



## PLACER COUNTY GRAND JURY

# **Anti-Bullying Policies in Middle and High Schools: Are They Effective?**

**Follow-up to the Responses to the 2013-2014 Report**

June 26, 2015

# **Anti-Bullying Policies in Middle and High Schools: Are They Effective**

## **Follow-Up to the Responses to the 2013-2014 Report**

### **Summary**

The Grand Jury reviewed the Placer County schools responses to the 2013-2014 Grand Jury's recommendations on anti-bullying policies. In particular, the Grand jury was interested in determining if the school districts are able to gauge the effectiveness of their policies.

There are nineteen school districts within Placer County. Each district has demographic differences in geographical size, number of students, and types of policies covering bullying. School administrators recognize the bullying problem and have implemented anti-bullying policies and programs to conform to state law. Not all schools have a mechanism for the anonymous reporting of bullying. While there are data gathering systems available, e.g. Positive Behavior Intervention Support (PBIS) discussed below, to track behavior changes, these systems are not fully utilized throughout the county. Most of the districts that have data collection systems have not had sufficient time to develop statistically valid data to gauge the effectiveness of their programs.

The Grand Jury recommends that the districts continue developing reporting mechanisms and collecting data to measure the effectiveness of their programs. All schools should have a plan for anonymous reporting.

### **Background**

Bullying and cyber-bullying continue to be a pervasive problem in middle schools and high schools in Placer County. Persistent bullying can cause significant and long term problems, not only for the victims and their families, but also for the perpetrators. Sometimes bullying ends with tragic results.

The 2013-2014 Placer County Grand Jury investigated what anti-bullying policies and procedures are being used in Placer County schools and whether those policies are effective in

reducing the bullying problem. That report on that investigation included seven significant findings and seven recommendations.

The responses to that 2013-2014 report indicated that there is a wide variety of anti-bullying policies and programs in place across the schools in the county. However, the responses were vague as to what was being done to evaluate the effectiveness of those programs and to provide a safe environment for reporting bullying.

The 2014-2015 Grand Jury followed up on the responses to recommendations 1 and 5 of the previous Grand Jury Report.

Recommendation 1 of that report is that:

“High schools and middle schools provide an environment that is safe for reporting both bullying and cyber-bullying.”

Recommendation 5 of that report is that:

“Schools should develop a comprehensive means to evaluate the effectiveness of their anti-bullying programs and policies. Schools should conduct semi-annual anonymous surveys of the student body to measure the effectiveness of anti-bullying programs. In addition to gathering information regarding the amount and type of bullying that the student has experienced, the survey should seek student perceptions of the attitudes of teachers and administrators toward bullying.”

The current Grand Jury wanted to know:

- How the schools are measuring the effectiveness of their programs.
- If changes were made to the Placer County schools policies and procedures to assure a safe environment for reporting bullying.

**Definitions:**

*Bullying* may include any physical or verbal act or conduct by an individual or group of individuals, including communications made in writing or electronically, that a student has or may reasonably be predicted to experience fear of harm to their person or property, a

detriment to their physical or mental health, an interference with their academic performance, or with their ability to participate in or benefit from the services, activities or privileges provided by a school or county office program.

*Cyber-bullying* may include the creation or transmission of harassing communications, direct threats, or other harmful texts, sounds or images on the Internet, social media, or other technologies using a telephone, computer or any wireless communication device. Cyber-bullying also includes breaking into another person's electronic account and assuming that person's identity in order to damage that person's reputation. Source: Placer County Office of Education Policy SR 5131.2 (a).

## **Investigation Methods**

The investigation was performed through interviews, reviewing documents and the responses to the 2013-2014 Grand Jury Report. Specifically, the 2014-2015 Grand Jury:

- Interviewed the leadership of the Placer County Office of Education (PCOE), several school district superintendents, as well as high school and middle school principals.
- Reviewed policies regarding bullying and harassment provided by school administrators and County Office of Education management.
- Reviewed 2013-14 Grand Jury report and the 13 responses received in response thereto.

One member of the Grand Jury was recused to avoid any conflict of interest and the appearance of bias.

## **Facts**

- Placer County Office of Education has updated its anti-bullying policies.
- Schools are aware of bullying as an issue; some schools are ahead of others. In particular, 49 schools in Placer County have implemented PBIS. There are 110 public schools in Placer County, including alternative high schools and public charter schools.
- The following school districts have graduated enforcement policies that could result in suspension or expulsion of a student for bullying and/or cyber-bullying:
  1. Placer Union High School District

2. Roseville Joint Union High School District
3. Rocklin Unified School District

- Not all schools have a means for anonymous reporting.
- Positive Behavior Intervention Support (PBIS) is a Program developed by the University of Oregon with support from University of North Carolina “to establish the social culture and behavioral supports needed for a school to be an effective learning environment for all students.”<sup>1</sup>
- PBIS emphasizes four integrated elements: (a) data for decision making, (b) measurable outcomes supported and evaluated by data, (c) practices with evidence that these outcomes are achievable, and (d) systems that efficiently and effectively support implementation of these practices.
- PBIS has a data collection component that allows schools to generate reports.
- PBIS collects both “behavior data” (who, what, where, when) and “fidelity data” (how the plans are being implemented).
- Schools using PBIS have teams of staff (administrators, certificated, non-certificated, parents) that analyze data to measure the effectiveness of the program and develop solutions to problems.
- For most schools, there has not been enough baseline data collected in PBIS to develop trends showing if the school’s programs are effective in reducing bullying incidents.
- Placer County Juvenile Detention Facility reports that using PBIS has led to a decrease in poor behavior incidents since they began using the program in February, 2013.

---

<sup>1</sup> Placer County Office of Education, PCOE Board Review “Student Support Services” October 9, 2014,  
[http://www.boarddocs.com/ca/pcoe/Board.nsf/files/9PMN7N5CD799/\\$file/PCOE%20Board%20Overview%20of%20PBIS%2010%204%2014.pdf](http://www.boarddocs.com/ca/pcoe/Board.nsf/files/9PMN7N5CD799/$file/PCOE%20Board%20Overview%20of%20PBIS%2010%204%2014.pdf)

## Findings

The Grand Jury found that:

- F1. During interviews, school district personnel indicated that they either have implemented, or are implementing, mechanisms for the safe reporting of bullying and cyber-bullying.
- F2. Some schools do not have a means for anonymous reporting.
- F3. Schools are measuring the effectiveness of the programs, but with a few exceptions, do not yet have enough data to draw statistically valid conclusions.
- F4. Schools are utilizing PBIS to collect behavior data that includes bullying incidents.

## Recommendations

The Grand Jury recommends that:

- R1. Schools should continue to develop and refine mechanisms for the safe reporting of bullying and cyber-bullying.
- R2. Schools with no provisions for the anonymous reporting of bullying should create them. As part of their response, all schools are to provide a copy of their anonymous bullying reporting policy.
- R3. Schools should continue to measure the effectiveness of their anti-bullying policies and utilize that data to improve school climate, including creating a safe environment for all.
- R4. Schools utilizing PBIS should continue its use and foster its expansion to other schools as training is available.

## Request for Responses

	<u>Recommendations Requiring Response</u>	<u>Response Due Date</u>
<b>Ms. Gayle Garbolino-Mojica</b> Placer County Supt. Of Schools 360 Nevada Street Auburn, CA 95630	<b>R1, R2, R3, R4</b>	<b>August 24, 2015</b>
<b>Mr. George Sziraki</b> Placer Union High School Dist. Supt. 13000 New Airport Rd. Auburn, CA 95603	<b>R1, R2, R3, R4</b>	<b>September 22, 2015</b>
<b>Mr. Roger Stock</b> Rocklin Unified School Dist. Supt. 2615 Sierra Meadows Dr. Rocklin, CA 95677	<b>R1, R2, R3, R4</b>	<b>September 22, 2015</b>
<b>Mr. Ron Severson</b> Roseville Joint Union High School Dist. Supt. 1750 Cirby Way Roseville, CA 95661	<b>R1, R2, R3, R4</b>	<b>September 22, 2015</b>
<b>Mr. Scott Leaman</b> Western Placer Unified School Dist. Supt. 600 6 <sup>th</sup> St. Suite 400 Lincoln, CA 95648	<b>R1, R2, R3, R4</b>	<b>September 22, 2015</b>
<b>Mr. Robert Leri</b> Tahoe-Truckee Unified School Dist. Supt. 11603 Donner Pass Rd. Truckee, CA 96161	<b>R1, R2, R3, R4</b>	<b>September 22, 2015</b>