

# Bullying Prevention Initiative Year III Final Evaluation Report

November 15, 2013

METROWEST  
HEALTH  
FOUNDATION



**MetroWest Health Foundation  
Bullying Prevention Initiative  
Year III Final Evaluation Report**

**Table of Contents**

---

Year III Highlights of Positive Student Reports on the MetroWest Adolescent Health Survey ....	1
Other Highlights.....	1
Introduction.....	2
The Grantees .....	2
Evaluation Summary.....	3
Grantee Activities and Accomplishments.....	3
Highlights of Achievements by School System.....	4
Evaluation Findings .....	6
Year 1 Goal - Policy Change.....	6
Year 2 Goal – Positive Change in Bullying Awareness.....	6
Year 3 Goal – Reduction in Bullying Behavior .....	7
Interviews of Students and Staff.....	10
Student Focus Groups .....	10
Staff Focus Groups and Interviews .....	14
Conclusion .....	16

# MetroWest Health Foundation Bullying Prevention Initiative Year III Evaluation Report

## Year III Highlights of Positive Student Reports on the MetroWest Adolescent Health Survey

- In 2012 (posttest), students at grantee schools reported being bullied at school significantly less often than students at non-grantee schools, while in 2010 (pretest) their reports were similar.
- Students at grantee schools reported bullying others significantly less often in 2012 than in 2010; students at non-grantee schools also reported bullying others less in 2012, but this decrease was not as dramatic as the change among grantee schools.
- In 2012, students at grantee schools reported cyberbullying others significantly less than students at non-grantee schools, while in 2010 their reports were similar. There were decreases in cyberbullying in both groups.
- In 2012, in comparison to non-grantee schools, grantee schools reported significantly less:
  - Participation in bullying to go along with what their friends were doing
  - Participation in cyberbullying to go along with what their friends were doing
  - Seeing or hearing about bullying at school
  - Seeing or hearing about cyberbullying

## Other Highlights

- In Year I, Grantees achieved a 52% increase in updating of 15 policies related to bullying prevention, with 97% compliance.
- In Year II, while there were no significant increases on a customized survey of awareness, student responses indicated positive growth:

*“It’s incredible to hear all the courageous acts the kids have already done, from large acts to small, they will ripple out and make such a difference in kids’ lives and in the school culture.”*

*“It’s totally changing the environment. And there’s kids leading it!*
- And Staff have become leaders:

*“This has been a fantastic experience. It has been a turning point in my career in education. It has inspired me to do things I never would have done before.”*

## Introduction

---

This is the final evaluation report of a bullying prevention initiative involving five middle school systems in the Massachusetts MetroWest area, funded by the MetroWest Health Foundation (MWHF). This initiative is part of the Foundation's Adolescent Health priority area, one of its seven health priorities for the region at the time the grant was begun. The initiative is a three-year grant program with awards in December 2010 targeting a distinct goal for each year. The goals are as follows:

- Goal 1 (Year I) - Bullying prevention policy change
- Goal 2 (Year II) - Positive change in bullying awareness
- Goal 3 (Year III) - Reduction in bullying behavior

DMA Health Strategies is the evaluator of this project, staffed by project lead Russell Lyman, Ph.D., and research analyst Dana Roth, M.S. For more information about DMA and its staff, please visit [www.dmahealth.com](http://www.dmahealth.com).

This report begins with a description of the grantees, the program logic model, and evaluation activities. Following a review of grantee activities and accomplishments, we then present findings, beginning with a brief summary of Year I and II evaluations, followed by a report on Year III findings. Reports from Years I and II, the evaluation logic model, detailed summaries of focus groups, detailed analysis of Year III MWAHS data and a brochure of Year II highlights can be found in Appendices A-K.

## The Grantees

---

Public school systems in the towns of Holliston, Hopkinton, Hudson, Natick, and Needham were each awarded \$59,500 each year for three years. MWHF made a strategic decision to fund initiatives in middle schools, with the rationale that the prevention of bullying should start early in life (several schools are also introducing bullying prevention curricula in the elementary grades). Holliston, Hopkinton, and Hudson each have one middle school, while Needham and Natick each have two middle schools. Each grantee has proposed and implemented its own unique bullying prevention plan with specific evidence based curricula and prevention activities.

According to 2010 census, Holliston (population 13, 875), Hopkinton (population 14,925), and Hudson (population 14,368) are suburban / rural towns that have had virtually no change in population numbers in the last two decades. Residents in these three towns are predominantly White. Needham, a more densely populated suburb of Boston, has a population of 28,000, 91% of whom are White. Natick is the largest of the five towns with a population of nearly 32,000, 87% of whom are White (6% Asian/Pacific Islander; 3% Hispanic; 2% Black). Virtually no change in population numbers has occurred in the last 20 years in either of these two towns.

## Evaluation Summary

---

As described in the Evaluation Logic Model (Appendix A), evaluation activities are structured around the program's three goals, which were evaluated sequentially across the three-year grant cycle. In this third and final year of the grant, we report findings on the Year III goal of reducing bullying behavior. We selected seven items from the MetroWest Adolescent Health Survey (MWAHS) as a measure of change in the two grant years between the 2010 and 2012 administrations of the survey. We also selected additional 2012 MWAHS measures for post hoc analysis. In addition, we interviewed staff and conducted student focus groups in all five school systems. Finally, we report on school tracking of bullying reports and those that have been substantiated, with the caveat that these reports may not accurately reflect actual bullying.

In Year I we examined 15 identified policies to determine whether appropriate changes had been made to bullying prevention regulations, procedures, and staff development plans. In Year II we measured change in bullying awareness by administering a customized survey at the beginning and the end of the year. We also interviewed groups of students as well as some staff. A brief summary of findings on these two goals follow this year's report on changes in bullying behavior as reported by students.

## Grantee Activities and Accomplishments

---

All five school systems have implemented common strategies as well as uniquely creative approaches to bullying prevention. All schools reported training their staff in how to identify bullying, intervene appropriately, and encourage prosocial student behavior. All invited experts (e.g., staff from the Massachusetts Aggression Reduction Center) to address school assemblies, sent staff and student groups offsite for trainings (e.g., to the Anti-Defamation League), and conducted parent nights and PTA workshops focused on bullying prevention. Most have engaged motivational speakers or purchased anti-bullying videos for students and staff to watch. Each school selected evidence-based violence prevention curricula, the most common being *Steps to Respect* and *Second Step*, which are taught in each grade. Bullying prevention curricula were often implemented in health classes, but have also been integrated in classes such as Music, History, English, and Digital Literacy.

Grantee schools carried out a number of different activities as part of the bullying prevention initiative. A number of the schools had or developed some form of peer leadership model. Peer leaders are trained as trainers and then are invited into lower grade classrooms to conduct bullying prevention trainings. In several school systems, high school students conducted similar trainings in the middle schools. In one school this has led to a girls group that is led by high school students and is reportedly highly valued by the girls. One school system conducts all-school advisory groups that meet for 20 minutes each day led by a school staff person with up to 14 students in each group. This has the advantage of involving many of the teachers in the school. Another has developed a website for their peer leadership program that has curriculum materials as well as a bulletin board for students and staff to share ideas. A separate school has developed a Guidance Website with similar materials, including tips for parents that are updated

regularly. Several schools have developed a bullying prevention brochure and printed it for parents.

Most schools display laminated posters created by students, with several schools awarding “best poster” prizes. Attractive murals depicting acceptance and respect for diversity have been created, both on interior and exterior walls of schools. Perhaps most compelling of all, a number of students have created and acted in their own videos, which depict how bullying and cyberbullying can cause harm and how students can confront the problem. A video developed by one school system is comprised of interviews from four students who speak eloquently about their understanding of bullying and how their approaches to interactions with peers have changed as a result of their work as peer leaders.

## Highlights of Achievements by School System

### **Holliston**

- 35 peer trainers trained by the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) in the 2012-2013 school year as part of World of Difference Program
- Attendance at the Boston ADL Youth Congress
- Presentation of related readings in elementary school classrooms
- Cradles to Crayons product drive as part of Governor Patrick’s service initiative, providing used clothing for needy children of all ages
- “Facing up to Facebook” training by the Middlesex Partners for Youth
- Internet Safety workshops
- Parent “survival training” for the middle school years
- Eighth grade Community Service Day

### **Hopkinton**

- Selection of the Michigan Model of Health for an all-school wellness curriculum (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/bullying/#4>)
- School Guidance website with bullying prevention materials and the “Tips for Parents Institute”
- 2012, 2013 student participation in “Stand Up” conference
- “Ignite” program (eighth-graders lead groups of younger students in activities; have monthly peer leader activities, and a week-long training in the summer)
- Lip dub video of “Born That Way” by Lady Gaga that included the entire school
- “Bullying Prevention and Response Manual” for parents
- Bullying prevention “station” with purchase of flyers – “Cyber Bullying – What you can do about it”; “Together We Can Be Bully Free – A Mini-Guide for Parents”; “25 Things Everyone Should Know About Parents.”
- Ropes course for students involving trust and resilience
- Use of Grade 8 Music classes to create a bullying prevention video presentation
- Grade 8 “empowering girls” workshop
- “Best Buddies” program (peer leaders spend time with students who have special needs)
- Purchase of wrist bands in memory of a student who died, with rally of 600 people

### **Hudson**

- K-12 anti-bullying curriculum delivered by health and wellness staff
- “Fun and Fitness” afterschool program, including Pacific Island dancing, brain games, weight training, and field hockey
- Adoption of animals, self-esteem building taught by peer leaders to younger students.
- “Circle of Power and Respect” (students and teachers meet three times a week for 25 minutes to build community and develop an understanding the difference between bullying and ordinary teasing)
- “Developmental Designs” program (teachers trained to lead groups of students in developing trust and understanding of differences among peers)
- Training of counselors in cognitive behavioral approaches to bullying and victimization.
- Growing a school community garden to donate to a local food bank
- Adoption by 160 sixth graders of newborn turtles from a threatened species to nurture to maturity and release to the wild; – special education students were especially involved
- Anti-bullying poster campaign

### **Natick**

- Honored by the Middlesex County District Attorney’s Office for educational leadership in the Peer Leadership program
- 703 peer leaders trained (130 in Year 1, 301 in Year 2, 272 in Year 3)
- By Year 3 140 students had been trained as peer leader trainers to train all grade 5 students in the town
- Outreach to community groups (elders, veterans, religious groups, etc.)
- Bullying prevention t-shirt design contest
- Creation of scripts for public service announcements
- After-school tutoring for students in lower grades
- Accompanying students in need of companionship to breakfast
- Police presentation on cyber safety
- Weekly email “blasts” to students and families regarding prevention activities
- Peer leader representation at community events
- Presentation at national conferences

### **Needham**

- “Advisory Groups” (students meet in small groups with a teacher/mentor each day)
- Youth Services counseling for bullies
- Parent conference on resiliency
- Development and administration of a school climate survey
- Student participation in analyzing MWAHS data
- Whole-school “Bullying Prevention Day” with four workshops (“Digital Drama,” “Trillion Dollar Footprint,” “MWAHS Data Analysis” and “Ourselves and Others”) designed to assess and improve the program
- Bullying trends included in school Performance Report mailed to every parent Advisory grade level
- Cluster leader stipends for bullying prevention are in the proposed school operating budget

- Featured in the Boston Globe for prevention efforts – *Needham bullies get therapy, not detention*, by Dan Adams, October 12, 2011.

## Evaluation Findings

---

### Year 1 Goal - Policy Change

All five school districts completed and submitted the Bullying Prevention Plan required by the Commonwealth. All plans were accepted by the MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE).

To assess policy change, we created the Bullying Prevention Policy Checklist (Appendix E). We reviewed school policies in January and February of 2011 and calculated the percentages of appropriate bullying prevention policies that were in place in each school system. Baseline percentages ranged from 47% to 87%, with an average score of 64%. As of January 15, 2012, posttest assessment found 100% of identified policies in place in four school systems, with one school system scoring 87%. Average percentages at posttest were 97%, a 52% increase from baseline less than a year earlier.

### Year 2 Goal – Positive Change in Bullying Awareness

To assess changes in bullying awareness, we created and administered a survey to students, school staff, and parents. Surveys were completed during the spring of 2011 and 2012, with data collection ending on June 30th of each year. Quantitative analyses were not especially revealing, but open-ended questions yielded rich information regarding bullying awareness as well as some of the complexities of bullying. We identified four themes worthy of attention: confusion about what behaviors constitute bullying; differences of opinion regarding how school personnel should be handling the issue; challenges for students in talking with adults; and racial differences in experience of bullying and prevention efforts. Our conclusions are summarized below.

- Bullying can be a *complex phenomenon* and identifying and addressing it appropriately can be challenging. On the one hand, it is possible to overlook instances of bullying, while on the other hand it is also possible to overreact, either in overall school approach or in specific instances. In addition to training, schools should consider maintaining ongoing opportunities for community (classroom, grade, advisory group, whole school) discussion that involves students, staff and parents in different combinations.
- There can be radically *different perspectives* on whether or not bullying is occurring and being dealt with properly. In general students appear to feel less positively about the situation than adults, especially school staff. Of particular concern is the student who feels that he or she is being bullied and no one is doing anything about it. Such students can go unnoticed when others, especially adults, believe that bullying is being dealt with effectively in the school.
- *Adults can also be bullies*, or at least they can be perceived as such. In some cases such interactions may be more due to awkwardness in setting limits rather than malicious intent. Acquisition of limit setting skills should be a component of training for all staff,

including and especially those staff providing supervision in loosely structured settings, such as in the lunchroom, on the playground and in the school bus. It is also possible for some adults to have problems that contribute to unpleasant behavior, just as is the case with students.

- *Parent involvement appears to be a challenge* according to all respondent groups. School resources are limited and many parents are busy with work and caring for their home and children. School partnerships with parents are extremely important, however, and can be especially important for students who are fragile.
- *Minority students* may be having a more negative experience in school. Non-white/mixed students consistently reported feeling less positive about their school climate than White students did. Therefore, racial differences and cultural competency should be seriously considered when implementing and evaluating bullying prevention efforts. In fact, we recommend that individual school systems evaluate racial differences in experience of bullying and safety as our preliminary analyses suggested some trends of concern.

Overall, it was clear that students, teachers, and parents were talking and thinking about bullying, and students demonstrated creativity and strength in their efforts to stop bullying.

### **Year 3 Goal – Reduction in Bullying Behavior**

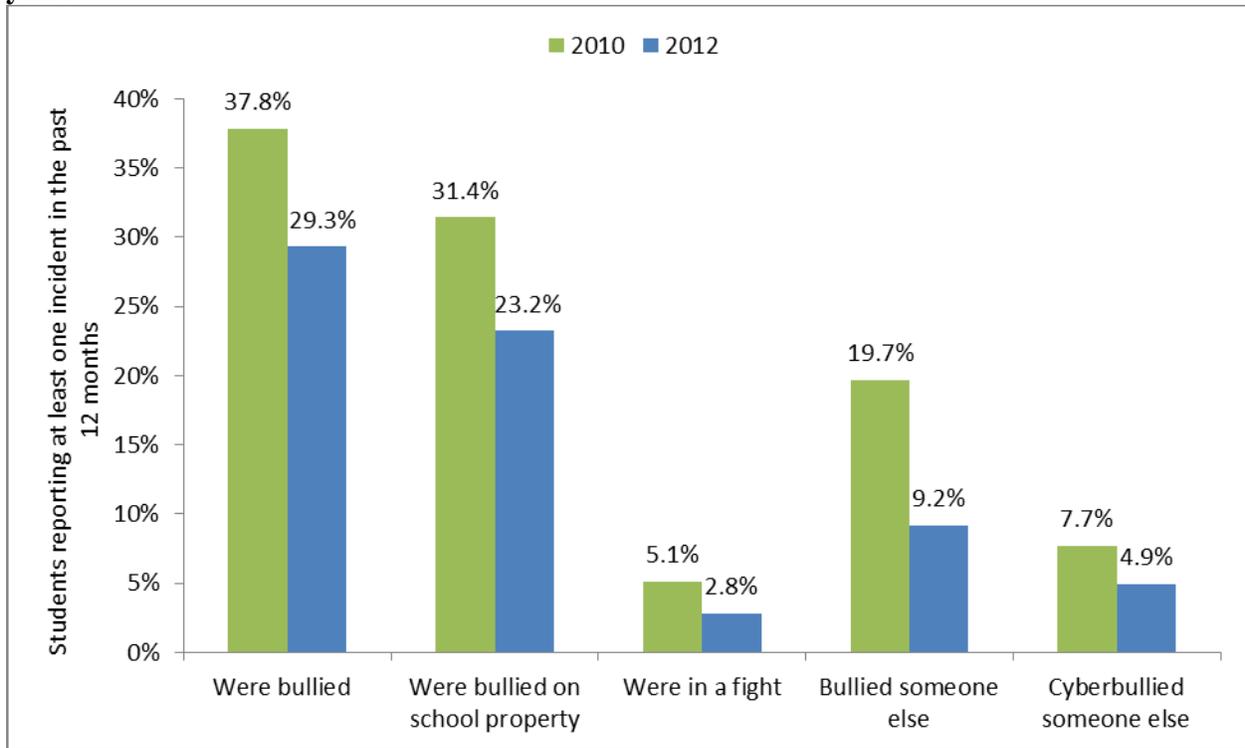
To assess the extent to which there was a reduction in bullying behavior at grantee schools, we examined selected items from the MetroWest Adolescent Health Survey (MWAHS) for the years 2010 and 2012, and we compared change across time in grantee and non-grantee schools. Overall, the results suggest that the bullying prevention initiatives had a very positive effect, both over time and in comparison to school systems that were not recipients of the MetroWest Health Foundation grant. Please see Appendix B for a complete listing of the MWAHS items we examined as well as detailed statistical analyses.

In 2012, students at grantee schools reported engaging in the following behaviors significantly less than they did in 2010:

- Being bullied
- Being bullied on school property
- Being in a physical fight on school property
- Bullying someone else
- Cyberbullying someone else

Please see Figure 1 on the following page.

**Figure 1. Student reports of bullying and related behavior in grantee schools by survey year.**



Non-grantee schools also saw positive changes related to bullying, but in general these changes were not as dramatic as the changes among grantee schools. In fact, the posttest findings in grantee schools were significantly more positive than in non-grantee schools.

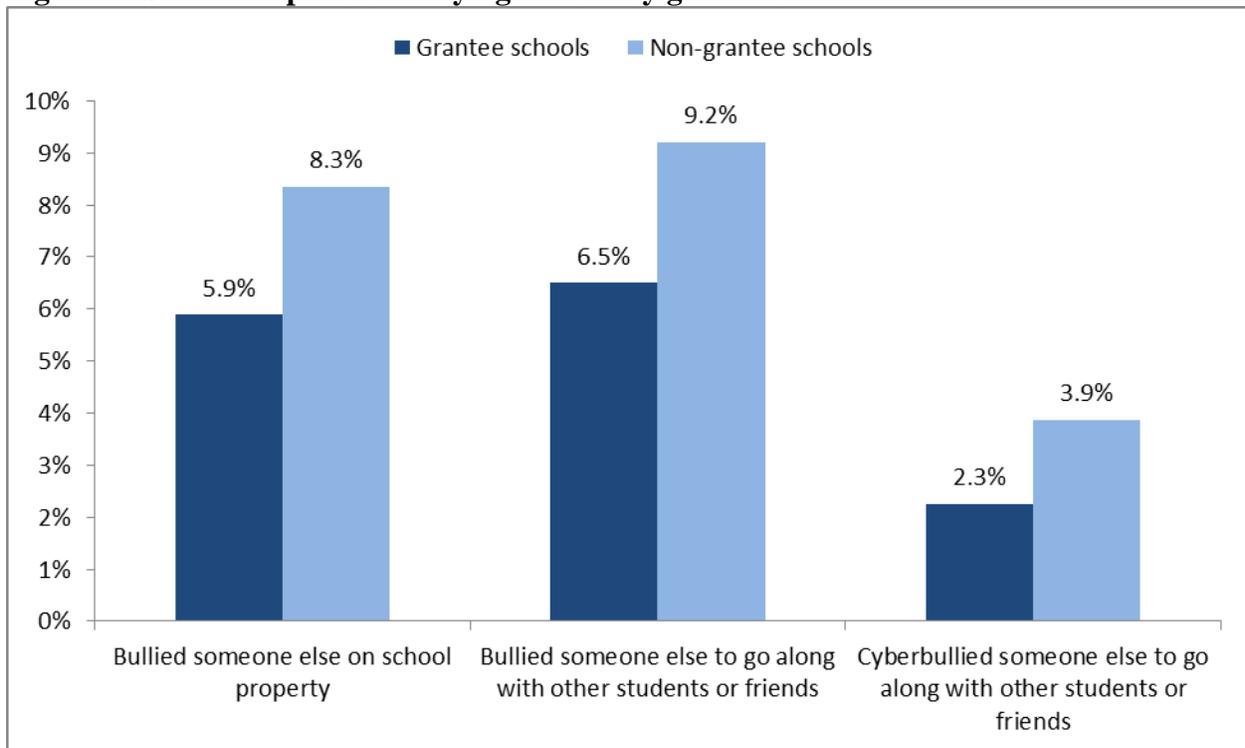
There were a number of items added to the 2012 MWAHS that were not included in the 2010 survey, so it was not possible to examine pre-post changes in these items. Rather, we compared students from grantee schools to those from non-grantee schools and examined between-group differences in responses.

Consistent with the goals of the bullying prevention initiative, students at grantee schools reported engaging in the following behaviors significantly less often than students at non-grantee schools in 2012 (all  $ps < .001$ ):

- Bullying someone else on school property
- Bullying someone on school property to go along with what other students or their friends were doing
- Cyberbullying someone to go along with what other students or their friends were doing

Please see Figure 2 on the following page.

**Figure 2. Student reports of bullying in 2012 by grantee status.**



Students from grantee schools also reported having seen or heard about another student being bullied or cyberbullied at school less often than students at non-grantee schools ( $ps \leq .001$ ).

In addition to examining responses to the MWAHS, we also reviewed data collected by schools on reports of bullying made and substantiated over the three-year period of the grant. In accordance with state law, all of the schools implemented a universal form for anonymous reporting of suspected bullying in Year 1. Parents and students can submit reports online, and schools maintain drop boxes for written reports by students. Four school systems shared these data with the evaluation team. The fifth school system reported that because no reports had been substantiated in three years, the reports were tracked as reports of harassment or other problem behaviors rather than bullying. One school did not track reports in the first year, and so we substituted the average (23) of the number of reports in the two subsequent years (22 and 24). On average, 10 bullying reports (range = 4 – 15) were made for every 100 students over the three-year period, but only 2 reports per 100 students were substantiated. The proportion of reports that were substantiated declined each year, from nearly a quarter of total reports in Year 1 to less than a fifth of total reports in Year 3. Please see Table 1 on the following page.

Staff in one school noted that numerous reports were made online by parents, and in the last year the majority of incidents occurred online or through social media.

**Table 1. Reports of bullying made and substantiated by grant year.**

Year	Reports Made	Reports Substantiated	Percent Substantiated
1	96	23	24%
2	126	27	21%
3	104	20	19%

## Interviews of Students and Staff

---

### Student Focus Groups

#### *The Interviews*

Student focus groups were conducted in four of five school districts in the spring and fall of 2013. One school district was unable to arrange these interviews. Between seven and ten 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders participated in each group, with a roughly equal balance of male and female students. Some students were peer leaders and others were not; in one group students who had been teased or victimized had been intentionally included. Students were interviewed according to a set protocol (see Appendix G).

#### *How often bullying happens and how you know when it's bullying*

In general, students voiced a clear sense of how to identify bullying, though in several cases they had to be reminded that bullying usually involves an imbalance of power. Across schools, they noted that bullying is rare, and that usually interactions involve fooling around between friends who understand that no hurt is meant. Several students noted, however, that negative interactions are more likely to happen in certain situations, especially on the school bus.

- “We never have serious bullying, but some gossiping, judging and stereotyping – growing up relationship stuff.”
- “A lot of times it’s not purposeful.”
- “Lots of instances of just fooling around.” “We know it’s not bullying because we are friends.”
- “Sometimes people just laugh along, and don’t see feelings being hurt.”
- “Its [bullying is] different from just joking around between friends, but sometimes that can be misinterpreted.”

#### *What to do when you see bullying*

Overall students voiced increased confidence in what to do about bullying. They articulated that they had learned a great deal about different strategies to deal with bullying, but at the same time noted the complexities in identifying whether bullying is indeed happening and in figuring out how to respond. They explained that they have to rely on their own judgment, and this is something that cannot be done by the book. A number of students expressed that in many cases, students are not comfortable reporting incidents to adults, and they are more likely to work it out with their peers. One young man gave an example of how useful it is to have a box in school for

reports that can be anonymous. He noted that in fact this worked for him when a student was hitting him on the bus. He put his report in the box, a guidance counselor dealt with it without revealing who made the report, and the hitting stopped.

- “Text books don’t cover it”
- “We have been taught a bunch of different ways to deal with it.”
- “The peer leaders are great that way.”
- “I feel more confident about what to do.” [peer leader]
- “It’s not clear that kids feel comfortable reporting....Often they go to their friends.”
- “You can tell, intervene, or change the subject.”
- “It’s harder to intervene when you are in a group of friends – or you might not be able to tell where it’s going.”
- “It’s hard to know what to do in the moment....You could make it worse....The bully might think you’re pathetic for stepping in.”
- “As far as ‘standing up’, you don’t want to be ‘Buzzkill,’ so you just step back and change the subject.”

### ***The program and what works best***

Most students, while forthright with their criticisms, were very positive about their school bullying prevention program. There was a general sense that, at least in some cases, it is the peer leaders who benefit the most, and what they get out of it depends on their personal commitment, which can vary. In the general population of students, some benefit more than others, and in some cases individual students did not feel that the program was valuable. This group, however, appears to be a small minority. Peer leaders appear to greatly value their own growth and what they are able to do for other students and for the community. There was universal praise for providing peer training in the classrooms of younger students and for 1:1 mentoring, including for students with special needs. Field trips were especially popular, and students from several schools had presented at national conferences and received awards for their program. In particular, ADL training received much praise.

- “I get to do training in the community and I really benefit from that.”
- “Being around others who care is really important.”
- “ADL training was ‘funjucational!’”
- “Movies work great and Lip Dub was awesome. It was about showing your differences and accepting them – that you shouldn’t be ashamed of who you are.”
- “After school clubs are fun.”
- “Posters are neat.”
- “Ignite [peer leadership] and Best Buddies [peer mentoring] were neat, too.”
- “The kids feel they can come to us and we’re going to do something about it.”

### ***What has not worked as well***

No interviewee expressed major dissatisfaction with the program. A number of peer leaders stated that there were no parts that really didn’t work well. However, when pressed they were able to provide constructive criticism, which varied based on the approach of their individual school. A common theme was that adult-driven lectures were boring, and going over the same or similar material each year tended to lose their attention. In some cases, the novelty wore off after the excitement of the first year. With the exception of ADL training, a number of trainings by outside experts appear to have fallen flat. However, motivational speakers who spoke about

their own experience were popular, as were books about acceptance or facing adversity that they had read in classes such as English or History. Students from schools that carried out large group activities noted that usually the group was too large to maintain their attention. It was also noted that some students joined leadership activities for the wrong reasons (such as status and popularity) and hence did not contribute as much as they should. It was also noted that teachers varied in their support for the program and in their tolerance for how it affects their class schedule.

- “It’s still OK but repetitive. Nothing new....It’s more like a club. Some of us are tired of it.” “Like, ‘Why do you keep talking about the same things?’”
- “Some kids join for the wrong reasons, like for status....Some people think Student Leadership Team is a joke.”
- “Some kids don’t care, but everyone else does.”
- “Lectures don’t affect us as much.”
- “Teachers have a problem with missing flex time.”
- “The monthly meetings are not as good. Too many kids (up to 80).”
- “They are planned by the adults and the skits don’t help....We get lost with all our friends....And some kids join for the wrong reasons.”

### ***How the way you act has changed***

Student descriptions of how they had changed were impressive. They had a clear sense of having gained a new perspective on the importance of considering the impact of one’s actions and words before acting. Peer leaders expressed a sense of responsibility and pride in the good things they were doing. Many also noted that they felt more confident. A growing sense that acts of kindness are as important as “standing up” was also prominent. A number of students also noted the importance of being part of a community where these values were shared.

- “We think more about what we say.”
- “I feel like I really know how to deal with it and being with others who care is really important.”
- “I feel more confident.”
- “It’s not just sticking up for people – just being there for a person can really help their day.”
- “I feel like doing things for people is a real eye-opener.”
- “Now I know that if I don’t want people to hear what I am saying, then maybe it’s something I shouldn’t say.”
- “When someone says ‘this kid is a loser and has no friends,’ I say, ‘You gotta stop now.’”
- “You’re always looking for good deeds.”
- “We’ve matured....We know how serious it is.”
- “It has made me think before talking – like with sarcastic comments.”
- “I understand it more – thinking more about expressions like, “That’s so gay.”
- “I think before I act now.”
- “Bullying is pointless.”

### ***How bullying in school has changed***

Most students noted a significant positive change in school atmosphere, while in a number of cases they indicated that bullying, even though it had decreased, had never been a really serious problem. Peer leaders expressed a sense of empowerment as agents of change. Growth in

knowledge about how to interact positively with peers and adults was a common theme. A number noted that program activities had brought them closer together, in many cases with students they might not have befriended otherwise.

A minority of students were less positive. In particular, a few students indicated that adults had not made as many positive changes as students had, and that in certain cases teacher behavior was problematic. A few also noted that some students had negative feelings about peer leaders. At the same time, growth in students' sense of acceptance, community, safety, and peers helping peers was evident.

- “Students know more about it; they get the message.”
- “People notice bullying and small things – There’s more standing up.”
- “The atmosphere is different now in school – You have to be nice....Cliques aren’t as cliquy.”
- “Kids are trying to expand beyond their usual friends....There is more positive coming together.”
- “Kids are less afraid to be different. People are more accepting of other people.”
- “The kids feel they can come to us (student leaders) and we’re going to do something about it.”
- “All the activities have brought us together....We know each other better.”
- “I don’t think staff reacts much to it....Teachers go by the rules rather than actively support the program....I feel like teachers don’t care as much.”
- “Some teachers have favorites.”
- “The change has been for the worse for some people who are not in the club...like swearing.”
- “Some people think we are ‘goody two shoes,’ like we have a higher status.”
- “And a bunch of people cry ‘wolf’ and are overdoing it.”
- “Most kids outside of group don’t care, except to protect themselves. If it’s not happening to them, they don’t care. They won’t listen to us.”
- “The popular people joke around until it happens to them – then they overreact.”
- “This group has benefitted....I’ve learned the true meaning of what bullying is and how to make things better when you see it....Maybe you don’t stop the bully but help the victim....Or stop bullying before it happens.”
- “Leadership helps build a sense of community. Now the school feels safer. There is not as much hurtful behavior.”

### ***Suggested changes for the program***

Students did not have many suggested changes, but what they did suggest reflects their answers throughout the interviews. Creating opportunities for hands-on activities in small groups and for peer leadership work with younger students were strong suggestions. Stronger engagement of specific groups of staff, depending on the school, was also a common suggestion.

- “Maybe you could have smaller groups where people can be closer.”
- “Some teachers could use advice on not embarrassing students.”
- “It’s good to have grades working together. It’s important to focus on equality and making sure that everyone gets a chance to express themselves.”
- “All groups should have an equal chance at ADL trainings.”

- “The [Peer Leadership] group should be smaller, maybe with a more detailed selection process.”
- “There should be more work with younger kids so they can be better prepared.”

## Staff Focus Groups and Interviews

### ***The Interviews***

A focus group with representatives from all five grantee school systems was held during a regular meeting of grantees at MetroWest Health Foundation on May 1, 2013 according to an established focus group protocol. The protocol can be found in Appendix H. Interviews with staff program leaders were conducted in the spring and fall of 2013 in each school district, with the exception of Holliston, where both of the program leaders were transferred to other schools at the end of the 2012-2013 school year.

- Hopkinton - On November 7, 2013 an interview was conducted with Bill Meehan, coordinator for the grant program.
- Hudson - On May 21, 2013 Laurie Curley, bullying prevention coordinator and Matt Gaffney, administrator, were interviewed.
- Natick - Staff co-facilitators Kelly Morin, Melissa MacDonald, and Megan Hatt were interviewed on June 12, 2013 at Kennedy School. In addition to the Peer Leadership program, they oversee a peer-run ADL curriculum. On the same day prevention staff leaders Nicole Papasso and Suzanne Kenny were interviewed at Wilson School.
- Needham - On October 21, 2013, Lisa Chen, Pollard School Principal was interviewed.

### ***Aspects that worked best***

- Whole school approaches work well but involving everyone with limited resources is a challenge.
- Involving students as leaders in ongoing planning, program evaluation, and adjustments is critical. They have ideas and know what works and doesn't work. “Putting kids in the driver's seat is a climate changer.”
- Most schools have use peer leadership models successful, but have to be wary of elitism or us / them phenomena.
- Kids prefer hands-on activities in relatively small groups.
- One school does this with daily advisory groups with 9-14 students for 15-20 minutes each day. Other schools have peer leader groups, either during or after school. Scheduling after school ensures that those who participate are fully committed.
- Having the support of an administrator, such as the principal or vice principal, is critical.
- One school is involving students in analyzing MWAHS data to address specific questions, such as gender differences. The MWAHS has been extremely useful to schools in evaluating their work and planning program improvements.
- Several schools have launched guidance or peer leadership websites that are popular with parents and students.
- Celebrating student leaders on school bulletin boards, for example in “Student Spotlight of the month,” is also popular among students.
- Helpful curricula and resources include “Second Step,” “Beyond Bullying,” “Steps to Respect,” “Facing History and Ourselves,” and Commonsense.org.
- ADL training for staff and especially for students has been very effective.

- Marketing to community groups helps to encourage support and parent participation.

### ***Aspects not working as well***

For most grantees, parent involvement has been a challenge, with very poor attendance at events focused just on bullying prevention. It has to be an “add-on” to other more popular events (e.g., bringing brochures to Curriculum Night). In some towns parents also miss-label student behavior as bullying. Students and staff can also reach a saturation point with “bullying.”

- “We don’t call it “bullying” at all – Like we talk about ‘acceptance’ instead.”
- Although some motivational speakers were popular, in general students across schools did not like lectures delivered by staff or other adults, much preferring fun, hand-on activities that brought them together in friendship and mutual support.
- Students tire of the same or similar curricula from one year to the next, and so staff have to be imaginative in “changing it up” (with significant input from students).
- Some have found “Second Step” to be flat and unexciting, while it has worked well for others.

### ***Staff/student responses to the program***

In general, students have been extremely positive about the program. Parents want their children involved in peer leadership, and appreciate how this is growing their children’s potential to become leaders in the world. Many staff embrace the program, though some staff are more supportive than others. Committed staff often volunteer their own time after school to support program efforts.

- “For some students it has been life-transforming.”
- Parents feel more attention is being paid to the well-being of their children.
- Community groups feel they have a voice.
- Surveying staff and parents about their awareness of bullying has in fact helped them to be more aware and sensitive.

### ***Changes in behavior***

Staff across schools consistently reported that their school climate is more favorable. Students are talking more with staff as well as with each other. There is more compassion and understanding. Students and staff are thinking more about how they talk to each other. It has been institutionalized.

- “Kids know better what bullying is. They don’t want to be seen as bullies – They want to be seen as good kids.
- “There is more communication with staff. The kids are not afraid to report anything.” We are “nipping it in the bud.” There is more awareness about what is OK and what is not.”
- “There is more ‘standing up’ but this is hard. Kids are showing more support for each other, which is easier than standing up.”

### ***What might be done differently next time***

Most schools are seeking better strategies to involve parents. Other suggestions include:

- Develop a steering committee of students, teachers and parents before designing the program.
- More support to develop a three-year plan.
- Focus more on peer education. You have to train kids around working with younger students because they aren't always good at it.

### ***What MetroWest Health Foundation might have done differently***

The grantee group voiced agreement that MetroWest has been extremely supportive. It would be good to have more structured opportunities to share strategies with other grantees. This was seen as very valuable, and in fact grantees ended up sharing ideas and resources with each other outside of their grantee meetings. In general they voiced great satisfaction with how they have been supported by the Foundation.

- “This grant has been a huge catalyst.”
- “We could not have done it without MetroWest support...This allowed us to shoot for the stars and keep improving.”

### ***Sustainability***

Support can be included in guidance budgets, and most principals are making proposals for staff stipends to continue the project. Whole-district approaches, such as adopting a K-12 health and wellness curriculum that includes bullying education and prevention ensures that the program will have budgetary support. Train-the-trainer approaches also contribute to sustainability. Peer leadership approaches can reportedly be sustained without much funding. Fundraising can happen through PTAs and Youth Councils. Outreach to other community organizations, such as those involving veterans and the elderly can help marshal resources. No grantees mentioned fundraising efforts with local corporations or philanthropies. All noted that they would have to make cuts, mainly in training expenses. Staff now know from experience what trainings have worked better than others.

### ***Suggested changes***

Moving from a concerted focus on bullying to nurturing and fun activities with a broader focus that build resilience, social skills and self-esteem may positively engage students and staff and contribute to prevention without belaboring the topic. It is important to use a wide variety of media and activities, to involve the whole community, and to “change it up” in hands-on activities.

- “This has been a fantastic experience. It has been a turning point in my career in education. It has inspired me to do things I never would have done before.”
- “This grant has been a huge catalyst.”

## **Conclusion**

---

Evaluating the MetroWest Health Foundation Bullying Prevention Initiative has been a remarkable journey. Students, parents, and staff have offered different perspectives, and some participants have benefitted more than others. However, extremely positive responses from students and staff are backed by survey data indicating that in many key areas, the ways that

student interact with each other have improved significantly. In particular, those who have taken on leadership roles appear to have benefitted the most.

Analyses comparing grantee schools with other schools in the MetroWest area suggest that the program has been effective in reducing bullying, and the results are compelling. Students in grantee schools reported fewer incidences of bullying and cyberbullying than students in non-grantee schools, and these effects were statistically reliable. Results from student interviews also demonstrate that students have a high level of awareness and have grown immensely in their understanding of how people should treat each other, their knowledge of what is not appropriate, and their confidence in what to do when some go astray.

Certain outcomes are difficult to measure, especially those that are long-term. Interviews of students and staff, however, suggest that this prevention program has had lasting effects. In the words of one staff leader:

*Through this grant we have provided opportunities to plant seeds that we hope will benefit our students long term. We have provided opportunities for students to realize their strengths socially, to develop stress management skills, to have opportunities to realize the positive feelings one gets from helping others. In middle school, we don't always see the immediate effects of these opportunities, but the seeds are planted and these experiences become part of who they want to be. This grant has enabled students to feel success in ways they may not have been able to and to develop skills that will be useful for them in years to come, both socially and emotionally.*

Students and staff also noted some areas for improvement. In particular, the progress of adults may lag behind that of students. Parent involvement remains a challenge for most schools, although select groups of parents have been very committed and effective. It appears that many parents who have reported bullying have not fully understood what bullying really is, despite being given a great deal of access to information through print and electronic media. While many school staff have done remarkable work, at least in the eyes of some students, certain teachers could improve in how they interact with students. Year I and Year II surveys also suggest that school staff had a more positive view of the situation than students.

At the same time, robust groups of teachers, counselors, and administrators have shown remarkable commitment, imagination, and innovation. They have learned to listen to students, supported them in leadership role, mentoring other students, and planned activities that bring students together as peers to encourage friendship and kindness and increase confidence, self-esteem and resilience. All school systems are trying to sustain prevention efforts in the context of positive changes in school culture that hopefully will endure. The MetroWest Health Foundation is to be congratulated for its vision, and students, staff and community members deserve accolades for their commitment and growth.