Of Interest to Teachers

Bullying: A Pervasive Problem

Bullying behavior is a pervasive problem in schools and can lead to physical violence if not dealt with, according to several studies presented at the annual conference of the American Psychological Association (APA).

Researchers from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign found that 80 percent of the students in a suburban middle school in Indianapolis, Indiana, said they had bullied another classmate in the past 30 days. Bullying was classified under a number of categories by the study: bullying actions such as teasing, name-calling, threatening, physical aggression, and social ridicule. Students who appeared physically different—in race, body size, or clothing—were most likely to be victimized, the study found. The survey also discovered that many bullies had been targets of harassment: Seventy-five percent of the students said they had been victims themselves.

Earlier studies have concluded that if such behavior is not identified and defused, it can lead to more violent behavior.

Though bullying has been found to be commonplace, offenders often go unnoticed by teachers, according to another study reported at the ASPA convention. In a survey of an identified Midwestern U.S. school, researchers from the University of Nebraska asked children to classify themselves as either bullies, victims, or both. Teachers were asked to categorize their students, and peers were asked to identify classmates.

The researchers found that teachers in the study failed to recognize two-thirds of the self-acknowledged bullies as such, and did not identify two-thirds of the female victims of harassment.

An anti-bullying program presented at an APA session had as its goal to help teachers identify characteristics of students who are at risk for committing violent acts, and to aid schools in creating an environment in which students feel safe about expressing their feelings. The program utilizes three two-hour training sessions over a three-week period in which teachers are taught how to identify bullies and victims, how to intervene with a bully, assist victims, and prevent bullying in the classroom. Compared with a control group who did not get the training, teachers who had gone through the program reported that, as a result of using the "bully proofing" techniques in their classrooms, the number of discipline problems dropped substantially.—Reported by *Education Week*, September 8, 1999, p. 6.

Teachers Favor Extended Professional Development Training

Most school systems require their staffs to participate in various kinds of professional development activities. A recent report by the U.S. Department of Education, *Teacher Quality: A Report on the Preparation and Qualifications of Public School Teachers*, revealed that 99 percent of the teachers surveyed said they had participated in such activities in the past 12 months. However, a large percentage of teachers said that they felt unprepared to deal with a number of areas that are often dealt with at such sessions: integrating educational technology into classroom instruction; implementing state or district curriculum and performance standards; using new teaching methods; and meeting the needs of students from diverse cultural backgrounds, who are disabled, or who have limited English proficiency.

However, teachers had higher praise for more extensive professional development activities. For example, teachers who spent more than eight hours in professional development in new methods of teaching were more likely than those who spent one to eight hours to say that the program improved their teaching (39 percent versus 12 percent). The same pattern emerged for teachers of culturally diverse and limited-English-proficiency students.

Unfortunately, even though extended staff-development activities were perceived as producing the greatest gains in improved teaching ability, about two-thirds of such activities reported in the survey lasted from one to eight hours. Teachers faulted these shorter training sessions because they "lack adequate follow-up and ongoing feedback from experts, and lack connection to the teachers' classroom and school contexts."—Reported by *Education Digest*, April 1999.

Seperate Article
Removed

Schools Eligible for Donated Supplies

American corporations donated more than $130 million worth of new products to education and charities during 1999, and more schools are being sought to accept them. Companies give their new, overstocked goods and thereby earn a federal income-tax deduction. Donated items include office and classroom supplies, computer software and accessories, toys, arts and crafts, janitorial items, audio and video tapes, hand tools, clothing, and holiday party goods.

Recipient groups pay dues ranging from $375 to $575 to join this not-for-profit network, plus shipping and handling, but the merchandise itself is free. Members choose what they need from 250-page catalogs published every 10 weeks. According to the program coordinator, participants receive an average of $2,500 worth of new supplies per catalog. For a free information kit and membership application, call the nonprofit National Association for the Exchange of Industrial Resources: (800) 562-0955.

Many Teachers Feel Unprepared for Their Responsibilities

Only 20 percent of full-time U.S. public school

Of Interest to Teachers

teachers feel well prepared to work in a modern classroom, according to a recent report from the U.S. Department of Education.

The report, *Teacher Quality: A Report on the Preparation and Qualifications of Public School Teachers*, was based on a survey of 4,049 full-time public school teachers in the 50 states and the District of Columbia.

Areas in which a majority of teachers felt unprepared included the following:

- Integrating educational technology into classroom instruction (80 percent);
- Implementing state or district curriculum and performance standards (64 percent);
- Using new teaching methods (59 percent); and
- Meeting the needs of several types of students: those from diverse cultural backgrounds (80 percent), those who are disabled (79 percent), and those with limited English proficiency (80 percent).

It is important to note that these are affective measures; that is, they do not indicate actual teacher skills or aptitudes. They show only how teachers feel about what they perceive as strengths and weaknesses. It is difficult to measure actual teacher aptitude and effectiveness.—Reported by *Education Digest*, April 1999.

At the Brink of the 21st Century—The Dismal State of World Education

Nearly a billion people—one-sixth of humanity—entered the 21st century unable to read a book or sign their names, much less operate a computer or understand a simple application form. Despite ringing affirmations like the 50-year-old Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child, 130 million children of school age in the developing world are growing up without access to basic education, while millions of others languish in sub-standard situations where little learning takes place. The majority of these children are girls: They constitute two-thirds of all children in developing countries who do not receive a primary education.

Basic education remains the most important single factor in protecting children from such hazards as exploitative child labor and sexual exploitation. In the developing world, there are estimated to be 250 million children trapped in child labor, many of whom receive no schooling whatsoever.

Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia are the regions facing the greatest challenge in enrolling all their children in primary school. In 1998 in Sub-Saharan Africa, only 57 percent of primary-age children attended school; in South Asia, it was 68 percent, compared with 98 percent in industrialized countries, 96 percent in East Asia and the Pacific region, 94 percent in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, 92 percent in Latin America and the Caribbean, and 81 percent in the Middle East and North Africa.

In addition to the millions of children who do not attend school at all, many more do not reach grade 5, considered one indication of minimum educational achievement. The pattern for this indicator is somewhat different than that for all enrollment, though South Asia (59 percent) and Sub-Saharan Africa (67 percent) still lead the list. Following them, however, are Latin America and the Caribbean (74 percent). At least 90 percent of the children who start school complete at least grade 5 in the Middle East and North Africa, East Asia and the Pacific and industrialized countries.

What would it cost to educate all of the children of the world? About $7 billion per year for the next 10 years, on average—less than is spent on cosmetics in the United States or on ice cream in Europe annually.—Reported by UNICEF in *The State of the World's Children 1999–Education.*

Americans Completing More Education

Between 1980 and 1997, the proportion of the U.S. adult population 25 years of age or older who had at least four years of high school increased from 69 percent to 82 percent. At the same time, the proportion of U.S. adults with at least four years of college increased from 17 percent to 24 percent.—From *Mini-Digest of Education Statistics,* 1998, National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education.

School Libraries Suffering From Neglect

A recent survey by the *School Library Journal* found that the average annual expenditure on library-materials budgets per school increased by about $1,000 to $12,185 this past school year, gaining ground lost to spending cuts over the past decade or so.

However, in many cities in the U.S., per-student spending on books is often in the single digits. At the same time, the cost of books is climbing; it now averages about $16 for a single title. Compounding the problem is a lack of library-media specialists—teachers certified in library and information science who can help classroom teachers integrate information skills throughout the curriculum and select books and software that can enhance student learning. Few states mandate that schools have certified library staff members, except at the secondary level.

The *School Library Journal* survey found that only half the K-12 respondents were library-media specialists. In some parts of the country, elementary school libraries are staffed by part-time aides, volunteers, or teachers with no background in library science.

In an age of emphasis on electronic media, libraries have been seen as a lower priority than computers or other academic programs, so few new books have been ordered, and the ones in school libraries are often out-of-date and in poor condition. Another problem is that decision-makers and administrators have not been supportive. A common misperception is that the Internet provides access to all the literary and informational materials that schools need, so they no longer need to purchase print resources.

But as the Information Age zooms forward, library advocates are beginning to make their case. The information-literacy standards drafted by the American Association of School Librarians in 1997—which call for students to acquire skills in finding and evaluating information from a variety of print and technology-based sources—are being used in some places to shape curriculum and state policy.—Reported in *Education Week*, XIX:14, December 1, 1999.

More U.S. High School Students Taking Advanced Courses

In 1983, the National Commission on Excellence in Education recommended that all U.S. students take four years of English, three years each of mathematics, science, and social studies; and half a year of computer science. For those going on to college, an additional two years of foreign-language study was highly recommended.

Over the next 12 years, the average number of science and mathematics credits earned by high school graduates increased substantially. The mean number of mathematics credits (Carnegie units) earned in high school rose from 2.6 in 1982 to 3.4 in 1994, and the number of science credits rose from 2.2 to 3.0.

The proportion of graduates who completed the full college preparatory program recommended by the Commission on Excellence rose from three percent in 1982 to 32 percent in 1994.—From *Mini-Digest of Education Statistics*, 1998, National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education.