

THE SCHOOL LEADER'S DEFINITIVE

GUIDE TO

BULLYING PREVENTION

FOSTERING A SAFE AND RESPECTFUL CULTURE IS ESSENTIAL FOR K12 LEADERS



INSIDE THIS GUIDE



The impact of
bullying in schools



How to understand
the problem



Keys to prevention

INSIDE THIS GUIDE



WHY BULLYING MATTERS 4

School leaders no longer can ignore this critical issue.



KNOWLEDGE IS POWER 8

Understanding bullying is the first step in preventing it.



CHANGE THE CULTURE 12

The keys to creating a safer, more respectful school environment.



If you like what you see here—
and we hope you do—reach out
to us at www.K12insight.com
for more information or
call us at **703-542-9600**.
We'd love your feedback.

Where has all the empathy gone?

As a child growing up with cerebral palsy, I remember what it was like to be bullied. Classmates pointed and stared at my awkward gait. Children and parents, whether out of fear or misunderstanding, said deeply hurtful things to me. It's hard—being different.

I persevered for one reason: because of my friends—a core support system of classmates, coaches and teachers who were empathetic to the challenges I faced, who got to know me for me, and not for the surface physical differences between us.



October is National Bullying Awareness Month—and that's good. Because we, as educators and community leaders, are in desperate need of some introspection on the topic. Across the country, students are struggling to overcome the sting and hurt of mental and physical abuse.

Our schools are supposed to be sanctuaries, safe havens where children are empowered to learn and grow and achieve uncommon success in spite of personal struggle. But when statistics tell us that nearly one in four children has been bullied in school or that 64 percent of school children who are bullied do not report the incident to a parent or educator out of fear, we know our schools are in need of a serious course correction.

TIME TO MAKE CHANGE

That work starts with teaching students and parents and teachers to be kind to one another. As Rob Ellis, founder and chief executive of the national advocacy group Stomp Out Bullying poignantly reminds us, “If children are not taught empathy, then bullying will continue to be pervasive in our schools.”

In this brief guide, you'll learn how school districts in states such as New York and South Carolina are amplifying student voice and feedback to beat back bullying in their communities. We'll also give you some signs to watch for when students feel threatened, as well as practical solutions to help you systematically eradicate the plague of physical and verbal abuse in your schools.

Let's band together to stop bullying this month—and every month, forever. Are you with me? Then read on.



All the best,
Corey Murray
Executive Editor, TrustED
www.trustedK12.com

TrustED is powered by K12 Insight

As you read this guide, ask yourself these questions:

1. Do your schools do enough to teach empathy and prevent bullying?
2. Do students have a way to stand up and speak out against abuses?



WHY BULLYING MATTERS

Tragic consequences

In August 2016, the sister of 13-year-old Daniel Fitzpatrick found him hanging from a belt around his neck in the attic of the family's Staten Island, N.Y., home. Tormented by his classmates over his weight, his grades, and his innocent disposition, Daniel couldn't take the abuse any longer.

"I gave up," he wrote in a note obtained by the New York Daily News.

Daniel's suicide was a terrible tragedy. Unfortunately, he's not alone: Suicide is the third leading cause of death among young people, resulting in about 4,400 deaths per year, the Centers for Disease Control says. And victims of bullying are up to nine times more likely to consider suicide than non-victims, according to studies by Yale University.

But bullying doesn't have to result in suicide to be devastating for its victims—and its perpetrators:

THE STUDENT BEING BULLIED

Students who experience bullying have a greater risk of sleep difficulties, anxiety, depression, and poor adjustment to school—often leading to academic problems. They're also twice as likely as their non-bullied peers to suffer negative health effects such as headaches and stomachaches.

THE BULLY

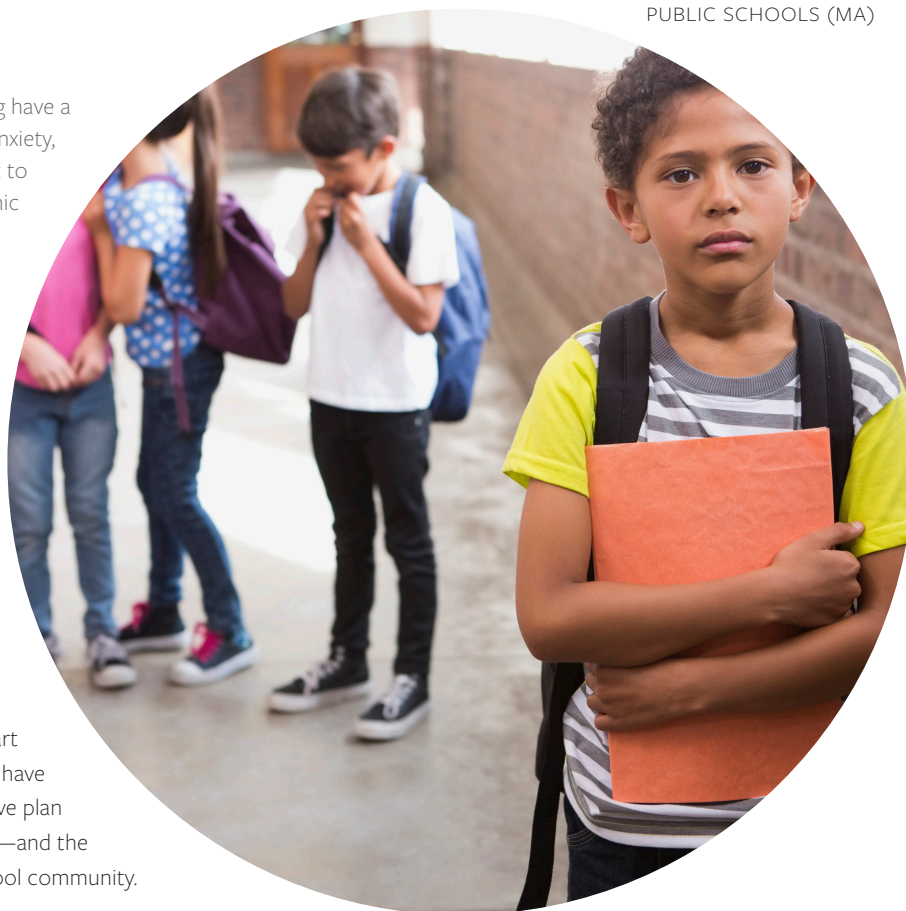
Students who *engage* in bullying are at a higher risk for academic problems as well—and they're more prone to substance abuse and violent behavior later in adolescence and adulthood.

Whereas bullying might have been dismissed at one time as a natural part of growing up, K12 leaders no longer have that option. Creating a comprehensive plan to deal with the problem is essential—and the process must include the entire school community.



A safe, supportive, and responsive school is a school that is bully-proof.”

AMY KELLY,
DEPARTMENT HEAD,
SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL
LEARNING, NEWTON
PUBLIC SCHOOLS (MA)



Bullying: A Pervasive Problem

HOW WIDESPREAD IS BULLYING IN U.S. SCHOOLS? CONSIDER THESE FACTS...



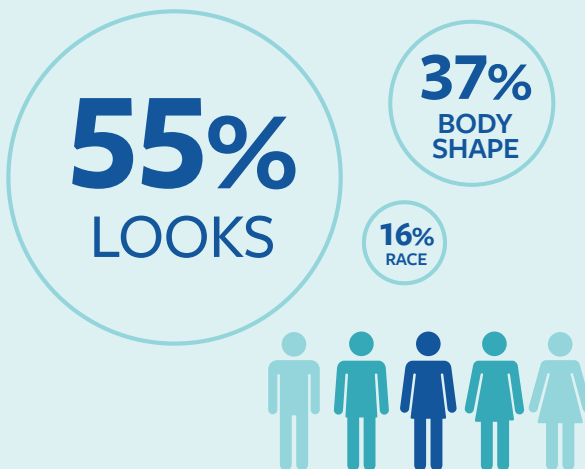
22% of students—nearly one in four—say they were bullied during the past year.¹



64% of children who were bullied did not report the incident to a parent or educator.²

REASONS FOR BULLYING

The most common reasons for being bullied are...³



What's more, **82% of students who identify as LGBTQ were bullied** in the last year based on their sexual orientation.⁴

CYBER BULLYING

Online bullying is a problem as well:

15% of high school students say they were **bullied online** in the past year.⁵

90% of teens who were cyber-bullied have also been bullied offline.⁶

Teens are **seven times** more likely to be e-bullied by current or former friends or dating partners than strangers.⁷

INTERVENTION WORKS

Intervention strategies can help reduce bullying. For instance...



57% of bullying incidents stop when a peer intervenes on behalf of the student being bullied.⁸



School-based prevention programs can **decrease bullying by up to 25%.**⁹

Designed by K12 Insight. www.k12insight.com

¹ National Center for Education Statistics (2015). nces.ed.gov/ipeds/data/ipedssearch/ipedssearch.asp?pubid=2015096.

² Institute of Education Sciences, (2010). ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/northeast/pdf/REL_2010092_sum.pdf.

³ The youth voice research project: Victimization and strategies. Retrieved from njbullying.org/documents/YVPMarch2010.pdf.

⁴ The 2011 National School Climate Survey. Retrieved from glsen.org/sites/default/files/2019/20National%20School%20Climate%20Survey%20Full%20Report.pdf.

⁵ CDC (2015).

⁶ "Seven Fears and the Science of How Mobile Technologies May Be Influencing Adolescents in the Digital Age." (2015) Perspectives on Psychological Science.

⁷ "Cyberbullying More Common with Teens' Current or Former Friends, Study Says." Education Week. blogs.edweek.org/edweek/DigitalEducation/2016/08/cyberbullying_more_common_with.html?cmp=eml-enl-dd-news2.

⁸ Student bullying: Overview of research, federal initiatives, and legal issues. Congressional Research Service. www.fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R43254.pdf.

⁹ Naturalistic observations of peer interventions in bullying. Social Development. Retrieved from bullylab.com/Portals/0/Naturalistic%20observations%20of%20peer%20interventions%20in%20bullying.pdf.

3 STRATEGIES FOR K12 LEADERS

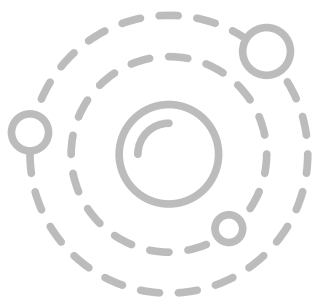
STOPBULLYING.GOV, A PROGRAM FROM THE U.S. DEPARTMENTS OF EDUCATION, JUSTICE, AND HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES, OFFERS A NUMBER OF RESOURCES TO HELP K12 LEADERS PREVENT BULLYING.

HERE ARE THREE KEY SUGGESTIONS



#1 Assess bullying in your schools.

School climate surveys can help you determine the frequency and locations of bullying behavior, so you know where to focus your attention. They can also help you gauge the effectiveness of your intervention efforts. For more on these types of surveys, see the advertisement on page 11.



#2 Establish a safe and supportive school climate.

Students should feel safe and respected everywhere on campus—including the cafeteria, the library, on the bus, and on the playground. Incorporating social and emotional learning into the curriculum is one way to accomplish this.



#3 Respond to bullying when it happens.

When adults respond quickly and consistently to bullying behavior, they send the message that it won't be tolerated. StopBullying.gov has advice on how to stop bullying on the spot, find out what happened, and support the students involved.





KNOWLEDGE IS POWER

Gather data

To address bullying in your schools, you first have to understand the problem. How pervasive is bullying on your campuses? How safe do your students feel? Are there any specific problem areas that must be confronted?

School climate surveys can help you answer these questions. Equipped with this knowledge, you can work with your stakeholders to craft an action plan that addresses the community's needs.

The Brighton Central School District in New York has a homegrown character education program, called Brighton Beliefs, that is a core part of the district's identity. "We're constantly instilling the qualities of integrity, self-control, respect, kindness, and responsibility throughout our students' K12 experience," says Superintendent Kevin



We're constantly instilling the qualities of integrity, self-control, respect, kindness, and responsibility throughout our students' K12 experience."



KEVIN MCGOWAN,
SUPERINTENDENT,
BRIGHTON CENTRAL
SCHOOL DISTRICT (NY)



McGowan. But McGowan and his team didn't stop there. District leaders wanted to know how they could further improve the learning climate for students. In fall 2015, Brighton issued a school climate survey to gather feedback from students, staff, and parents. A follow-up survey was issued in spring 2016 to explore the findings from the first survey in more detail, and the results have helped shape the district's priorities moving forward.

Although students reported that they felt safe at school, the surveys revealed that bullying off campus was still a problem—especially cyber bullying. This insight prompted McGowan and his staff to place more emphasis on teaching students proper online behavior.

Having data to show what its needs were helped ensure that Brighton was on the right path; it also paved the way for greater community support around the problem.

The surveys were “essential in demonstrating to the community that this wasn't just one person's plan,” McGowan says. “It was a community plan for building on our success.”



Listen to students

Listening to what students have to say and giving them a safe place to express their concerns and report abuse is a critical element of any school-based anti-bullying plan. In addition to climate surveys, McGowan and his staff have worked to create an environment in which students feel comfortable sharing their concerns with an adult.

“I think we broadly preach that message, but it only happens when we constantly consider our relationship with kids and treat them with respect,” he says. “We have to address their concerns openly and transparently and then follow through for them. That has to happen on an everyday basis and in every interaction. When we do that, students are much more likely to turn to adults as partners in this process.”



“Parents know that safety is not something we take lightly. If there are any issues, we want to know about them.”



BRYAN DILLON
CHIEF INFORMATION OFFICER,
CLOVER SCHOOL DISTRICT (SC)

One of Brighton's priorities is making sure that every student has a personal connection to a trusted adult. But even within such a supportive environment, fewer than half of students are likely to alert an adult if they are being bullied, studies suggest.

Why don't more students ask for help? StopBullying.gov lists a number of reasons:

- **BULLYING CAN MAKE A CHILD FEEL HELPLESS.**
Students might want to handle it on their own to feel in control again. They might fear being seen as weak or a tattletale.
- **STUDENTS MIGHT FEAR BACKLASH** from the person who bullied them.
- **BULLYING CAN BE A HUMILIATING EXPERIENCE.**
Students might not want adults to know what is being said about them, whether it's true or false.

Because students might be reluctant to tell an adult, even if they believe their problems will be taken seriously, many schools have given students a way to report threats or concerns anonymously.

South Carolina's Clover School District has an anonymous tipline that students and parents can use to send messages to school or district leaders. All reports are thoroughly investigated, and Chief Information Officer Bryan Dillon says the tipline—and subsequent follow-through by administrators—helps build the community's trust in the district.

“Parents know that safety is not something we take lightly,” he says. “If there are any issues, we want to know about them.”

Recognize the warning signs

There are many indicators to suggest that someone might be bullied or is bullying others. Recognizing these warning signs is an important prevention strategy, because two-thirds of students who are bullied never report the incident to a parent or educator.

SIGNS A CHILD MIGHT BE BULLIED



- Unexplainable injuries
- Lost or destroyed clothing, books, electronics, or jewelry
- Frequent headaches or stomach aches, feeling sick or faking illness
- Changes in eating habits, like suddenly skipping meals or binge eating.
- Difficulty sleeping or frequent nightmares
- Declining grades, loss of interest in schoolwork, or not wanting to go to school
- Sudden loss of friends or avoidance of social situations
- Feelings of helplessness or decreased self-esteem
- Self-destructive behaviors such as running away from home, harming themselves, or talking about suicide

SIGNS A CHILD MIGHT BE BULLYING OTHERS



- Gets into physical or verbal fights
- Has friends who bully others
- Is increasingly aggressive
- Gets sent to the principal's office or to detention frequently
- Has unexplained extra money or new belongings
- Blames others for his or her problems
- Doesn't accept responsibility for actions
- Is competitive and worries about reputation or popularity

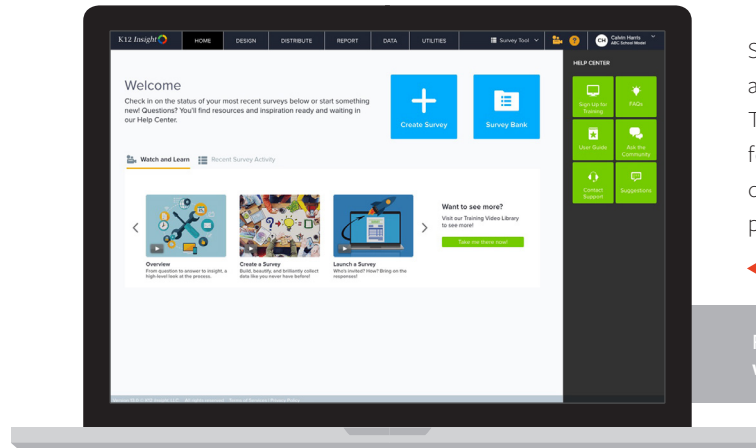
For more, visit K12 *Insight* at www.K12insight.com

Source: StopBullying.gov

Giving students a voice

Schools have several options when trying to engage students and families in critical conversations about student safety and bullying. What's important is that everyone has a safe place to express their concerns, and to report abuse.

The Brighton Central School District in New York and Clover School District in South Carolina are two of hundreds of school districts nationwide that partner with **K12 Insight** to gather insights about bullying and other school safety and climate issues using Engage, the company's cloud-based survey solution.



School districts use Engage to design, promote, administer and analyze student and climate surveys. The goal: to ask the right questions, elicit honest feedback from parents and students and use reliable data to create an action-based plan around bullying prevention and awareness in schools.

◀ Engage from K12 Insight

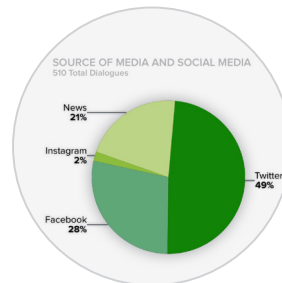
For more about Engage climate surveys, visit:
www.K12insight.com/engage

When surveys aren't enough

Surveys are a great way to get feedback from your school community. But, when it comes to critical issues like bullying, sometimes they aren't enough.

Students and parents need a way to contact teachers or administrators, and to express concerns or report abuse in real-time, as it's happening.

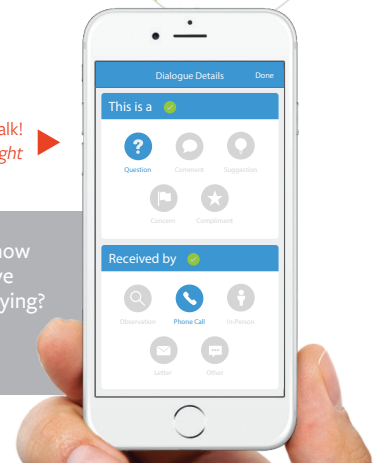
Let's Talk!, from **K12 Insight**, aims to create a safe place where students, parents and others can send feedback or concerns. Accessible from any device, the Let's Talk! app allows students and others to contact school officials 24/7. No call centers or general mailboxes. Each personal message is immediately routed to the right team member to issue a prompt response. A special Critical Alerts feature allows administrators to set immediate alerts for key topics, such as student health or violence in schools. When leaving feedback, parents and students can choose to leave their names or remain anonymous, ensuring they always feel protected and safe when engaging with the school.



Let's Talk!
from K12 Insight ▶

Interested in learning more about how Let's Talk! can help your schools give students a louder voice against bullying?

Sign up for a free demo:
www.K12insight.com/lets-talk





CHANGE THE CULTURE

Address the underlying cause

Listening to students' concerns and intervening to stop bullying are important, but K12 leaders also must focus on prevention. And that starts by fostering the right school culture, as Brighton has done with its Brighton Beliefs program.

"School leaders must address the underlying cause of bullying, which is a lack of emotional intelligence—a set of skills for understanding, communicating about, and regulating feelings," says Ross Ellis, founder and chief executive of STOMP Out Bullying. "Social and emotional learning must be a major component in bullying prevention efforts from preschool to high school classrooms and at home."

In Newton, Mass., the public school system received a five-year, \$2 million grant to make its schools safer and its climate more accepting by adopting a multi-tiered approach to teaching kindness and respect.



If children are not taught empathy, then bullying will continue to be pervasive in our schools."

ROSS ELLIS,
FOUNDER AND
CHIEF EXECUTIVE,
STOMP OUT BULLYING



The Newton Public Schools have created a Social and Emotional Learning Department that functions like any other academic department. The district is using the Responsive Classroom model, a research-based approach for integrating social and emotional learning into the K-8 curriculum, to be “preventive rather than reactive” in heading off bullying, says Amy Kelly, who leads the department.

“When you have a safe, supportive, and responsive school, you have a school that is bully-proof,” Kelly says.

To support the development of this kind of environment, Newton has established Responsive School Teams in each of its 19 elementary and middle schools. These teams include a diverse array of staff members, such as administrators, general education teachers, and special-education teachers.

Every teacher is required to take a Responsive Classroom course within their first five years of teaching, and the Responsive School Teams provide additional training and support. “We have taken a team-based approach to capacity building,” Kelly explains.

3 KEYS TO KINDNESS

Driven by a desire to protect the health and well-being of students, Brighton and Newton are instilling a culture of kindness and respect in their schools. Here are three keys to their success:

1 Set clear expectations—and be consistent

“We’re trying to make sure we have the same expectations for students in all areas of our schools,” says Amy Kelly, department head for social and emotional learning at Newton Public Schools in Massachusetts, “and those expectations are taught, modeled, and practiced constantly.” If everyone understands these expectations—including staff—then the adults in each building can respond to situations consistently, she said, which helps reinforce correct behavior.

2 Involve parents

“Developing partnerships with parents is essential to making sure the message is reinforced at home, and that everybody is buying into our approach to character development,” says Kevin McGowan, superintendent, Brighton Central School District in New York.

In Newton, teachers who have been trained in the Responsive Classroom approach are using their open house nights to explain the model to parents, and some teachers are inviting parents into their classrooms during school hours to observe these practices in action. In addition, Kelly has created a two-hour workshop for parents to learn how they can support the Responsive Classroom values with their children at home.

3 Get buy-in from staff

This work “has to be a combination of top-down and bottom-up approaches,” Kelly says. “You need the time and the money and the support structures from the administration, but you also need a contagion of enthusiasm from your educators. That’s really what has helped us to move this forward.”

On the administrative side, Newton is fortunate to have a department for social and emotional learning. “We have two people in our district who are dedicated to this work full time,” she says. “Without that, I think it would be a challenge to keep this focus front and center.”

At the same time, “teachers leave the Responsive Classroom course and are ready to change the world. They’re so energized by this material that they say to their colleagues, ‘You’ve got to take this course. In 25 years, I’ve never taken anything that has been so transformative.’”

SAFER SCHOOLS START NOW

Now is the time to act

K12 leaders must take steps to eliminate bullying and other forms of harm or abuse in schools. To do this, you need to enlist the help of all stakeholders—including parents, teachers and students—to create a safe, respectful culture.

Tools that can help you identify key problem areas and help students and parents report their concerns are useful. But they are just one part of a larger commitment to embracing caring and empathy in public education.








“By creating a safe school climate, enforcing ant-bullying programs, and teaching social and emotional learning skills, we can see a major reduction in bullying,” Ellis says. “If children are not taught empathy, then bullying will continue to be pervasive in our schools.”

We all have a role to play. What steps are you taking to do your part?



MORE BULLYING RESOURCES

As you strive to create a safe, supportive, and bully-free culture in your schools, here are some organizations that can help you and your students.

It Gets Better Project @ItGetsBetter www.itgetsbetter.org	The It Gets Better Project started with one YouTube video from activist and author Dan Savage and now has more than 50,000 videos of people speaking about their struggles with not fitting in and how things did get better for them—reminding youth that they're not alone.	
Kind Campaign @kindcampaign www.kindcampaign.com	Kind Campaign was started in 2009 by Pepperdine University students Lauren Parsekian and Molly Thompson, who were both affected by bullying from other girls. They created a nonprofit organization to stop what they call "girl on girl crime."	
National Bullying Prevention Center @PACER_NBPC Bullying411@PACER.org www.pacer.org/bullying	Founded in 2006, PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center actively leads social change, so that bullying is no longer considered an accepted childhood rite of passage. PACER provides resources for students, parents, educators, and others.	
STOMP Out Bullying (877) 602-8559 @STOMPOutBullying www.stompoutbullying.org	STOMP Out Bullying is a national anti-bullying and cyber-bullying organization for kids and teens. It teaches effective solutions on how to respond to all forms of bullying, as well as educating kids and teens in school and online and providing help for those in need.	
StopBullying.gov @stopbullyinggov www.stopbullying.gov	StopBullying.gov provides information from various government agencies on what bullying is, what cyber bullying is, who's at risk, and how you can prevent and respond to bullying.	
Suicide Prevention Lifeline (800) 273-TALK (8255) www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org	If students are feeling hopeless or helpless or know someone who is, they can call this toll-free number at any time.	
The Trevor Project (866) 488-7386 @TrevorProject www.thetrevorproject.org	The Trevor Project is a nonprofit organization focused on suicide prevention efforts among lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning youth. It provides suicide and crisis prevention for LGBTQ youth through a 24-hour phone line, text support, and online chat service.	

JOIN THE MORE THAN **30,000** SCHOOL LEADERS
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