

STORIES FOR ADVOCACY

Learners Use Technology to Speak Out Against Bullying

As told by Sandy O'Neil, NJ Department of Education to Suzie Boss

To wealthy summer visitors, Trenton, New Jersey, seems like an idyllic resort town. But many of the children growing up here experience a grittier reality, with poverty and crime embedded in the culture. In high-poverty neighborhoods, gangs own the streets and provide the strongest sense of family that some children know. Bullying is an unfortunate rite of passage, a way to earn one's place in the gang culture.

The project uses multimedia tools to provide students with a creative, engaging outlet for speaking out against bullying and delivering authentic messages to their peers.

Schools offer children a safe haven from street violence, and caring teachers work hard to show that there are alternatives to gang membership. In particular, teachers here are focusing on anti-bullying education to discourage pre-gang activities. Through technology, students are now creating and sharing their own messages about why bullying is the wrong approach to getting along in life.

A three-year project, funded by a technology grant, is now underway. The project uses multimedia tools to provide students with a creative, engaging outlet for speaking out against bullying and delivering authentic messages to their peers. The first year, students worked in cooperative learning groups to research and develop informative videos about bullying. The subject grabbed students' interest, motivating them to pay attention and dig into learning. Students became class experts for specific topics, and their self-esteem blossomed as they took their new roles to heart. Attendance improved, and teachers saw a gain in test scores as students became more motivated to learn. The second year, students brainstormed strategies to combat bullying and related personal stories in videos and multimedia presentations. During year three, students will look outward to their community. They will investigate local history, research community strengths, and create videos that will help to build a sense of pride in their hometown.

While the anti-bullying message is coming through loud and clear, students are also learning important academic and team skills. Reading, writing, and cooperative skills have improved in the course of learning about creating an effective narrative for video production. Students now know how to create storyboards, and how to gauge their time on a big project. They understand video production techniques, such as editing, and they know how to offer constructive feedback to each other. They are gaining new skills for coping with problems—not only for their school video projects, but for life.

Follow up: The New Jersey Network filmed the B2B project in the spring and will air it in September or October under a Character Education program.

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