

# THE PIONEER UNION ELEMENTARY SCHOOL DISTRICT

*Safe Schools • Youth Development • Integrated Support Services*

## STRATEGIC PLAN

### Bullying Prevention and Intervention

# Creating Caring Schools



January 2016

# **Pioneer Union Elementary School District**

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## **CREATING CARING SCHOOLS:**

### **PUESD Strategic Plan on Bullying Prevention and Intervention**

## **Acknowledgements**

We wish to thank the many members of the PUESD community that contributed their time and energy to the development of this plan and for their passion and commitment to making our schools safe and caring places for all.



**“Every child is entitled to feel safe in the classroom, in the hallways of school and on the playground. Children go to school to learn, and educational opportunity must be the great equalizer in America. No matter what your race, sex or zip code, every child is entitled to a quality education and no child can get a quality education if they don’t first feel safe at school.”**

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## The Problem of Bullying

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Bullying has been in the media as never before and for good reason: statistics show that 24% of elementary and secondary schools report daily or weekly bullying incidents,<sup>1</sup> and that as many as half of all children are bullied at some time during their school years.<sup>2</sup>



According to the 2008 *Indicators of School Crime and Safety* report from the Institute of Education Sciences, 32% of students ages 12–18 reported being bullied within the past year, with 63% percent of these students bullied once or twice over the year, 21% bullied once or twice a month, 10 percent bullied once or twice a week, and 7 percent bullied almost every day. The frequency of actual bullying incidents may even be

greater, since adults are often unaware of, or fail to adequately respond to bullying.<sup>3</sup>

The problem of bullying is especially significant for children who are overweight, have disabilities or mental health issues, are recent immigrants or who are LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender)—or simply perceived to be. Children of these groups are bullied at much higher rates than average, compounding an already heightened risk for many social, emotional, behavioral and health problems.

A 2009 survey by GLSEN (Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network) of 7,261 middle and high school students found that nearly 9 out of 10 LGBT students experienced harassment at school and nearly two-thirds

**As many as half of all children are bullied at some time during their school years.**

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<sup>1</sup> Dinkes, R., Kemp, J. & Baum, K. (2009). *Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2008* (NCES 2009-022/NCJ 226343). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, and Bureau of Justice Statistics, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice.

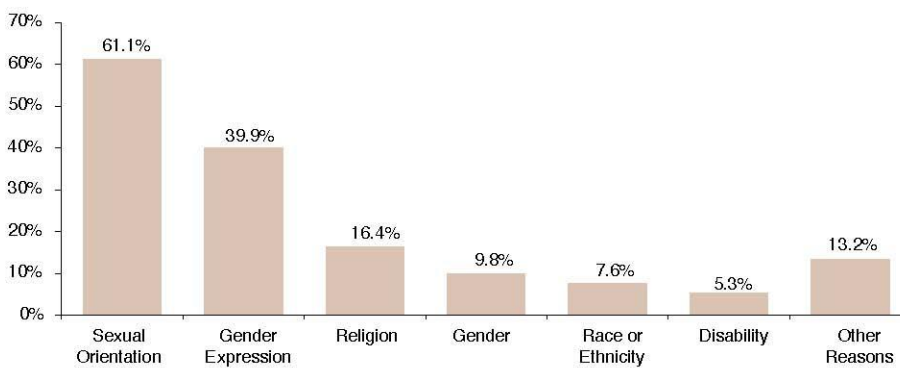
<sup>2</sup> American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (2008). *Bullying Facts for Families*, No. 80 (5/08).

<sup>3</sup> Pepler, D. J., & Craig, W. M. (2000). *Making a difference in bullying*. LaMarsh Research Report # 60. Toronto: York University.

felt unsafe because of their sexual orientation.<sup>4</sup> The study also found that more than 61% of students surveyed felt unsafe at school because of their sexual orientation and nearly 40% because of their gender expression, far higher than any other personal characteristic surveyed (table 1). In addition, nearly a third of LGBT students reported skipping at least one day of school in the month prior to the survey because of safety concerns.

**Table 1 – Data from GLSEN 2009 National School Climate Survey**

### Percentage of Students Who Felt Unsafe at School Because of a Personal Characteristic



Children who are bullied frequently experience a wide range of mental health issues including anger, depression, anxiety, substance abuse and suicide. They are also at high risk for school failure, chronic absence and dropout.

It is clear that schools have a critical role in addressing bullying not only because it often occurs during the school day, but because the effects of bullying impact student health, wellness and educational achievement. The issue of bullying though, is not exclusively the domain of schools; the entire

**The issue of bullying is not exclusively the domain of schools; the entire community must be invested**

community must be invested in addressing the problem of bullying as a community health issue affecting our most vulnerable children.

Consequently, bullying is not an isolated issue for just one school district to face or to address; bullying is a national issue. Such awareness recently sparked the first-ever national response from the U.S. Department

of Education in August of 2010, in which U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan commented, “This

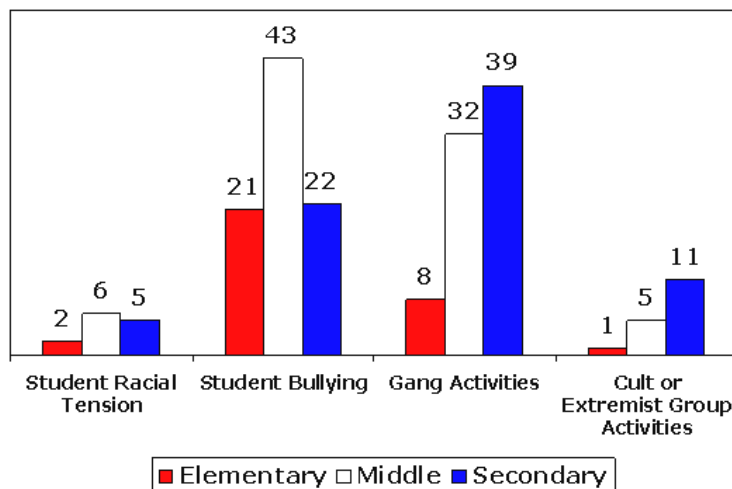
<sup>4</sup> 2009 National School Climate Survey, published by GLSEN (Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network).

isn't just a big-city problem. Bullying is epidemic in urban, suburban and rural schools.”

This national call to action has sparked attention from government and educational stakeholders to look deeper at what bullying is and the associated short- and long-term impact on students. Nationwide, student bullying is one of the most frequently reported discipline problems at school, with middle schools reporting the highest percentage of bullying related discipline problems (table 2).<sup>5</sup>

**Table 2 – Rates of Bullying and Other School Discipline Problems**

Numbers reflect percentages of schools reporting problems in 2005-06 in these areas:



Data from Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2007; National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2005–06 School Survey on Crime and Safety (SSOCS), 2006

In spite of the high rates of reported bullying, bullying also appears to be the most underreported safety issue on school campuses,<sup>6</sup> as students may fear repercussions from reporting or may perceive school administration to be incapable of taking effective action.

The widespread use of cell phones and computers in bullying has also made it ever harder to detect. While merely a decade ago, it could have been stated confidently that bullying more often takes place at school than on the way to and from school, the emergence of cyberbullying has radically changed the nature of when, where and how bullying occurs.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2007; National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2005–06 School Survey on Crime and Safety (SSOCS), 2006.

<sup>6</sup> Batsche, G., and H. Knoff (1994). Bullies and Their Victims: Understanding a Pervasive Problem in the Schools. *School Psychology Review* 23(2):165–174.

<sup>7</sup> Clarke, E., and M. Kiselica (1997). A Systemic Counseling Approach to the Problem of Bullying. *Elementary School Guidance and Counseling* 31(4):310–335.

Both national and local data indicate that bullying is a pervasive problem that needs much more attention than it currently receives. Though bullying costs school districts money through decreased student attendance, the costs to children's academic achievement, health and wellness are immeasurable.



## Bullying Defined

Although the term “bullying” is commonly used to refer to a wide variety of harassing behaviors, bullying is defined as involving the following characteristics:

- aggressive behavior that involves unwanted, negative actions
- a pattern of behavior repeated over time
- an imbalance of power or strength

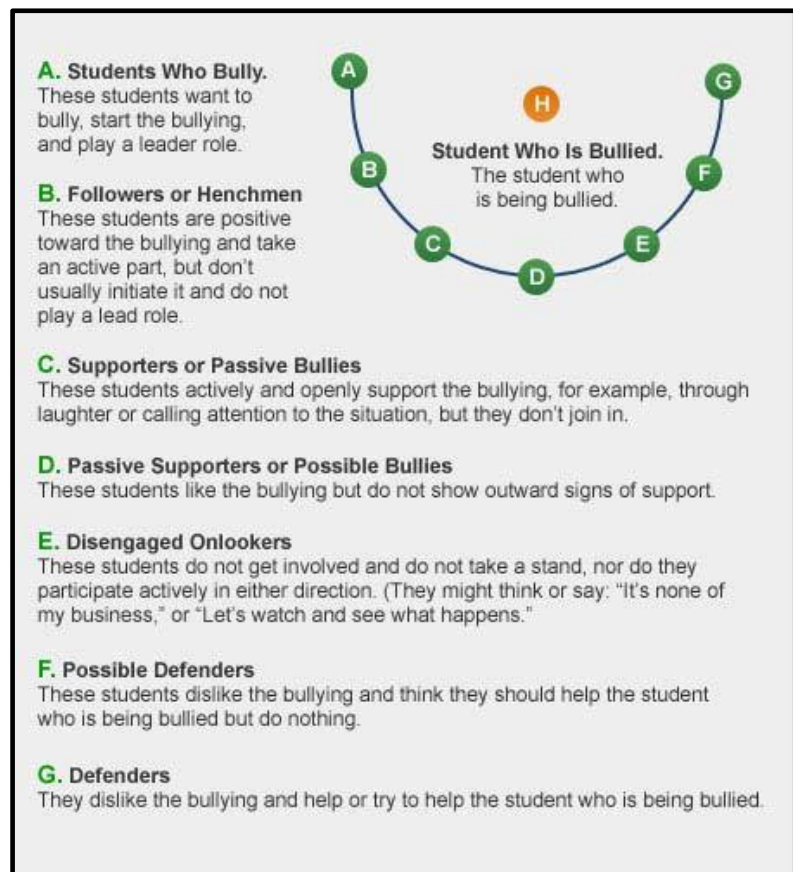
Data suggests that there are three interrelated reasons why students bully: <sup>8</sup>

- power and (negative) dominance
- satisfaction in causing injury and suffering to others
- material or psychological rewards

Bullying is complex phenomena that involves not only the victim and perpetrator, but a variety of other players.

Dan Olweus, a leading researcher on bullying, describes a “bullying circle” (right) in which students have roles that encourage, sustain or disrupt bullying behavior, including followers, supporters, onlookers and defenders.

This model emphasizes the interconnectedness of students in addressing bullying behavior at their schools. Teachers, administrators and other school staff also play a key role and can prevent bullying activity by fostering a climate of respect and support for everyone in the school community.



<sup>8</sup> Olweus, D. "Peer Harassment: A Critical Analysis and Some Important Issues," in Peer Harassment in School, ed. J. Juvonen and S. Graham (New York: Guilford Publications, 2001): 3-20.

## School Culture and Climate

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While there is wide consensus that bullying behaviors are greatly influenced by school culture and climate, there is little agreement among organizational theorists about the precise definition of these two concepts.<sup>9</sup> Regardless, school climate and culture are closely related ideas that are thought to reflect the shared values, norms, attitudes and beliefs of the school population.

“School culture is much more likely than official policies and procedures to determine what it is that students, teachers and administrators say and do.”



Bullying prevention programs generally adopt a whole school approach precisely to change school culture and create the conditions needed for respectful and inclusive behavior. While formal structures and policies have a significant impact on bullying behaviors, research indicates that informal structures—such as school culture and climate—may have an even more profound effect.

“School culture is much more likely than official policies and procedures to determine what it is that students, teachers and administrators say and do,” writes Elizabeth Meyer. “This means that teachers are more inclined to act in ways that reflect the shared norms and values of other teachers than in ways defined by school policy.”<sup>10</sup>

To create enduring change in school culture, the buy-in and commitment from the entire school community is needed. Simply mandating that schools adopt a bullying prevention program will do little

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<sup>9</sup> Lindahl, R. (2006). The Role of Organizational Climate and Culture in the School Improvement Process, *The Connexions Project*.

<sup>10</sup> Meyer, Elizabeth J. (2009). *Gender, Bullying and Harassment: Strategies to End Sexism and Homophobia in Schools*. New York: Teachers College Press, Columbia University.

over the long run to reduce bullying if teachers, parents and students are not fully behind this approach. This may be especially true in economically challenging times when schools are faced with increasing burdens and diminishing resources.

As a result, leadership is needed at the district level to provide the inspiration, knowledge and resources to empower schools to engage in effective bullying prevention efforts. Aligning bullying prevention with academic achievement and the district's own strategic goals is key in ensuring that site administrators are sent a clear message that a focus on bullying prevention is consistent with the goals of the organization as a whole.



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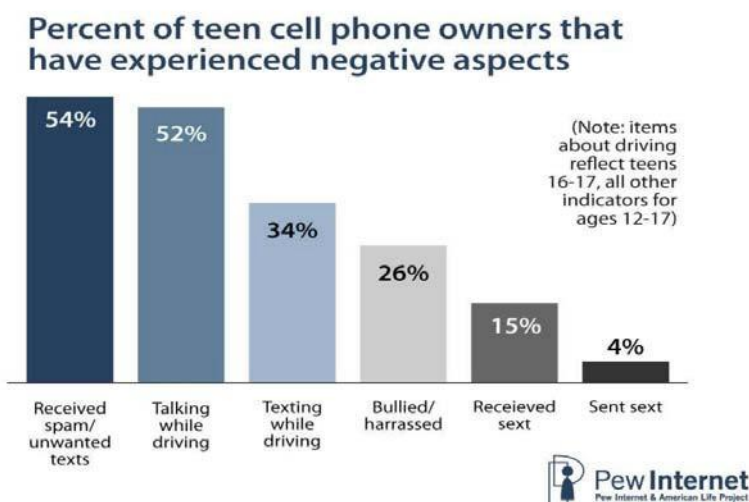
# Cyberbullying

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Cyberbullying has become one of the most widespread and challenging forms of bullying to address among children. Because of its concealed nature, its ability to spread rapidly, and its availability round-the-clock, cyberbullying can cause extreme harm to vulnerable children in a very short amount of time. Even children who are not targets of traditional bullying can be cyberbullied through email, text and photo messaging, exclusion from social media, as well as the posting of real or false information in chat rooms and on social networking sites.

The investigation of cyberbullying is fraught with challenges as well. Even when law enforcement is involved, cyberbullying can be difficult to trace and even more difficult to prosecute. Social networking sites are often slow to respond to complaints, citing privacy and first amendment concerns. Even when they do respond, the damage to a child's reputation may already be severe.

Adolescents, in particular, are at high risk for cyberbullying because of the widespread availability and use of cell phones, computers and other forms of technology among this age group. Research indicates that nearly 75% of children over age 12 used social networking sites in 2009, as compared to 58% in 2007.<sup>11</sup> More than 75% of teens over age 12 own cell phones, with the vast majority of these teens using their cell phones for daily text messaging and internet access.<sup>12</sup> In a study of teen cell phone use, 26% reported being bullied or harassed via cell phone.<sup>13</sup>



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<sup>11</sup> Patchin, J. W. & Hinduja, S. (forthcoming). Changes in adolescent online social networking behaviors from 2006 to 2009. *Computers and Human Behavior*.

<sup>12</sup> Lenhart, A. (2009). *Teens, Cell Phones and Texting*, Pew Internet & American Life Project.

<sup>13</sup> Lenhart, A. (2010). *Social Media and Young Adults*, Pew Internet & American Life Project.

While acknowledging the prevalence and significance of cyberbullying among teens, many schools and school districts question their role in addressing these issues because they commonly occur outside of school. However, cyberbullying can affect academic performance and there is increasing evidence of a link between cyberbullying and school bullying. In a recent study by Raskauskas and Chau (2010) of four schools in Northern California, the researchers found that victims of cyberbullying reported lower academic performance and less school connectedness than their counterparts who were not cyberbullied. In addition, cyberbullying victims also reported being bullied at school more often. The researchers concluded that “although it occurs off school grounds, cyberbullying can impact what happens at school.”<sup>14</sup>



“Although it occurs off school grounds, cyberbullying can impact what happens at school.”

When students are cyberbullied, they often don’t know where to turn for help. Presuming that school officials will not take action on issues that occur away from school, many students do not report cyberbullying.<sup>15</sup>

To address cyberbullying, school districts need to be clear on the laws that pertain to cyberbullying and the responsibilities school officials have to educate students and intervene on their behalf. In California, Assembly Bill 86—passed in 2008—gives schools the right to suspend or expel students who harass their peers through cyberbullying. In addition, AB 86 requires schools to develop policies regarding cyberbullying detection and intervention.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Raskauskas, J., & Chau, H.Y. (forthcoming). Cyberbullying: Connection with School Factors and Policy Implications. California State University Sacramento.

<sup>15</sup> Hinduja, S., & Patchin, J.W. (2009). Bullying Beyond the Schoolyard: Preventing and Responding to Cyberbullying. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

<sup>16</sup> Raskauskas, J., & Chau, H.Y. (forthcoming). Cyberbullying: Connection with School Factors and Policy Implications. California State University Sacramento.



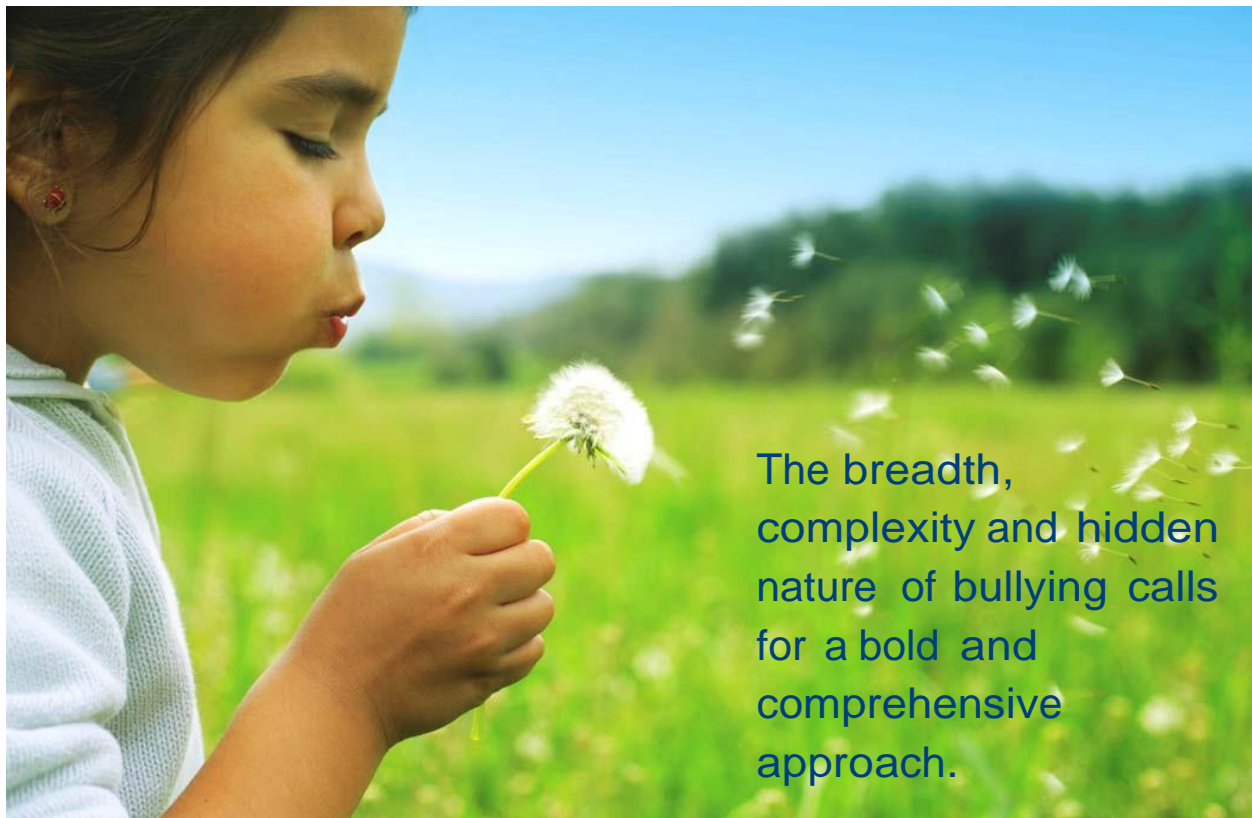
## Addressing Bullying

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The breadth, complexity and hidden nature of bullying calls for a bold and comprehensive approach to prevention and intervention. Research shows that comprehensive programs that empower both youth and adults as resources and responders have more success than single-issue focused programs.

Comprehensive programs target the entire school community, including teachers, non-teaching school staff, parents, administrators and students, and include three distinct components: 1) a school-wide component centered on training, awareness, monitoring and assessment of bullying; 2) a classroom component focused on reinforcing school wide rules and building social and emotional skills; 3) an intervention component for students who are frequent targets or perpetrators of bullying.<sup>17</sup>

This multifaceted approach must include a focus on positive culture and climate, employing youth development principles to foster a student centered safe learning environment. In addition, training and policy development at the district level is needed in order to ensure continued support for addressing bullying on school campuses.



<sup>17</sup> Social and Emotional Learning and Bullying Prevention. Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (2009). Washington, D.C.: National Center for Mental Health Promotion and Youth Violence Prevention, Education Development Center.

## Strategic Plan Development

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In January 2016, PUESD's School Board, Staff and Parent's Club convened a district-wide Bullying Prevention Task Force with the goal of developing a strategic plan to help reduce bullying across the district by addressing critical policy, program, training and funding issues. The Bullying Prevention Task Force was formed in response to a number of converging issues:



1. The identification of bullying as a contributor to student mental health issues.
2. The identification of bullying as an issue requiring greater attention district-wide.
3. Increasing requests from staff and parents for bullying prevention and intervention programs, as well as staff training.
4. Increasing public concern related to bullying and its effects on children's health, wellness and learning.

In addition, PUESD's superintendent and Board of Education have identified the importance of a systematic approach to bullying as a high priority for the district. Working together with the community, PUESD embarked on an effort to achieve these goals.

The District gathered data from a variety of sources, including focus groups with students, parents and school staff.

Recognizing that bullying is an issue that requires the attention of the entire school community, PUESD invited students, parents, community partners, school staff and administrators to participate in identifying needs, develop a process for gathering information and participate in the creation of a strategic plan on bullying prevention and intervention for the district. Participation was broad and included students, parents and school staff.

To better understand how bullying affects the PUESD community, the District will gathered data from a variety of sources, including focus groups with students, parents and school staff.

## Local Assessment

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Information gathered from focus groups and surveys will be helpful in understanding the major issues related to bullying at PUESD. This information will also be helpful in understanding the differing perspectives of students, parents, school staff and administrators. However, because these issues are so complex—and vary by school and grade level—it may be difficult to draw conclusions. Nonetheless, there are several overarching themes that will be considered:



1. Bullying is a difficult issue to discuss clearly because other forms of negative student behavior—such as harassment—frequently get mixed into the conversation.
2. School climate has a major impact on the level of bullying student's experience. Schools that work hard at developing a positive school climate generally have lower levels of bullying.
3. Few schools have any systematic approach to bullying prevention or intervention. Some schools though, have a focused approach to strengthening school climate that relates closely to a reduced incidence of bullying.
4. Few schools have any training available related to bullying. Students, parents and school staff need to be better educated on the subject to prevent and address bullying.
5. Cyberbullying is an area where bullying occurs frequently and often goes undetected. As cyberbullying may be an extension of bullying that occurs during the school day it is important for schools to take an interest in this issue.
6. Participation in school activities—such as sports, after school programs, music, student government and others—may help students maintain a stronger connection to school and function as a protective factor against bullying.



## Strategic Plan Goals

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The long-term goal of the district is to reduce the incidence of bullying throughout the school district for all students. Through the development, distribution and implementation of this strategic plan, it is hoped that the following systems changes will occur:

- A heightened awareness among PUESD leadership of the importance of addressing bullying systematically and proactively
- Greater understanding of the specific issues facing schools in relation to bullying
- Development of best practices and policies for bullying prevention and intervention
- Development of specific resources to assist schools in addressing bullying
- Ongoing staff training to raise awareness of these issues and provide information on policies, protocols and best practices

The plan represents the best collaborative thinking of our community and draws on the collective research and thinking of many other states, counties, universities and school districts nationwide. The plan is a framework for addressing bullying and a call for action, but is by no means the final word on the subject. While there are many recommendations that can be implemented immediately at no cost, many other issues will require time and resources to address. As a result, the plan should be viewed as the beginning process of strategically addressing bullying rather than the end product.



## Strategic Plan – Overview

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*The plan is broken down into three key elements that cover the range of issues around bullying prevention and intervention. The plan is not divided into separate prevention and intervention strategies, as there is considerable overlap in these areas:*



### **POLICY**

Addressing issues related to a set of principles or rules designed to guide decision-making, ensure adherence to accepted best practices and compliance with legal and ethical obligations. Recommended action on policy issues primarily refers to district-wide policy, though can include changes in state laws and regulations that affect PUESD students.

### **PROGRAM**

Implementation of specific, organized sets of activities designed to effect changes in attitudes, beliefs and behaviors around bullying. Bullying prevention programs emphasize the importance of addressing the entire school community, which includes all school staff, site and district administrators, students, parents, family members and anyone who interacts with students.

### **TRAINING, EDUCATION AND AWARENESS**

Formal mechanisms for the dissemination of information to all sectors of the school community. The importance of educating the entire school community—from students and parents to administrators and school board members—was emphasized repeatedly throughout the planning process and is consistent with research.

## Strategic Recommendations – Policy

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### *Strategy #1*

#### **DEVELOP DISTRICT BULLYING POLICY**

PUESD will develop a comprehensive, district-level policy focused on bullying prevention and intervention. The policy, with accompanying administrative regulations, will clearly define what bullying is, where bullying can occur and what steps administrators need to take when they become aware of alleged bullying situations. The policy will prohibit acts of bullying and will support the belief that bullying is conduct that disrupts both a student's ability to learn and a school's ability to educate its students in a safe environment. The policy will recognize the need to provide both support for students who are targets of bullying and alternatives to suspension for perpetrators.

### *Strategy #2*

#### **CREATE DISTRICT-WIDE COMMITTEE FOCUSED ON BULLYING AND HARASSMENT**

PUESD will assign the School Site Council as the committee focused on ensuring that both bullying and harassment are addressed systematically. As this strategic plan is focused specifically on bullying, the workgroup will provide oversight and guidance on the implementation of this plan and will include students, parents, school staff and community members. Since harassment was not addressed directly in this plan, the workgroup will explore additional program, policy and training needs related specifically to the issue of harassment.



### *Strategy #3*

#### **SUPERINTENDENT AND TEACHER IN CHARGE WILLOVERSEE BULLYING PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION**

PUESD'S Superintendent and Teacher in Charge will oversee and coordinate implementation of bullying prevention programs district wide. Other responsibilities will include coordination of training, education, outreach, support to site administrators and other activities related to bullying prevention and intervention.

### *Strategy #4*

#### **DEVELOP BEST PRACTICES AND MANDATORY ACTIONS FOR SCHOOL STAFF AND ADMINISTRATORS**

The district will develop a set of best practices and mandatory actions required of school staff and administrators when addressing bullying situations. The best practices will be informed by the most current research available and will be developed in conjunction with a wide array of stakeholders. Actions required of staff and administrators when responding to bullying situations will be drawn from these best practices to ensure that bullying situations are dealt with in a comprehensive, ethical and legally compliant manner.

### *Strategy #5*

#### **DEVELOP A VARIETY OF MECHANISMS FOR REPORTING BULLYING**

PUESD, with the support of district staff, will develop several different mechanisms for reporting bullying that will include the possibility of anonymous reporting. At the beginning of each school year, each school will provide written notice to students, family members and school staff regarding school site and district-wide mechanisms for reporting bullying.



### *Strategy #6*

#### **SUPPORT RESEARCH CONNECTED TO BULLYING, HARASSMENT AND CYBERSAFETY**

The district will continue to support research on bullying, harassment and cyber safety. In addition, the district will develop a set of assessment tools to monitor the level of bullying in the district and to better gauge where the greatest needs are.

## Strategic Recommendations – Program

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### *Strategy #7*

#### **IMPLEMENT BULLYING PREVENTION PROGRAMS**

PUESD will implement a recommended evidence-based, comprehensive program designed to improve school climate and prevent bullying. Programs will be researched to determine which are the best fit with PUESD's needs, and may include the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program, Caring School Community, Steps to Respect and others.



### *Strategy #8*

#### **CREATE A YOUTH ACTION TEAM TO PROVIDE LEADERSHIP ON DISTRICT BULLYING PREVENTION EFFORTS**

The creation of a Youth Action Team on bullying prevention will help provide youth perspective on issues of bullying and empower youth to take action on these issues. The Youth Action Team will initiate, plan and implement strategies related to assessment, training, policy development and public awareness of bullying. They will provide guidance to the school district on bullying and help maintain a strong youth voice in implementing the district strategic plan on bullying prevention and intervention.





### *Strategy #9*

#### **FOCUS ON POPULATIONS AT HIGH RISK FOR BULLYING**

PUESD will develop resources to focus on prevention activities with populations at high risk for bullying, including LGBTQ students (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or questioning), students with disabilities, students with mental health issues, students who are English Language Learners, and students who are obese. As research indicates that these groups of students are much more likely to be targeted for bullying than their peers, it is incumbent on the district to provide students of these groups with additional tools and resources to prevent and counteract bullying that is directed toward them.

### *Strategy #10*

#### **ENRICH AND EXPAND PARTNERSHIPS WITH CITY, COUNTY AND COMMUNITY**

PUESD will enrich and expand partnerships with county and community agencies focused on bullying prevention, including the Oroville Police Department, Feather River Parks and Recreation Department, Girl Scouts of America, Butte County Office of Education, Butte County Department of Behavioral Health and others. PUESD will partner with these organizations to implement training activities, assist in program development, provide technical expertise and participate in critical policy discussions.



## *Strategy #11*

### **PROVIDE COUNSELING AND OTHER SUPPORT SERVICES TO VICTIMS AND PERPETRATORS OF BULLYING**

When students are identified either as victims or perpetrators of bullying, PUESD will connect students and families to culturally and linguistically appropriate support services within the district and community. Although taking action to stop bullying when it is identified is a critically important action, schools must recognize that the impact of bullying may have long-lasting social and emotional consequences for children and families. In addition, schools must recognize that perpetrators of bullying are often struggling with social and emotional issues as well. As a result, it is incumbent on school personnel to become familiar with the types of counseling and other support services available so students involved in bullying can be referred for additional support.



## Strategic Recommendations – Training, Education, Awareness

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### *Strategy #12*

#### **PROVIDE EDUCATION AND TRAINING TO STUDENTS**

PUESD will develop resources for teachers and schools to educate students on the issue of bullying. This will include books, videos and other materials appropriate for a variety of grade levels. In addition, PUESD will develop resources for a presentation focused on bullying prevention and intervention that is in a format suitable for school assemblies at the middle school level. This may include youth and adult speakers that have had direct experiences with bullying, theatrical enactments of fictional bullying situations and other high interest presentations. Curriculum will be developed that is aligned with this presentation to enable teachers to facilitate discussions and provide more specific information to students. These presentations will be developed in coordination with the Youth Action Team to ensure that they are effective in addressing issues from a youth perspective.

### *Strategy #13*

#### **PROVIDE TRAINING AND SUPPORT TO PARENTS**

PUESD will develop a training and support program for parents on the subject of bullying which will include such subjects as strategies for detecting bullying, communicating with your child about bullying, communicating with school staff about bullying and cybersafety issues. The training will be offered at school



with curriculum tailored to address the unique needs of the elementary and middle grade levels.

### *Strategy #14*

#### **PROVIDE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT TRAINING FOR ALL PUESD STAFF**

PUESD will develop a training for all PUESD staff on the issue of bullying. The training will review the definition of bullying, strategies for preventing bullying and actions required of school staff when they are aware of a bullying situation. The training will be offered at school with curriculum tailored to



address the unique needs of the elementary and middle grade levels. All PUESD staff, including classified, credentialed and management—as well as community partner agency staff, such as after school and recreation staff—will be encouraged to attend this training.



### *Strategy #15*

#### **PROVIDE TRAINING AND CONSULTATION TO ADMINISTRATORS**

PUESD will develop training on bullying specifically designed for administrators. The training will review protocol for addressing bullying situations at school, legal issues related to bullying and prevention strategies

