

## "No Bully" Policy at Philadelphia Schools

By Patricia Hawke Philadelphia Schools has a "just say no" policy, when it comes to school bullies and other related negative student behavior. Approximately, two thirds of all deaths among children and adolescents in the United States are the result of injury-related causes. These include motor vehicle crashes, unintentional injuries, homicide and suicide. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, at least 126 students committed a school-associated homicide or suicide between 1994 and 1999. Of these students, 28 committed suicide, of which eight intentionally injured others immediately before killing themselves. None of these students were involved in gangs. The suicides, now referred to as "bullycide", were attributed to school-associated violence, including bullying and other such social stressors. Though the 126 students may seem small for a national statistic, this is only the tip of the iceberg. It does not address the number of students who develop substance abuse and psychological problems due to being bullied and harassed at school — some for many years from elementary through high school by the same individual(s). "Pediatrics", Journal of the American Academy of Pediatrics, reported in its May 5, 2004, issue that the rise of obesity and overweight in school-aged children is associated with "many negative social and psychological ramifications." Peer aggression is at the top of the list. To work toward eliminating this rising national problem in their schools, Philadelphia schools developed a policy that prohibits anyone from bullying or seriously threatening any member of the school community during school hours and coming to and from school. This includes: Repeated threats; Threats of bodily injury; Physical or psychological intimidation; Extortion of any type; Fighting or other acts/threats of violence; Repeatedly posting information about another individual without his/her consent on the Internet, bulletin boards, school walls, individual's personal belongings, or any other location — whether it is during school hours or not; and Harassment for any reason, but especially due to race, gender, disability, language or physical characteristic. Besides school personnel, Philadelphia schools have enlisted the help of the students and their parents. They have set up a Bully Hotline that is staffed 24 hours a day for students or parents to report school-related abuse. The hotline serves over 175 languages through a telephonic interpretation service. Philadelphia schools promise to act on a reported problem within 24 hours of receiving the hotline complaint. For some issues, callers may receive a follow-up telephone call to ensure the situations were satisfactorily resolved. Philadelphia schools created flyers in nine different languages that describe the school policy against these negative behaviors, the Bully Hotline, and instructions for non-English language individuals to access the hotline. The eight non-English languages are the most frequently encountered in Philadelphia schools and represent over 85 percent of their "English as a Second Language" students. The flyers were sent to the parents of students enrolled in their schools. Additionally, they asked parents and community groups to further distribute the flyers throughout the city. Philadelphia schools are truly concerned about the safety and well-being of its students. They believe that all students have a right not to be bullied or harassed. With their "no bully" policy and the hotline, they are well on their way to prevent, address and eliminate intimidation and harassment of any student for any reason.

### About the Author

Patricia Hawke is a staff writer for <http://www.schoolsk-12.com>, providing free, in-depth reports on all U.S. public and private K-12 schools. Stacy has a nose for research and writes stimulating news and views on school issues. For more on Philadelphia schools visit

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