

Research Brief

Teacher Intimidation by Students

Question: What is the best course of action when students engage in non-aggressive intimidation of teachers?

Summary of Findings: Fortunately, only about 34% of teachers in Wyoming report ever being harassed, threatened or intimidated by students at anytime during their career. As such, Wyoming Schools are considered some of the safest working environments for teachers in the United States. Because Wyoming teachers are so seldom harassed or intimidated by students there are very few (if any) specific laws, rules or regulations regarding such behavior. Student behavior that intimidates teachers may be dealt with using a statute that permits suspension or even expulsion in cases where a student's behavior is, in the judgment of the local board of trustees, clearly detrimental to the education, welfare, safety or morals of other pupils, including the use of foul, profane or abusive language or habitually disruptive behavior. A copy of the statute is attached for your information. *However, because the behavior of the students is not overtly aggressive, a conference with your school board attorney is a good first step before disciplinary action is taken in this situation.*

While there may be grounds for disciplinary intervention under this statute, it may be more useful to explore current research pertaining to bullying in schools as the students' behavior clearly falls within the definitions of school bullies. A solution would seem to have two parts; first, quickly and firmly intervening with the offending students, and working with faculty and staff to develop a comprehensive anti-bullying program for the school.

Major Findings and Conclusions:

- Incidents of violence and intimidation of teachers were lower in schools and districts that had implemented policies and practices such as written student discipline codes, formal record keeping for violent incidents, occupational health and safety committees, and other pro-active measures.
- There are three factors that identify bullying behavior
 1. There is a perceived power difference between the individual being bullied and the bullier.
 2. There is a negative intent on the part of the bullier to hurt, embarrass, frighten or humiliate the other.

3. The behavior is repeated, perhaps with others, perhaps with the same person, perhaps with the same person over time. It is probably safe to say that students who are bullying teachers are also bullying other students.
- One of the most effective tools for dealing with bullying is to mobilize the masses of students and teachers who are neither victims nor bullies to take action against bullying. This group has the potential to significantly reduce bullying simply by the way they react when they witness bullying incidents. Action can be taken in many different ways. Refusing to watch bullying, reporting bullying incidents, using distraction with either the bully or the victim are all effective ways of making a difference.
 - There must be a clear and effective plan for dealing with both the bully and the victim. It is important that all students know the consequences for bullying. Victims need to be taught how to interact with assertiveness and confidence. In the case of teachers who are being bullied, assertiveness training may be very helpful as it increases confidence and enables teachers to develop the personal power that makes them less likely to be victims of young bullies.
 - There are three distinct groups that are harmed by bullying behavior.
 1. Bullying behavior harms the victim. If a person experiences chronic intimidation, he or she may learn to expect this from others. He may develop a pattern of compliance with the unfair demands of those he perceives as stronger. He may become anxious or depressed.
 2. The bully is also harmed. If he or she is allowed to continue the behavior, it becomes habitual. He becomes more likely to surround himself with friends who condone and promote aggressive behavior. He may not develop a mature sense of justice. If he intimidates others to cover up his own insecurities, his own anxiety may increase.
 3. Bystanders who observe the interaction are harmed. A bystander may become frightened to express himself openly. He may also adopt the behaviors of either the bully or the victim.
 - Adults who are assertive and self-confident are less likely to be bullied. A strong positive self-image can help by making it easier to ignore minor incidents. The positive self-image can also make it easier for one to take action when the bullying has gone too far. Personal insecurity can lead victims to be seen as weak, easy targets. Since a positive, assertive attitude is one of the characteristics of highly effective teachers, Assertiveness Training for teacher may be worth consideration.
 - Traditional approaches—the strong-arm Dean responding after the fact, corporal punishment, addressing only behavior and not its causes—cannot, in isolation, produce a safe school environment that is free from intimidation. Such approaches “manage” a crisis but do not lead to lasting resolutions. Comprehensive

policies and strategies are needed.

- According to Benard, (1991), students who are socially competent, possess good problem solving skills, have a sense of autonomy, and a sense of purpose for the future are less likely to engage in violent, or bullying behavior.

Online Resources:

- **Protecting Against Bullies Throughout the Life Cycle**

This site from the Northern County Psychiatric Associates in Baltimore contains concise information that describes different types of bullies. There is also a section on what schools can do to combat bullying.

http://www.ncpamd.com/Bullying_thru_life_cycle.htm

- **Reducing School Violence: Building a Framework for School Safety**

The development of this publication is a collaborative effort among SERVE, the Florida Department of

Education, and the Southeast Regional Center for Drug-Free Schools and Communities.

This publication is pretty detailed, but contains good general information about school safety. It contains tables of information that would be perfect as part of a planning packet of for a faculty meeting.

<http://www.serve.org/Syc/proarfeb01.htm>

- **National Bullying Awareness Campaign (NBAC)**

This NEA publication is an excellent introduction to the problem of bullying in schools. It contains concise information that would be used for faculty discussion or planning.

<http://www.nea.org/schoolsafety/bullying.html>

- **A Stress Reduction Guide for Teachers and Other School Staff**

This site is part of the National Education Association Health Information Network. It contains information about stress reduction for teachers and other school staff. There is a list of stressors, and a detailed list of tips for dealing with classroom stress that contains good information. There is also information for reducing stressors that affect teachers.

This might be something you could use during a faculty meeting. Teachers who are calm and in control are better able to deal with bullies.

<http://www.neahin.org/programs/mentalhealth/stressguide-3.htm>

- **Take Action Against Bullying, Bullying Hurts and Keeps on Hurting**

This website by BullyB'ware Productions contains good basic information about bullies and how to deal with them. There are products and workshops descriptions as well as news articles about the subject.

<http://www.bullybeware.com>



References

- Benard, B. (1991). Fostering resiliency in kids: Protective factors in the family, school, and community. Portland, OR: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory.
- The following statute governs suspension and expulsion in Wyoming schools. The section dealing with disruptive behavior is highlighted in red.

1998 State of Wyoming 98LSO-0068

HOUSE BILL NO. HB0050

Education-suspension and expulsion.

Sponsored by: Representative(s) Shreve, Badgett and Childers
and Senator(s) Coe

A BILL

for

1 AN ACT relating to suspension and expulsion of students;
2 amending suspension and expulsion grounds and procedures for
3 destroying or defacing school property; and providing for an
4 effective date.

5

6 *Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Wyoming:*

7

8 Section 1. W.S. 21-4-305(e) and 21-4-306(a) [(a) (iii)]
9 as amended effective 7/1/98] are amended to read:

10

11 21-4-305. Suspension or expulsion; authority;
12 procedure.

13

14 (e) Suspension or expulsion shall not be imposed as an

15 additional punishment for offenses punishable under the laws
16 of the state, except for expulsion by a district
17 superintendent under subsection (a) of this section, or
18 where the offense was committed at a school function,

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1 against the property of the school, or is of such nature
2 that continuation of the child in school would clearly be
3 detrimental to the education, welfare, safety or morals of
4 other pupils. No suspension or expulsion shall be for
5 longer than one (1) year.

6

7 21-4-306. Suspension or expulsion; grounds.

8

9 (a) The following shall be grounds for suspension or
10 expulsion of a child from a public school: ~~during the school~~
11 ~~year:~~

12

13 (i) Continued willful disobedience or open
14 defiance of the authority of school personnel during the
15 school year;

16

17 (ii) Willful destruction or defacing of school
18 property during the school year or any recess or vacation;

19



20 (iii) Any behavior during the school year which
21 in the judgment of the local board of trustees is clearly
22 detrimental to the education, welfare, safety or morals of
23 other pupils, including the use of foul, profane or abusive
24 language or habitually disruptive behavior as defined by
25 subsection (b) of this section;

By: Mike Muir, Maine Center for Meaningful Engaged Learning

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