Bullying behavior is a growing concern among America’s educators. Bullying is generally defined as repeated aggressive acts intended to do harm, and is characterized by a power or status difference between the students. Bullying includes not only physical aggression such as hitting or stealing, but also verbal aggression, such as threatening, name calling, spreading rumors, socially rejecting and isolating someone, or cyberbullying (where perpetrators can hide behind the anonymity of the Internet).

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2011), more than 70 percent of students play some role in bullying, whether as one who bullies, is bullied, or witnesses bullying. A U.S. Department of Education study found that in 2006-2007, one-third of U.S. students 12 through 18 reported being bullied. Students who have been bullied report feeling depressed, anxious, and isolated. Many have low self-esteem. Their school attendance and performance may suffer. And in some cases, as the nation has seen recently, they are so tormented, they take their own lives.

Even though there are many training programs that can provide educators with tools to intervene in bullying situations, bullying often occurs outside the classroom, beyond teachers’ reach. Research consistently shows that bullying often occurs where there is little adult supervision—such as in the hallways and stairwells between classes, in bathrooms and locker rooms, and on the playground. Often, well-intentioned bullying prevention programs don’t take this into consideration, missing the opportunity to inform non-teaching staff about how to intervene in bullying situations.

Because skilled trades workers are among the few staff members who have keys to the entire building and who have authority to walk through every part of the school campus, they may encounter students hiding in the basement, in a closet, in a bathroom, or in a far corner of the school grounds out of fear of being bullied. Knowing how to respond to these situations would go a long way to helping these ESPs make students feel safe. And, since skilled trades ESPs usually live in the school districts in which they work, they are uniquely positioned to understand local factors that may be affecting students’ behaviors when they’re not in class. Skilled trades workers are already focused on safety issues in school buildings, offices and other facilities. With training on bullying prevention, their natural inclination to keep students safe can be tapped, which benefits students and staff alike.

NEA has long been committed to bullying and harassment prevention and intervention. For decades, members have received training in how to recognize and intervene in student-to-student bullying situations. NEA conducted a nationwide survey of 4,870 ESPs in 2012 that included questions about their experiences with bullying. Among the respondents, 339 were skilled trades or crafts workers. Highlights of their responses are presented on the next page.
What Skilled Trades ESPs Said

They see bullying as a problem in their school. Forty-three percent (43%) of skilled trades ESPs surveyed said bullying is a major or a moderate problem in their school.

They witness bullying. Skilled trades ESPs were less likely than other ESPs to report seeing a student being bullied at their school. Only 5% of them reported witnessing it as frequently as several times a month, slightly less than 5% saw bullying daily.

Skilled trades ESPs are the least likely to hear reports of bullying from students of any job category. Slightly more than 4% of the skilled trades ESPs surveyed indicated that a student reported bullying to them within the past month.

They feel it’s their job to intervene. A majority of skilled trades ESPs surveyed—71%—reported that it is “their job” to intervene when they see bullying situations.

They need training on bullying prevention and intervention. Nearly all the skilled trades ESPs surveyed reported that their school district has a bullying policy, but fewer than 33% of them said they received training on that policy.

They need to be invited/encouraged to join school committees on bullying prevention. Among all ESP job groups, skilled trades workers are the least likely to be involved in formal bullying prevention efforts in their schools. Only 4% reported being involved in formal school teams, committees or prevention programs dealing with bullying.

Like other ESPs, skilled trades workers generally report feeling slightly more connected to their school community than teachers, which influences bullying intervention. Connectedness is the belief by adults in the school that they are cared about as individuals and professionals involved in the learning process. Research has shown there is an important link between feeling connected to the school and being comfortable intervening with all forms of bullying among all types of students. The more staff members, including skilled trades ESPs, feel connected to their school, the more likely they are to intervene and stop bullying when they see it.

A majority of skilled trades ESPs say it’s “their job” to intervene in bullying situations.

They are likely to live in their school community. The ESP survey found that nearly 54% of skilled trades ESPs live in the school community where they work; this is considerably higher than the 39% of teachers who live in the community served by the school. This means that skilled trades ESPs know the students and their families, and can be an invaluable resource when seeking answers to bullying incidents.

VIEW FROM A SKILLED TRADES WORKER

Michael Musser, Carpenter, Ventura Unified School District, California.

Many skilled trades ESPs in our public schools feel they don’t have much to do with preventing bullying among students. School districts often do not include skilled trades employees in district anti-bullying training. Still, I feel all school district employees can have a positive effect on the learning environment for our students.

In these days of difficult state budgets, school districts are operating with bigger classes and fewer employees. There are fewer eyes watching our students during the day and more opportunities for bullying to happen.

I believe I offer yet another set of eyes to help prevent bullying on the campuses where I do maintenance work. Principals, teachers, and parents can rely on me for my opinion on interactions I observe between students. If my kind words and attention to the students I come in contact with help promote student safety and learning, I feel that I have contributed more than maintenance to our schools. All education employees are a part of student success.

TIPS FOR SKILLED TRADES ESPS

To Prevent Bullying

✔ Treat students the way you want to be treated and the way you want them to treat each other.
✔ Focus on developing empathy and respect.
✔ Model respect for diversity among the student population.
✔ Use positive, non-verbal interactions—a smile, a nod, a thumbs up, a high five, a pat on the back.
✔ Notice something positive the students do and say something about it to them or someone else where they can hear it.
✔ Don’t expect students to solve bullying incidents themselves; they lack the skills.
✔ Encourage students to use peaceful, non-aggressive ways to resolve differences.
✔ Encourage students to report incidents of bullying to you and other adults.
✔ Inform administrators that increasing adult supervision and monitoring in the hallways when classes change can help ensure bullying won’t go unnoticed.
✔ Encourage administrators to acknowledge the unique role skilled trades staff might play in identifying and reporting instances of bullying.
✔ Negotiate with administrators to ensure skilled trades personnel are provided training on bullying, so you know what you’re looking for (see resources).

To Intervene in Bullying

✔ Learn about bullying so you know what you’re looking for (see resources).
✔ Ensure all skilled trades staff members receive training on how to intervene appropriately during a bullying incident.
✔ Learn what your school’s consequences are for students who bully and what supports exist for targets.
✔ Work with administrators to give authority to skilled trades staff to intervene appropriately during a bullying incident.
✔ When you see something, do something—be assertive and calm.
✔ Express strong disapproval of and intervene appropriately to stop bullying when it occurs.
✔ Start with verbal warnings. If possible, use the name of the student who is bullying.
✔ Report incidents you witness as required by your school’s policy.
✔ Maintain your own log of bullying incidents.

Inform Yourself and Your Association

✔ Visit www.nea.org/neabullyfree, a good go-to source for resources about how to help bullied students and how to prevent bullying in your school.
✔ Seek input and collect data from other school staff to whom students go for support.
✔ Request a bullying prevention and intervention training session from NEA at www.nea.org/neabullyfree (there is a training link). Make sure the training is scheduled at a time that is convenient for skilled trades ESPs to attend.

ESP PERSPECTIVES ON BULLYING

✔ Ask your school district to provide training on the content of current policies for bullying prevention and intervention.
✔ Become involved in bullying prevention teams, committees and other activities at your school or Education Association.
✔ Initiate meetings with other staff to share concerns about bullying in general or specific students in particular.
✔ Acknowledge that you have a unique role to play in preventing student bullying and keeping all students safe.