

Homophobic Bullying and the 10 second intervention.

Homophobic bullying is a huge problem in Maine. There's no quick fix or easy answer. The long term answer lies in changing the norms and behavior of the culture. It helps for the adults to have clear policy and knowledge of the law to support them as well as a collective will to persist in facing this problem. Beyond that, administrative leadership is the key. If the administration makes it important, it usually will be important. Without strong leadership about this issue, it's business as usual.

The escalator of violence begins with language and continues to escalate until the adults draw a clear line for the students about what is and isn't appropriate language or behavior. A student's exposure to hate related words or symbols at school can increase his or her feeling of vulnerability. An environment in which students are confronted with discriminatory behavior is not conducive to learning and creates a climate of hostility.

Hate speech/graffiti is any verbal or written conduct that degrades a person's race, creed, color, national origin, marital status, sex, sexual orientation or disability and which has the purpose or effect of substantially interfering with a student's educational performance or creating an intimidating, hostile or offensive environment.

In working with middle schools I encourage teachers to use the "10 second intervention" which is an idea I got from Steve Wessler's book "The Respectful School". One of the problems with getting teachers to intervene is they believe that they "don't have time". I ask them to commit to six 10 second interventions a day - one minute of their time. This intervention is designed to address inappropriate language that is not directed at anyone person with the intention of hurting. It's more for the type of language that adults have come to believe is OK because "they all talk that way." Like when one friend says to another , " That shirt is so gay". All it involves is the teacher turning to whoever said the inappropriate statement and saying something like, "That's inappropriate language for school please don't say it again", and then move on - no lecture , argument or further discussion. When every adult in school is doing this consistently it really gets student attention. It also puts into the air that this teacher is trying to do something about this issue and make school a better place. Another by product of this action is that students may begin to see the teacher intervening as someone they can trust to take action against inappropriate behavior. Wessler calls these teachers "islands of safety." Another benefit of this is that it actually has more likelihood of being tried than expecting a teacher to do a whole "teachable moment" as their first attempt at an intervention.

It's not the whole answer to homophobic bullying but it is a good start.

The 10 Second Intervention

- **Use as often as possible.**
- **Ideal for transitional moments when there is no specific target or perceived hostile intent.**
- **Make it brief and respectful, not a lecture.**
- **Make a mental note of who was involved**
- **And watch for repeat offenders and report them to administration for further action.**

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