A GUIDE FOR ADMINISTRATORS, COUNSELORS AND TEACHERS

RESPONDING TO HATE AND BIAS AT SCHOOL

A PUBLICATION OF TEACHING TOLERANCE
tolerance.org

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PREFACE

RESPONDING TO HATE AND BIAS AT SCHOOL

A NOOSE IS FOUND HANGING FROM A GOALPOST ON A HIGH SCHOOL CAMPUS.

A SWASTIKA, 20 FEET IN DIAMETER, IS BURNED INTO THE PAVEMENT AT A JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL.

A GROUP OF WHITE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS DRESSES IN BANANA SUITS FOR A BASKETBALL GAME AND TAUNTS THEIR MAJORITY-BLACK RIVAL WITH RACIAL SLURS.

A SIKH STUDENT HAS HIS TURBAN PULLED OFF AND HAIR CUT BY FELLOW STUDENTS.

Your school has plans and protocols in place to respond to fires, severe weather, medical emergencies, fights and weapons possession. But what about school incidents like those listed above that involve bigotry and hate? Are plans in place to respond to a bias incident or hate crime? Too often these plans are created in the moment during the actual crisis. Bias incidents are far too complex for on-the-fly planning; an early misstep can heighten tension and damage chances for long-term success.

Responding to Bias and Hate at School is designed primarily for school administrators, but teachers, staff, counselors, students and others also may find guidance here.

The guide is divided into three sections:

BEFORE A CRISIS OCCURS. How can you and other school leaders assess your school's climate with an eye toward defusing tension, preventing escalation and avoiding problems?

WHEN THERE'S A CRISIS. What are the nine key points to consider when responding to a crisis that has been triggered by a bias incident at your school?

AFTER THE WORST IS OVER. How can you address long-term planning and capacity building for the future, including development of social emotional skills?

Hateful acts at school are dangerous, disturbing and disruptive. But keep this in mind: A bias incident does not define a school. It is, in many ways, a test of the school's culture and climate. How you respond is the true measure of a school's character.

It's up to school leaders to set expectations. Everyone on staff, from the bus driver and custodian to classroom teachers and the IT department, must know that hate, disrespect and intimidation have no place on campus, and that every student should feel welcome.

SECTION ONE

BEFORE A CRISIS OCCURS

WHAT IS THE SCHOOL'S CLIMATE?

Unsavory pranks, bias incidents and even hate crimes can happen at any school, anywhere—rural, urban, suburban, public, private, small, large, East, West, North or South. Sometimes they arrive as a complete surprise; other times, they arise from tension that has been brewing for weeks, months, even years.

So what is the climate at your school?

Everyday acts of intolerance manifest themselves in many ways: name-calling, slurs, sexual harassment, casual putdowns regarding race, ethnicity, gender, size, abilities, perceived sexual orientation or gender identification. The bias might come in the form of clothing—certain colors or styles—or music or symbols associated with hate groups. Growing intolerance can also be found online, posted on Tumblr or tweeted on Twitter. It might be blatant, such as a noose left hanging from an African-American student's locker. Or it might be subtle, a hushed rumor texted like a whisper, phone to phone, person to person.

In some cases, the viciousness is intentional; in others, perpetrators might have little clue—other than shock value—about the meaning behind the words, signs and symbols they shout, tweet, paint or text. In many ways, the issue is less about intent—who can know for certain why someone does something?—and more about impact. No matter the intention, these messages and behaviors can cause fear, damage and injury to individuals and the entire school community.

How can educators deal with this? The adults at any school teach in so many ways, far beyond textbooks and lesson plans. They teach by example, by the tone and words they choose, by how they treat others during moments of disagreement or tension. They teach by what they don't say. If, for example, they allow a bigoted comment to go unchecked, they are offering tacit approval of similar comments.

A school climate that encourages inclusion and promotes tolerance does not guarantee that bias incidents won't happen. Instead, it creates an atmosphere in which these acts are less likely to gain momentum and more likely to be quickly and widely denounced.

LISTEN, WATCH AND LEARN

When you walk the halls or spend time in the cafeteria—wherever you are on campus—be alert. Are you hearing putdowns and slurs? Do you notice tense or fearful looks between some groups of students? These are early warning signs of potential trouble. Unacknowledged and unchallenged, these attitudes and behaviors can set the stage for worse to come.

Safety, of course, is your first concern. Are direct threats being made? Is danger imminent? These situations may require immediate action. More general, indirect behaviors indicate that there might be a problem with the school's climate. Is this the type of school you want? Pose that question to students, teachers, parents and staff, and listen closely to the answers.

Take notes. Identify patterns. Be the person who knows what's *really* going on at your school.

One more thing: Make sure your staff members exercise the same vigilance in classrooms, playgrounds, the cafeteria, buses—everywhere. Being alert is the responsibility of everyone on campus, and everyone has a duty to report problems they see and hear. Make this an expectation and set up an efficient reporting system, like an anonymous complaint box or a designated staff member. After problems are reported, there must be clear signs of follow-up.

The Anti-Defamation League's Pyramid of Hate offers a lesson—suitable for older students as well as for professional development—exploring levels of hate and bigotry. This can be helpful in gauging the seriousness of what you might encounter on campus. adl.org/education/courttv/pyramid_of_hate.pdf

Here's a checklist to consider as you travel the halls, classrooms and school grounds:

CASUAL PEJORATIVES. Do you hear certain words used regularly in a derogatory manner? That's so gay. That's lame. That's retarded. Is the word "bitch" used casually to label female students? Work to establish a climate where casual slurs are uncommon—and are challenged when they do occur. *Speak Up at School* offers advice on responding to everyday bias (tolerance.org/speak-up-at-school).

SCHOOL "PRIDE." Do cheers and chants at sporting events focus on positive aspects of your school, or do they demean opponents instead? Chants or taunts based on ethnic stereotypes and socioeconomic differences have no place in an inclusive school community.

ASSEMBLIES AND HOLIDAYS. Skits and costumes can convey bigoted and stereotypical messages: the "day-laboring Mexican," students dressed as "rednecks," people in blackface. Pep rallies, Halloween and other events, like spirit days, can become steeped in stereotypes and bigotry. Set expectations beforehand about appropriate costumes and cultural sensitivity. Discuss the inappropriateness of caricatures or disturbing representations that are rooted in bias and bigotry.

MARGINALIZED STUDENTS. Engage students who appear to be left out in the cafeteria, on the playground or in other school settings. Watch for patterns or changes in the way groups of students are aligned. Check for signs of hostility, depression or a marked change in behavior or academic performance, and reach out to the students' parents or guardians and/or the school counselor as appropriate. Alienated students—either as individuals or in groups—are more susceptible to bias-based bullying and even to recruitment by gangs and hate groups.

STUDENT RECOGNITION. How does your school recognize student achievement? Long-standing traditions may contribute to a sense of entitlement among some students, and feelings of frustration or inadequacy in others. Who is spotlighted and who is ignored? Is there a perception—fair or not—that athletes, advanced placement (AP) students and student leaders enjoy privileges or are

Every person in the school—from the music teacher who visits twice a week to the newest transfer student—should understand the climate of tolerance at your school.

disciplined less severely for misconduct? Collaborate with students and faculty in developing more egalitarian ways to honor an array of student achievements.

STAFF LOUNGES. How are teachers and other staff talking among themselves when outside of student hearing? Are teachers making negative comments about the "kids from the trailer park?" Are they telling casually bigoted jokes? Model inclusive, nonbigoted behavior yourself, and interrupt moments of bias among staff.

YOUR OWN PERCEPTIONS. Pay attention to the comments or complaints you automatically dismiss or discount. Is there a pattern? Is there a gap between your perception of a certain issue (bias-based bullying, for example) and the perception others have of the issue? Explore that with an open mind and a willingness to learn from others.

INVOLVE EVERYONE. Every person in the school—from the music teacher who visits twice a week to the newest transfer student—should understand the climate of tolerance at your school. "If you see something, say something" should be the model everyone uses. Let everyone know that incidents and concerns should be reported to school leaders in person or anonymously.

DON'T FORGET THE SCHOOL BUS. Speak regularly with bus drivers about what they are seeing and hearing on the buses. Occasionally assign staff to ride buses (or ride the bus yourself) to monitor behavior and to reinforce to students that the climate of tolerance includes not just the school grounds, but the bus as well.

STAY CURRENT, STAY CONNECTED

Bias-based social media cases involving students have already made it into U.S. and Canadian courtrooms. Cyberbullying, once a new term, is now a common one. Some schools have or are considering policies or agreements around Facebook use.

"We have kindergartners with Facebook accounts," said Dawn DuPree Kelley, an Alabama school principal.

And when more than two-thirds of youths have cell phones—on which they are more likely to text than talk—and more than 90 percent of youths are active online, other platforms, beyond Facebook, come into play.

Enter Instagram. Tumblr. Digg. StumbleUpon, Fark, foursquare and reddit. These are all new tools, and all potential new outlets for bias-based bullying and bigoted cyber interactions among students.

Add to that the advent of online commentary, which can be vicious and bigoted, exposing young people to dehumanizing invective across the Web on a daily basis. And, of course, there's the casual bigotry found in various forms of music.

The landscape is dizzying.

Your job, as a school administrator, isn't necessarily to know every hill and valley of that landscape. But you must stay abreast of new avenues, as they arise, and make sure they're not infiltrating your school community with biased and bigoted messages. It might be the racist and misogynistic impact of "gangsta rap" at one school, and the antigay messages heard in so-called "murder music" at another. Or it might be Photoshopped pictures of a targeted student at one school, posted on a "burn page," and it might be a texting campaign targeting a lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT) or LGBT-perceived student at another school.

The **Anti-Defamation League** offers resources around school-based Internet issues.
adl.org/cyberbullying

A pilot program from **Seattle Public Schools** focuses on prevention and parental engagement.
district.seattleschools.org/modules

The **Cyberbullying Research Center** offers updated information about the nature, extent, causes and consequences of cyberbullying, with an assortment of downloadable resources.
cyberbullying.us

The New York Times provides an array of resources on cyberbullying (as well as bullying), including case studies and lesson plans.
learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/06/28/resources-on-bullying-and-cyberbullying

MTV's "A Thin Line" is a youth-directed campaign to raise awareness about how what seems like a harmless joke can end up having serious repercussions.
athinline.com

Wired Safety is one of the longest running online safety organizations. Its Tween and Teen Angel programs empower youths to lead presentations on responsible use of social media and online technology.
wiredsafety.org

Keep your focus on behaviors. What are students doing with these social-media platforms or these songs? The objectives are to keep up with trends and innovations, to be vigilant against biased or bigoted behaviors and not to bury your head in the sand.

Know how students use social media, know how to monitor and set expectations around that usage and decide how to respond when these platforms are used to harm a student or target a group of students. Avail yourself of resources that address the many aspects of this issue.

SET HIGH EXPECTATIONS

Protect your school against hate, bias and bigotry by setting firm—and high—expectations early and often. And not just for students. Everyone on staff, from janitors and bus drivers to classroom teachers and support services, must know that hate, disrespect and intimidation have no place on campus. Then reinforce these expectations at every turn.

Messages should be consistent, from the administrator's office to every classroom and school activity. Expectations should be set at registration, at orientation, on the first day of school, at the first schoolwide assembly—at every opportunity to remind students that yours is a school that does not allow hate or bias to flourish.

While it's essential to speak up against bias and bigotry in a consistent manner, it's equally important to reinforce good behavior, praising students for using respectful language, especially during tense or difficult moments. Discipline policies should be reasonable, with no zero-tolerance stances and a focus that is restorative rather than punitive. (See "Capacity Building" in Section 3 for more guidance on this subject.)

"Set up structures to promote respectful behavior," said Amber Strong Makaiau, a high schoolteacher in Hawaii who authored a conflict-resolution curriculum that was adopted statewide. "Make it clear: This is how we want people to behave. This is the norm."

Here are three other considerations:

CREATE A NO-SLUR SCHOOL. Early in the term, state clear support for a safe, open learning environment free of slurs. Be specific: no insults related to ability, appearance, culture, gender, home language, race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation or social class will be tolerated. Make sure these expectations are clearly outlined in the school handbook—for students, staff and faculty—and ensure that they're rooted in education, helping to raise both awareness and empathy about the harm done by slurs.

CURB TAUNTING AND TEASING. Set expectations of how students should speak to each other, whether they are in or out of earshot of a teacher or administrator. Listen for teasing or insults related to race, ethnicity, body size, physical abilities, religion, sexual orientation, clothing, appearance or socioeconomic status. As needed, lead and encourage discussions about respectful ways people should interact. Guide students in brainstorming ways to curb taunting and teasing. Having students develop their own rules, with adult guidance, often results in greater student buy in. Teaching Tolerance offers an excellent activity, "Building a Classroom Constitution," to kick off the school year. (tolerance.org/activity/new-set-rules)

POST REMINDERS. Administrators can put up signs in their offices and around the school (e.g., "Safe Space from Hate," or "Hate Has No Home Here"). Classroom teachers can do the same. Teachers also should be encouraged to involve students in making ground rules for the classroom at the start of each year, focusing on respectful behavior and positive interactions. These rules should be posted prominently in each classroom so they can be referred to when rules are not followed. These same rules apply to all adults within the school community, who always should model respectful interaction.

MAKE THE MOST OF TEACHABLE MOMENTS

It's generally easier to discuss a hate crime or bias incident that has occurred elsewhere—to pose the questions "Could it happen here?" or "How would we respond?" in a theoretical manner, rather than in the heat of your own crisis.

So prior to any crisis arising on your campus, pay attention to struggles happening at other schools. Find moments that can be used for staff and classroom discussion. Focus the conversation on the kind of atmosphere you want at your school and how you can achieve that. Don't discuss how to punish perpetrators; instead talk about how to create and sustain a climate in which such an incident would be less likely to occur. Frame discussion questions accordingly.

Don't ask, "Why did he do that?" Ask instead, "How and why did this happen?"

These are teachable moments. Moments when you can remind all members of the school community about school expectations. Moments when you can help students understand the damage done and pain inflicted by bias and bigotry. Teachers across the country share "teachable moments" with Teaching Tolerance on a regular basis. Join us on Facebook to follow these stories. (facebook.com/TeachingTolerance.org)

If a hate crime happens in your community or in a neighboring community, be prepared to discuss how your school might respond.

Also use these teachable moments to build student capacity for empathy. Is there something students can do to support those at the other school who were targeted by hate? Write cards of encouragement? Paint a banner of support and send it to the school? Hold a rally at your school in support of victims at the other school, and post a video of it on YouTube?

And remember this: Sometimes, you as a school leader are the one learning in a teachable moment. In any moment of bias or bigotry, whether it happens on campus or elsewhere, ask yourself—and ask others in the school community—what happened and why are people reacting to it? Could it happen here? If so, what might we do to prevent it, or at least lessen its impact?

Because make no mistake, things can go powerfully wrong in the wake of a bias incident at a school—as they did in Jena, Louisiana in 2006. Read "Six Lessons from Jena: What Every School & Educator Should Take to Heart" to learn more about how to constructively respond to a hate incident at your school. (tolerance.org/sites/default/files/general/tt_lessons_from_jena.pdf)

Here are other considerations:

WHAT IF HATE COMES TO TOWN? If a hate group, such as Fred Phelps' Westboro Baptist Church, plans to hold a rally in your community, take time to discuss the most effective response. Talk about the group's history and practices with students, and discuss what other communities have done in the

past. Develop a plan that is thoughtful and strategic, avoiding knee-jerk reactions that may end up being portrayed as little more than shouting matches on TV news programs. Likewise, if a hate crime happens in your community or in a neighboring community, be prepared to discuss how your school might respond. Not in Our Town (niot.org) and its Not in Our School program (niot.org/nios) are great resources for planning this kind of response.

AVOID REINJURY. It's bad enough when a pejorative word is used publicly. Don't compound the problem by focusing on targeted students when asking questions about the damage caused by a bias-based incident. Don't single out the Latino students to comment on an anti-immigrant crime or incident. Ask the whole class or group, without singling anyone out, putting anyone on the spot or tacitly demanding that a single person speak for his or her entire identity group.

SPEAK UP

You're walking the halls, staying connected, setting high expectations and embracing teachable moments. There's one more important step. Speak up and out against intolerance.

When a slur flies, speak up. When a racist joke is told, speak up. Make sure yours is a community that does not remain silent in the face of bigotry. If school leaders say the school is a no-slur zone and then remain silent when someone calls someone else a "bitch" or a "spaz" in the hallway, the message is lost.

And speaking up is not just an administrator-to-student or teacher-to-student scenario. The climate should encourage everyone to speak up against bias and hate, at all levels and in all areas throughout the school.

"We don't use slurs at this school," should be a phrase everyone has at the ready.

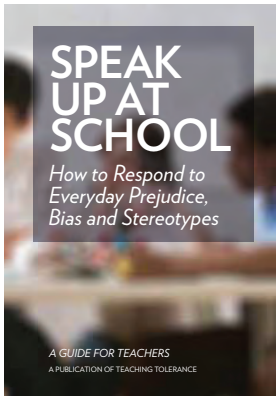
Here are some other considerations:

BIASED "JOKES" AREN'T OK. Speak up against all biased speech, even if it's used in a "joking" manner. Interrupt whatever is happening—a conversation in the teachers' lounge, a lesson in the classroom, someone starting to tell an obviously racist or sexist joke—and offer calm, firm guidance. "Those words hurt and anger a lot of people. We don't use them in this classroom."

IT DOESN'T HAVE TO BE PERSONAL. A powerful response to hate speech is to tie it to one's own life—my grandmother died in the Holocaust, my brother has a developmental disability, and so on—but the word or slur need not be tied to you personally for it to be offensive. The goal is not to have students avoid using slurs in front of the people targeted by the slurs; rather, the goal is to eliminate the use of slurs no matter who might be within earshot.

WATCH FOR NONVERBAL TAUNTS, TOO. If a student hurtfully mocks another's appearance, mannerisms, mobility or ability, call the offender's attention to the fundamental issue of respect. You might consider pulling the individual aside to address and correct such behavior, rather than embarrassing him or her in front of peers, a situation that can lead to a more defensive reaction.

BE A ROLE MODEL. All adults in the school community should model respectful behavior, especially in tense or difficult moments; remember that you are leaders and mentors, not just random adults. Students are watching, and, whether they admit it or not, they take their cues from the adults around them. It's especially powerful when one adult speaks up against another adult who has used a slur or biased language. If you ignore a colleague's racist language, you're tacitly indicating that it's OK to use such language.



A TOOL FOR YOUR TOOLBOX
Teaching Tolerance has written a guide, "Speak Up at School," which offers guidance in speaking up against everyday bigotry. (**tolerance.org/speak-up-at-school**)

SECTION TWO

WHEN THERE'S A CRISIS

WHAT HAS HAPPENED?

A LATINO STUDENT AND AN ASIAN STUDENT HAVE AN ARGUMENT THAT ESCALATES INTO SCREAMED SLURS AND A PHYSICAL SCUFFLE, OBSERVED BY MORE THAN 50 CLASSMATES.

AN OPPOSING FOOTBALL TEAM REFUSES TO TAKE THE FIELD AGAINST A TEAM THAT HAS A FEMALE PLAYER, SAYING GIRLS HAVE NO PLACE IN "BOYS' SPORTS."

STUDENTS PLAY AN OFF-CAMPUS GAME CALLED "BEAT THE JEW," IN WHICH SOME STUDENTS PRETEND TO BE NAZIS CHASING THE STUDENT IDENTIFIED AS "THE JEW."

A TEACHER DISCOVERS A "BURN" PAGE ON FACEBOOK FILLED WITH ENDLESS BIGOTED COMMENTS AGAINST A MALE STUDENT WHO IS PERCEIVED TO BE GAY.

A STUDENT WHITE-PRIDE GROUP DISRUPTS AN ALL-SCHOOL PHOTOGRAPH.

A PEP RALLY INVOLVES STUDENTS PORTRAYING ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS, WHILE OTHER STUDENTS COSTUMED AS BORDER GUARDS ROUND THEM UP WITH BILLY CLUBS.

A TEEN GIRL KILLS HERSELF AFTER UNRELENTING BULLYING TARGETED HER AS A "SLUT."

Hate crimes and bias incidents happen across the country with aggravating frequency. They vary on many levels, and your response must take that into account.

So what has happened?

Is it a hate crime? For that to be the case, two things are necessary. First, a crime has to have occurred—vandalism, physical assault, arson and so on. Second, the crime must be motivated, in whole or in part, by bias, and the targeted individual or group must be listed in the statutes as a protected class. Federally protected classes are race, religion, ethnicity, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity and disability. State and locally protected classes vary.

If no crime has occurred—and again, that may be difficult to determine at the outset—it likely can be called a bias incident. (It may more aptly be labeled harassment or intimidation, and school policy might

come into play.) A bias incident is biased conduct, speech or expression that has an impact but does not involve criminal action.

Reread the opening list of school incidents—drawn from recent headlines—as an exercise to make these distinctions. With limited information, answers may vary, but it will help to discern where one definition ends and the other begins. The University of Chicago also offers an online guide (civility.uchicago.edu/crimes.shtml) to help discern between hate crimes and bias incidents. Teaching Tolerance is also a partner with Stop the Hate (stophate.org), which offers training programs tied to these issues.

Why does this distinction matter? A hate crime likely will involve law enforcement. A bias incident likely will not.

The investigative force behind a hate crime may be focused on motivation and punishment—who did this, why did they do it, and how will they be brought to justice? That may not be your main objective as an administrator—and in most cases *should not* be your main objective. Your focus should remain on addressing the impact of the incident, not its motivation. How has the school climate been damaged? What must we do to repair and improve that climate?

You likely will have less control in managing the incident if police are involved, but you may have more resources available—patrolling in and around the school, community resource officers, increased investigatory capabilities and so on.

Already, in the first moment, framing a response is not easy. That's why this guide exists. In it, we outline nine key considerations as you chart your course during a bias crisis:

- Put safety first
- Denounce the act
- Investigate
- Involve others
- Work with the media
- Provide accurate information—and dispel misinformation
- Support targeted students
- Seek justice, avoid blame
- Promote healing

Before you move to these steps—which are much more simultaneous than linear—ask yourself another question: What resources do we have in place to manage our responses?

Does the district have legal or security personnel who will be called to help with the investigation? Who will serve as the media spokesperson? Does anyone have experience in that role (talking to media about sensitive issues, training in crisis management)? Who else needs to be involved in the school, at the district level, in the community?

Start creating a list of resources you have (a written school lockdown policy that may come into play, a designated phone line that can be used to share updates with parents, neighboring Boys & Girls Clubs of America that might provide meeting spaces and so on), making connections that will help you move forward. Your resource list should include people as well—influential community members who may serve as allies in a crisis.

Gossip and rumor, aided by cell phones and the Internet, spreads throughout your school, to other schools, other cities, other states and other nations within hours, if not moments.

Now also is the time to activate the incident response team. You can start small—draw in a handful of key people—but know that as the response unfolds, the team may grow so that it is both representative of and responsive to the school community.

(Now also is the time to be thankful for any of the precrisis work you have put into play. You can't truly plan for the specificity of this moment, but you can be better prepared.)

And as the school administrator, steel yourself for the following:

BAD NEWS TRAVELS FAST—AND FAR—THESE DAYS. Gossip and rumor, aided by cell phones and the Internet, spreads throughout your school, to other schools, other cities, other states and other nations within hours, if not moments. Things may escalate far more quickly than you expect via social media outlets, mainstream media and, in some cases, on hate groups' websites, which may twist the facts and create new issues to address.

YOU ARE THE HUB. In a crisis moment, you have less time to think and plan than you would like, and students, teachers, staff and others will be coming to you for immediate guidance. It also means you may be getting calls from the superintendent, the mayor's office, community groups and the media before you have had a chance to gather a full report about what has actually happened on your campus.

JUDGMENTS WILL BE RUSHED. The wider community may already have taken sides and formed opinions before anyone fully understands the situation. It is imperative for you to have structures and plans in place for crisis management, specifically around information management and the dispelling of rumors.

BALANCE THE DESIRE FOR SPEED WITH THE NEED FOR THOROUGHNESS. Don't let the chaos of a crisis situation derail your work. Focus on what needs to be done, and make sure you don't allow someone else's deadline to distract you from the work needed to manage this crisis. Be ready to say, "We don't have enough information yet to make that determination," while also understanding that the longer it takes to gather that information, the more misinformation may grow and spread.

USE OR CREATE TOOLS TO SPREAD ACCURATE INFORMATION. You may add a special page to the school website where updates are placed. Email also can be a useful tool for sending updates, though remember that everyone might not have access to email. A campus newsletter or newspaper also can be a tool for spreading accurate information about the incident and the ongoing investigation.

PUT SAFETY FIRST

The paramount concern in any crisis is safety. Follow your school's policies for locking down the site or site evacuation, if needed; call school security officers or outside law enforcement, if appropriate; alert parents and caregivers, if warranted; and make sure everyone on campus is safe and accounted for. Attend to any injuries. Follow your school's emergency protocols. That, always, is an administrator's first order of business.

If you have not already formed an incident response team, do so now. Ideally, members of an incident response team need to project a sense of calm as well as earnest concern.

Restoring order is a key step to reestablishing any sense of safety.

Isolate alleged offenders as quickly as possible. Direct uninvolved students back to classrooms, and have teachers keep them there until further notice. If necessary for safety, hold bells and provide instructions to teachers by intercom, phone or written messages. Students, faculty and staff should be assured that the matter is being dealt with and that more information about the incident will be provided as soon as possible.

Rumors already will be flying. Take them seriously. According to both the U.S. Secret Service and the U.S. Department of Education, in most cases of school violence someone other than the attacker knew of the threat but failed to report it. Emphasize that any such information should be communicated immediately, and identify the person or persons to whom information should be reported. Publicize access to an anonymous tip line, an online report form or an in-school tip box. Provide avenues for people to share information, and assign people to review and report on that information as it comes in.

Also, especially with more serious incidents, be on high alert regarding the potential for copycats or retaliatory actions. With many incidents—bias-driven fights or attacks, vandalism and graffiti—there is a real risk of repeated incidents by vengeful classmates or copycats. Faculty and staff should be more aware than usual, watching for signs of tension, veiled or implied threats and unusual activity. Let all students know that the campus is on heightened alert.

DENOUNCE THE ACT

When a hate crime or bias incident has affected the school, it is important to denounce the hateful act in clear, unambiguous terms. Silence or a lack of response allows fear, confusion, misinformation and distrust to grow.

If someone spray paints swastikas on the school's main entrance, for example, or hangs a noose outside an African-American teacher's classroom window, it is not the time to say, "We regret if anyone took offense." The swastikas and the noose *are* offensive, and school leaders need to say so.

Your denunciation of the incident should be delivered to students and staff, parents and caregivers, and the wider community. Post it on the school website, and publish it in the school newspaper or newsletter. Send it out to the media. Deliver it over the school's PA system, closed-circuit TV or intercom.

Keep it simple. Focus on three main points:

- An unacceptable incident has occurred (be specific in your description of it, otherwise gossip and rumor will allow mistaken information to take root).
- A full investigation is under way.
- Our school stands for respect and inclusion, a place where all are welcome and appreciated.

An example:
"Someone or some group has painted swastikas, a long-standing symbol of the worst kind of hate, on the front entrance of our school. It is deplorable, and we denounce it. A full investigation is under way. We are working quickly to cover and remove this vicious symbol of oppression and genocide. Hate has no place at this school. We, as a school community, stand for respect and inclusion, a place where all are free to learn in a safe and welcoming environment."

In crafting a response, however, some issues need to be considered.

Is this an act that appears to be perpetrated by an outsider? If so, the whole school has been attacked, and your words must reflect that, as in the example above. But what if it is an act carried out by members of the school community, something that may have or already has divided students? If so, you must approach the statement with that in mind.

"Hateful graffiti has been found in three of our school's bathrooms. We believe the person or group responsible may be part of our own school community. The images used are deplorable, and we denounce them. An investigation is under way, and we are working quickly to remove these swastikas, vicious symbols of oppression and genocide. Hate has no place in this school. We will use this as an opportunity to remind ourselves why we are here. This is an opportunity for education, a time to remind ourselves that we, as a school community, stand for respect and inclusion. We must be a place where all are free to learn in a safe and welcoming environment. That is the work that lies before us."

Remember that your primary aim should be to restore the school to health, not to punish perpetrators. Your focus should be on what the school stands for, that hate has no place here. Focus on the positive steps the school community will take to restore order and renew its commitment to provide a safe and welcoming environment where all students can learn. Also mention the need for healing within the school community, as well as support for any identity groups specifically targeted by the incident.

And the message needs to come from you, the top administrator, as a signal to students and others that the matter is under control and being dealt with at the highest level. This is not a time to delegate.

ISSUE THE STATEMENT AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. After immediate safety and investigative needs have been addressed, prepare a simple response statement denouncing the hateful act and reiterating the school's commitment to a respectful, safe learning environment for all students.

INCLUDE VOICES OF ALLIES IN THE STATEMENT. These allies should come from the list of influential community members that school leaders can call upon. These community leaders or organizations can present a powerful, united front. And involving them will also show that school leaders are reaching out beyond the school grounds as they manage the response.

PROMISE (AND DELIVER) UPDATES. Make it clear that more complete information will be shared as facts and details become known.

INVESTIGATE

As an administrator, it is your responsibility to remain calm, firm and deliberate as you gather the facts surrounding a potential bias-based incident. Don't let others' passions distract you from this task, and don't let the rushed feeling of a crisis force you into making hasty judgments. Empower the incident response team to carry out a thorough investigation, and provide resources to support it.

Take note: While it is necessary to be alert to bias or bigotry in any student conflict, it is also important not to jump to conclusions before facts are gathered. Not every conflict involving students of different races is motivated by racial bias, for example. A premature conclusion could fuel racial tension rather than ease it.

Also, maintain perspective. Particularly among younger students, someone may make bigoted comments or carry out other apparent acts of bias without understanding the full significance of his or her actions. Approach each incident with an open mind, and ask questions to determine whether a student was acting out of ignorance rather than malice. That understanding will help you frame your response to the incident.

Understand that hoaxes sometimes happen. Individuals may fabricate reports of bias incidents. This kind of deception can reflect a variety of motivations, including malicious mischief, a desire to call attention to oneself or, ironically, a wish to bring attention to an issue such as the need for a stronger school policy on harassment. When genuine bias incidents go unaddressed, a student may exaggerate or make up false incidents—writing hate notes to oneself, for example—to prompt a response from school officials. These offenses need to be taken seriously, and appropriate consequences should be enforced, but a fabricated incident may also indicate that related issues have not been fully examined within the school.

Here are additional considerations:

- Be up-to-date on district policies and legal protocols and discuss them with district legal counsel and law enforcement officials, if the latter are involved.

- Let the campus know that you (or the police, if that is the case) are in a fact-gathering mode. If you are silent at this point, some may assume you are doing nothing to address the incident.
- Give a sense of expected duration of the fact-gathering phase. "For the next two days, we will be gathering facts about this incident. I will share specific news as it becomes available. In the meantime, please come to me, or to any member of the staff, with information or concerns you may have."
- Conduct individual interviews with eyewitnesses as soon as possible to collect fresh recollections, emphasizing that the main goal is the protection of the school community. Hold these interviews in a secure place that doesn't put eyewitnesses at additional risk. Ask witnesses to help identify others who may have information.
- Understand that eyewitness accounts will vary, and not all witnesses will feel safe in coming forward. Talk to as many people as possible in order to better understand what happened.
- If the incident was caught on school security cameras, review the video to see if it helps to clarify what happened or assists in identifying potential witnesses.
- Investigate the incident with an eye toward whether it is part of a larger pattern. Does a hostile environment exist for some students? Ask members of targeted groups if they are surprised by this incident and whether similar incidents have happened. Ask whether the school leaders' response is satisfactory, and listen with an open mind if people say it isn't satisfactory.
- Create a way for witnesses to remain anonymous. People may feel too frightened to identify themselves but may have vital information.

When police are involved, there may be additional concerns regarding the investigation. If individual safety is a factor, for example, then having a visible show of police support might be a calming influence. If, on the other hand, there is a large police response to what is perceived as a relatively minor incident, it could exacerbate tension rather than ease it.

And do not expect police to manage the campus climate. Police investigators are looking to solve a crime. As a campus administrator, one of your key objectives is to repair and improve school climate in the wake of a bias-based crisis; do not neglect that role as you await completion of a police investigation.

INVOLVE OTHERS

This should not be a starting-from-scratch moment; you should have existing relationships with parents and caregivers, community organizations and civic leaders to whom you can reach out during a crisis. It is, however, a moment to expand those connections and relationships. Maybe you don't have a strong connection to a neighborhood adjoining the school campus, for example. Now is the time to strengthen it.

Small incidents that have not drawn widespread attention may be solved through much simpler processes. (Don't, however, neglect considering whether a small incident is part of a larger pattern of hostility at your school.) For mid-level and larger incidents, take into account the following:

There are two overarching groups to consider:

DIRECT TIES TO THE SCHOOL

- Faculty and staff
- Students
- Parents and caregivers
- School district officials
- Alumni
- Who else?

INDIRECT TIES TO THE SCHOOL

- Government entities (a powerful one is the U.S. Department of Justice's Community Relations Service at justice.gov/crs)
- Human rights groups
- Nonprofits and civic groups
- Faith groups
- Mental health counselors
- Elected officials
- Who else?

Ask yourself: At what level do we need to keep them informed, and how will we accomplish that?

Those with direct ties to the school likely need daily (or more frequent in the early days) updates; use existing channels of communication to accomplish this, and consider (based on the level of impact the incident has had) emergency meetings, including an all-staff meeting before the start of the following school day.

To those with indirect ties, you may reach out in other ways, asking for specific help, a meeting space, vocal support and so on. If it's a particularly high-profile moment, it may be that you are coordinating with the mayor to join you at the initial press conference, for example. And if you don't have a strong list of community resources, start developing it now. Are there human rights groups at the local, state or national level who might have ready resources and guidance?

A crucial component in the aftermath of a bias crisis is counseling for students, faculty and staff. Some members of the school community may need more time and help to process what has happened. Others may want to talk about fears related to acute or chronic bias issues. Consider offering facilitated sessions where students and school employees can talk about their experiences and feelings. Ask school counselors to update a list or database of current resources and referral information. Seek district and community resources to support these efforts.

Also ask: How can we seek input?

It's vital for you to keep people informed, and it's also important for you to set up channels for listening. People need to be heard in crisis moments, and if you don't give them a platform for that, frustration and distrust will rise.

Set up avenues for written and verbal feedback—perhaps a special email (crisisteam@domain) or phone line, as well as meetings where people are allowed to speak, ask questions, offer thoughts and guidance. Publicize meetings well so all who are interested might attend. Work with the PTA, which may have additional resources for engaging parents.

For high-profile incidents, a community meeting a few nights after the incident—say on the third or fourth night—often can be an effective tool.

Offer a written summary of the gathering, and make it available to those who are unable to attend, via email, the school website and local media. Reiterate how this incident has violated school values, outline steps being taken in response, and provide avenues for community involvement. (This written communication can be shared first at the staff and faculty emergency meeting, where you can solicit feedback for editing and improvement.)

WORK WITH THE MEDIA

Minor incidents may fly under the media radar. Any incident that spills off school grounds or draws more widespread attention also likely will draw media attention. So at any moment in a crisis, the next call may be from a reporter wanting information and a comment.

Cooperate with the media, as much as possible. Clearly, if a media outlet is mishandling the story or breaking school policy or rules about access to the campus, corrective action should be taken. In general, though, it is best to work with the media, and present facts as you see them rather than being at odds with them.

Your school or district may have a public information officer or media relations specialist. If so, that person should be involved from the very outset, to be prepared for early media calls.

That person—or someone else with previous experience working with media or public relations—should be designated to handle all media inquiries. It's imperative that this person be kept up to date on all aspects of the situation, through regular meetings and communications.

Give everyone on staff this person's contact information, and instruct everyone to deliver a clear message: "All media inquiries are being handled by [X]. Here is that contact information ..."

A single hub is vital to avoid miscommunication and the spread of conflicting messages or misinformation. If four people are answering media questions in four different ways, you will end up sending mixed and misleading messages.

Resist the urge to deliver a flat "no comment." The lack of information makes the media more apt to look to others to answer their questions and also may be seen by some as a lack of action on your part—that you

are ignoring the incident, trying to sweep it under the rug, not taking it seriously, hoping it just might go away. Because of that, a "no comment" response may damage your efforts to rebuild community. What's a good alternative, when you have little or nothing to say? Frame the response as a values statement: "We're very concerned. We don't yet have all the facts. We'll be ready to make a comment when we do."

So be prepared to work with the media, and see it as an opportunity for you to widen the denunciation of the incident and to frame the message you want to be out there.

Smaller incidents may involve only a few calls from the local media. For larger incidents, it likely will involve the organization of a press conference for local, regional and sometimes national media. This press conference should happen within a few days of the incident—probably not on the same day, but perhaps on the afternoon of the next day or on the morning of the third day. The top school administrator should be the main speaker; again, this is not a time to delegate.

You want to work with reporters and readily share as much information as is safely possible. This can help ease the crisis.

In most cases, it is a bad idea to stiff-arm the media at this event with "no comments" and hostile attitudes. Efforts to do so almost always backfire. You want to work with reporters and readily share as much information as is safely possible. This can help ease the crisis. On the other hand, it is not necessary to answer every—or even most—reporters' questions, especially in the early stages of a crisis when you are still figuring out what happened and how to deal with it. Your number-one priority is the safety of students, parents and staff.

So what to say at the press conference? First of all, keep it simple. Use short, direct sentences. Provide enough details to explain what happened, but don't slip into conjecture or guesswork about motives or other aspects of the incident. Repeat your main points often. Have a simple, nondefensive response ready for questions you do not wish to answer. "That's not something I can comment on." Or, "We haven't determined that yet."

Here's a road map for your press conference message. This same road map can be helpful in developing talking points for teachers who will be speaking to students and their families and caregivers:

- State what has happened.
- Denounce the hateful incident.
- Indicate where you are in the investigation (early, partway through, nearly done).
- State what steps the school is taking in its response to the incident (setting up counseling teams for students and staff, creating an incident response team to investigate the incident).
- Describe supports that already exist in the school (an antiharassment policy, core values, pledges of tolerance signed by staff and students, etc.).
- Indicate that clearly there is need for more work to be done.
- Remind people that you are an educational institution, well-positioned to raise awareness and increase understanding around the issues raised by the hateful incident.
- State that discipline will be handled in a manner appropriate to the offense, based on school policy and local laws.
- Focus on positive steps you plan to take rather than on punitive measures against perpetrators.

And here are some tips on holding a press conference:

- Choose a room on the perimeter of the school, preferably with its own entrance. Otherwise, you'll be allowing people with cameras and recording devices to walk down your hallways, potentially capturing unapproved images. (You also can partner with a nearby community organization and hold the press conference off campus.)
- Hold the press conference in a room from which you can exit easily when the conference ends, and have a couple of people remain behind to escort media from the room. You should be in a position to calmly call an end to the press conference and leave.
- Set the press conference after school has been dismissed and students have left the building or before the school day starts prior to students' arrival. This will minimize media seeking student and parent comments as they leave school.
- Give reporters copies of all statements you make, including any messages denouncing the incident that have been posted on websites, given to students or sent home to families and caregivers.
- Don't announce anything dramatic to the media if faculty, students, families and caregivers have not been informed first. It raises tension and distrust when direct constituents hear or read surprising news in the media.
- Speak in short, direct sentences when answering questions. Longer sentences can end up being edited badly for TV, radio and print media.
- Answer the question being asked. Don't wander onto unrelated topics.
- Be prepared to answer the same question multiple times without becoming irritated or defensive. Reporters often ask the same question in different ways to elicit deeper responses. Simply repeat your main message as often as necessary, in a calm, professional tone. Don't sound exasperated at having to repeat something; that's not the tone or image you want to see on the evening news.
- Have a ready response to questions you do not wish to answer, such as "That's not something I can address." Then ask, "Next question?"
- When the questioning has run out of steam, or you need to return to deal directly with the crisis, offer a polite, "Thank you," and exit.

Unless there is a dramatic turn of events following the initial incident, one press conference may be enough. After that, send out press statements as key actions occur. If community healing events—a

candlelight vigil or a rally for inclusion—are planned, alert the press in advance. Coverage of the positive aftermath of a bias incident illustrates the steps being taken to improve school climate.

PROVIDE ACCURATE INFORMATION—AND DISPEL MISINFORMATION

This is less about a step in the crisis-recovery process and more about your overall management of the response to an incident.

Misinformation often runs rampant in the aftermath of a bias-based incident at school. A fight involving two people becomes a melee involving a dozen or more. Stories of possible retaliation are whispered in hallways. Tales of "what really happened" allow for exaggeration, ratcheting up fears. In a crisis, you are tasked not just with managing information, but also with managing misinformation.

You cannot monitor everything, but you can designate a person or a small group to keep eyes and ears on various information sources, bringing misinformation to the attention of the incident response team in a coordinated, ongoing way.

Read comments on news websites. Browse Facebook and other social media sites. Follow Twitter. Spend time in the cafeteria and the hallways, listening to what is being said.

Create a fact sheet about the incident, and keep it updated—specifically correcting misinformation. Don't let misinformation take root in the school or community; once that happens, it becomes much more difficult to correct.

Use each new communication—statements, emails, public address announcements, comments at meetings and school gatherings—to correct misinformation and reiterate facts, always coming back to the values message that there is no place for hate in this school.

And be careful as you gather your own information. Don't jump to conclusions. If you are hasty, you may spread misinformation yourself and then appear to be backtracking or sidestepping something when you try to correct your own misinformation. It's OK to say, "We don't know that yet."

And what if the incident turns out to be a hoax or fabrication? It happens, and it calls for a constructive response as well. In the case of a hoax, address the negative impact of the act anyway, even as you denounce the deception. Clear up any rumors and point out the damaging effects these deceptions have on confidence and trust. "Crying wolf"—lying about a threat—damages the peace and safety of the entire school community. And remember, just because someone has cried wolf does not mean a problem does not exist; continue to look into the issue to see if a pattern of hostility exists.

SUPPORT TARGETED STUDENTS

It is vital to support specific victims of a bias incident or hate crime at school, as well as show support for the targeted community. To create this support, you must provide for physical safety, denounce the act in unequivocal terms and follow through on appropriate consequences for perpetrators.

Victims of hateful acts often feel vulnerable, alone and angry. Even when the attack is impersonal—graffiti on a wall, for example—victims often feel personally violated and individually targeted.

A victim's wishes regarding privacy should be respected. If the victim is a teacher, then a close colleague or department head should check in with that individual to discuss privacy issues. In the case of a student, have a designated safe contact person ask the student about her wishes regarding privacy. If a victim voices a desire to go public, initiate a conversation about the risks of doing so (media scrutiny, nasty comments in online settings, an inability to go back to anonymity) to make sure she is making an informed decision. Balance the risk of going public against the reasons for doing so. For many victims, there is a real sense of power in speaking up and out. For others, going public would make a terrible situation even worse.

Here are five other considerations:

DON'T PUT VICTIMS ON THE SPOT. Don't ask victims to speak in class or issue statements to the media or answer for their entire identity group in response to the incident. This may reinjure victims and

make them feel like a target all over again. Also be sensitive to the position of minority faculty and staff. As with students in the classroom, never single out members of a particular identity group for their response to bias incidents or other matters of diversity. ("Joe, you're African-American. What do you think of this?") At the same time, welcome their input when it is offered.

DON'T TAKE OFFENSE. Victims, parents and caregivers may lash out at the school community for not doing enough to protect them or their children; this is a very natural reaction. Acknowledge their feelings and discuss ways that the school plans to prevent future incidents. Also inform victims and parents about victim advocacy and services, counseling and other supportive resources at the school and in the community.

It is vital to support specific victims of a bias incident or hate crime at school, as well as show support for the targeted community.

DENOUNCE EFFORTS THAT MAY REINJURE THE VICTIM. Avoid any suggestion that the victim somehow "brought on" the attack by his or her appearance or behavior. For example, every year, shameful reports surface about administrators telling LGBT victims they would not be harassed or attacked if they just refrained from being "out." Also, if a victim of harassment retaliates against a bully or harasser, do not allow the original provocation to go unaddressed when considering consequences in the wake of the second incident.

APOLOGIZE ON BEHALF OF THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY. In private or during an incident-related conference, express how sorry you and the school are for what happened. Social and psychological research has shown that sincere apologies have great power in healing ruptures in trust and security within organizations, communities and professional relationships. Explain that the school will do everything possible to identify offenders and see that they face appropriate consequences.

BE SENSITIVE TO PRIVACY CONCERNS IN ANTI-LGBT INCIDENTS. If a bias incident targets a LGBT student or teacher, or perceived LGBT student or teacher, avoid making an issue of the victim's sexual orientation or gender identity. Focus on the incident, safety and prevention of future incidents. Be very careful not to "out" students or teachers who have not shared their sexual orientation publicly.

SEEK JUSTICE, AVOID BLAME

When an offender or group of offenders is identified, there is a desire among some people to focus solely on discipline and punishment. Appropriate action should be taken against any offender. If a crime has occurred, that likely will be in the hands of law enforcement and courts. If a crime has not occurred, let school policy be your guide.

Violent offenses, of course, require stern, nonnegotiable consequences, including separation from the school through suspension or expulsion. Inform the offender and his or her adult family members about community counseling services that may be helpful. If a student's bullying or abusive behavior is chronic, push for a psychological evaluation that may reveal mental, emotional or behavioral issues that need attention.

Whether the incident was violent or nonviolent, one of your most important tasks as an administrator is to focus on restoration and not merely punishment. Bias-based incidents are ripe occasions for education. Fear and ignorance often are at least partially to blame for this type of incident. This crisis is an opportunity to teach about culture and race, to help guide students to a deeper understanding that our diversity is a powerful force for good, binding us by our common humanity.

Here are three key issues to consider:

THE POWER OF POLICY. Understandably, victims and their families may judge some disciplinary measures to be ineffective or too lenient. This is less likely to happen if schools have addressed harassment

and bias-motivated incidents in their policies, particularly policies that have been well-publicized and reviewed by the school and the community at large. Be open to the need for change; use this incident as an opportunity to review and improve policy.

FAIR ENFORCEMENT. When incidents do occur, it is crucial that schools enforce the consequences fairly and without regard to the offender's status. If some offenders seem to be treated more leniently than others, the victims and the school community will have little sense of justice and closure. Offenders also will be less likely to change their behavior and victims may feel more vulnerable and be less likely to report future abuses. This dynamic can contribute to a divisive and unsafe school environment.

A COMMUNITY APPROACH. Alliances with parents and caregivers, community or service organizations and advocacy groups can help school officials develop more creative consequences that will require offenders to face the destructive nature of what they did and perhaps even help them take steps to repair the damage they have done. Dialogue groups and peer mediation programs are particularly helpful for incidents involving large groups of students. Some communities also have restorative-justice programs in place, which can help. Los Angeles County, for example, created JOLT (Juvenile Offenders Learning Tolerance), a program aimed to provide education and awareness to first-time hate crime offenders.

PROMOTE HEALING

A hateful act has rocked the school, and the crisis-response effort continues to move forward. It's easy to get so focused on specific tasks—investigating the incident, handling the press conference, addressing the victims' needs—that the bigger picture is lost.

Your community has been wounded. That wound might have come from a source outside the school, such as vandals spraying hateful graffiti on school walls. Or it may have come from inside the school, identifying a deep division among students. Either way, opportunities for healing need to be part of your crisis response.

As the crisis winds down—sooner rather than later—it is helpful to find a way to gather together and share messages of healing and unity. This becomes an initial step into the postcrisis phase, a bridge between crisis management and longer term strategic planning around improving school climate.

One option is to plan a schoolwide or community-wide show of unity. Orchestrating a demonstration of school unity after a hate crime or high-profile bias incident can be a way to begin repairing the sense of community within a school. Distributing ribbons or wearing certain colors can become symbols of determination to recover from the incident and show unity in opposing hate and prejudice at school. Involve the neighborhood and wider community, as appropriate. This type of gathering can have a galvanizing effect, especially if it includes a pledge to work together to address issues raised by the incident.

Consider creating posters or buttons, promoting school values. "Our school stands for ..." Paint that slogan on a banner along the hallway, and invite students to add their thoughts. *Inclusion. Fairness. Kindness.*

A march around the school. A candlelight vigil. A mural painted on the wall that had held the hateful graffiti.

Do not frame this as the end of your efforts, but rather as a beginning of further work toward improving school climate and culture.

A TOOL FOR YOUR TOOLBOX
Teaching Tolerance has created a nationwide program that can help kick-start this kind of change. *Mix It Up at Lunch* promotes inclusion and bridge building within schools. (**tolerance.org/mix-it-up/what-is-mix**)

SECTION THREE

AFTER THE WORST IS OVER

WHAT COMES NEXT?

The crisis has faded. Media have moved on to other news stories. School days have returned to a relatively normal routine. You've had time to catch your breath.

And now the real work begins.

Change is not easy, particularly long-term change involving a school's climate or culture.

Roland S. Barth, educator and founder of the Principals' Center at Harvard University, puts it this way: "All school cultures are incredibly resistant to change, which makes school improvement—from within or without—usually so futile. Unless teachers and administrators act to change the culture of a school, all innovations ... will be destined to remain superficial window dressing, incapable of making much of a difference."

This is where you, as an administrator, can make a real difference, by putting time, energy and resources toward improvement plans.

Educator Sonia Galaviz, an Idaho elementary schoolteacher, urges administrators to hold themselves and others to high standards. "The message is, 'I'm willing to push myself, and you guys are coming with me,' " she said.

The push is worth it.

Increasingly, educational leaders at all levels acknowledge the role of climate in the successes and failings of schools. A steady stream of research—including studies by the National School Climate Center and the High School Survey of Student Engagement—indicates that a positive school climate reduces conflicts, harassment, bullying and violence, making schools safer and more inclusive. It also fosters social and civic development while gradually bolstering student academic performance as changes gain traction. A more positive school climate also can improve staff morale, boosting employee satisfaction and retention rates.

Enter this postcrisis phase with an open mind. The work to change the climate and culture of a school can turn long-held beliefs upside down.

When you closely examine patterns—in class assignments, in discipline referrals, in access to privileges and opportunities—you may discover that the school has been sending unintentional messages that result in stratification of the school community, with deep divisions between the "haves" and the "have-nots." A good start for professional development is a Teaching Tolerance presentation, "Social Justice Equity Audits," at (tolerance.org/activity/social-justice-equity-audits).

Take a deep breath and keep the objective in mind—the desire to create a school where all are welcome and all can thrive.

LESSONS LEARNED

Debriefing is an essential step in the postcrisis process. Bring together the incident response team to review lessons learned.

But don't stop there.

"Always make sure there's an opportunity for exchange with multiple perspectives," advised Enid Pickett, a California elementary schoolteacher.

Expand the discussion to include students, parents and guardians, and community members. Thoughts and guidance from these constituents should be gathered, reviewed and prioritized as part of the effort for addressing shortcomings within the school community.

It's best to carry out a facilitated meeting, with strong note taking. The objective is to develop a working list of specific improvements, which can become a road map for change. This list may indicate the need for policy changes, role assignments and skill building.

Here are some questions to get you started:

- What worked well?
- Where are there opportunities for improvement?
- What resources did we have, and how did we use them?
- What resources did we lack, and how might we introduce and use new resources in the future?

Steer answers away from simple finger-pointing or blaming.

Dr. James Comer, a child psychiatrist and educational researcher at Yale University, says that a school's climate-improvement process works best with a "no-fault" framework. In this management style, when people or groups make miscalculations or mistakes in efforts to improve school climate, they are not blamed but receive reassurance, support, guidance and encouragement to try again. A no-fault framework develops trust, encourages initiative and promotes a culture that constructs success from setbacks.

"If you blame people you become defensive [and] fight more," Comer said. "But if you focus on solving the problem then people start working together to focus on what's really important and what's good for the children."

So steer clear of blame, but do not steer away from discomfort.

"I want us to be uncomfortable, to wake up in the middle of the night thinking about these things," Pickett said. "I want us to be driving home and be bugged by this. I want us to challenge our own -isms, our own biases."

PLANNING FOR THE LONG TERM

You've debriefed, discussing the lessons learned. Now is the time to put those lessons to work.

Pull together a committee of effective, collaborative-minded people from among students, faculty, staff, parents and caregivers, and members of the larger community to create a school climate task force. Task force members should include not just traditional student leaders but representatives of multiple identity groups within the school.

A school climate coordinator can handle day-to-day planning and management of the task force, but committed leadership from the school's top administrator is essential for success. The top administrator should promote the group strongly, reassure the school community that this is not just a feel-good exercise, and then back up the words with concrete actions.

Resources also must be provided, otherwise it will appear to be an empty effort. Support for these efforts is growing; increasingly, states are looking at school climate as a vital element in students' ability to learn as well as teachers' ability to teach.

"When schools improve school climate, they are safer," said Dr. Jonathan Cohen, executive director of the National School Climate Center (schoolclimate.org/index.php), a web-based resource founded in 1996 as the Center for Social and Emotional Education. "They have more positive outcomes, lower dropout rates and violence goes down."

Of course, there are pitfalls. Here are some issues to anticipate:

CYNICS AND NAYSAYERS. Someone, likely more than one someone, will grumble and ask, "What's another task force going to do?" Steer conversations to more constructive topics. Ask those who speak negatively about the effort to identify for you what they want to change in the school climate. Engage them in the effort in whatever way you can.

FINGER-POINTING AND BLAMING. Shift negative or pessimistic comments toward a more constructive path, identifying opportunities for improvement and constructive changes in the school community.

TOO MUCH INFORMATION. You risk getting bogged down by a lengthy list, with individuals championing pet projects. Create a process for prioritization that involves group input. Aim for a short list of high-priority changes.

ONE STEP AT A TIME. Attempting to change a whole system can be paralyzing. Aim to identify individual changes that have the most potential impact. Take one step, then see what comes next.

PERCEPTION GAPS. Teachers say the school is safe, but students say it isn't. Or parents see bias-based bullying as a bigger problem than you do. These are areas where more discussion and more understanding are needed. Don't dismiss the views you disagree with; take time to explore them, and be open to adjusting your outlook.

Work to navigate these pitfalls, but don't allow them to derail the process. Give this effort time.

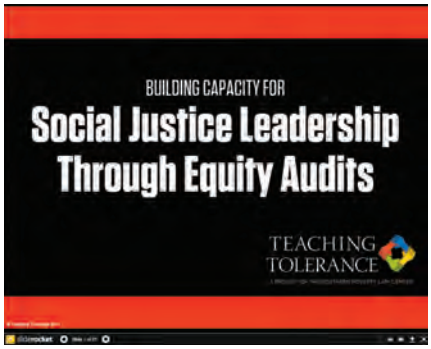
"School leaders don't spend enough time in the action planning stage; they want to measure it and move right away to implementing," said Dr. Jonathan Cohen of the National School Climate Center. "That's understandable, but it gives short shrift to essential planning."

CAPACITY BUILDING

This is a school, a place where students learn. There are history and art, math and science. There's also an element of social emotional learning (SEL) that takes place at school. School is the most common place where young people interact with a broad spectrum of others, from different cultures and abilities, backgrounds and races.

This is where we can change the world.

Many educators are mission driven. They came to this profession with that world-changing notion in mind, knowing that the relationship between educator and student can be powerful and life-changing. There are people throughout your school who have hearts and a passion for this work. Some may have become jaded. Others may feel tired, overwhelmed by parts of the job that drain them of that original passion.



A TOOL FOR YOUR TOOLBOX

Teaching Tolerance offers a presentation on Social Justice Equity Audits (with guidelines for taking a school survey). The professional development presentation is designed to help educators move beyond simple accountability models to those that include an equity framework for school reform.
(tolerance.org/activity/social-justice-equity-audits)

Now is the time for a plan steeped in hope—the hope that sensitivity and leadership training can genuinely improve school climate; the hope that we can develop compassion in students who will become culturally aware, community-building stewards of our future; the hope that we *can* make a difference.

Teaching Tolerance has had the opportunity to be present in the aftermath of several bias-related school crises. Certainly discussions dealt with aspects of the nine steps outlined in the crisis section of this guide. But the real power, the real hope, arrived in leadership and sensitivity training that involved students, staff and community members at these schools.

Social emotional learning (SEL) revolves around self-awareness and self-management, with an emphasis on social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision making. How do I manage my feelings? What sympathy and empathy do I have for others? How can I maintain positive relationships? And how can I deal with situations in a constructive and ethical manner?

Key to incidents of bias and hate that may occur at school, SEL promotes understanding of the self and others. Respecting differences. Managing strong emotions. Resisting negative peer pressure. Working cooperatively. Learning to manage and negotiate conflict nonviolently. Seeking and offering help.

SEL can be part of professional development. It can be used by teachers in classroom management, or by counselors in their work in schools. There can be special trainings. Parents and caregivers and the wider community can be involved.

The goal is to build capacity—in your school community and in the individuals who comprise that community. This will not only enrich your school, it also will make it less likely that a hate crime or bias incident will arise within the school. And if the incident comes from someone outside the school, you are all the more prepared to deal with it in a constructive, forward-looking manner.

What does a school community without this capacity look like?

"It's a culture of fear," said Enid Pickett, a California elementary schoolteacher. "People are afraid of engaging with each other. It closes people down."

That's why Sonia Galaviz, an Idaho elementary schoolteacher, calls on this kind of capacity building as a way of creating "a culture that exposes and deals with fears."

"It's time," Galaviz said, "to see things in a different light."

Tools for your toolbox that encourage SEL

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports
tolerance.org/sites/default/files/documents/PBIS_factsheet_flier_web.pdf

No Name-Calling Week
nonamecallingweek.org

Day of Silence
dayofsilence.org

Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL)
casel.org

Roots of Empathy
rootsofempathy.org

Strong Kids
strongkids.uoregon.edu

Edutopia
edutopia.org/social-emotional-learning

APPENDIX

1 FORMS FOR SECTION ONE

Before a Crisis Occurs

Worksheet 1—Our School Climate Team

Worksheet 2—Our Policies

Worksheet 3—What is the Climate of Our School?

Worksheet 4—Preparation Checklist

2 FORMS FOR SECTION TWO

When There's a Crisis

Worsheet 1—Incident Report

Worksheet 2—Meeting Record

Worksheet 3—Incident Response Plan

3 FORMS FOR SECTION THREE

After the Worst is Over

Worksheet 1—Incident Resolution Evaluation

WORKSHEET 1 // Our School Climate Team // page one

OUR SCHOOL CLIMATE TEAM

Who will manage incident response on campus?

Name: _____ Position: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Who will manage incident response for the district?

Name: _____ Position: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Who will communicate about incidents?

Name: _____ Position: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Other Incident Response Team Members

Name: _____ Position: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Name: _____ Position: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Name: _____ Position: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Name: _____ Position: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

COMMUNITY RESOURCES

PTA/PTSA

Name: _____ Phone: _____

SRO/Law Enforcement

Name: _____ Phone: _____

LEA or County Ed Agency

Name: _____ Phone: _____

Faith Community

Name: _____ Phone: _____

Municipal Agency or Commission

Name: _____ Phone: _____

DOJ/CRS/Other Fed Agency

Name: _____ Phone: _____

Other Local Service Providers

Name: _____ Phone: _____

Name: _____ Phone: _____

Name: _____ Phone: _____

OUR POLICIES

The district policy on addressing hate and bias incidents was last revised on _____.

Campus Code of Conduct

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Attach the following

- District policy on addressing hate and bias incidents
- Relevant administrative regulations or other prevailing policies

WORKSHEET 3 // What Is the Climate of Our School? // page one

WHAT IS THE CLIMATE OF OUR SCHOOL?

School climate survey used (attach results): _____

Date deployed: _____

Participation rate: _____

Where are our "hot spots" on campus?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

What is the capacity of our staff to handle bias and hate incidents?

Professional development provided on diversity-related topics:

Date: _____ Provider: _____

Staff present: _____

_____

_____

_____

Content overview: _____

_____

_____

_____

(Content overview continued) _____

_____

_____

Professional development on district policies and expectations on responding to hate and bias:

Date: _____ Provider: _____

Staff present: _____

_____

_____

_____

Content overview: _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Other types of relevant training:

Date: _____ Provider: _____

Staff present: _____

_____

_____

_____

Content overview: _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

WORKSHEET 4 // Preparation Checklist

PREPARATION CHECKLIST

- [ ] Develop incident response plan.
- [ ] Create media plan.
- [ ] Have plans reviewed by risk management personnel at district.
- [ ] Share plans with responsible parties.
- [ ] Train both certificated and classified staff on plans.
- [ ] Schedule review and revision dates for periodic review of plans.

WORKSHEET 1 // Incident Report // page one

INCIDENT REPORT

Date: _____ Time: _____ Location: _____

Persons Directly Involved in the Incident

Name: _____ Position (e.g., student, staff, parent): _____

Name: _____ Position (e.g., student, staff, parent): _____

Name: _____ Position (e.g., student, staff, parent): _____

Name: _____ Position (e.g., student, staff, parent): _____

Name: _____ Position (e.g., student, staff, parent): _____

Witnesses

Name: _____ Position (e.g., student, staff, parent): _____

Name: _____ Position (e.g., student, staff, parent): _____

Name: _____ Position (e.g., student, staff, parent): _____

Name: _____ Position (e.g., student, staff, parent): _____

Name: _____ Position (e.g., student, staff, parent): _____

Critical incident description:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Was the incident violent? _____ Was property damaged? _____

When and to whom was this event initially reported?

Were any steps taken to address the incident? If so, when were these steps taken? What was the outcome?

Was anything about this incident communicated to other students or parents? If so, what and by whom?

Does this incident fall under the suspension or expulsion codes? _____

Has this incident reached the threat level? _____

Is there evidence that this incident is part of a larger pattern of bullying or bias? _____

Have there been subsequent incidents? If so, please describe in detail.

WORKSHEET 2 // Meeting Record

MEETING RECORD

Date: _____ Time: _____ Location: _____

Participants

School staff: _____

Parent(s): _____

Student(s): _____

Others: _____

_____

Description of meeting:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

WORKSHEET 3 // Incident Response Plan // page one

INCIDENT RESPONSE PLAN

Planned actions to support those most affected by the incident:

School support and community resources needed to implement this plan:

Planned remediation for the perpetrators of the incident:

School support and community resources needed to implement this plan:

Planned actions to address the needs of witnesses and bystanders:

_____

_____

_____

_____

School support and community resources needed to implement this plan:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Who is responsible for ensuring follow through on these actions?

Name: _____ Position: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Is there a timetable for completing these actions? If so, describe.

_____

_____

_____

Who will communicate with parents and update other stakeholders as necessary?

Name: _____ Position: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

WORKSHEET 1 //Incident Resolution Evaluation

INCIDENT RESOLUTION EVALUATION

Did we implement our plan effectively?

NO — MOSTLY NO — NEITHER YES OR NO — MOSTLY YES — YES

Did our incident response team have the right personnel and resources to effectively manage the incident?

NO — MOSTLY NO — NEITHER YES OR NO — MOSTLY YES — YES

Was the entire school staff appropriately prepared to respond to the incident?

NO — MOSTLY NO — NEITHER YES OR NO — MOSTLY YES — YES

Was our communication plan sufficient?

NO — MOSTLY NO — NEITHER YES OR NO — MOSTLY YES — YES

Were our campus communities prepared to respond to the critical incident?

NO — MOSTLY NO — NEITHER YES OR NO — MOSTLY YES — YES

Did we make effective use of our parent and community allies?

NO — MOSTLY NO — NEITHER YES OR NO — MOSTLY YES — YES

Was our code of conduct effective in addressing student behavior related to the incident?

NO — MOSTLY NO — NEITHER YES OR NO — MOSTLY YES — YES

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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