



Each and Every Child



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An e-newsletter by the Iowa Department of Education

Bullying, harassment down 79%? Oh, yeah!

Prevention program empowers students to get involved

DUBUQUE – There aren't too many school districts that can boast they have plunged bullying and harassment by 79 percent. OK, there's

only one school district that can lay that claim: Dubuque Community School District.

Though a statistic like that seems almost too good to be true – you know what they say about too-good-to-be-true claims – this is the real McCoy. And it isn't through happenstance or good drinking water.

The district launched its Green Dot program in 2013.

"It is a violence prevention program that helps students identify where bullying and harassment incidents may happen and empowers them to deal with those high-risk situations," said Mae Hingtgen, the district's learning supports and equity liaison.

Though the program is for all students, students with disabilities – frequently targets of bullying and harassment – may see the benefits of the program most keenly.

The program focuses on how to



Photos by Iowa Department of Education's Deborah Darge

Dubuque students learn techniques to impact bullying.

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spot Red Dot situations – scenarios in which bullying or harassment is present – and how to launch a Green Dot resolution. The how-to of the program rests in its acronym Dot:

D Do it yourself, in which you confront the bully yourself or even just asked the target to go to lunch with you.

O Others can help: tell a teacher, a parent, a coach, or other students.

T Talk about something else to distract the bully.

“We all have our barriers to getting involved,” Hingtgen said. “It’s OK to be shy, not liking conflict, being less popular. That’s all OK. We get students to assess what would make it hard for them to get involved. Then we bring it back to the Dot. If you don’t like conflict, then do the O or do the T. We give students a lot of ideas on how to respond to Red Dot situations based on their individual personalities

and what they are comfortable with. Then we have them practice.”

The program is in the district’s middle and high schools, with plans to roll it out into the elementary schools.

The program was developed at the University of Kentucky as a means of curbing dating violence and sexual assault. The developer, Dorothy Edwards, who at the time was the director of the rape crisis center at the university, decided to create a model for high schools, altering it to be more age appropriate with an emphasis on dating violence and bullying. Later, she developed a middle school model, which is mostly aimed at bullying. Edwards is currently developing a developmentally appropriate grade school model.

“We were the first school district in the nation to adopt the Green Dot on as large a scale as we are,” Hingtgen said. “We want to be the first district in the nation to have Green Dot K-through-12.”

In a recent training of middle schoolers, students were engaged in determining how kids have influence



Mae Hingtgen, Dubuque’s learning supports and equity liaison, says anti-bullying techniques are personalized for each student.

over others, and what Red Dot situations – from dating violence to cyber bullying – look like. Students then broke into teams to discern what they see in their schools, what kind of language surrounds these scenarios and then asking one another, “What would I be comfortable doing to end the behavior?”



Students who are identified as peer influencers are brought in to learn how to mitigate bullying and harassment.

It's a six-hour training course in which the district has so far trained over 1,000 students. Participants are chosen based on their perceived ability to influence their peers, and come from all walks of student life from athletics, drama, student council, science and chess clubs, to name a few.

"Our goal is to always have at least 15 to 20 percent of the student body who has gone through the training," Hingtgen said.

One middle school in the district, Washington, decided that all students were potential influencers and decided to have all students trained. And now Jefferson Middle School is training all seventh graders.

Results from the training are gratifyingly immediate.

"We had some students go through Green Dot training, and they were back in school the very next day," Hingtgen said. "There was a new girl at school who was being picked on



Tashawn Vance, left, said he's learning how to effectively curb bullying with techniques that won't make him alienated by peers.

and, in two separate incidents with two separate students who had gone through the training, they intervened and made the girl feel safe at school."

No one needs to convince students that the program is valuable. Just ask Jefferson Middle School's Tashawn Vance and Dezi Copeland, both of whom were going through training recently.

"I see bullying a lot in our school and I would like to try to help stop it," Tashawn said. "Honestly, I don't do it right now because I may be made fun of or left out. But I'm learning, don't be afraid to do it yourself, don't be afraid to ask a teacher."

"We're learning what we can do to prevent it," Dezi said. "You see bullying in the hallways sometimes, some will act out. I guess they don't see it as a big deal to make fun of one another."

Any teacher could tell you that the benefits of the Green Dot program go far beyond stemming the miseries of being a bully's target.

"When kids feel safer at school,

then they have the opportunity to learn," Hingtgen said. "Kids are more engaged, teachers can do their jobs of teaching rather than having to deal with withdrawn students."

"We have two messages with Green Dot," she said. "The first message is: Violence will not be tolerated. The second message? Nobody has to do everything, but everyone can do something. We are changing the message that every single one of us – teacher, parent, student – it is all our responsibilities to end Red Dot situations in our schools."

Hingtgen knew the Green Dot program was doing well in the district – but not that well. When she first saw the report that there had been a 79 percent drop in bullying and harassment in a four-year period, she didn't believe it.

"My first thought was, 'we still aren't reporting enough,'" she said. "We average about 50 reports a years, and with 10,500 students, I didn't really think that was right – we still aren't doing enough to get students to report. Then my second thought was, 'Green Dot is working!'"



Dezi Copeland

Tip from Heather Howland

Regular communication with general education teachers is essential. Meet to review accommodations, discuss modifications and plan for instruction on a weekly or monthly basis. Share goal progress with teachers so they can assist in supporting the student. Conduct periodic observations of students in the general education environment, and offer feedback on how to best meet their needs. Collaboration is key to success!



Teacher Leader Heather Howland, Janesville CSD

A check list for success

1. Read those IEPs

Do you want to know who your kids are? Read their reports and IEP! These very important documents give you (almost) all of the information you will need about your students. Still, some of the best information you will get on the students will come from the student's previous teachers and their parents!

2. Meet the Parents

Take the time to send a note, postcard, make a phone call, use a carrier pigeon ;) Just make contact with the parents. I have to admit that I used to be kind of nervous about calling parents, until I became one. I know that I want to know my children's teachers, so I figure other parents must feel the same way.

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Keep parents informed

Prior Written Notice (PWN) is the notice to parents of the action proposed or refused as a part of the special education IEP process. Parents have the right to receive PWN when a district or AEA proposes or refuses to initiate or change the identification, evaluation, or placement of their child or the provision of a free appropriate public education.

A PWN includes:

- A clearly and explicitly stated proposed or refused action
- A detailed description of the data used as a basis for the decision
- Other options the district or AEA considered including alternatives to the proposed/refused action and clear reasoning why those options were rejected

- Each evaluation procedure, test, record, or report the district or AEA used as a basis for the proposed or refused action including record review, observation or interview
- A description of any other factors relevant to the district or AEA's proposal or refusal
- A statement that the parents have protection under the due process provisions of special education and, if this notice is not an initial referral for evaluation, how the parent may obtain a copy of the procedural safeguards

Indication of a change in identification, evaluation, services, supports, or placement should be noted and the contact information of an individual who can address questions regarding the notice is included. Finally, the PWN should be written in parent-friendly language.

Courtesy Keystone AEA

Have a tidbit you'd like to share? Send to jim.flansburg@iowa.gov.

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3. Prepare Materials

After you have gathered information from paperwork and people, now is the time to prepare the materials you will need to make successful programming for your students. Some of your students may have sensory needs, need a visual schedule, or a behavior plan. Have something prepared for the first day, so the students know your expectations and are started off on the right foot.

4. Be Flexible

Special education teachers should take a class in flexibility. Schedules, students, due dates are constantly changing. You have to hang in there and roll with the punches. Find a way to get organized so when the times get tough, you are able to bend with change!

5. Work WITH Your Co-Teachers

One thing that is difficult for some teachers is to go into a classroom of another teacher. Some people welcome you with open arms and others feel like you are cramping their space. My advice is to feel the person out, find out their teaching strategy, study their classroom management and then figure out where your personality and strengths will fit in. I do not want to go in and take over another teacher's classroom, I want to feel like I belong there and feel wanted and needed.

6. Is This Eternally Significant?

Some "seasoned" teacher friends of mind always would say, "Is this (event, test, project) eternally significant?" If it isn't, then is it worth getting worked up over? Probably not. Keep things in

perspective. Remember not to take things too personally, especially with our students.

7. Get Organized

Purchase a big desk calendar, and at the beginning of the year, write down all of your annual review due dates, re-evaluation due dates, and any other important dates. Make sure you look at this calendar daily and know what is coming up. Don't get behind, because there is no catching up!

8. Get Organized #2

Find a monitoring system that works for you. Everyone is different and monitoring of IEP goals can be accomplished 5,000 different ways. I like to use an excel document to plot my probe percentages that I gather from curriculum-based measures, rubrics, and other assessments. Find your way!

9. Document, document, document & save

In special ed, "they" say, "If it isn't written down, it didn't happen." Document everything! Parent phone calls, meeting notes, co-teacher conversations, work samples...everything! Save that documentation and also save work samples.

10. Become One with the Paperwork

Since I first mentioned becoming a special education teacher, people have groaned and told me that it is so much paperwork. They weren't kidding! There is a lot of paperwork. You have to find a way to stay on top of it (maybe that's why I have 2 tips for being organized)!

*A blog from a central Kentucky special education teacher
(Mrs.HsResourceRoom)*

Registration is now open for the 2018 Special Education Symposium

The symposium will be held June 11-12 at the Community Choice Credit Union Convention Center in Des Moines. There is no fee to register.

The symposium is open to Iowa school administrators and educators, Area Education Agency staff, families,

and other adults who work with learners with disabilities.

A live link to register precedes this newsletter.

For more information, contact Nancy Hunt at nancy.ankeney-hunt@iowa.gov