

# CPS Anti-Bullying Community Conversations and Strategies

– 2018 –

**Bridgeable**

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## Bullying Affects Everyone

Bullying affects everyone, at all stages of life, and yet it is one of those problems that feels uniquely terrible each time it happens to someone. That is especially true for kids who are being bullied at school, and parents of students who are experiencing bullying.

We believe that living an issue every day makes someone an “everyday expert”, and that decision makers need to listen to and learn from those experts to make better decisions.

This project focused on getting the feedback, insights, and ideas from the “everyday experts” who live this issue: students who have experienced bullying, parents of kids who have been bullied, student leaders, and teachers, staff, and administrators. We asked them how this issue has impacted their lives, how CPS responded to their situation, and most importantly, how things could be improved moving forward.

Our process included academic and policy research, deep-dive 1:1 interviews, and facilitated group discussions between CPS decision makers and the everyday experts. Throughout this process, the focus was always on how CPS could become a safer, more innovative, and more inclusive school district, based on the experiences and insights of lived experience.

This summary will outline the key themes we learned, and is organized by which group of everyday experts provided those insights:

students, parents, and staff. It will close by outlining potential next steps that CPS can take to implement improvements.


We learned that the issue of bullying in schools cuts across class, racial, geographic, and age lines, and has a profound impact on the people who deal with it. Each person touched by this issue - especially the students who were victims of bullying - had incredible insights into how to improve things for other kids in the future.

Students are eager to engage one another in meaningful ways through peer support groups, mentorship programs, and continued discussions between students at different schools. They often feel misunderstood or dismissed by the adults they turn to, and as a result feel like their options for responding to bullying are limited to handling it themselves. For parents, there are opportunities to build more structured, trusting relationships with school staff who are trained to acknowledge and address issues of bullying with empathy. And finally, administrators and teachers welcome the opportunity to have more training on how to respond to and prevent bullying. Both were also interested in dedicating more class time and resources to adequately address bullying as it arises.

Most importantly, while it was very clear that there is work to be done to make CPS a safer, better district when it comes to bullying, there are also concrete and actionable steps the district can take to make progress towards that goal.

we believe

**Living an issue every day  
makes you an expert**



**“I think it would be wonderful if kids were incentivized to be stepping in when they see bullying going on...I think incentivizing kids to stand up for each other would be great.”**

**–Bob, parent of student who experienced bullying**

**who we  
engaged**

# By The Numbers



**15**  
deep dive  
interviews

- 4 principals
- 1 assistant principal
- 4 resource coordinators
- 2 students who have experienced bullying
- 3 parents of students who have experienced bullying
- 1 teacher



**16**  
schools

- |   |                                      |
|---|--------------------------------------|
| 1. <b>Rockdale Elementary</b>                     | 9. <b>Aiken High School</b>          |
| 2. <b>Withrow High School</b>                     | 10. <b>Taft High School</b>          |
| 3. <b>Rothenberg Prep</b>                         | 11. <b>Taft Elementary</b>           |
| 4. <b>Silverton-Paideia</b>                       | 12. <b>John P. Parker Elementary</b> |
| 5. <b>Shroder High School</b>                     | 13. <b>Walnut Hills High School</b>  |
| 6. <b>Roselawn-Condon</b>                         | 14. <b>The Spencer Center</b>        |
| 7. <b>Western Hills High School</b>               | 15. <b>Roberts Academy</b>           |
| 8. <b>School for Creative and Performing Arts</b> | 16. <b>South Avondale Elementary</b> |

# Who We Engaged

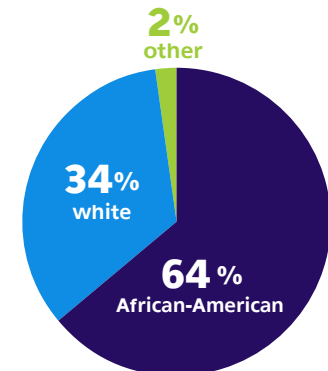


**5**  
groups of  
everyday experts

- 8 male students who experienced bullying and CPS Board Member Mike Moroski at The School for Creative and Performing Arts in Over-the-Rhine
- 13 female students who experienced bullying and CPS Superintendent Laura Mitchell at The Spencer Center in Walnut Hills
- 12 student leaders and CPS Board Member Eve Bolton at Rockdale Elementary in Avondale
- 8 parents of children who experienced bullying and CPS Board Member Mike Moroski at Roberts Academy in East Price Hill
- 6 teachers and administrators and CPS Chief Communications and Engagement Officer Lauren Worley at Walnut Hills in Evanston

## Demographics by category

- 33 students ages 7-17
- 8 parents
- 3 teachers
- 1 Assistant Principal
- 2 Principals





**“What would have been better  
would have been ‘I hear you, I’m with  
you’...just – recognition.”**

–Erin, parent of student who experienced bullying

**key  
themes**

1

EMPATHETIC ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF BULLYING IS PARAMOUNT

2

PEER-TO-PEER SUPPORT AMONG STUDENTS IS THE MOST PROMISING AREA TO IMPROVE PROGRAMMING

3

IT IS IMPORTANT TO HAVE DEFINED, WELL-TRAINED ADULTS AT EVERY SCHOOL WHO ARE THE MAIN POINTS OF CONTACT ON BULLYING ISSUES



**"I have 1,000 kids. That's a lot. If one percent of them is having a problem every day, you're barely keeping up."**

*-CPS Assistant Principal*

4

MORE TRAINING ON HOW TO IDENTIFY, RESPOND TO, AND REDUCE BULLYING IS NEEDED FOR STUDENTS, PARENTS, AND STAFF ALIKE

5

SHIFT AWAY FROM PUNITIVE ACTIONS AND TOWARDS RESTORATIVE PRACTICES IN RESPONSE TO STUDENTS WHO EXHIBIT BULLYING BEHAVIOR



**Pretend like you're my mother, talk to me in that way because it doesn't really help if you just tell me you can't do nothing about it, because it makes me wanna take it into my own hands.**

*-M, 6th grader*

### 1. Empathetic acknowledgement of bullying experiences is paramount

Students and parents were clear: they often feel ignored, dismissed, and treated like legal liabilities. If their initial interaction with CPS staff included a more human acknowledgment of their pain, it would go a long way towards building a better CPS environment around bullying.

**"I wish I could go to a teachers and that the teacher would understand me. Not like a student-teacher relationship but like she could be a mother figure and try to talk to me in that way instead of talking to me as a teacher and say 'I can't do anything about it until it gets physical.' Pretend like you're my mother, talk to me in that way because it doesn't really help if you just tell me you can't do nothing about it, because it makes me wanna take it into my own hands." –M, 6th grader**

Feeling dismissed or ignored was a central theme that cut across everything we heard. Both students and parents want to feel heard, and often an empathetic initial response is what they need to feel safe, comforted, and protected.

**"What would have been better would have been 'I hear you, I'm with you'...just - recognition." –Erin**

### 2. Peer-to-peer support among students is the most promising area to improve programming

Students want to be a part of the solution, and they believe that more mentorship, group discussions, and student-led support systems would all be effective strategies to reduce bullying and mitigate its impact.

**"Can we please have more groups?...That way you don't feel so alone." –L, 8th grader**

Parents and staff were equally supportive of these strategies.

**"I think it would be wonderful if kids were incentivized to be stepping in when they see bullying going on...I think incentivizing kids to stand up for each other would be great." –Bob, CPS parent**

### 3. It is important to have defined, well-trained adults at every school who are the main points of contact on bullying issues for both students and parents

Students wanted to know there was someone they could turn to who would hear them out and seek to comfort and help them.

**"I think it's important for the teachers to make it clear that they're there for us, that we can go up and talk to them if there's a problem, and not that they're gonna turn against us. That they'll listen. I just think that they need to make it more clear on who to reach out to when there's problems." –M, 9th grader**



Parents feel like it is difficult to get the necessary attention when every issue is funneled through the principal, and want more individualized responses to their child's issue.

**“When the principal is not here you get told ‘well we can’t do anything if you don’t talk to the principal’ but the principals are gone so much that when things happen and they’re not there for you to talk to them...it just gets pushed under a rug because they weren’t there and it was dealt with by the assistant principal. You as a parent don’t feel like it was dealt with appropriately.” –Valerie, CPS parent**

Staff feel overwhelmed by the scale of the issue, and often feel like responses to bullying issues happen in an ad-hoc, “if you have the time” sort of way. Staff members who are trained and designated to handle issues of bullying, both with students and adults, would help schools wrap their arms around this issue.

**“I have 1,000 kids. That’s a lot. If one percent of them is having a problem every day, you’re barely keeping up.” –Kathy, Assistant CPS Principal**

#### **4. More training on how to identify, respond to, and reduce bullying is needed for students, parents, and staff alike**

Students who experienced bullying, as well as their parents, would like more training on effective strategies to deal with and address bullying on their own.

**“I really really really have a lot of anger built up, I’m not tryin’ to unleash it, but you just get to that point.” –J, Junior**

Students need more education on both what bullying is and how it can impact others.

**“One aspect that I think could be really helpful, especially with the more subtle emotional bullying, is I think if we tried to teach the kid what bullying is...when you start talking about someone negatively in a group setting, that’s when it turns from just a personal sentiment into bullying. I would like for the kids to understand that themselves.” –Nina P**

Parents need more education on what bullying is, the role they can play in preventing and responding to it, and how they can work with the school to address bullying.

**“Being a single mother of a son, that’s difficult right, you can’t really teach him how to be a man and how to respond - and so a part of me is like ‘don’t let anybody hit you you go back in there and you hit them back’ and as a result he’s having issues.” –Tamara, CPS parent**

Staff need more training on effective and empathetic response strategies, building trusting relationships with parents, and restorative practices for students who exhibit bullying behavior.

**“We don’t get a ton of training on this. It’s really kind of what you bring to the table...It’s really something that we ourselves need some best practice training on.” –Heather, High School teacher**



**...I’m not tryin’ to unleash it,  
but you just get to that point.**

**–J, Junior**

## 5. Shift away from punitive actions and towards restorative practices in response to students who exhibit bullying behavior

Students feel like the initial punishment sometimes can be an effective deterrent, but that repeated punishments are not helpful in preventing bullying.

**“Most people in our school...they don’t care if they get suspended. They’ve been suspended and expelled so many times, at this point it doesn’t matter.”** –J, 8th grader

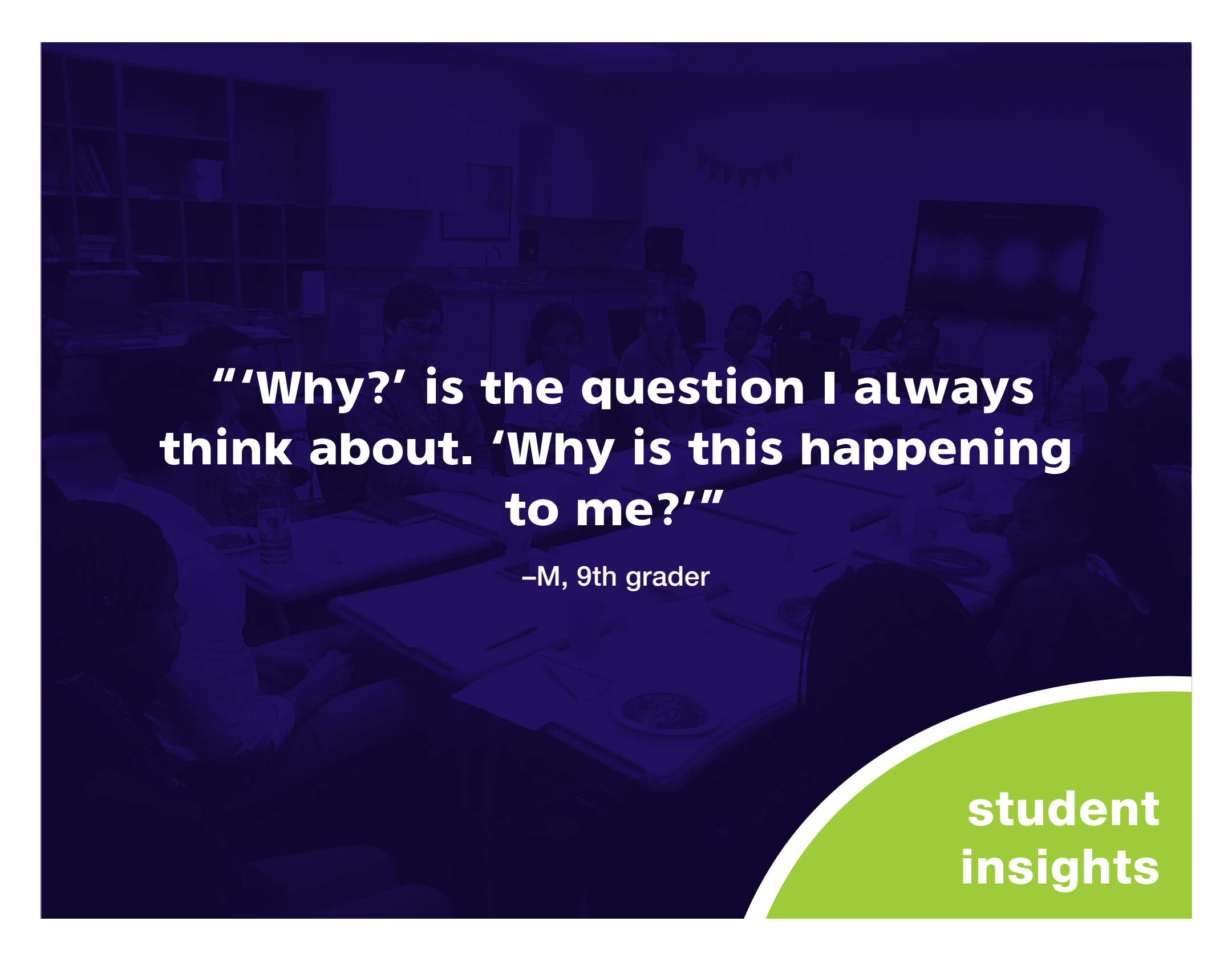
Staff believe that the current tools are not improving the situation, they just feed into negative cycles of punishment and retribution that create bigger behavioral and academic problems down the road.



**“One student said he feels like we’re doing nothing but preparing him to go to jail when he’s an adult.”**

–Britni, Elementary School Teacher





**“‘Why?’ is the question I always think about. ‘Why is this happening to me?’”**

–M, 9th grader

**student  
insights**

We spoke with students in three groups: boys who have experienced bullying, girls who have experienced bullying, and a variety of student leaders and bystanders. The conversations with students who were victims of bullying focused on their experiences reporting and dealing with the issue, rather than their experiences themselves. For some students, however, it was important to share their story.

For most students, the combination of helplessness and loneliness that come with being bullied are the two most important factors to address. Trusted adults who empathize and demonstrate that they are taking the issue seriously, strategies to empower students to know how to address bullying, and peer support systems were the three ideas that resonated across these conversations.

### What bullying looks like for kids

**“They used to hit me and pull my hair, disrespect me, call me all types of names, and it led me to want to commit suicide. My friends tried to talk me out of it, I went into depression. It was a lot.”** –J, Junior

**“I got spit on at school, and I did not retaliate because my mom told me at the time to not retaliate. So I kept letting stuff go on in my life and guess what, one of my friends got into a fight with my bully and beat him up”** –M, Sophomore

**“People bullied me because I was different and I was unique, and I didn’t have the stuff that other kids had. I still struggle with insecurities because of what happened in elementary school...”** –M, Sophomore

**“There’s this boy at school...he keeps on saying bad stuff about me, just because I come from a different country. I speak different language.”** –S, middle school student

**“I was cyberbullied...I didn’t tell anybody at first because I was scared to make it like a, real thing I guess. But eventually it got to the point where I couldn’t handle it anymore.”** –L, 8th grade student

**“People were posting things online about me...There’s this group chat of like twenty kids in my grade and they made this video of me that was really nasty and mean. They took the time out of their life to make that video and spread it around.”** –M, 9th grader

**“I had a mental breakdown in school, so that was another label. Label. Labels labels labels. They just get under your skin and they get hard to ignore. We tried to switch classrooms and the problems decreased but they never went away.”** –E, 6th grader

**“Since the first day of school to almost the last day I was being called names over and over. It first started with a little joke, it was funny in class, ok, then they just carried it on.”** –K, 6th grader



**28% of students experience bullying between ages 12-18**

[www.stopbullying.gov/at-risk/index.html](http://www.stopbullying.gov/at-risk/index.html)

Male and female students spoke about similar issues, but male students were much more focused on incidents of physical violence. While very few of the girls mentioned resource officers, the boys were interested in having a larger, more effective security presence at school, in addition to other measures.

**“I remember this one time he just started barreling toward me, and he tackled me...I just remember that moment...I hated it, because I was just so afraid in that moment.”** –J, 7th grader

**“At my school it goes on forever. Kids are always yelling, standing up, saying no to the teachers. There are so many things happening at once. It’s really crazy at my school.”** –M, 7th grader

### **Teachers, principals, and security staff are too quick to dismiss the situation, and often are not willing to confront and address it**

This was the number one piece of feedback we heard from nearly every student we spoke with. They feel like teachers are either not willing or not equipped to handle the situation when they come to them, and that principals are sometimes not able to give it enough attention or effectively listen to the students. Even when students knew that the school had taken action, like suspending another student, the lack of effective communication from the teacher or principal made them feel like nothing had been done to help them.

**“The teachers were scared to handle the situation...They would be scared of the bully because they act up, they're very disrespectful. They acted like they just didn't want to handle it.”** –A, 4th grade student

**“I told my teachers about it, and it wasn't the first time I got jumped...and they kept doing it and I kept complaining to the teachers. They didn't really help except get someone suspended for a day or two.”** –M, 6th grade student

**“I told my favorite teacher. And then he didn't really do anything. And then I went to the principal, and she didn't really do anything either. They never sat down with me to find out what I was going through and so we never worked it out. We still haven't worked it out.”** –L, 8th grade student

**“The teachers talk to the assistant principals who talk to the principal and then nothing happens.”** –J, Junior

**“They (teachers) say they'll do something about it, but they don't do anything. The principal will do something about it, he'll put them in in-school suspension, but when they come back to class they do the same thing.”** –C, 8th grader



**They never sat down with me to find out what I was going through...**

–N, Senior

“I went to go tell one of my favorite teachers and she said to tell the principal and the principal did nothing about it. The only thing he said was ‘just go back down there and try to ignore it.’ I tried to ignore it, ignore it ignore it, and he just kept saying the same thing over and over. And he kept saying ‘just go back and try to ignore it.’ He didn’t try to talk to them, he didn’t try to expel them, he didn’t tell the teacher to keep an eye on me or anything. He just told me to go back to the classroom.”  
–K, 6th grader

“All they did was told them to leave me alone. They said when it gets physical then they could do something about it. I wish they could do something about it when it’s happening, not let it continue.” –M, 7th grader

When you come to them they don’t really talk to you as a person, to sit down and have a conversation with you about the situation. They don’t take the time to learn what’s going on. They don’t take the time to understand.” –J, Junior

“I was super frustrated because no one did anything...Every time I went to people they were like ‘there’s nothing I can do’ and then say a bunch of stuff and just throw it all away. They didn’t talk to him or anything, just put him in ISS.” –J, 8th grader

I think the security guards should say more about it, because I feel like they see them do it and just don’t say anything.”  
–T, 7th grader

Sometimes people will get hit and the security guards see it, the teachers see it, and don’t do anything” –L, 8th grader

### Current methods for teaching students about bullying are not taken seriously

“I feel like there are a lot of half-baked attempts to stop something that needs more attention. We’ll have a class meeting, an introduction to the school year type of assembly, and they’ll slap ten minutes on of ‘oh don’t bully people’ at the end. And it’s really ineffective and the whole time you can hear people in the back laughing, doing it right there as a joke” –K, Freshman

“A lot of these anti-bullying attempts made by the Administration were not taken seriously...they were ignored and laughed at by the students.” –N, Senior



## Potential solutions

The students we spoke to were eager to get more immediate, nuanced attention from adults, to have strategies to help themselves, and to have deeper systems of support from and with other students.

### Create peer support groups e.g. Women's empowerment groups

"If I would have had the Women Empowerment Club at my old school, I don't think that some of the problems that happened would have happened. Through that, I've been able to talk about some of that stuff and make people who have gone through the same thing feel more open to talk about it."  
-L, 8th grader

"I think that this - meeting with other girls from around the district and talking - is really nice." -M, 9th grader

"We don't have many groups at school and I think having people stick together and have friends is a great way for people to feel less alone and more welcome and less angry all the time, less aggressive." -J, 6th grader

"We have a program in our school called Girls with Girls. I think it would be good for other students to have in their school because it's a really good program, you can talk to other girls about situations going on" -J, Junior

"I think there should be something less formal...If it was just like a place where like, students, people who were bullied, bullies, and teachers sitting down in a place that was less formal than a meeting, then it would be less intimidating and a lot more room for opening up. If I was sitting down playing Call of Duty or something, I would be much more open to talking about it." -J, 8th grader

"I think a group where it's just a group of people that have gone through bullying or are getting bullied and they could just talk to each other. Because it's easier to know that someone, that you could share a bell with, just has your back." -J, 6th grader

"I love the safety patrol idea...I like how it's student-run and how there are people specifically appointed to do this."  
-K, Freshman

### Develop mentorship programs between older and younger students

"It is cool if a younger student could talk to an older student, because it's more when like a student confronts a student about bullying people, that's more effective. If another student could go to you and say 'it's okay' it's a lot better than a teacher saying it." -J, 8th grader

"At my old school there were bigs and littles...I know for me that would make me really happy. Those were the days I would look forward to. I think having someone who has been through the same things that you're currently going through and can help you through that, that would be really good for a lot of people." -M, 9th grader

"We have a program called the Sisters of SCPA...We talk to each other, we always say hi. All the sisters call each other sisters...Maybe there could be more of that at other schools."  
- A, 5th grader

"Peers are really what students lean on. I'm not gonna go pour my heart and soul out to a teacher, just because of a trust issue and I feel like a lot of students feel the same way. You're more comfortable speaking to older students. I was bullied a lot when I was younger...and I think if I had an older student there it would have helped me." - N, Senior

“The social ladder is important...I feel like when an older student corrects someone who’s younger than them I feel like we actually take it seriously.” –K, Freshman

### Immediately acknowledge and address issues of bullying

Students stressed how important the first interaction with an adult was for them, and that they wish the situations had been nipped in the bud. This was especially true because bullying that started at school often developed into cyber-bullying or physical violence outside of school.

“I just wish the teachers can understand more than just say ‘I can’t do anything about it.’ But really get down to the problem and fix it.” –M, 7th grader

“I wish the school would be more aggressive, like if I went to the school and I said ‘look what this person is doing to me’ I wish they wouldn’t need all the evidence, the whole story. Just call them in and tell them to stop.” –M, 9th grader

“A lot of the stuff that happens over the phone is from what happens at school and so like, if nothing happened at school not as much stuff would happen on social media.” –M, 9th grader



**But really get down to the problem and fix it.**

–M, 7th grader

### Use consequences as a way to demonstrate taking an issue seriously, not as a pro forma, rote response

“Actual consequences would help so he could learn that the things he said, like he can’t say whatever he wants to someone without hurting someone or him getting hurt afterwards.” –C, 10th grader

“I feel like the reasons that kids repeatedly bully is because the teachers aren’t doing anything so they feel like ‘I’m gonna do it again because I’m not gonna get in trouble.’ –K, 6th grader

“The one time it worked for me this boy had a (school) hearing, and they told him ‘if you go back to school you’re not allowed to talk to her, do anything, or else you’re gone.’ And that worked.’ –M, 9th grader

“They (the bullies) had to come to the class and say ‘I’m sorry’ in front of everybody, three times, and they stop. Because the principal said, ‘if they do it again they’re gonna get expelled. That helped.’ –A, 9th grader



**Just call them in and tell them to stop**

–M, 9th grader



### Treat the bullies better

The majority of the students, including those who had been bullied, felt that it was important that CPS develop better, more positive strategies for dealing with the students who exhibited bullying behavior.

**“People like that, they don’t need to be suspended; they need help. They don’t need to be put in an even worse spot.”**  
–J, 8th grader

**“We have this program at my school. All the ‘bad’ kids, they get this thing they fill out. If they do good in the day, they get free time at the end. That really changed a lot of students.”**  
–M, 6th grader




**...they don’t need to be suspended; they need help.**

–J, 8th grader

**Students who bully are likely to have social power, have friends who are bullies, be aggressive, and have low self-esteem**

[www.stopbullying.gov/at-risk/index.html](http://www.stopbullying.gov/at-risk/index.html)



**“I hope that when the district thinks about making investments in this issue, whether it’s creating a new program or having more social workers, that they realize it’s not a separate issue from academic performance...kids cannot perform academically when they’re being bullied. Helping this problem will also help how the kids can do academically.”**

–Nina, parent

**parent  
insights**

Parents were focused on feeling like they had channels of communication to the school where their issues could be heard, plans developed in partnership, and follow-up actions taken. They were also clear that they would like better training for themselves and their children in how to handle bullying situations.

### **The current environment is not working well for parents of children who are being bullied**

**“The ‘no bullying policy’ obviously is not working for any school and no child. Hanging up banners is not fixing what’s going on in the child’s mind...”** –Valerie

**“There is too much bullying going on when you’re a refugee and not an American. Nobody wants to deal with you, nobody wants to be your friend, nobody wants to talk to you.”**  
–Sanaa, parent and ESL teacher

### **The complicated reporting structure and opaque ladder of responsibility makes dealing with these issues effectively take too much of parents’ time, in turn favoring parents who can make the time**

**“Our system is extremely complicated...you can get lost very quickly. Things can go to the district and it’s like a black hole if you don’t know somebody.”**

–Mike Moroski, CPS Board Member

**“I used to drive a bus...so I was so busy I didn’t have the time to sit with the school when they asked.”** –Tamika

**“It takes a huge amount of parental time. There were times when I would spend all day...I would be having phone calls, drafting emails to the school, talking to the principal, going into the school, having interactions and meetings. One time where I must have spent two solid weeks working on this. I said to my husband ‘if I was still working I could not have handled this.’”** –Nina

### **More acknowledgment and attention from the school when they first hear about the issue**

Echoing the students, the main issue parents had with CPS was the system for responding to issues of bullying when parents try to bring them to the school’s attention. Parents felt like there was no clear line of communication, and that their issues were often ignored or minimized by staff. For the parents who were pleased with how their situation was handled, it was often because of how quickly and effectively the school communicated with them.

**“I went to the counselor and principal, and three, four, five days went by before I heard something.”** –Erin

**“We’ve had experiences...where the teacher minimizes what the child is experiencing”** –Bob

**“For me, it seemed like I had a great response and it died down quickly. They had a culture of being very intentional, so the teachers addressed it quickly.”** –Daphney

**“I e-mailed his teacher and he did email back really quickly...but he didn’t give me any steps”** –Tamara

**“I don’t think I’ve ever had a teacher not listen. I think it’s how they come back and talk to you, that’s the problem I’ve had. They get defensive.”** –Valerie

## Ideas for improvement

### Start with empathy and recognition of the seriousness of their child's issue and safety

"It makes such a difference if they start off with the good things and then move to what the children are doing wrong. As a parent you immediately shut down...when all you hear is all the negatives." *-Valerie*

"What would have been better would have been 'I hear you, I'm with you'...just - recognition." *-Erin*

"In some of the meetings I come into for my son, I break down crying and they all just sit there and stare at me. No one reacts, the principal was sitting there at his computer typing away." *-Valerie*

### Assign specific adults to be parents' contacts for these issues at the school

Parents recognized how overwhelmed many of the teachers and principals are, and felt like it could be helpful if there was one adult assigned to be their point of contact on all behavioral and emotional situations with their child, to avoid feeling like they are being passed off.

"As a parent I feel pretty powerless at this point because I don't have a relationship with one staff member in this school." *-Tamara*

"When the principal is not here you get told 'well we can't do anything if you don't talk to the principal' but the principals are gone so much that when things happen and they're not there for you to talk to them...it just gets pushed under a rug..." *-Valerie*

### Teach and empower students how to handle these issues to avoid larger flare-ups

"He was a star student, but it kept happening over and over again...so my son finally hits back and then they put him in the behavior school." *-Tamika*

"A part of me is like 'don't let anybody hit you you go back in there and you hit them back' and as a result he's having issues. We could maybe try to...teach them how to protect themselves in a way that's not violent." *-Tamara*

"I think it's really important to help kids learn the coping skills for how to deal with bullying, whether it's getting a relationship with a counselor or teacher or someone they can talk it through with." *-Nina P*



**If I was still working I could not have handled this.**

*-Nina*



**...it kept happening over and over again... so my son finally hits back and then they put him in the behavior school.**

*-Tamika*

**Make sure students know the severity of the emotional impact of bullying, and empower them to step in to help other kids**

“One aspect that I think could be really helpful, especially with the more subtle emotional bullying, is I think if we tried to teach the kid what bullying is...when you start talking about someone negatively in a group setting, that’s when it turns from just a personal sentiment into bullying. I would like for the kids to understand that themselves.” *–Nina P*

“We need these children to understand what they are doing to each other...I don’t think children realize how far they’re taking it and how much they’re actually damaging each other when they do it.” *–Valerie*

“If they...try to explain to the students in the gen. ed. that these kids, even their parents, were born in refugee camps. They don’t know how to take care of themselves, they don’t know how to eat. We have to help them.”*–Sanaa*



**I think it would be wonderful if kids were incentivized to be stepping in when they see bullying going on...**

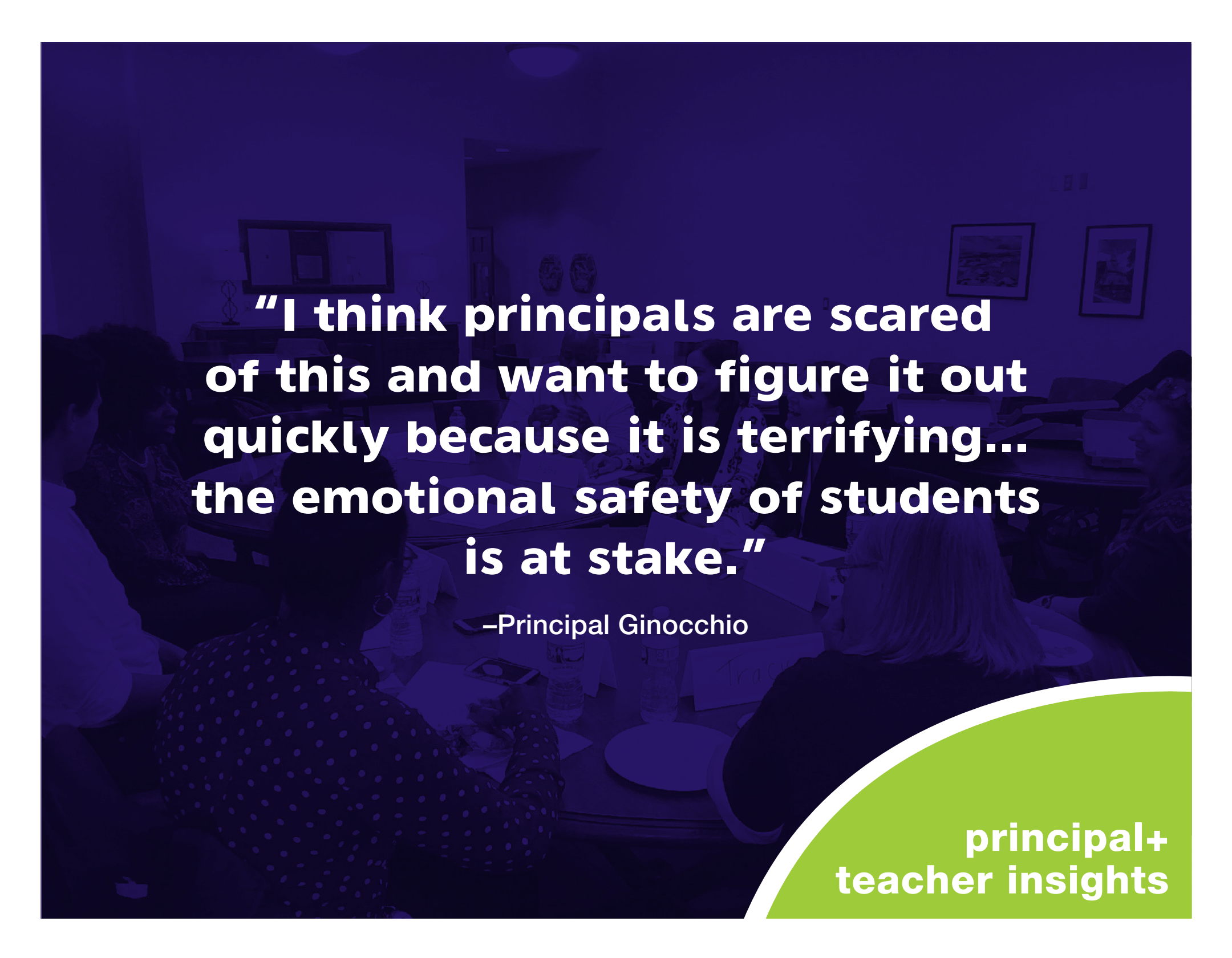
*–Bob*



**We need these children to understand what they are doing to each other...**

*–Valerie*





**"I think principals are scared  
of this and want to figure it out  
quickly because it is terrifying...  
the emotional safety of students  
is at stake."**

–Principal Ginocchio

**principal+  
teacher insights**

Staff were almost unanimous in thinking that there is room for improvement in how CPS trains, equips, and resources them to deal with bullying. They feel overwhelmed with the scope of the problem, under-resourced to address it, and that the current systems for punishment and reporting are not as effective as they could be. The most promising ideas centered around more time and attention dedicated to addressing bullying, as well less punitive practices in dealing with students who exhibit bullying behavior.

### Relationships between the school and parents are key to addressing bullying

"When you call a parent and say, 'Hey this is what I need from you, what do you need from me?' they understand that we're both involved in this and it's not just a one way street. It's more so 'what can we do to make sure that everybody has got an opportunity to be successful?' as opposed to feeling threatened that something's gonna happen."  
–Principal Allison

"I think it behooves the building, the administration, to educate parents the best that we can. Being community learning centers, I mean, we're obligated to do that, it's not just kids that we teach... but we have to do our due diligence with the parent as well. We don't do that well enough right now." –Tracy, Elementary School Resource Coordinator

"Many times getting the parent to see that there's a different want to handle things as opposed to 'if somebody disrespects you, you go beat 'em up...' So, getting the parents to understand that, if you're always gonna go for an eye for an eye, everyone's gonna be blind...Getting them to understand that is key." –Principal Allison

### Traditional discipline-based punishments are not very effective

"They go to ISS, which personally I think is a waste of space and a waste of everybody's time... But it might be the best that we have as an alternative to interruptions and things in a classroom." –Tracy, Elementary School Resource Coordinator

"I wonder how we can get more out of ISS because I feel like a lot of kids go there and they're kinda, killing time...we see a lot of repeat offenders and, all this reflection and teaching and everything, some of that could happen there." –  
Britni, Elementary School Teacher

"We're not servicing them other than punishing them in this prison-like setting." –Tracy, Elementary School Teacher

"One student said he feels like we're doing nothing but preparing him to go to jail when he's an adult." –Britni, Elementary School Teacher

"They said they'd have counselors there, psychologists there, but as I talked to my children who actually went... they didn't do anything there that it said it would." –  
Heather, High School Teacher



**If you're always gonna go  
for an eye for an eye,  
everyone's gonna be blind...**

–Principal Allison

### **Making sure that staff are clear with students about the fact that what they are doing constitutes bullying, even if it is not physical, and that there will be consequences**

“When you can talk with kids about why it’s not ok and how it affects others, we kinda put them on notice that if it would happen again it would be your second offense. We don’t give consequences the first time...If it happens again you’re on your second offense and they know the consequences. Nine times out of ten that will shut it down.” *–Principal Wallace*

“The social-emotional part of advisory falls by the wayside once you get to the older grades. They still need to be reminded every day that ‘no you can’t hit so-and-so on the back of the head for no reason.’ A lot of the time I do feel like I’m still teaching elementary school.” *–Heather, High School Teacher*

### **Empowering teachers to address bullying head on, and giving them the resources to do it, is critical**

“The teachers at our school are doing a great job of addressing it and I think it’s because I told them ‘stop, pause,’ I don’t care if you don’t get through the module. Our teachers take 10 seconds when they see a budding bullying conversation to knock it out, even things as small as dirty glance. These kids got to live, and they have to feel ok and feel safe.” *–Principal Wallace*

“Administrative support is what you need. I’m sure the teachers really appreciate it, and are comforted by the fact that ‘oh my God, I didn’t get through my lesson today’...is ok.” *–Heather, High School Teacher*

“We don’t have that kind of staff or personnel to do it...The reality is sometimes you have five or six stacked up that all need to be seen that day, plus the teacher evaluations have to get done. To provide some of the service...It is gonna take more resources. It could be another administrator, it could be a counselor, it could be a dedicated person. We’ve had a lot of success this year with a mental health specialist who is there for anxiety issues...she is busy all the time...Somebody else doing this would be huge.” *–Kathy, High School Assistant Principal*

### **Mental health partnerships, when they work, can be very effective**

“We have mental health partners on site every day of the week, and a lot of times those types of disagreements or potential bullying episodes or occurrences can be defused and deflated because they happen to be either a client, you know, in therapeutic settings, or they’re part of this prevention and intervention services that mental health partners offer.” *–Tracy, Elementary School Resource Coordinator*





### Being intentional about creating a culture where bullying is actively and loudly shunned is important for prevention

Many staff felt like the only way to shift the culture at their school was for the entire staff, beginning with the principal, to be very proactive and vocal about creating a safe environment. Zero tolerance policies of bullying have to be paired with positive reinforcement, on a regular basis, from teachers and administrators. Also, students need to feel comfortable speaking up about incidents of bullying.

**“We have a morning assembly every day where we sing about respecting one another and not bullying. Students know what our school is about, once they come in they see that we’re about peace, love and hope. We also empower students to feel safe reporting incidents of bullying - to *“Tell before it swells”* –Principal Wallace**

**“It has to be a culture within the building, a very organic and grassroots one, that everyone, not just teachers – the lunch lady and the custodians, the resource coordinator and the mental health people – know the kids that are in the building and have this relationship in a more intimate way. You can’t develop a relationship with anyone – a third grader, a tenth grader, parents – if you’re in an auditorium, talking to the masses. That’s just a waste of time.” –Tracy, Elementary School Resource Coordinator**

**“We all have to develop these positive school culture plans... bullying response plans...that every space in the school is monitored, we try to make sure every space in the school is safe. But I don’t think we necessarily empower students with ‘if this, then this.’” –Principal Ginocchio**

### Encourage more peer, group, and teacher-led conflict mediation

**“Our students face so much trauma outside of school. We could more mediation techniques to help students respond to bullying in nonviolent ways.” –Barbara, Elementary School Resource Coordinator**

**“One of the biggest things we’ve learned is through our ‘Family meetings’ as we call them. In the family meetings you have an opportunity to express exactly what’s going on, some things that you’re feeling, some things that you may not be aware of.” –Principal Wallace**

**“Peer-to-peer would be awesome if it was in a safe environment, and the kids who showed up just needed to chat. Like give them time to just talk, and feel better. In a group they trust, or even just to you. Like a teacher could set up a half-hour. I do office hours so kids can show up to me just to talk, get it out of their system.” –Heather, High School Teacher**

**“We have a ‘Safety Patrol’ of responsible students who help identify, record, and disrupt bullying. It works great.” –Principal Wallace**



### Train CPS teachers, staff, and other adults on de-escalation techniques and how to handle cultural, racial, and socio-economic differences

“We had an issue with the bus driver, she kept submitting reports about the students...When we talked with the students, we found out that the bus driver didn’t want them to talk in their own language.” –Sanaa, *ESL Teacher*

“Get all the staff and students and bring somebody to talk to all the students and teach them ‘these kids are not here because they wanna be here, they’re here because of what’s going on in their country. They’ve seen a lot, wars and killings. They’ve been through a lot’. –Tracy, *Elementary School teacher*

“I think a lot of us did not take bullying as seriously until we had the death...I would think some of the mandated district days we need to have something on social-emotional health.” –Britni, *Elementary School Teacher*

“I feel that with the right supports this will work. If every school gets more trained IA’s and every school gets a peer mediation room to effectively make that transition when students come back to reenter the classroom.” –Barbara, *Elementary School Resource Coordinator*

“Or maybe make it a district mandate that there be a blue dot in every building, or every floor, indicating which adults are trained to talk about bullying.”

–Kathy, *High School Assistant Principal*

### Replace punitive strategies with a focus on restorative and rehabilitative processes for students who exhibit bullying behavior

“I think there’s a huge opportunity for work in restorative practices as a district-wide approach, that all of our teachers are trained in...It gets the prevention piece and the response piece for both parties.” –Nina, *K-12 Principal*

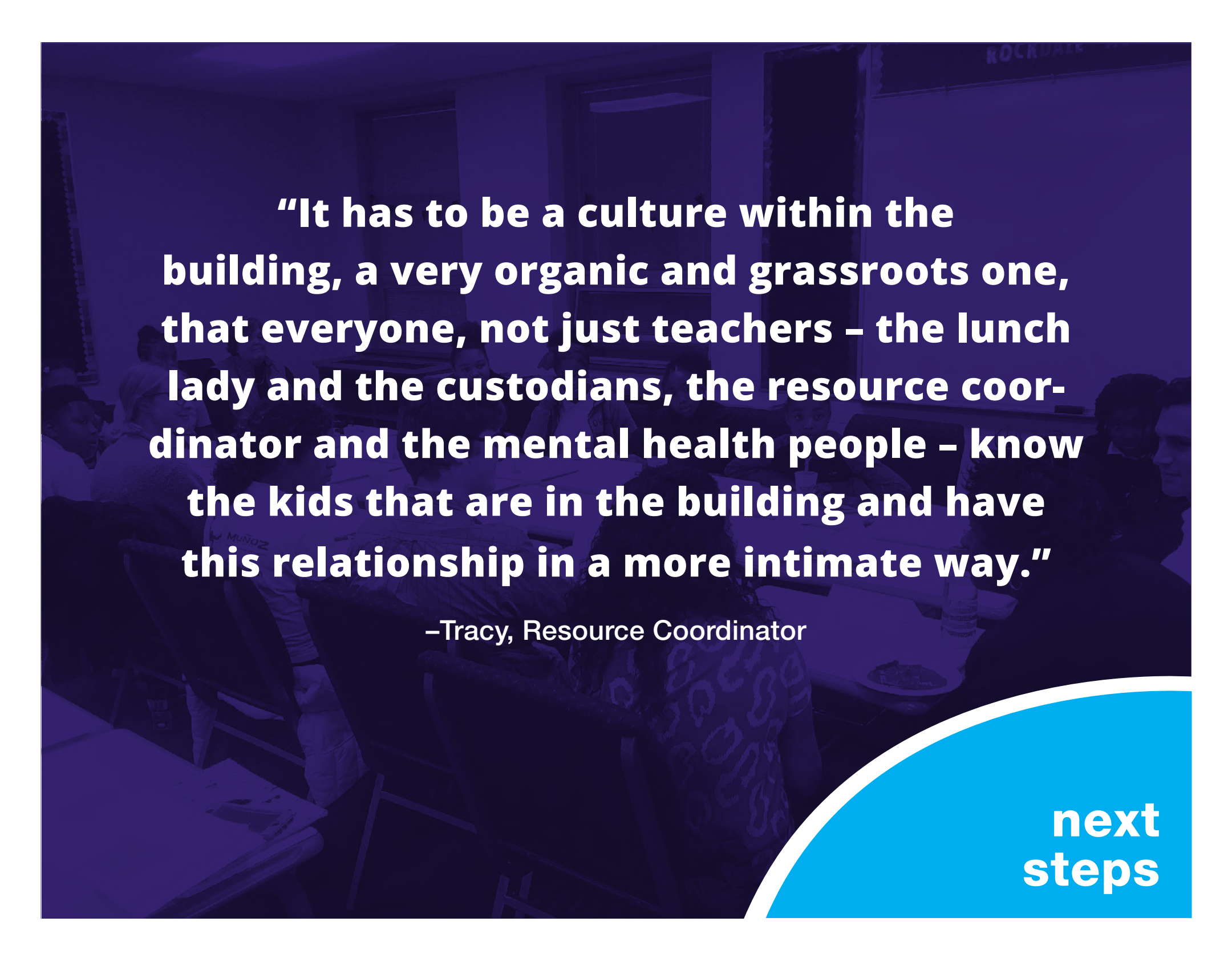
“They go to outside services [during their time suspended] and when they come they aren’t changed. I’ve never been a part of those services but the students say they basically sit around. You want it to be a rehabilitative service, they aren’t preparing them to back and be better than when they left.” –Barbara, *Elementary School Resource Coordinator*

“With some eighth grade boys...we did...restorative practices, had them sit together to discuss you know, how did the behavior make them feel, how did it occur, any misconceptions, and I think it went very well.” –Britni, *Elementary School Teacher*



**I think there’s a huge opportunity for work in restorative practices as a district-wide approach, that all of our teachers are trained in...**

—Principal Ginocchio



**“It has to be a culture within the building, a very organic and grassroots one, that everyone, not just teachers – the lunch lady and the custodians, the resource coordinator and the mental health people – know the kids that are in the building and have this relationship in a more intimate way.”**

–Tracy, Resource Coordinator

**next  
steps**

1

### **Create a “Bullying Advisory Board” of students to sustain engagement**

This engagement process brought dozens of everyday experts to the table to have powerful, thoughtful discussions with CPS leadership. Those conversations were a spark, and therefore present a tremendous opportunity for CPS to build real, lasting relationships with the students (and parents) who participated. As CPS looks to pilot or implement some of the ideas discussed, it will be critical that they continue to engage the everyday experts whose insights led to those ideas. Continued engagement will help CPS implement these ideas more effectively, because the students will be able to identify obstacles and solutions that might be missed by policymakers who aren't in schools every day. It will also create a group of natural leaders and ambassadors for any new programs or policies.

2

### **Develop a strategy to train all CPS staff on empathetic listening, especially as it relates to issues of bullying and trauma**

The most consistent insight from this process was that students and parents who deal with bullying do not feel heard, understood, or properly acknowledged. Developing trainings, systems, and expectations for how CPS staff engage with individuals who come to them with bullying issues is therefore critical. Other paths to addressing this issue include assigning specific staff members within each school the role of bullying liaison, providing them deeper training, and making sure that students and parents know who they are.

3

### **Pilot and expand mentorship, peer-mediation, and support group programs**

Students are eager to engage with one another to seek support, a sense of community, and guidance on how to deal with issues of bullying. There are a number of various mentorship programs that exist at individual schools that could be expanded, and new groups and clubs should be piloted to bring students experiencing these issues across various schools together for discussions and strategy sessions.

4

### **Increase use of restorative practices, and move away from traditional punitive strategies**

Move decisively in the direction of restorative practices for students who are punished for exhibiting bullying behavior, with a focus on instilling leadership, responsibility, and an understanding of the impact of their behavior on others. Many students, parents, and staff expressed their belief that the current system of punishing students who bully other students with ISS or other punitive measures is ineffective, and should be replaced. Most participants were eager for CPS to incorporate more restorative practices, similar to other school districts that are at the forefront of addressing these issues across the country.



**appendix**

## Our Process

### Phase One: Learning the Context

- Academic research through studies and other analyses
- Best practices and policy research from school districts across the country

### Phase Two: Framing the Conversations

- 15 “deep-dive” interviews with principals, teachers, resource coordinators, parents, and students

### Phase Three: Five Conversations between CPS leadership and everyday experts

- Parents of students who have been bullied with CPS Board Member Mike Moroski
- Female students who have been bullied with Superintendent Laura Mitchell
- Male students who have been bullied with CPS Board Member Mike Moroski
- Student leaders with CPS Board Member Eve Bolton
- Teachers and principals with CPS Chief Engagement and Communication Office Lauren Worley

## Feedback Statistics

**73%**  
of students said it was their first time ever engaging in discussions like these

**100%**  
want to keep these conversations going

**93%**  
felt it was a valuable use of their time

**4.7/5**  
average rating of conversation

### Key Statistics on Bullying

Source: [www.stopbullying.gov/at-risk/index.html](http://www.stopbullying.gov/at-risk/index.html)

- 28% of students experience bullying between ages 12-18
- Bullying happens more in 6th grade than any other grade
- About 6% of students have experienced cyberbullying and 87% report witnessing cyberbullying
- Students who are most at risk for bullying are obese, LGBTQ, viewed as weak or unpopular, socially isolated, or known for being annoying
- Students who bully are likely to have social power, have friends who are bullies, be aggressive, and have low self-esteem
- Girls are more likely to engage in/be victims of cyberbullying but boys are more likely to experience physical violence
- Teachers and students do not perceive the threat of bullying at equal levels. 49% of students reported experiencing bullying but a majority of teachers (71.4%) believed that less than 15% of students were bullied
  - Only 30.8% of bullying incidents were reported to a teacher
  - A majority of staff reported that they would intervene if they saw bullying occurring but students believed that staff interfering rarely made the bullying better
- The highest rates of bullying were reported in middle school

### Current Ohio Law and Policy

Ohio's Anti-Bullying Policies are in line with a majority of federal regulations and contain many of the best-practice standards used nationwide. Ohio does not, however, provide protections for enumerated groups that are more likely to be at risk for bullying, nor does it outline ways bullying can be punished by administration or by law. Additionally, there is no formal mechanism to review bullying prevention procedures in Ohio schools or enforce the implementation of Ohio's model policies.

### Cincinnati Public Schools Policy

#### 5507.01 Bullying and Other Forms of Aggressive Behavior

- Defines bullying as any behavior (online or in person) that creates an unsafe or intimidating educational environment for a student.
- Provides specific language that demonstrates how minority groups are at risk for bullying

**Positive School Culture Plan** Following major trends, CPS doesn't suspend or expel students who misbehave, rather they use the Positive School Culture Plan to help students learn from their mistakes and become better students. CPS includes a button on their website to report bullying online. This makes anonymous reporting easier.

## Key Policy Best Practices

Schools are steering away from zero-tolerance policies that punish students for bullying but don't teach them to be more empathetic. New policies focus on trust, holistic interventions and trainings, and restorative practices. Another key element of any policy is to provide a legal definition of the scope of bullying.

### Establish stronger connections and trust between teachers and students

- Students need to feel respected and safe in order to feel comfortable sharing their issues with bullying. This can be because they feel as if they are “tattling” or because they are embarrassed by their inability to deal with the aggression alone. The biggest issue with this system is that participants have reported only about 50% of students take the system seriously.

### Provide a clear definition of bullying behavior

- Students who are bullied and parents of bullied children often have a challenging time distinguishing normal teasing and behavior that is causing an intimidating educational environment. This inhibits them from reporting bullying and working towards a solution
- Students who are bullies can claim that their actions, no matter how harmful, were done in jest and avoid consequences
- Because harmful behaviors exist outside of the more obvious physical pushing and shoving, a clear definition of bullying helps teach bystanders what subtler forms of bullying look like. When students can identify what bullying is, they can step in to protect other students, report it to staff members, and reevaluate their own behavior

## Examples

### Empower and train victims and bystanders of bullying: New Jersey

New Jersey has some of the toughest anti-bullying laws in the US. The state saw increases in student well-being when students were empowered to stand up to their harassers, instead of feeling forced to live through the bullying. Additionally, teachers, administrators, and parents have the ability to pursue consequences for bullies and protect students. New Jersey law includes provisions stating that:

- Any bullying/harassment that is witnessed by or reported to a faculty member must be reported to the principal or designated administrator within one day of the incident
- The administrator must then inform the parents/guardians of all involved parties and discuss with them counseling or intervention strategies
- Appropriate actions are must be taken within 2 schools days, and a written report is provided to the superintendent
- Schools are to be given a grade each year based on their performance in handling bullying that is posted on their website to hold them accountable

It is also important to train student bystanders on how to identify bullying and strategies to intervene.



### Implement restorative practices: San Francisco

- More and more evidence shows that a zero-tolerance anti-bullying policy is ineffective. Procedures for handling bullying need to contain an element of social-emotional learning to prevent students from being repeat bullies. Students also often don't feel comfortable coming forward as bullying victims, as they may not wish to inflict the harsh consequences of zero-tolerance policies on their peers.. Only 43% of students actually report bullying to their teachers.
- To address these concerns, San Francisco public schools use restorative practices to help students learn from their harmful behaviors and empower bullying victims to come forward. This has led to a decrease in suspension and expulsion rates in San Francisco. Restorative practices include
  - Moderating a conversation between the bullied students and the bullies, helping students learn from each other and put an end to conflicts
  - Involving parents and guardians in discussions
  - Building better relationships between students and faculty

### Positive Policies in School Districts: Minnesota

#### Anoka-Hennepin Public Schools, Minnesota

After string of suicides in the public schools, several students filed a lawsuit saying that the schools' LGBTQ policies facilitated bullying. The district's policies limited how much teachers were

able to intervene in anti-gay bullying because they had to remain neutral on their acceptance of homosexuality. Teachers could not condemn anti-gay taunts or teach students to accept their peers regardless of sexual orientation without breaking district policy. Policy changes were designed to protect marginalized students from harassment and provide teachers with the training to protect these students. Changes included:

- Rewriting district policies with language that specifically protected marginalized groups including racial and ethnic minorities in addition to LGBTQ students
- Providing teachers with training on how to deal with harassment of their students
- Increased mental health resources for students facing bullying
- Attempts to foster a school and community culture that fosters respect Restorative practices to teach students to treat students of all sexual orientations with respect and show the dangers of bullying their LGBTQ classmates

In the time after the policy changes, LGBTQ students reported they weren't harassed by their peers and felt confident telling staff what was going on. Additionally, anti-gay rhetoric decreased.