



More on safe schools/healthy students initiative

Katie Moran | Posted: Monday, December 5, 2011 3:05 am

As was mentioned in a previous column, five school districts in Cayuga and Onondaga counties are participating in a federal Safe Schools/Healthy Students initiative. Those school districts are: Cato Meridian, Jordan-Elbridge, Moravia, Southern Cayuga and Union Springs. The grants have been awarded across the country since 1999 and their primary goal is to promote a feeling of physical and emotional safety for students when they are in school. There are several directions that are taken to achieve this safe school climate, including physical safety of the schools through design; security procedures and school resource officers; programs that approach emotional issues that children have in school and at home; juvenile justice programs; and evidence-based programs, some that become part of the school curriculum and some that are directed at parents and families. There are a variety of evidence-based programs (EBP) that are being implemented under the auspices of the Safe Schools grant.

Therapeutic Crisis Intervention (TCI) is a program that was developed at Cornell University. People who are trained in this program learn how to proactively prevent and/or de-escalate a potential crisis situation with a child or young person, how to manage a crisis situation in a therapeutic manner, and how to process the crisis event with children and young people to help improve their coping strategies. Participants can be any and all school staff, including counselors, social workers, administrators, teachers, aides, bus drivers and cafeteria workers. In each district, staff members are trained as trainers and then they carry on the training of the rest of the staff within the various schools in their districts. In the past two years, 25 people have been trained as trainers in the five districts and more than 140 staff members have received TCI training from those trainers. Second Step is another EBP that is being implemented in the Safe Schools districts. It was developed by the Committee for Children, a not-for-profit organization based in the state of Washington that seeks to foster a world without bullying, violence and abuse. The program is one that is provided to classroom teachers and it covers topics such as empathy training, impulse control, problem-solving and anger management. There are curricula developed that are aimed at students in preschool through the eighth grade.

In the curricula for older students, topics also include substance abuse prevention, handling stress and bullying prevention, which covers areas such as dating bullying, bullying in friendships, and labels, stereotypes and prejudice. Teachers have the materials and curricula and can integrate the program into their classes in whatever way fits best. They can establish a specific time to present the lessons from Second Step each day or week or month, or they can use the materials for teachable moments that arise in the course of the school year. At this point, more than 100 teachers have been trained for the Second Step program, and nine have been trained as trainers.

Botvin's Life Skills is a program that is meant to help young people develop personal self-management skills, general social skills and drug resistance skills. It provides students with the skills to enhance self-esteem, reduce stress and anxiety, make good decisions, manage anger, overcome shyness, communicate clearly, build relationships and avoid the use of substances. The program is offered for youth from the third to the 10th grades and is usually offered in health classes, although it can be provided by any teacher into whose curriculum it will fit. Twenty-eight teachers have been trained in the Botvin's program, as well as two trainers.

There is evidence that there has already been some success as a result of the Safe Schools initiative and the EBPs. Surveys were conducted among students in the five districts in grades four through 12 in the spring of 2010 and again in the spring of 2011.

Across all five districts, there was an average decline of 16 percent in the percentage of students who reported that they had verbally bullied other students at least once in the past 30 days.

There was also a 12.5-percent reduction in the percentage of students who reported that they had been hit, kicked or pushed by other students in the past 30 days. For the students who are being bullied, a reduction in being bullied translates into less classes skipped and a lower inclination to use substances.

While these programs are not the only initiative going on in the schools that can help with bullying and other safety concerns of students, they certainly contribute to the improved school climate in these districts.

Katie Moran is the executive director of the Partnership for Results, a not-for-profit in Auburn dedicated to fostering the healthy development of children and their families. For more information on the Partnership for Results or the Safe Schools/Healthy Students Initiative, she can be contacted at 282-0005 ext. 10 or kmoran@partnershipforresults.org.