to learn.

Earlier this year, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) declared “bullying is widespread in the U.S.” but added “bullying is preventable.”¹ According to the CDC’s 2021 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System, the rates of bullying are alarming with one in five high school students report being bullied while at school.² The reasons that were cited for bullying included physical appearance, race/ethnicity, gender, disability, religion and sexual orientation, according to the National Center for Education.³ The CDC’s 2023 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System examined the use social of media and association between frequent use and bullying concluding, “Frequent social media use among students was associated with higher prevalence of bullying victimization at school and electronically, persistent feelings of sadness and hopelessness, having seriously considered attempting suicide, and having made a suicide plan.”

In today’s world of social media, bullying does not stop at the end of the school day and only exacerbates the youth mental health crisis. New York State has made strides in addressing bullying including with the passage and enactment of The Dignity for All Students Act. This Act seeks to “...provide the State’s public elementary and secondary school students with a safe and supportive environment free from discrimination, intimidation, taunting, harassment, and bullying on school property, a school bus and/or at a school function.”⁴ Also instrumental is the enactment of legislation in 2016 requiring all public and private schools in New York State to include mental health education as part of the health curricula for grades K-12. This first-in-the-nation legislation took effect on July 1, 2018. To assist schools in complying with the law, and with funding provided by the Legislature and State, the Mental Health Association in New York State (MHANYS) established the School Mental Health Resource and Training Center and works closely with the State Education Department and Office of Mental Health. This Center provides school districts with web-based resources, online and in-person trainings, and technical assistance for curriculum development to support student instruction. Other states have followed New York State’s lead and since enacted laws requiring mental health education in schools.

National bullying prevention month was first recognized in 2006. Nearly 20 years later and the advent and growth of social media have only strengthened the need to address bullying in all forms. There is no one-size fits all solution to bullying. But what we do know is that to effectively address it and to provide strategies to prevent it, we must involve all members of the school community from administrators, to teachers, to support staff, to students and their families -- each doing their part.

1 [https://www.cdc.gov/youth-violence/about/about-bullying.html#:~:text=Bullying%20is%20a%20frequent%20discipline,and%20primary%20schools%20\(9%25\).](https://www.cdc.gov/youth-violence/about/about-bullying.html#:~:text=Bullying%20is%20a%20frequent%20discipline,and%20primary%20schools%20(9%25).)

2 [https://www.cdc.gov/youth-violence/about/about-bullying.html#:~:text=Bullying%20is%20a%20frequent%20discipline,and%20primary%20schools%20\(9%25\).](https://www.cdc.gov/youth-violence/about/about-bullying.html#:~:text=Bullying%20is%20a%20frequent%20discipline,and%20primary%20schools%20(9%25).)

3 <https://www.pacer.org/bullying/info/stats.asp>

4 <https://www.nysed.gov/student-support-services/dignity-all-students-act-dasa>