

## Inform Yourself and Your Association

- Visit [www.nea.org/neabullyfree](http://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](http://www.nea.org/neabullyfree) (there is a training link). Make sure the training is scheduled at a time that is convenient for custodial and maintenance ESPs to attend.
- Ask your school district to provide training on the content of current policies for bullying prevention and intervention. Work with your local affiliate to ensure these trainings are scheduled at times that are convenient for custodial and maintenance ESPs to attend along with other school staff.
- 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.

## Resources

[www.nea.org/neabullyfree](http://www.nea.org/neabullyfree)

NEA's official website for the NEA Bully Free: It Starts with Me campaign.

[www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-201010.html](http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-201010.html)  
Guidance on bullying from the U.S. Department of Education.

[www.pta.org/bullying.asp](http://www.pta.org/bullying.asp)

National PTA guide on safeguarding children from bullying.

## NEA'S BULLY FREE PLEDGE

I agree to be identified as a caring adult who pledges to help bullied students. I will listen carefully to all students who seek my help and act on their behalf to put an immediate stop to the bullying. I will work with other caring adults to create a safe learning environment for all students in my school.



Be that caring adult. Take the pledge at [nea.org/neabullyfree](http://nea.org/neabullyfree)

**Bully Free: It Starts With Me!**

[www.nea.org/home/3207.htm](http://www.nea.org/home/3207.htm)

Education Support Professionals website with links to bullying resources, including the 2010 NEA *Nationwide Study of Bullying*.

[www.stopbullyingnow.samhsa.gov](http://www.stopbullyingnow.samhsa.gov)

Educator Tip Sheets are available, such as *How to Intervene to Stop Bullying: Tips for On-the-Spot Intervention at School*.

<http://www.nea.org/home/3207.htm>

2012 report comparing results of 2010 Teacher and ESP Bullying Survey with results of questions on 2012 ESP Member Survey regarding bullying.

## References

<http://www.tolerance.org/blog/piecing-together-puzzle-bullying>

<http://www.weac.org/professional-resources/great-schools/news-and-articles/2006-2007/custodians.aspx>

EDUCATION SUPPORT  
**ESP**  
PROFESSIONALS  
One Education Workforce  
Serving the Whole Student

**nea**  
NATIONAL  
EDUCATION  
ASSOCIATION  
[nea.org](http://nea.org)  
Great Public Schools  
for Every Student

10225 | 7/2013 | vn

This document has been printed by Organized Staff Union Labor at the National Education Association



EDUCATION SUPPORT PROFESSIONALS

# PERSPECTIVES ON BULLYING

## CUSTODIAL AND MAINTENANCE SERVICES ESPs AND BULLYING PREVENTION

### Custodians Witness Bullying All Around the School

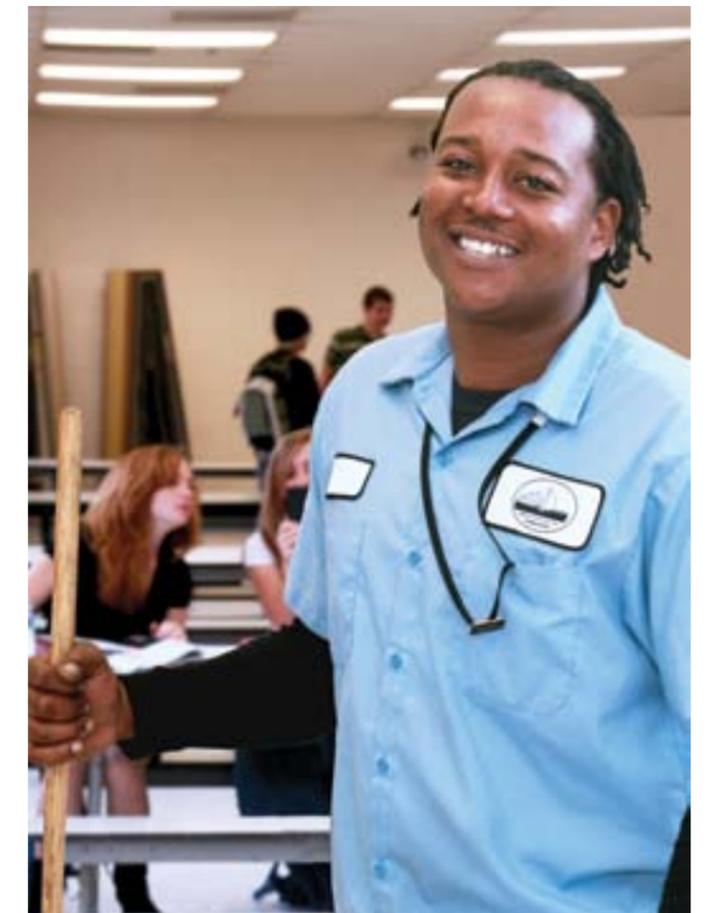
Bullying behavior is a growing concern among America's educators. Bullying is defined by the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention as an attack or intimidation intended to cause fear, distress or harm, either physical, verbal or psychological. Bullying involves a real or perceived power imbalance between the students involved, and it is repeated attacks or intimidation between the same students over time. Examples of physical forms of bullying include hitting or stealing; verbal bullying includes threatening, name calling, or spreading rumors, for example; and psychological bullying includes behaviors such as 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, and custodians confirm, that bullying often occurs where there is little adult supervision—such as between classes in the hallways, stairwells, bathrooms, and locker rooms. Often, well-intentioned bullying prevention programs don't take this into consideration, missing the opportunity to inform custodial and maintenance staff about how to intervene in bullying situations.

Custodial and maintenance services professionals are often the only staff members, other than the principal, who have keys to the entire building and who have authority to walk through every part of the school campus. Thus, custodians report they often find 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.

In addition, studies show that students who are bullied often feel more comfortable confiding in someone other than the teacher or other authority figures. Also, since custodial and maintenance services staff are from the community, they are likely to know



students' names, which is helpful in making students feel connected to the school. They also are uniquely positioned to understand local factors that may be affecting students' behaviors when they're not in class.

## What Custodial and Maintenance Employees Said

NEA has long been committed to bullying and harassment prevention and intervention. For decades, members have received training on 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, 426 were custodial or maintenance staff. Highlights of their responses are presented below.

**They see bullying as a problem in their school.** 39.6% of custodians surveyed said bullying was a major or a moderate problem in their school. They viewed bullying as significantly less of a problem at their school than did other ESPs.

**They witness bullying.** Those custodians who were surveyed were less likely than other ESPs to report seeing a student being bullied at their school. However, 5% of them reported witnessing it as frequently as several times a month. Nearly 6% saw bullying daily.

**A majority of custodial and maintenance ESPs say it's "their job" to intervene in bullying situations.**

**Custodial and maintenance workers are less likely to hear reports of bullying from students than most other ESPs.** Approximately 9% of the custodial ESP surveyed indicated that a student reported bullying to them within the past month.

**They feel it's their job to intervene.** A majority of custodians surveyed—82.9%—reported that it is "their job" to intervene when they see bullying situations.

**They need training on bullying prevention and intervention.** Nearly all the custodial ESP surveyed reported that their school district has a bullying policy, but fewer than 31% of them said they received training on that policy.

Pat Nicholson, 2009 CLEAN Award winner, with Fang and fans.



**They need to be invited/encouraged to join school committees on bullying prevention.** Among all ESPs, custodial and maintenance workers are one of the least likely groups to be involved in formal bullying prevention efforts in their schools. Only 6% reported being involved in formal school teams, committees, or prevention programs dealing with bullying.

## VIEW FROM THE HALLWAYS

Pat Nicholson, 2009 CLEAN Award winner  
(see photo this page)

As a custodian who has worked in both elementary and secondary public schools for the last 28 years, I have seen a lot of bullying behavior among students.

My first job as a custodian was at a junior high school, the same junior high school that I myself attended and was bullied as a student. I probably was bullied because I was small for my age, very introverted, and a bit of a loner. At this time, older students were allowed to pick on younger students. There was a row of thorny plants along one side of the school that these bullies would push me and others like me into if we walked by. As a seventh grader, I learned to detour around the school to avoid being "bushed." Any Friday the 13th was unofficially "Sevey Day" when seventh graders were made particular targets of bullying.

This behavior was still common at the school when I first became a custodian.

We know that a lot of bullying occurs in the hallways and common areas of schools such as cafeterias where there is little or no regular staff supervision. School custodians are often the staff that are commonly in these areas and see and experience bullying first hand. The classes that I have taken on bullying have helped me deal with these situations. Identifying bullying behavior should be as important a skill to a custodian as vacuuming a classroom.

I now work at an elementary school where I deal with bullying a little differently. I've found that it's hard to bully someone you respect. So I try to build respect for everyone in our school. I use my floor scrubber, which I painted to resemble a saber-toothed tiger (we've named it Fang), to model good behavior. Fang is like SpongeBob Square Pants in that he accepts everyone for who they are. Fang is very popular among the students. Fang and I also look out for and make friends with the introverted kids and others that bullies might pick on. I feel that there is less bullying at our school because of this.

Custodians can be powerful factors in a school's anti-bullying program.

## TIPS FOR CUSTODIAL AND MAINTENANCE SERVICES 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 report incidents of bullying to you and other adults.
- ✓ Encourage administrators to acknowledge the key role custodial and maintenance staff play as the eyes and ears of a school in identifying instances of bullying.
- ✓ Negotiate with administrators to ensure custodial and maintenance services personnel are provided training on bullying, so you know what you're looking for (see resources).
- ✓ Inform administrators that increasing adult supervision and monitoring in the hallways when classes change can help ensure bullying won't go unnoticed.
- ✓ Advocate for and remain active in school-wide student bullying prevention programs.

- ✓ Suggest establishing an incentive program for classrooms on their best behavior in the hallways.

### To Intervene in Bullying

- ✓ Ensure all custodians and maintenance services staff 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 custodians and maintenance services personnel to intervene appropriately during a bullying incident.
- ✓ When you see something, do something—be assertive and calm.
- ✓ Express strong disapproval of bullying, and intervene appropriately to stop bullying when it occurs.
- ✓ Start with verbal warnings. 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.
- ✓ Talk to other school staff about what you've witnessed so they are alert to possible retaliation during the balance of the school day.

Sources: U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of Health & Human Services

**An NEA survey conducted in 2010 examined connectedness among staff members.** Connectedness influences bullying intervention. Generally speaking, ESPs report feeling slightly more connected to their school community than teachers. Connectedness is the belief by adults in the school that they are regarded 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 custodial ESPs, feel connected to their school, the more likely they are to intervene and stop bullying when they see it.

**They are likely to live in their school community.** The ESP survey found that 67% of custodial and maintenance ESPs live in the school community where they work; this is considerably higher than the 38.7% of teachers who live in the community served by the school. This means they know the students and their families, and can be an invaluable resource when seeking answers to bullying incidents.

