



thrive report

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A partnership of the RI Departments of Education and Health
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February's Focus Mental Health

Now with February behind us, and after being in the clutches of winter for a while, we at RI's Coordinated School Health Program model -- **thrive** -- will turn our attention to issues of Mental Health.

Mental health encompasses a broad area of concern. Whether the mental health issue is related to depression, suicide, eating disorders, school discipline, anxiety, dating violence, sexual discrimination, antisocial behavior, bullying, etc., sometimes experts are needed. However, there are many steps schools and communities can take to create healthier learning environments and provide supports for youth and their families. These collaborative efforts strengthen families, schools, and neighborhoods and offer all students an equal opportunity to develop to their fullest cognitive, social, and emotional capacities.

One area of concern -- bullying -- can be reduced through the collaborative efforts **thrive** promotes. Bullying is often underreported and underestimated. It can take many forms, physical, verbal, nonverbal or emotional, and its damage is far-reaching. Rhode Island school suspension data for school year 2005-2006 illustrates the extent of certain types of bullying in our schools. Of the 44,509 suspension related fractions statewide, 11% (n=4991) were for bullying related concerns.

Further, in the ever-evolving world of cyberspace, a new manifestation of bullying occurs online, in a space that while virtual can still have very real consequences.

In this **thrive report** we'll explore the fundamentals of bullying and efforts we can take to prevent it. We know that schools across the state are implementing creative programs to address bullying and we invite you to share your efforts and successes with us in our "Fresh from the Field" section. Should you have any other questions about the Coordinated School Health model, please email us at rosemary.reilly-chammat@health.ri.gov or midge.sabatini@ride.ri.gov. Or call Rosemary Reilly-Chammat at 222-5922 or Midge Sabatini at 222-8952.

Sincerely,

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The Core Issue: Bullying

What is bullying?

Bullying should not be considered just a normal part of growing up. Bullying is serious and occurs frequently in our schools. The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development found that bullying has long-term and short-term psychological effects on both those who bully and those who are bullied (source: US Dept of Justice Fact Sheet). Bullying can take multiple forms: physical, verbal or psychological. These include a variety of behaviors done repeatedly to harm someone else or some group. Hitting, teasing, intimidation, internet stalking, and spreading rumors are just some examples of bullying.

What is cyber-bullying?

With technologies that include text messaging, instant messaging, chat rooms, emails, digital photography, and streaming media comes a form of aggression called cyber-bullying. Cyber-bullying includes online message fighting, cyber-stalking, verbal attacking, defamation, impersonating others, and cyber threats. It has emerged as a major school safety issue for educators, parents, and students and should be considered in any conversation that aims to stem harassment in any form.

Why you should care about bullying?

Bullying can lead to feeling anxious and afraid. Not only can it affect students' concentration, but it can also lead them to avoid school. It affects self-esteem and self-worth, especially if it continues over a long period of time. Bullying behavior has been linked to other forms of antisocial behavior such as vandalism, shoplifting, skipping and dropping out of school, fighting, the use of drugs and alcohol as well as increased levels of depression and anxiety (source: US Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention).

How can you help students feel safe at your school?

Address bullying at all levels: school, classroom and individual. In your school: enforce bullying, teasing and harassment policies, determine the nature and extent of bullying at your school, conduct school-wide assemblies to discuss the issue and increase supervision during breaks. In your classroom: introduce and enforce classroom rules against bullying and meet regularly to discuss bullying. Encourage parents to participate. As a teacher, school administrator, or parent: you must intervene when you see bullying taking place. *It is not only required by law*, but research also shows that stopping bullying works and has a positive effect on school climate. And, when students feel safe and supported in school, they learn better and will be healthier.

There are many helpful resources on bullying, its impact and how you can help. Go to www.thriveri.org for additional resources, references and tools to help prevent and stop bullying at your school.

Fresh from the Field

Submitted by Richard Pickett, Principal of the Social Street Elementary School, Woonsocket, Rhode Island.

The headline in the April 2002 *Woonsocket Call* read "Social Street School conditions 'abysmal'." The SALT report used that word to describe physical conditions, instructional programs and student interactions at Social Street on their visit. Test scores were among the lowest in R.I., ranking Social Street 4th lowest performing Elementary School in the state.

In April of 2002, we began to confront the major issues pointed out in the SALT report. Foremost was changing student behavior and the negative culture, which pervaded all aspects of schooling. The faculty used a simple formula: reduce instances of fighting, bullying and other disruptive behavior in the school life of our students. We acted on the premise that fewer classroom disruptions and student concerns about their safety leads to more real instructional time and increased academic achievement.

As part of this vision we partnered with the Institute for Non-Violence at the beginning of the 2002-03 school year. Because the school staff and Institute were so deeply committed to finding peaceful ways for students to deal with disputes, it began to change our entire school culture. Evidence of this change was dramatic for Social's 225 students. Suspensions dropped from 63 in 2001-2002 to 6 in 2002-2003 and to a handful since then. Office referrals dropped even more dramatically than those percentages.

We continued to utilize Institute training for the next two years with great success. Perhaps the most pronounced, concrete evidence that our vision about a peaceful environment and its connection to student success showed in our continuous improvement on state testing.

A school once labeled "abysmal" now can boast of being a "Regent's Commended School" for the last two testing cycles. That's a headline we can be proud of.

To share your first-person success stories in "Fresh from the Field," please email annemarie.silvia@ride.ri.gov.

Thrive: by the numbers

- 9: The percentage of violent crimes against teenagers that occurred **in schools** that are reported to police.
- 37: The percentage of the same kind of crime that occurred **on the street** that is reported to police. *A National Study of School Environment and Problem Behavior: The National Study of Delinquency Prevention in Schools.* Gottfredson Associates, Inc., 2000.
- 9.1: The percentage of LGBTQ students in a Rhode Island survey who claim they are harassed daily. Equity in Action, "Meet the Neighbors" RI Community Scan 2004.
- 55.6: Among those surveyed, the percentage who report having been cyber-bullied in chatrooms.
- 9.2: The percentage that report cyber-bullying through email. 41.5: The percentage of those surveyed who told a friend they'd been cyber-bullied.
- 3.0: The percentage from the same survey who told a teacher or other adult. *Patchin, J. W. and Hinduja, S. (2006). Bullies Move beyond the Schoolyard: A Preliminary Look at Cyberbullying. Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice, 4(2), 148-169.*
- 438: The number of threat and intimidations in **urban** school districts in Rhode Island that resulted in suspension in 2005-2006.
- 401: The number of threat and intimidations in **non-urban** school districts in Rhode Island that resulted in suspension in 2005-2006. Rhode Island Annual School Discipline Reports.

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The thrive report can also be found at www.thriveri.org/report.html