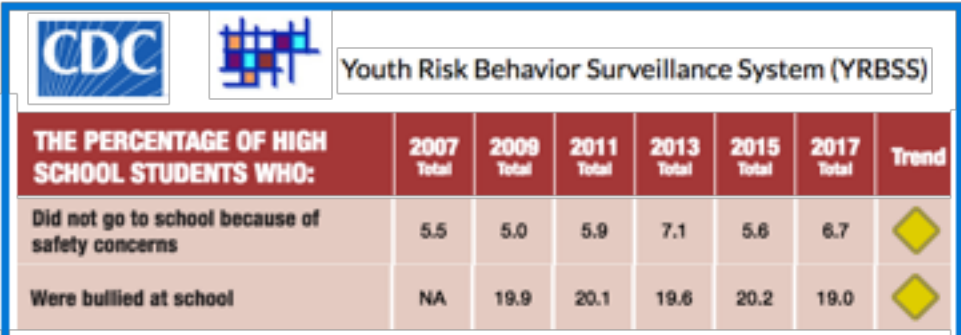To: Nevada Statewide School Safety Task Force

From: Nancy Willard, M.S., J.D,, Director of Embrace Civility in the Digital Age

Re: Statement

Date: August 27, 2018

I am sorry that I am not able to be in attendance. I have provided some articles that I hope will be helpful to you, along with some information on my book, Engage Students to Embrace Civility, and student program, Embrace Civility. I just wanted to take this opportunity to write what I would say if I had the opportunity to present.

In 2007, my book on cyberbullying, Cyberbullying and Cyber threats: Responding to the Challenge on Online Cruelty, Threats, and Distress. Obviously, I was early in noting and responding to this concern.

What I realized at the time was that what educators were being told about bullying behavior was partially inaccurate and the approach they were advised to use was not going to be effective in addressing digital concerns. What has clearly emerged since this time is ample research that documents that what schools are doing to better address bullying is not, despite best intentions and efforts, having a positive impact. This is data from the CDC's Youth Risk Behavior Survey that demonstrates no reduction.

THE PERCENTAGE OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS WHO:	2007 Total	2009 Total	2011 Total	2013 Total	2015 Total	2017 Total	Trend
Did not go to school because of safety concerns	5.5	5.0	5.9	7.1	5.6	6.7	◇
Were bullied at school	NA	19.9	20.1	19.6	20.2	19.0	◇

Being a growth mindset kind of person, I have been trying to figure out why this is the case and better, research-based, practices that schools could implement. The very brief answer to this is that schools must:

- Implement Trauma Informed Care practices to increase the resilience of some of the students who are hurtful and to better support many of the students who are treated badly.

- Engage student leaders in a positive social norms based approach to communicate to the students who are being hurtful to achieve social dominance and status that the majority of students do not like to see this and truly admire those who are kind and respectful and step in to help.

- Increase the social relationship skills of students in hurtful situations, as a witness, the one who was hurtful, or the one targeted.

- Improve the effectiveness of the responses to hurtful incidents that are reported by staff and by the principal by focusing on an investigation and an intervention that supports resilience and restoration.

However, especially at this point in time with the concerns of increased school shootings, increased suicide attempts, and other social disruptions, it seems that the insight I have developed also must be applied in the context of increasing efforts related to school safety.

Along with others, I note a huge concern of the efforts of companies selling school security technologies that have no evidence of effectiveness and are exceptionally costly. In addition, there are calls for more

armed personnel. School shootings happen so rapidly, the potential they will be stopped by armed personnel in the vast majority of situations is almost zero--only if the school shooter clearly wants to be "killed by cop." Increased armed personnel are not a deterrent because most school shooters are suicidal.

I would strongly encourage you to read:

- The Atlantic: School-Security Companies Are Thriving in the Era of Mass Shootings. A multibillion-dollar industry is pushing an array of expensive technologies with the message that any campus could be next.[i]

- Rand Corporation. The Role of Technology in Improving K–12 School Safety.[ii]

Both increases technical security and armed personnel will be entirely ineffective in reducing or responding to most instances of violence--and will increase student distress, invade student privacy, increase the school-to-prison pipeline, and interfere with the positive relationships between staff and students school that are essential to reducing the risks of school violence.

The Secret Service just released a helpful guide, Enhancing School Safety Using a Threat Assessment Model.[iii] This document provides helpful guidance on an effective Threat Assessment process, with a caveat: It does not focus sufficiently on the role and impact of trauma.

Establishing an effective threat assessment process is essential. However, the absolutely essential component of an effective threat assessment approach is that students are willing to report. In the introduction to the guidelines presented findings from a prior report on school shootings: "(P)rior to most attacks, though other students had information about the attackers' plans, most did not report their concerns to an adult."

It is my opinion that this statement was not sufficiently explicit. The finding in a prior comprehensive study of school shootings was more clear:

The school shooters had exhibited concerning behavior prior to the attack in 93% of the incidents and at least one other person had some type of knowledge of the attacker's plan in 81% of the incidents and more than one person had such knowledge in 59% of the incidents. Of those individuals who had prior knowledge, 93% were peers of the perpetrators--friends, schoolmates, or siblings.[iv]

Clearly, the only way we are going to reduce the carnage of school shootings is to increase student reporting of concerns, leading to an effective threat assessment.

Here is where insight that I have from the bullying research comes in. This is quoted from my book Engage Students to Embrace Civility:

It is well established that the majority of secondary students do not report hurtful incidents. Data from 2015 NCVS indicated that only 43% of students who reported someone had bullied them at school said that they told an adult.[v]

One 2004 study at the elementary school level found that there was a perception among the students that the school tolerated bullying because nothing was ever done and therefore it was a waste of time to report.[vi] A 2004 study of secondary students revealed that students did not report their situation to teachers or other adults for fear of being viewed as a "squealer," belief that the school staff would act in a way that would make their situation worse, and they did not trust school staff to keep secrets told to them in confidence.[vii] In a 2007 study, students associated telling a teacher with a double jeopardy: they might not be believed and telling might result in retaliation by the perpetrators.[viii]

The Youth Voice Project asked students who were repeatedly bullied and had experienced moderate to very severe levels of distress whether they reported to an adult at school and, if so, whether things got better, stayed the same, or got worse.[ix] The findings indicated:

- Elementary (grade 5). 46% did not tell an adult, 29% told and things got better, 17% told and things stayed the same, 11% told and things got worse.

- Middle school (grades 6 to 8). 68% did not tell an adult at school, 12% told and things got better, 8% told and things stayed the same, 12% told and things got worse.

- High school (grades 9 to 12). 76% did not tell an adult at school, 7% told and things got better, 8% told and things stayed the same, 9% told and things got worse.[x]

(Interrupting my book to add this slide that communicates this data more clearly.)
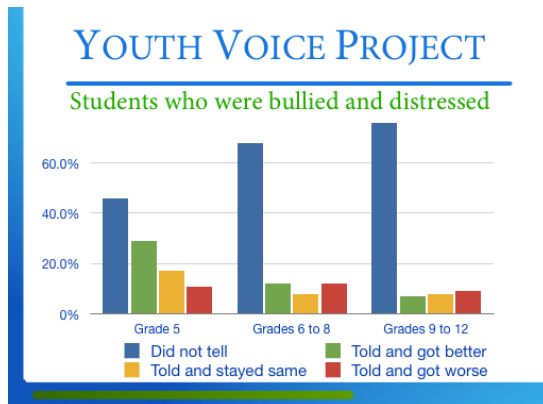
On the Embrace Civility Student Survey, (this was a survey of 1,500 students I conducted) students who were treated badly were also asked if they told a school staff member and, if so, how the staff responded and whether things got better, stayed the same, or got worse. If they did not tell a school staff member, they were asked why they did not do so.Overall, only 32% of all students told a school staff member. Only 36% of the "more vulnerable" students (bullied once or twice a week or more and distressed) told a staff member.

For all targeted students who told a school staff member, after they told, the reported impact was:

- 48% Things got better.

- 39% Stayed the same.

- 15% Things got worse.

However, after the "more vulnerable" students told a staff member, the reported impact was:

- 30% Things got better.

- 45% Things stayed the same.

- 25% Things got worse.

Thus, looking at these findings from an overall perspective, the current level of the "tell an adult" approach to bullying for "more vulnerable" students was:

- 64% Did not tell a staff member.

- 11% Told a staff member and things got better.

- 16% Told a staff member and things stayed the same.

- 9% Told a staff member and things got worse.

The reasons given by the "more vulnerable" students for not telling were:

- Did not think a school staff member would do anything to help.

- Thought that a school staff member might make things worse.

- Thought I would be blamed.

- I probably deserved it.

- The student being hurtful would likely have retaliated.

Essentially, given that it appears that we currently have about a 10% rate of effectiveness in the "tell an adult" approach to resolving situations where students are being bullied and are feeling distressed, this does not bode well for reliance on the student reporting, leading to effective threat assessment approach. Clearly, this is where schools must focus their attention. Fortunately, this not a difficult task to accomplish.

Additional insight from a survey conducted in Oregon is helpful. the Student Wellness Survey, which is similar to the CDC's Youth Behavior Risk Survey, however with some additional questions.[xi]

Table 6:

I can talk to my teachers openly and freely about my concerns.	68.9	56.6	61.1

Table 19:

There is at least one teacher or other adult in my school that really cares about me.	73.5	66.1	71.2

If this data is at all similar to what would be found in other states, then this indicates a huge problem. If around 30% of students do not think that any staff member really cares about them and around 40% would not feel comfortable talking with a teacher about a concern, this tells us where improvements must rapidly be made.

Anonymous tip lines may help some. But no anonymous tip line is is going to effectively address the underlying factors that are interfering with staff-student connections and the trust many students , likely those at higher risk and associated with those at higher risk, apparently do not have when trying to deal with concerns associated with emotional distress.

My new book, Engage Students to Embrace Civility, contains guidance on a recommended comprehensive approach to respond reports of bullying and other hurtful behavior that is in accord with the federal civil rights regulations, as well as Nevada's model policy.[xii] This approach incorporates principles of Trauma Informed Care, Restorative Practices, and Collaborative Problem Solving. This book also addresses how schools can improve staff-student connections. The documents I have submitted also provide insight into positive strategies.

Thank you for the opportunity and your attention.

i https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2018/08/school-security-mass-shootings/567080/

ii https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1488.html

iii https://www.secretservice.gov/data/protection/ntac/USSS_NTAC_Enhancing_School_Safety_Guide_7.11.18.pdf.

iv The Final Report and Findings of the Safe School Initiative: Implications for the Prevention of School Attacks in the United States. https://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/safety/preventingattacksreport.pdf

v U.S Department of Education, NCVS, supra.

vi MacDonald H, Swart E. (2004). The culture of bullying at a primary school. Education as Change 8: 33–55.

vii Garpelin A. (2004). Accepted or rejected in school. European Educational Research Journal 3: 729–742.

viii Oliver C, and Candappa M. 2007. Bullying and the politics of 'telling'. Oxford Review of Education 33: 71–86.

ix Davis, S. and Nixon, C. (2013) Youth Voice Project: Student Insights into Bullying and Peer Mistreatment. Research Press: Illinois; Davis S. and Nixon, C. (2011) Youth Voice Project, National Data Set. Youth Voice Project. http://www.youthvoiceproject.com.

x Davis S. and Nixon, C. (2011), supra.

xi https://oregon.pridesurveys.com/dl.php?pdf=Oregon_SWS_Statewide_Report_2016.pdf&type=region.

xii http://bullyfreezone.nv.gov/About/Model_Policy/

Increase Student Resilience

Research-based strategies to increase student resilience and emotional well-being.

Cultivating Dandelions

Schools are encouraged to implement more comprehensive approaches to improve school climate that incorporate Trauma Informed Care principles, combined with positive psychology.

The objective is to help young people gain greater dandelion-like qualities—the ability to grow and bloom anywhere. There are so many challenges that schools do not have the ability to control when their students are in their homes and communities. What is in their control is ensuring that when students are in school, they feel safe, welcome, and supported. Therefore, it is imperative to improve school climate and increase positive staff-student and student-student connections.

Dandelion-like qualities are the essence of resilience. The Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University provides excellent insight on increasing youth resilience. They say:

Research has identified a common set of factors that predispose children to positive outcomes in the face of significant adversity. Individuals who demonstrate resilience in response to one form of adversity may not necessarily do so in response to another. Yet when these positive influences are operating effectively, they "stack the scale" with positive weight and optimize resilience across multiple contexts. These counterbalancing factors include:

1. facilitating supportive adult-child relationships;

2. building a sense of self-efficacy and perceived control;

3. providing opportunities to strengthen adaptive skills and self-regulatory capacities; and

4. mobilizing sources of faith, hope, and cultural traditions.[i]

Increasing Positive Staff-Student Connections

It is essential to ensure that every student has one or more staff members who are committed to maintaining a close connection—being the person who really cares. For students who are

identified as being at a higher risk, several staff members should be assigned to be mentors for these students.

Schools are advised to use a relationship mapping approach to ensure every student has a staff member assigned to watch out for his or her well-being.[ii]

Increasing positive acknowledgement of students is also important. The ideal is that students regularly receive 5 positive comments to every 1 negative comment or correction. This is especially important for students who are at higher risk. This requires constant focus on positive acknowledgement.

School staff must know that this formula is "magic." Focused staff attention on increasing positive acknowledgement and connections, especially of those students with greater challenges, will have magical results in improving emotional well-being and resilience of students.

Reduce Hurtful Student-Student Behavior

Bullying and other hurtful behavior is a form of trauma. Schools must implement new approaches to address student hurtful behavior—because the evidence is clear that the current approaches are not having any positive impact.

Schools are advised to ground their approach in trauma informed care, involve students as leaders in the effort, seek to increase students' relationship skills, and ensure that staff responses to hurtful behavior that is witnessed or reported are effective and restorative.[iii]

Positive Thinking

Positive thinking is grounded in research insight into positive psychology.[iv] Ask students to respond to statements such as these:

- Something that happened that I am thankful for and why I am thankful.

- Something I did that I am proud of.

- A goal of mine and one action I took to accomplish this goal.

- How I reached out to be kind to someone today.

- Who I connected with today in a positive way and how this made me feel.

- A challenge I faced and how I successfully thought things through.

- How I used a personal strength of mine.

Mindfulness and Self-Regulation

There are many programs that provide excellent guidance on establishing mindfulness practices.[v] One very simple practice is to simply have students practice mindfulness for several minutes upon coming into class after a transition. A minute of silence for self-calming. Then at any time the students appear to be getting "rambunctious," a return to just a minute of silence.

All school staff and students should be trained in self-regulation or de-escalation strategies. However, every student likely has different ways that are best for him or her to self-regulate. Have the students determine what the best ways are for them to self-regulate when getting triggered.

When a student starts to trigger or escalate, the teacher can say to this student, "It seems you are getting a bit stressed. What is something you can do to self-regulate?" It is especially important to positively acknowledge the student's success in self-regulation.

Character Strengths

The VIA Institute on Character has identified 24-character strengths: creativity, curiosity, judgment, love of learning, perspective and wisdom, bravery, perseverance, honesty, zest, love, kindness, social intelligence, teamwork, fairness, leadership, forgiveness, humility, prudence, self-control, appreciation of beauty and excellence, gratitude, hope, humor, and spirituality.[vi] Research has shown that when people intentionally act to use a known strength, this increases their happiness.

Schools are encouraged to have students complete the VIA character strengths survey. Teachers can help students recognize and celebrate their strengths. When discussing strategies to respond to any hurtful situations or other challenges, students could be asked how they could use different strengths in this situation.

Whenever a teacher is discussing any issue of concern with a student asking that student what his or her strengths are and how he or she might use their personal strengths to find a resolution for this problem situation is advisable.

Problem Solving

Students who know how to engage in problem solving, especially in relation to interpersonal challenges, are more resilient.[vii] The Embrace Civility Think Things Through approach is this:

- What is the situation?

- What do I want to accomplish?

- What strategies could I use?

- Is each in accord with my values and strengths?

- For each, what might happen?

- What is my best choice?

- If that does not work, what else could I do?

In the context of responding to any situation where a student has engaged in misbehavior, engaging that student in Collaborative Problem Solving to decide how to prevent similar challenges in the future and to remedy any harm that was caused is advised.[viii]

Kindness

Encouraging acts of kindness is critically important, especially for any student who is having challenges in fitting in. Encouraging that student to reach out to be kind to someone at least 3 times a day and to record what he or she has done to report back to their teacher/supporter can, based on the research, result in an improvement in this student's level of peer acceptance.

The Random Acts of Kindness Foundation web site has many resources to support kindness activities in schools.[ix] Beyond Differences encourages programs to reduce student social isolation.[x] GLSEN's No Name Calling Week promotes kindness.[xi]

Increase Student Social Emotional Skills

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning has identified five interrelated sets of social emotional competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making.[xii]

Schools must help students gain greater effectiveness in social relationship skills related to hurtful situations, including how to respond if they witness hurtful behavior, have been treated badly, or have been hurtful.[xiii]

Cultural Competence

Increasing the cultural competence of students and staff is necessary to ensure that all students feel welcomed and respected in school.

The National Education Association's Diversity Toolkit focuses on five basic cultural competence skill areas: valuing diversity, being culturally self-aware, understanding the dynamics of difference, knowledge of students' culture, and institutionalizing cultural knowledge and adapting to diversity.[xiv] Teaching Tolerance has excellent instructional resources.[xv]

Increase Authentic Student Voice and Leadership

Increasing authentic student voice is essential to the objective of helping all students feel that they are part of the solution in forming a positive school culture. Increased student voice also provides a more effective way for schools to engage in needs assessment and identify concerns that must be addressed.[xvi]

Schools are encouraged to engage a diverse group of kind, compassionate, and inclusive students in leadership roles to promote positive relations and kindness.[xvii]

Effective Investigation and Intervention

It is absolutely imperative to improve the manner in which school leaders respond to reports of hurtful or distressful situation and any other concerns regarding the well-being of students or when a student has engaged in misbehavior.

This area is fraught with challenges for school leaders associated with conflicting directives and insufficient attention to the establishment of effective intervention approaches that avoid exclusionary disciplinary response and, at the same time, resolve the hurtful or challenging situation or address inappropriate behavior.

It is recommended that schools proceed in a manner that:

- Integrates the insight of Multiple Tier System of Supports to ensure that the concerns of students with challenges, have experienced trauma, or are experiencing toxic stress are identified and effectively addressed in an ongoing manner.

- Uses a Restorative Practices approach that requires students who have been hurtful or have engaged in misbehavior to accept personal responsibility and remedy the harm to any individual harmed and the school community.

- Engages students whose behavior was inappropriate in Collaborative Problem Solving so that these students are fully involved in the process of determining how to remedy the harm and prevent further concerns.

- Makes any necessary corrections to the school climate to increase inclusion.

- Ensures ongoing monitoring until it has been established that things have gotten better. Nancy Willard, M.S., J.D. is the Director of Embrace Civility in the Digital Age. She is author of Engage Students to Embrace Civility and creator of a student leadership, positive relationship skills program, Embrace Civility.

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Citations

i https://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/resilience/.
ii https://mcc.gse.harvard.edu/links/relationship-mapping.
iii Nancy Willard's book, Engage Students to Embrace Civility, provides insight.
iv https://greatergood.berkeley.edu.
v https://Mindfulnessinschools.org/; https://www.mindfulschools.org/;
https://www.mindfulschools.org/.
vi https://www.viacharacter.org/.
vii http://www.icanproblemsolve.info/.
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ix https://www.randomactsofkindness.org/
x https://www.beyonddifferences.org/.
xi https://www.glsen.org/no-name-calling-week.
xii https://casel.org/.
xiii Embrace Civility in the Digital Age's student leadership program, Embrace Civility, focuses
specifically on increasing these skills.
xiv http://www.nea.org/tools/diversity-toolkit.html
xv https://www.tolerance.org/.
xvi https://soundout.org/; https://www.wested.org/resources/speak-out-listen-up-tools-for-
using-student-perspectives-and-local-data-for-school-improvement/;
https://www.gse.harvard.edu/news/uk/16/08/giving-students-voice;
https://www.stuvoice.org/.
xvii Embrace Civility in the Digital Age's student leadership program, Embrace Civility, focuses
specifically on engaging students as leaders.

Trauma Informed School Safety

School shootings and youth suicide must be recognized as an outcome of trauma and addressed in accord with Trauma Informed Care practices.

Across the country, state or district school safety teams are releasing new School Safety Plans. Many schools have also been focusing on integrating Trauma Informed Care practices. Educators are encouraged to fully integrate the understandings of Trauma Informed Care into their revised School Safety Plans.

Background

Over the last years, there has been an increase in school shootings, as well as youth suicides and attempts. School shootings, although significantly tragic, remain exceptionally rare. Other forms of violence, such as physical bullying and assaults are a more frequent concern.

Students who engage in school shootings or other forms of violence or who attempt suicide do not fit into one singular profile. There are always multiple factors involved in these situations.

In the case of school shootings, most attackers engaged in some behavior prior to the incident that caused others concern or indicated a need for help. Most attackers had difficulty coping with significant losses or personal failures. Moreover, many had considered or attempted suicide. Many attackers felt bullied, mistreated, or injured by others prior to the attack. All of these factors are evidence of the experience of trauma.

Students who have experienced trauma have disrupted relationships with adults, can be more easily triggered, and have challenges in problem solving, especially in challenging relationship situations.

Very often in these situations there has been a recent disturbing "triggering" event to which these students have felt helpless in resolving and they do not feel they can obtain assistance from anyone at school or in the home. Engaging in a school shooting is often an act of attempted suicide. These students intend to kill themselves or be killed by the police.

Being bullied and engaging in bullying is a well-documented factor in youth suicide. Youth suicide attempts are most prevalent during the school year. The quality of the school climate must be considered a contributing factor. Students who are bullied and feel unsafe are more likely to bring weapons to school.

Students who have engaged in bullying should never be blamed for the decisions of other students. Blaming tragic incidents on students who engaged in bullying ignores the multiple factors, can increase copy-cat behavior, and unfairly blames students for what are overall school climate concerns.

School-based violence appears to have declined since the 1990's, with one exception. Despite efforts of school leaders over the last decade, the evidence is that what most schools are doing in the area of bullying prevention is not having any positive impact. The Center for Disease Control has included a bullying question on its Youth Risk Behavior survey since 2009. There has been no decline in the number of students reporting being bullied. This is a huge concern that must be better addressed.

The majority of students who are being bullied do not report what is happening to the school. Ample research indicates that students think reporting does not resolve the problem or it makes things worse.

The fact that the majority of students think that reporting bullying to school staff will not lead to an effective result is a huge "red flag" of concern in relation to school safety because effective Threat Assessment requires that students report concerns.

UPSTREAM, MIDSTREAM, PLUNGE, DOWNSTREAM

It is helpful to think of school safety strategies in the context of where they lie on a river that turns into rapids, that go to a waterfall where the water plunges to dangerous rocks below. Strategies can be considered:

- Upstream, where the river is calmer and it is easier to help students get out of the water.
- Midstream, where water is moving more swiftly in rapids indicating there is a higher risk.
- The end of the rapids and the Plunge, where students go over the waterfall and crash into the rocks below
- Downstream, into the rocks below and the future direction of the river.

DOWNSTREAM

Postvention activities are those that occur Downstream after the Plunge—after a suicide, suicide attempt, or significant act of violence. Every school must have a postvention plan developed in conjunction with regional mental health providers to help students and staff recover from what has happened and to prevent further Plunges.

An individualized postvention plan is essential for any student who has attempted suicide, engaged in violence, or was the victim of violence. It is necessary to assess and correct any situations at school may have been causing distress and to put a positive support plan into place for these students.

PLUNGE

The presence of more armed personnel may prevent more carnage if, and only if, the armed personnel are in the right place at the right time—which is highly unlikely. The likelihood of armed personnel rapidly climbing the cliff and catching students in a net before they Plunge into the rocks is exceptionally slim. Most shooting incidents are stopped by means other than law enforcement intervention.

More armed personnel should not be considered an effective Midstream deterrent to school shootings because most school shooters desire "suicide by cop." Additionally, more law enforcement in schools can contribute to school-to-prison concerns.

Prior to the Plunge, is where some technical security might be placed. It is of course necessary for schools to be adequately secure. However, there is no research-based evidence of effectiveness of reliance on increased technical security. Some technical security measures are relatively low cost

and thought to be helpful. This includes entry control, identification tags, communication technologies, site alarms in secluded areas, and emergency alerts. GPS tracking systems may be helpful for more vulnerable students and school buses.

Video surveillance can reduce property crimes, but is likely to displace violence to unmonitored areas. Comprehensive video surveillance systems are exceptionally expensive and require consistent monitoring by staff. The minute or two it would take for a school shooter to shoot numerous victims is insufficient time for a video monitor to notice, call law enforcement, and for law enforcement to respond.

Metal detectors are now being strongly promoted. These technologies cannot distinguish between different objects made of metal, thus such determinations must be made by trained employees. To facilitate entrance of hundreds of students will require a significant number of staff members.

Metal detectors raise concerns that include students being late to class and infringing on students' rights. While metal detectors may protect students once they enter a school building, there are many places where students will be present without such protection—such as the long lines that have formed in front of the building to get through the metal detector. Metal detectors also create a prison-like atmosphere for students and can be very expensive.

Increased technical security features communicate to students that their school is not safe—thus contributing to increased student distress. Increased technical security may create a public perception that the school is dedicated to school safety. Absent any research evidence of effectiveness, such appearances are entirely deceiving.

MIDSTREAM

In the Midstream rapids, right before the falls is when student behavior should alert someone that this student is under distress and is considering an act of violence or self-harm.

Security technologies are also being promoted for this region of the river. Anonymous tip lines have become quite popular. There is no research evidence, but anecdotal evidence suggests they are helpful. A concern about anonymity is that it is not possible for the responder to obtain what might be critically important further information. This can complicate the investigation.

It is also important to consider the reasoning for why some might think it is necessary to provide anonymity and what it might say about the school climate that a student does not feel safe asking to talk confidentially to a principal or counselor.

The bottom line is that the effectiveness of an anonymous tip line will be dependent on the responsiveness of the staff to the reports. If the students perceive this responsiveness to beneficial, they may use such a tip line. If the responsiveness is not so perceived, tips will decline.

Companies are also marketing social media monitoring technologies. This software scans online content for indicators of school safety concerns. This software only scans public posts, not private messages. There is no research on effectiveness of the technology itself or in preventing violence. Every school has a significant number of "social media monitors"—walking around the halls wearing jeans with their cellphones in hand. School efforts to increase the likelihood of students reporting concerns would be preferable to reliance on fallible software.

Establishing an effective Threat Assessment process is essential. Effective Threat Assessment can catch at-risk students in a net prior to going into the Plunge and possibly taking others along.

However, for the Threat Assessment process to work, the net must span the rapids. While it is true that most students who are suicidal or potentially violent present warning signs, school leaders will

not know of such concerns unless other students report. If students do not think it will make things better to tell school staff about such concerns, there is less likelihood they will report.

The Secret Service just released new guidance for schools, Enhancing School Safety Using a Threat Assessment Model. This document provides helpful guidance on an effective Threat Assessment process—with a caveat that is discussed below.

In the Introduction to the guidelines presented findings from a prior report on school shootings: "(P)rior to most attacks, though other students had information about the attackers' plans, most did not report their concerns to an adult."

The willingness of students to report will be directly connected to the degree to which they feel they have positive connections with school staff and they trust that the Threat Assessment process will help, and not harm, their distressed friend.

The key factor that must be immediately corrected to ensure school safety is diligent efforts to increase positive staff-student connections and the effectiveness of reports of concern, so students will trust reporting will lead to a positive outcome for their friend.

Effective Threat Assessment requires an in-depth understanding of the role of trauma that the student who is engaging in threatening behavior has and likely is experiencing. It is essential the Threat Assessment team includes professionals with expertise in trauma.

The caveat to the Secret Service guidelines is that they do not reference "trauma." Without an understanding of the role and impact of trauma, schools are less likely to engage in the actions necessary to effectively address the concerns of the student about whom the report was made.

Schools are encouraged to identify what traumatic situations this student has experienced and recent distressing situations this student is experiencing that has caused significant distress and has led to the concern he or she may cause harm to self or others. Schools must implement comprehensive corrective actions if these concerns relate to how this student is being treated by other students or staff. Schools must develop a positive action plan to assist this student in resolving the current triggering situation and gaining greater resilience.

The assessment must never ask, "What is wrong with this student?" The assessment must always focus on "What wrong has or is happening to this student and how can this be corrected?"

UPSTREAM

Vitally important Upstream initiatives can help to prevent students from falling into the river in the first place and getting them out when the water is still relatively calm.

In many states, there have been calls for more counselors or social workers in schools. This is clearly imperative. More rapidly, however, it is necessary to shift the current responsibilities of counselors away from such non-counseling activities as course enrollment to allow them to use their counseling skills to assist students who are experiencing emotional distress.

The vitally important additional Upstream initiatives will involve all school staff in a comprehensive approach to improve school climate in accord with Trauma Informed Care practices to increase student resilience and actions to better foster more staff-student and student-student positive relations.

Nancy Willard, M.S., J.D. is the Director of Embrace Civility in the Digital Age. She is author of Engage Students to Embrace Civility and creator of a student leadership, positive relationship skills program, Embrace Civility. Website: http://embracecivility.org . Email: info@embracecivility.org .

ENGAGE STUDENTS TO EMBRACE CIVILITY

An approach to foster civility through an emphasis on positive social norms, increased student competence, resilience, and restoration.

Embracing failure as an opportunity for growth is a core component of having growth mindset. To be fruitful, it is necessary to note when something is not working, delve into the possible reasons why, and identify strategies that would appear to have a better chance of success.

With this thinking in mind, it appears that what schools are doing, with best intentions and efforts, is not having a positive impact in the addressing bullying. It is not reasonable to expect that continuing to implement the same approaches—but with more vim and vigor—will achieve better results. What is necessary is a shift in approach.

There is a profound misunderstanding about the nature of bullying and other hurtful behavior and, thus, effective prevention strategies. Some students who engage in bullying have experienced trauma and have other risk factors. However, the primary source of bullying, especially at the secondary level, is popular, socially skilled students who are being hurtful to achieve social dominance and status. These students target those who they view as "different," as well as rivals or potential rivals. They are not viewed by staff as the source of problems.

Students who are perceived as "different" often experience being bullied. Sometimes, these students also have social relationship challenges that contribute to their being targeted. Being bullied is a form of trauma.

A significant amount of hurtful behavior in schools is bi-directional or impulsive retaliation. Such "drama" is emotionally distressing and creates a negative school climate that interferes with student learning. The concern of staff who are treating students badly or ignore hurtful situations is often not ever or effectively addressed.

As some students who are hurtful and many students who are targeted have or are experiencing trauma, trauma informed practices provide an underlying

foundation for success. The key components of this effort must include increasing positive staff-student connections, mindfulness and de-escalation practices, and problem-solving skills.

However, it will not be possible to reduce bullying using only trauma informed practices. The perceived path to achieving high social status within the school must change. This requires a focus on positive social norms. The majority of students do not like to see their peers be hurtful and truly admire those who are kind and compassionate and step in to help. By revealing this insight, derived through local survey data, behavior is more likely to change.

It is necessary to engage a diverse group of kind, compassionate, and inclusive students in leadership roles to promote positive relations. Placing the students in a position of responsibility for the way in which they treat each other and giving them greater authentic voice in addressing school climate issues will increase their positive involvement and behavior.

As students approach puberty, their profound interest is in gaining independence and handling their own interpersonal relationship challenges. To them, "tell an adult" is "admit personal failure and prepare for shame."

Schools must assist students in gaining greater effectiveness in social relationship skills. This includes how to effectively respond if they witness hurtful behavior, have been treated badly, or have been hurtful. These instructional efforts must support increased peer involvement and resilience, as well a personal accountability and remedy of harm.

Schools have been directed by statute to make "bullying" a violation of the disciplinary code, create a reporting system, investigate student reports, and impose disciplinary sanctions. While schools have been directed to impose disciplinary sanctions on those who engage in bullying, they have also been directed to stop imposing exclusionary disciplinary sanctions. Schools also must make annual public reports of "bullying" incidents—a "blackmark" principals want to avoid.

The majority of students who are bullied do not report these concerns to the school, even if distressed. They think that this will make things worse.

This "rules and consequences" approach frequently leads a principal to shift his or her focus from seeking to fully understand and resolve the hurtful situation to an assessment of whether the accused student has violated the disciplinary code and should be punished.

Punishment is entirely ineffective. The harm the targeted student has suffered is most often not remedied. This approach often leads to retaliation—which the targeted student does not report because reporting the first time only made things worse.

It is necessary to switch to a more comprehensive investigation and restorative intervention. This intervention must:

- Identify and address the trauma and social relationship concerns of any involved student, hurtful or targeted, in a manner that increases this student's resilience and social skills.

- Require acceptance of personal responsibility and a remedy of the harm to the one treated badly and to the school community by any student who was hurtful—and his or her supporters.

- Make any necessary corrections to the school climate. This includes increasing inclusion and addressing how staff are treating students—also in a restorative manner.

- Engage in ongoing monitoring until it has been established that things have gotten better.

Fortunately, this Engage Students to Embrace Civility approach is based on values that most all educators strongly believe in—a positive approach that supports increased resilience and skills of students and restoration of harm.

Nancy Willard, M.S., J.D. is the Director of Embrace Civility in the Digital Age. She is author of Engage Students to Embrace Civility, available through Amazon. Two professional development videos are available on her web site. She is also creator of a newly released student leadership, positive relationship skills program, Embrace Civility.

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ENGAGE
STUDENTS TO EMBRACE CIVILITY

BOOK AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT VIDEOS

OBJECTIVES

Engage all members of the school community in establishing a positive school climate that embraces kindness, inclusion, and civility that integrates the principles of Trauma Informed Care, Positive Psychology, Collaborative Problem Solving, Social Norms, Student Voice, and Restorative Practices.

Increase the effectiveness of both staff and principals in investigating and intervening hurtful situations in a manner that is restorative, supports the increased resilience of the involved students, and avoids an exclusionary disciplinary response.

Engage Students to Embrace Civility, the book, is now available on Amazon. The chapters include:

1. Engage Students to Embrace Civility Approach
2. Bullying Prevention: Understanding the Concerns
3. Reasons for the Lack of Effectiveness
4. Integrated Risk Prevention
5. Connections, Competencies, and Engaged Students
6. Positive Strategies to Foster Positive Relations
7. Positive Strategies for Investigation and Intervention

There are also Appendices that support a positive and restorative investigation and intervention.

Engage Students to Embrace Civility, the videos, are two free videos that cover the topics in the book. Educators who provide payment can receive documentation to support 2.5 Professional Development Units.

EMBRACE CIVILITY

STUDENT LEADERSHIP AND RELATIONSHIP SKILLS PROGRAM

OBJECTIVES

Reduce student hurtful behavior and increase helpful behavior by reinforcing positive social norms that the majority of students do not admire those who are hurtful and admire those who are kind and compassionate and step in to help.

Increase the ability of students to independently resolve hurtful incidents when using social media or face-to-face by ensuring they gain the skills to effectively respond as a witness, the one targeted, or the one being hurtful.

Embrace Civility is a student leadership program for students in grades 4 through high school that teaches the values and skills to foster positive relations.

- Reach Out. Be kind to those who are treated badly or left out and help resolve conflict.

- Say "Stop." Help those who are hurtful stop, accept personal responsibility, and remedy the harm.

- Report Concerns. Report concerns to an adult who can help.

- Stop, Own it, and Fix It. Avoid being hurtful and if you were, stop yourself, accept responsibility, and remedy the harm.

- Be Positively Powerful. Respond effectively if someone is hurtful and become positively powerful.

Embrace Civility engages a student leadership team to deliver positive messages and engage in other activities to promote kindness and inclusion. Direct instruction is encouraged in grades 4 through 8. At the high school level, an informal messaging approach is encouraged.

One key innovative concept incorporated into Embrace Civility is the use of a local social norms survey that documents from students their own values that support positive relations. This positive social norms approach can influence behavior.

The program includes an implementation guide with instructional support documents, the Embrace Civility student survey, a 6 page reproducible student guide, slides for an introductory assembly and for lessons that are to be modified locally with local data, poster templates, and 6 short instructional videos for staff and student leaders. Staff and students leaders are also invited to join a collaborative network email discussion group to exchange insight and ideas.

Nancy Willard, M.S., J.D., Director of Embrace Civility in the Digital Age, is also available for presentations and webinars. Email: info@embracecivility.org.

More information: http://embracecivility.org