

# What is Project Prevent and Address Bullying (PPAB)?

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## Abstract

Bullying is associated with negative outcomes, which suggests a significant need for prevention and intervention efforts from schools. An Illinois school psychology graduate program was awarded a national training grant titled **Project Prevent and Address Bullying**. The goals and current progress of the training grant, levels of bullying and victimization in schools, need for school-wide bullying prevention, and prevention resources for schools are addressed.

## Introduction

- Bullying is associated with negative outcomes, such as depression, anxiety, and low academic achievement (McDougall & Vaillancourt, 2015).
- Children play multiple roles in the bullying dynamic, including engaging in bullying behaviors, being victimized, being a bystander, and being uninvolved.
- Twenty-five percent of middle school students reported being bullied at least once per week, (Musu-Gillette, et al., 2017).
- Approximately 60% of youth with disabilities are victimized in schools (Rose et al., 2015).
- There exists a significant need for prevention and intervention efforts from educators, especially in special education populations.
- Although school psychologists possess many of the functional skills necessary to address bullying in schools, few receive extensive bullying training (Sherer & Nickerson, 2010).
- Northern Illinois University's APA-accredited and NASP-approved school psychology graduate training program received a grant from the U.S. Office of Special Education Programs to provide school psychologists with specialized skills and knowledge to prevent and address bullying.

## Knowledge Growth

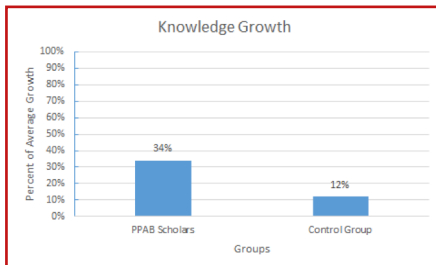


Figure 1. Average knowledge growth rate in one year between groups as determined by a pre-post test assessment.

## Grant Components

Aims of this grant: (1) Train specialist-level school psychologists to become experts in bullying prevention and intervention, emphasizing students with disabilities, and (2) provide parents, educators, and other school personnel with information and resources to prevent and address bullying.

The five components of this grant are described below, as well as outcomes of each component.

### Seminar

- Scholars participate in a weekly course focused on current issues in bullying where scholars gain foundational knowledge of best practices in bullying identification, prevention, and intervention within a multi-tiered framework.
- To assess outcomes related to increases in knowledge on bullying, PPAB scholars (and a control group of students in another graduate program in school psychology) were administered a pre-post knowledge test.
- On average, the growth of the control group was 12%, while the average growth of the NIU scholars was 34% (see Figure 1).
- One hundred percent of PPAB scholars demonstrated at least 10% more growth in knowledge of preventing and addressing bullying in schools with an emphasis on students with disabilities than students in the control group.

### Partner School Consultation

- The scholars have administered a bi-annual survey to students and staff to collect data on bullying and middle school climate at our partner school.
- Scholars also generate reports to communicate findings from surveys and develop interventions.
- Scholars conducted focus groups to discuss bullying from students' perspectives.
- To date, there have been a total of eight surveys administered, six focus groups conducted, and numerous meetings held with school staff, faculty, and scholars.
- Drawing from quantitative and qualitative findings, a lunchroom intervention was launched.
- Lunches were separated into two sections per grade (A and B), thus facilitating easier crowd management and decreasing time for students to engage in interfering behaviors.

### Expert Consultants

- Consultants with expertise in bullying communicate with scholars and faculty on a regular basis to discuss grant-related projects and the emerging research in the field.
- They make annual visits to NIU and provide professional development opportunities.
- Currently, the grant's expert consultants are Dorothy Espelage, Ph.D., Amanda Nickerson, Ph.D., and Tricia Berg, Ph.D. from Safe and Civil Schools.
- In the first year, Dr. Espelage conducted a staff training with the partner school, provided a training talk for the community, and consulted with scholars about partner school interventions areas. Dr. Nickerson coordinated a training for the NIU School Psychology Department and scholars.
- In the second year, Dr. Berg provided professional development for the staff at the partner school and conducted a training with the scholars.

### Professional Development

- In 2017, scholars presented on cyberbullying at the Northern Illinois University Bully Conference.
- In 2018, scholars presented on how teachers can address bullying in the classroom.
- This year, scholars presented with a focus on bystanders.
- Trainings are developed with the goal of disseminating relevant research and empirical evidence to current school psychologists and educators in the field.
- Workshop participants attending professional development from PPAB scholars identify being satisfied with the scholars' presentation of material and professional development as related to the work in schools with all students, including students with disabilities.

## Lessons Learned

- Grant scholars and faculty have gained insight on how school psychologists can approach conversations with school personnel and assist in integrating evidence-based practices regarding bullying prevention into the school's existing framework for behavior management.
- Social emotional education was initially considered a logical first intervention. However, results from the school-wide survey revealed that it was necessary to first reform the school climate. The lunchroom was prioritized because bullying occurred there most frequently. Using Safe and Civil Schools' publications, the PPAB team has applied the STOIC framework (Structure for Success; Teach Expectations; Observe and Monitor; Interact Positively; Correct Fluently) to the lunchroom to design a space that is safe for all students. These positive structural supports serve as a foundation for subsequent SEL programming to thrive.
- As a team, the PPAB faculty and scholars have learned the importance of understanding one's partner school's culture; the perspective of students and staff will ultimately determine the acceptability of the systems-level changes the team hopes to make. Building a positive working relationship and creating a presence in the school for data collection and consultation has helped the grant team become a part of the school team.

### Dissemination

- The PPAB website is an aggregate of research with handouts for different audiences (parents, students, teachers) with a specific interest and focus on bullying prevention and intervention in regards to students with disabilities.
- Multiple downloadable documents propose research- and data-based approaches to intervening with children who exhibit bullying behavior, those who are victimized, and other players in the bullying network.
- These scholar-created resources are available to the public.

