

# **Social-Emotional Outcomes:**

## **Relationship between Peer Aggression and Student Adjustment**

- The analyses suggest that there is a strong and significant relationship between peer aggression and academic achievement, social-emotional functioning, and social support for bullies and victims(see Appendix A).
  - Experiences of peer victimization at the beginning of the school year predicted lower GPA at the end of the school year.
  - Experiences of peer victimization at the beginning of the school year predicted increases in depressive symptoms by the end of the school year.
  - ITBS scores were affected differently for boys and girls (data provided only for 7<sup>th</sup> graders). For girls, experiences with peer victimization predicted decreases in ITBS scores in both math and reading, but for boys, there was no decrease in performance.
  - Experiences of peer victimization had its negative effects, above and beyond other negative life events reported by the students. In other words, the negative outcomes (e.g., increases in depressive symptoms, decreases in ITBS scores) do not appear to be solely a reaction to other negative life events experienced by the students.
- These analyses also suggest that even “bystanders” or observers, may be negatively affected by a climate of verbal, physical, or relational aggression. However, these results may also suggest that students who are having academic or social-emotional difficulties may be more likely to be friends with those who are actively involved in peer aggression, and thus exposed to more situations involving aggression at school.
- A summary of the correlations between bullying and indices of social-emotional adjustment as measured by the BASC-2 and SDQ, academic achievement, social-emotional outcomes, and social support are provided in Appendix B.

# Summary

## **Prevalence of Peer Aggression and Bullying**

- ❑ The level of general peer aggression and bullying at XXXX is not atypical for a large suburban middle school in the United States.
- ❑ However, the levels of peer aggression that were reported are significant enough to warrant interventions to:
  - Reduce the number of students who experience general peer aggression.
  - Reduce the number of students who experience targeted peer aggression, i.e., bullying.
- ❑ The majority of the peer aggression and bullying behaviors are reportedly occurring during unsupervised locations, such as hallways, in the lunchroom, in the locker room, and on the bus. However, 40% of the students reported peer aggression also occurred in the classroom.
- ❑ The overwhelming percentage of students who “bully,” report that they do so in retaliation to something that was said or done by the victim.

## **Peer Aggression, Social Support, and Adjustment Outcomes**

- ❑ Students experience *general* support more strongly than support specific to dealing with peer aggression. This was especially true of support from school staff and classmates: general support was perceived more strongly than support specific to dealing with peer aggression.
  - Students may not know how to approach school staff, or feel permission to do so. Alternatively, students may fear being ridiculed further by other students if they seek help from the school.
- ❑ Peer aggression and bullying are significantly related to academic achievement (grades and ITBS scores) and social-emotional outcomes, such as depression, and attitudes toward school.
  - Even “bystanders” or observers, may be negatively affected by a climate of verbal, physical, or relational aggression.

# Recommendations

*While there are many pre-packaged, school-wide interventions for bullying; it is also possible for schools to develop a system of universal, selected, and targeted interventions to address bullying-related issues. An efficient way to address some of the issues brought to light in this assessment is to use the latter approach, and incorporate areas of need into the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) Program that will be implemented at XXXX.*

## □ **Initial Data Collection, Assessment, and Training Phase:**

- Research suggests that the following areas would be important to assess in teachers/staff before implementing bullying/school climate interventions:
  1. Attitudes about bullying
  2. Knowledge of effective discipline strategies
  3. Confidence in handling bullying situations/Felt training needs
  4. Personal involvement in “bullying,” e.g., using their position of power and authority to intimidate students.
- Research suggests that the following areas would be important topics of training related to bullying/school climate interventions, which is consistent with the PBIS goal of improving school climate:
  1. Effective strategies for handling situations involving peer aggression, or openly discouraging the use of aggression, in a *respectful but firm manner*, especially in the classroom.
  2. Correctly identifying bullies and victims, and bullying situations, including verbal and relational bullying.

## □ **Universal Interventions:** These recommendations are focused on addressing the general needs of the entire student body:

- Increase supervision in locations that were reported to have the highest incidents of peer aggression, e.g., the hallways between passing periods, during lunch, in the locker room, etc.
- Train all school staff who are involved in monitoring students’ unstructured time (e.g., office staff, lunchroom staff, bus drivers, etc.) in appropriate discipline methods and strategies for effectively handling situations that involve peer aggression.
- Encourage teachers and staff to address verbal and relational peer aggression, as well as physical aggression, with the goal of fostering more prosocial and respectful behavior among students.

- Implement (or continue to enforce) a school-wide policy addressing clear expectations and consequences to peer aggression, including the passive encouragement of peer aggression by observing peer aggression without reporting it.
- Communicate clear procedures to victims and bystanders for reporting bullying (e.g., via email or phone call) with a strict confidentiality policy. Use the information to provide additional monitoring, structure, and limit-setting to provide for the safety of the victim, and/or “targeted” interventions to the alleged bully.
- **Targeted Interventions:** These recommendations are focused on addressing the specific needs of students who are regularly involved in bullying or regularly victimized. The following are possible interventions:
  - ***Bullies*** may benefit from:
    1. Anger management skills training, including challenging possible “hostile attributional bias,” i.e., automatic assumptions that the behavior of others are meant to be hurtful or hostile, to reduce the felt need to retaliate
    2. Empathy/perspective-taking skills
    3. Further assessment for possible depression
    4. Opportunities to focus energies toward more prosocial behavior
  - ***Victims*** may benefit from a wide range of supportive interventions:
    1. Emotional support (e.g., listening and affirmation to offer a sense of feeling validated, valued, and respected)
    2. Informational support (e.g., help with ideas on how to handle challenging situations, or where to go for help, to challenge the notion that they need to handle peer problems on their own)
    3. Instrumental support (e.g., practical assistance, such as active discouragement of peer aggression, or help with practicing new skills in handling challenging situations)
    4. Appraisal support (e.g., feedback on behaviors that might make a student more vulnerable to attack, or encouragement of how well a student handled a difficult situation)
- **Ongoing Assessment :** The recommendation is to monitor progress and change in occurrences of peer aggression/bullying, students’ and teachers’ perceptions of peer aggression/bullying, students’ perceptions of social support and school climate, and social-emotional functioning.