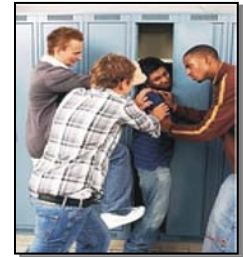


**Bullying in Schools: A Strategic Solution**  
by  
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Bullying in our nation's schools is rampant. Consider the following data points from the 2010 Federal Bullying Prevention Summit: every day, 160,000 students stay home out of fear of getting bullied at school; 1 in 3 students will be bullied this year (about 18M young people); 75-80% of all students observe bullying; and, depending on definition, 15-35% of students are victims of cyber-bullying.

Fortunately, our elected officials and others are now taking bold action. To their credit, for example, 43 states have passed anti-bullying legislation. At the national level, several different agencies co-hosted the (first ever) Summit mentioned above. The event included over 100 respected scholars, authors, psychologists, nonprofit and corporate leaders, government staffers and students.

I had the honor of representing CEP at the Summit. The key takeaways were: (1) bullying in schools is widespread; (2) the ramifications are very serious; (3) we need to learn more through research; (4) several government agencies are truly committed to taking this issue on; (5) policies and definitions need attention and clarity; (6) there are 67 different programs or books that claim to combat bullying; and (7) there is no simple, silver bullet solution.

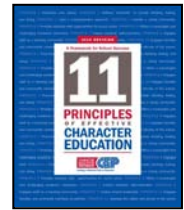
*"...if educators are serious about mitigating and eradicating bullying in schools, they will need to take a broad and strategic approach--one that focuses on the school's entire culture."*

As with all complex and chronic problems in our schools, narrowly focused intervention strategies typically fail to make a lasting impact. Zero tolerance policies, hallway posters and such all sound very good in theory. There is no doubt that they are also implemented by well-meaning people who really do want to make things better. However, according to many experts, such measures are shallow in nature and thus fail to achieve their intended purpose, especially over the long haul.

So, having said all of this, if educators are serious about mitigating and eradicating bullying in schools, they will need to take a broad and strategic approach--one that focuses on the school's entire culture. Beyond having a good strategic plan to guide the entire process, success requires committed leadership, hard work, collaboration with all stakeholders, tenacity and lots of patience. Remember, cultural change takes time, so think "crock pot," not "microwave oven."

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As for the strategic plan, CEP can help. We offer an excellent resource for this very purpose—one that goes to the heart of school culture. It is free of charge online. I am referring to the [\*11 Principles of Effective Character Education\*](#). One school leader referred to them as a “GPS system” to guide one along the path of meaningful change. To learn more, or to download a copy, please go to [www.character.org](http://www.character.org).



Following the *11 Principles* will help curb violence at your school and drive other positive changes. We know this to be true from managing the National Schools of Character program for 13 years. It has given us a rich and extensive database of case studies that consistently show how violence and other problems decline as culture improves. At the same time, other important metrics also move in the right direction—including academic achievement.

A safe, caring, supportive school culture doesn't just solve problems. It also creates an environment where young people flourish in countless positive ways. To make the point, let's look at three schools that followed the *11 Principles of Effective Character Education* and took a broad and strategic approach to creating healthy cultures. Each one drastically reduced violence and other problems. Beyond that, they also showed remarkable improvement in a host of other important areas.



[Seckman High School](#) in Imperial, MO, stresses team work, empathy and service. The assistant principal said the emphasis goes far deeper than “banners hanging from the cafeteria ceiling.” Over a 5-year period, **out-of-school suspensions decreased 98%; in-school suspensions decreased 30%; fights decreased 65%; and drug-related incidents decreased 74%**. Seckman was also named a Top 10 Performing School for Science; their graduation rate rose to 94%; and ACT scores hit an all-time high.

[Waterloo Middle School](#) in NY was once riddled with disciplinary and academic problems. A veteran staff member said it was “the black sheep of the district.” That is not true today. One teacher said the school “created a strong sense of family and built a culture of caring.” They emphasize respect and acceptance. Students pledge each day not to use their hands or words to hurt themselves or others. Over two years, **serious offenses decreased 71% and other reportable offenses decreased 50%**. Also, passing scores on the NY math assessment increased 49% and attendance climbed to 97%.



[Julian Elementary School](#) is located near San Diego. Their motto is “We can change the world with our own two hands.” Their culture includes service and respect. In a survey, 100% of parents said the school created a positive climate for learning. Last year, they achieved the highest Academic Performance Index rating in school history. Of note, it went up 45 points for socioeconomically disadvantaged students and 74 points for those with learning disabilities. **As for problems, disciplinary actions for violence and bullying decreased by 71%**.

The three schools showcased above are all different, yet they have several things in common. First, each one follows the *11 Principles of Effective Character Education*. Second, they all created healthy, supportive, respectful cultures. Third, each school significantly mitigated major problems. And fourth, they all showed improvements in academics and other key areas. The CEP database includes many other real-world case studies that show similarly striking results.



But let's look at a final school that is not in our database. Dunbar Senior High is in Washington, DC. It was founded in 1870 and has a long and rich history. However, like many other urban schools, it faces major challenges. Three years ago, the principal was fired and a private consulting firm took over. Even after the radical change in leadership, things failed to improve.

In December of 2010, the [Washington Post](#) reported on a Dunbar teacher who resigned because she was disgusted by the response to a cyberbullying incident. It was one of many cases of harassment and violence she claimed were tolerated or overlooked. The teacher said the consultants created “a culture of neglect, insecurity, zero accountability and poor communication.” She added “the culture, one of tolerance for sexual violence, was one she could no longer be part of.”

U.S. Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, talked about culture at the Summit. He said bullying goes to the very heart of school performance and culture. The Secretary views safety as a moral issue and said schools “should be cultivating a culture of trust and accountability.” CEP agrees with Secretary Duncan. We actually view culture as a two-way street. A good one solves problems and makes things better; a bad one exacerbates problems and makes things worse.



In conclusion, bullying is a daunting and frightening problem. If you want to take the issue on at your school and truly make a difference, you will have to take a strategic approach--one that focuses on the disease (unhealthy culture), not just the symptom. CEP's vision is for all schools to have healthy cultures that foster respect, acceptance and compassion. We are pleased to share an excellent framework others have used to achieve great success--[The 11 Principles of Effective Character Education](#).

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