Q & A from Cyberbullying webinar hosted June 2, 2016

1. How are schools finding the time to implement meaningful programs to prevent cyberbullying?

Effective implementation is integrated across curriculum in order to promote the school climate and how students and adults treat each other. Each member of the school community plays an integral role in modeling expectations and improving interactions and relationships. Maintaining a socially and psychologically safe environment is essential for learning.

Schools have reported use of the following strategies (polling question during live webinar):

- early use of Common Sense Media materials: K-12 scope-and-sequence, digital citizenry skills
- educate about DASA and effects of bullying/cyberbullying/sexting
- middle and high school presentations featuring cyber-safety expert(s)
- presentations focused on long-term impacts of misuse
- parent forums
- use of Second Step
- acceptable use policy (AUP) review and clarification for expectations
- citizenship integrated into courses
- class projects and presentations

2. How can we present this information to kids in a creative, engaging and interesting way?

Common Sense Media has a K-12 digital citizenship curriculum:

- for educators: **https://www.commonsensemedia.org/educators/digital-citizenship**

Netsmartz, from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children has resources including activities, and videos:

- for educators: **http://www.netsmartz.org**
- educators and teens: **http://www.nsteens.org/Videos/Cyberbullying**
- The University at Buffalo's Alberti Center for Bullying Abuse Prevention has resources and active social media where they regularly post information, tips, and videos that can be used with students: **http://gse.buffalo.edu/alberticenter**

Ideas from Sameer Hinduja and Justin Patchin, founders of the Cyberbullying Research Center (**http://cyberbullying.org**) include:

- organize a digital citizenship fair to embrace technology and allow students to show creativity
- have students produce public service announcements
- challenge students to unplug from technology

- discuss specific vignettes and scenarios and how to respond
- discuss crediting online sources and the legal implications of plagiarism

3. What specific steps/actions have proven to be effective in the prevention of cyberbullying?

Efforts to prevent all forms of bullying need to be integrated into a comprehensive approach to improving school climate and culture and should begin as early as possible. Actions related specifically to cyberbullying include:

- comprehensive and explicit teaching and reinforcing of social-emotional and behavioral skills and expectations
- teaching responsible use of technology
- include students in designing for policies and procedures
- build trust and open lines of communication
- provide students with specific responses to handle cyberbullying
- educate parents about the school's responsible use of technology
- reinforce positive social norms and practices

SEDL guidelines can be found at **http://www.p12.nysed.gov/sss/sedl/**

4. What power do schools have in cyberbullying situations among young people?

Under the NYS Dignity for All Students Act (DASA), schools not only have the power, but the responsibility for prevention and intervention of all bullying incidents (including cyberbullying) that disrupt the learning environment.

The original legislation amended State Education Law by creating a new Article 2 – Dignity for All Students. The Dignity Act also amended Section 801-a of New York State Education Law regarding instruction in civility, citizenship, and character education by expanding the concepts of tolerance, respect for others and dignity to include: an awareness and sensitivity in the relations of people, including but not limited to, different races, weights, national origins, ethnic groups, religions, religious practices, mental or physical abilities, sexual orientations, gender identity, and sexes. The Dignity Act further amended Section 2801 of the Education Law by requiring Boards of Education to include language addressing The Dignity Act in their codes of conduct.

These include:

- having a clear policy and code of conduct
- appointment of a dignity act coordinator at each school
- instruction for students on digital civility and character education, including prohibition of harassment, bullying, and intimidation
- school employee training

- reporting and investigation requirements
- elimination of the hostile environment

5. How can schools address cyberbullying that happens off campus but affects relationships in school?

The definition of cyberbullying per the NYS Dignity for All Students Act (DASA) is defined as: *harassment or bullying by any form of electronic communication, and include incidents occurring off school property that create or would foreseeably create a risk of substantial disruption within the school environment.(i)* School districts must work on building trust and establishing positive relationships. School districts have the responsibility to develop a school culture where students who are bullied/harassed/intimidated can feel that their concerns and complaints will be handled appropriately.

6. I get many questions about verifying online bullying. If there are no screenshots, how do we go about it?

You must rely on collecting information and data from the parties involved. If an investigation does not provide information/evidence that can verify a material incident, it is recommended to record and archive this information should a similar future incident take place. Even alleged incidents that are determined to be non-material can be addressed and should be recorded on the VADIR report Item #2.

A Material incident under DASA is:

An act or series of acts by a student and/or employee on school property, or at a school function, that creates a hostile environment by conduct, with or without physical contact and/or by verbal threats, intimidation or abuse, of such severe or pervasive nature that the conduct:

- has or would have the effect of unreasonably and substantially interfering with a student's educational performance, opportunities or benefits, or mental, emotional and/or physical well-being; or
- reasonably causes, or would reasonably be expected to cause, a student to fear for his or her physical safety

7. What are the legal consequences of cyberbullying?

Districts should consult with their legal counsel to determine when to involve law enforcement. Cyberbullying can lead to legal consequences when actions are deemed criminal in nature including, but not limited to:

- death threats or other forms of violence to people or property
- excessive intimidation or extortion
- evidence of sexual exploitation

- harassment or stalking
- hate-based crimes
- creation or dissemination of materials that are considered harmful to minors or any type of child pornography
- invasion of privacy or taking an image of someone in a place where privacy is expected

Notification of Law Enforcement: The Principal, Superintendent or designee will be required to notify appropriate local law enforcement when they believe that any harassment, bullying or discrimination constitutes criminal conduct.(i)
http://www.p12.nysed.gov/dignityact/documents/DignityActBrochureUpdateFinal.pdf

8. Some law enforcement agents do not take cyberbullying seriously. How can we help students if this is the case?

School districts should build a positive and collaborative relationship with law enforcement to assist with incidents of a criminal matter.

9. Are there any recognized "Best Practices" for recording and reporting DASA violations?

Best practices include the following:

- take all complaints seriously and conduct a thorough investigation
- collect information from student(s) allegedly bullied, students alleged to be the perpetrator(s), and all other witnesses
- determination of material incident with attention towards power differential among the students involved

10. Can you speak to the usability of anonymous reporting mechanisms?

School districts should provide multiple opportunities for incidents of bullying to be reported. The best mechanism to decrease bullying is build trusting relationships where students feel comfortable speaking with adults. If a school develops an anonymous reporting system, students should receive guidance and training on how to use the system. All complaints must be treated in a confidential manner. Anonymous reports may limit the school or district's ability to respond in full capacity. A prompt and thorough investigation should be conducted for all reports. Students should also be warned of the dangers and consequences of false reporting.

11. Can you provide more guidance for helping parents when they experience frustration related to reports of bullying/cyberbullying?

School personnel should take the time to listen to parents, acknowledge their concern for their child's safety, and take actions to ensure their child's future safety. The more school personnel

take the time to build trusting relationships with parents, the less confrontational parents will are likely to be. When bullying and complaints are proven to be non-material, a record of the investigation should be retained to support any future incidents that may occur. The prior non-material information can assist in any future report of the same nature.

Additional resources:

http://cyberbullying.org/Digital-Citizenship-Activities-Educators.pdf
http://www.pewinternet.org/2013/05/21/teens-social-media-and-privacy/
http://www.pewinternet.org/2015/04/09/teens-social-media-technology-2015/
http://www.p12.nysed.gov/dignityact/rgsection7.html

https://www.stopbullying.gov/cyberbullying/index.html

http://www.criminaljustice.ny.gov/missing/i_safety/cyberbullying.htm

http://www.ncpc.org/topics/cyberbullying