

Examining Bullying at Touro Symposium

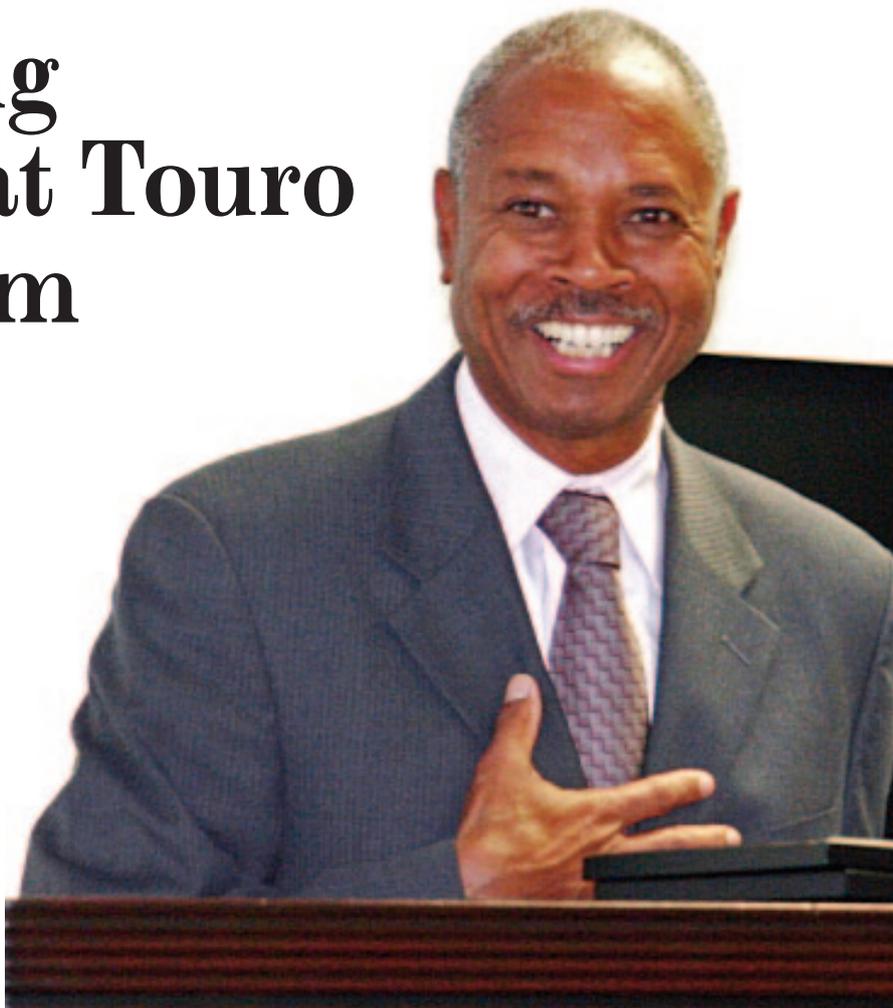
Bronx DA Robert Johnson, Bullying Experts Offer Violence Prevention Strategies

Amid mounting incidents of school and cyber-bullying that have increasingly led to teen suicide, Touro College's Equity Assistance Center hosted a symposium last September to inform teachers and school administrators about practical strategies to combat bullying and violence.

Bronx County District Attorney Robert T. Johnson, the keynote speaker at the event, warned of the consequences of bullying and called the Dignity for All Students Act, signed into law by former Gov. David Paterson in September 2010, one of the solutions to the growing problem of bullying and harassment. The new law, which takes effect in July 2012, aims to ensure that school administrators and educators have the tools and resources in place to afford all students, particularly those who are traditionally targeted by bullies, an educational environment in which they can thrive.

"Much of the behavior that we are witnessing, particularly on so-called reality television programs, suggests that constant humiliation of others has become an acceptable national sport. The results have been tragic," Mr. Johnson said at the Sept. 28, 2010 event held at Touro's Lander College for Women-The Anna Ruth and Mark Hasten School on the Upper West Side of Manhattan.

"It (the Dignity for All Students Act) is going to take effect in 2012 but I for one don't see why people can't begin implementing it now," he added. "It calls for the schools to teach civility and character



building. We don't have to wait for a law to do something. It makes sense."

Mr. Johnson said the Internet has exacerbated the problem of bullying among today's youth. "It's so much easier to taunt somebody if you don't have to be face-to-face with them...We can prosecute cyber bullies or telephone harassers. It can be criminal conduct and we will prosecute if it gets to that point. We feel there is more that we can do and we will be looking at cyber-bullying even more carefully than we have until today."

The six-hour symposium entitled "Bullying and Harassment: The Most Common Form of Violence" brought together bullying experts, teachers, school administrators and not-for-profits from New York City, Westchester, Long Island and New Jersey. The Equity Assistance Center (EAC)-Region II hosted the event in collaboration with the U.S. Department of Education's New York Office for Civil Rights. Touro's EAC is part of the Graduate School of Education's Lander Center for Educational Research and is funded by a \$1.9 million three-year grant from the U.S. Department of Education.

According to the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP), bullying has become the most common form of violence in schools, whether in person, in social media or by text. The National Education Association (NEA) estimates that 160,000 children miss school every day due to fear of attack or intimidation by other students. Additionally, two-thirds of students believe that schools respond poorly to bullying, with a high percentage believing that adult help is infrequent and ineffective, according to NASP.

At the Touro symposium, Mr. Johnson detailed several of the community outreach programs that the Bronx District Attorney's office runs to combat violence, bullying,



Additional speakers at the Touro bullying symposium included, from left to right, David Hensel, Coleen Chin, Miriam Nunberg, Corrine O'Hara, Stuart Green, Jason Siros and Dr. Velma Cobb

internet crimes, drugs and sexual assault among teens. He also stressed the importance of programs like EARS (Effective Alternative in Reconciliation Services), a Bronx-based program with which his office collaborates that trains teens to develop and lead workshops for their peers in violence prevention and conflict resolution. Mr. Johnson said these types of community outreach programs, which provide positive role models for today's youth, are another important part of the solution to bullying.

"I try not to call myself a prosecutor because prosecution is an element of what I do; it's not all that I do," he said. "I really relish the other part of what needs to be done: the educational component—the collaboration with educators, the contacts that we make, the work that we've done with the various schools in our county. We have affiliations with three high schools. We have mentoring programs. Children are under stress... whether it be from the home or homework or from bullying. So we relish it (the educational work) because it gives us an opportunity to try to help them get it right."

Dr. Stuart Green, founder and director of the New Jersey Coalition for Bullying Awareness and Prevention, told the symposium that bullying is the most common serious problem of school-age children and usually peaks during the middle school years. He said bullying is a worldwide occurrence that is inadequately addressed in schools and stressed the importance of early intervention in elementary school grades.

"Basically bullying is a phenomenon created in children by adults modeling bullying-like behavior in their relationships with other adults and in their relationships with kids. We are exposing children to social systems in which bullying is rewarded or implicitly accepted."

Dr. Green, also chair of the New Jersey Commission on Bullying in Schools, said bullying, the most common form of violence in both children and adults, is typically a traumatic experience with lasting effects that commonly impacts adult functioning.

"Bullying causes fear of openness and self-expression, as well as inhibited expression of gender identity, which is why it is a huge issue for the LGBT community," he said, noting that the suicide rate is four times greater in gay and lesbian youth. "Just witnessing violence creates psychological effects for people who see it...and don't do anything about it. We only want kids to intervene in an atmosphere in which adults get it and support the kids."

While the most common issues targeted for bullying include looks, race, gender identity, poverty, religion, disability and family conflict, any child can be bullied, Dr.

Green said. TV and film actress Samantha Hahn, who was the winner of the 2005 National American Miss Teen contest, was severely bullied in school and now serves as the New Jersey State advocate for the NJ Cares about Bullying campaign, speaking across the state on victim impact.

Dr. Green said bullying is primarily an institutional problem related more to the characteristics of the school environment than to the individual participants, and schools can effectively prevent and address bullying, as well as see students' academic performance improve, by changing their culture.

"Schools need to have clear, consistent rules, and meet with the children involved—both the bully and the child who is bullied," he said. "School administrators and teachers need to convey that bullying is not acceptable behavior and they need to understand that inaction is not an acceptable reaction to the problem."

Dr. Green suggested schools implement school-wide bullying prevention programs that include anonymous reporting systems, proactive efforts to identify all incidents, consistent rules and sanctions, proactive identification of aggressive and vulnerable groups, proactive education, and supervision of high-risk areas such as the schoolyard, lunchroom, school bus, team activities,

CONTINUED ON PAGE 69

Yaman Shrestha, Graduate School of Technology, Database Systems, 2008, is database engineer at DocPatient Network, a company dedicated to making healthcare more accessible to patients by creating innovative Internet-based means of transacting healthcare via electronic patient medical records.

Jenny Sora, Graduate School of Education, Instructional Technology, 2008, is an adjunct professor at Touro College in educational technology, a teacher of technology at P.S. 166 on the Upper West Side of Manhattan, and a student in the doctoral program in computing for educational professionals at Pace University.

Juan Subirana, Graduate School of Education, School Leadership, 2006, is assistant principal at William Cullen Bryant High School in Long Island City, New York.

Pamela Tripsas, Graduate School of Social Work, 2008, is program manager at Rockland Psychiatric Center-Partial Hospitalization Program and Transitional Placement Program, which services adults who suffer from psychiatric illnesses complicated by social and economic problems such as homelessness and substance abuse.

Shrestha Vishwa, Graduate School of Technology, Database Systems, 2010, is a professor at ASA College teaching computer fundamentals and computer hardware.

Chad Woodard, Graduate School of Health Sciences, Doctor of Physical Therapy (DPT), 2009, is a dance therapist and a lab assistant in the Touro College DPT Program.

Bullying Symposium

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 21

locker room and cyberspace. In addition, he recommended classroom bullying prevention programs that include clear, consistent rules, regular meetings, collaborative learning, curriculum integration, proactive work on relationships and parent involvement.

This systemic approach reduces bullying incidents dramatically in the first year and leads to improvements in subsequent years and has been shown to reduce bullying substantially in intervention studies in many countries including the United States, he said. "If you want to have test scores shoot up in every school in the country, take care of bullying."

But Dr. Green noted that in order for these programs to be effective, "the principal has to get how important this is and understand the impact on academics, and ideally have the support from his assistant superintendent. You have to have a coordinating group and you have to have a couple of teachers in it. Lack of teacher leadership and lack of teacher guidance in anti-bullying programs is corrosive."

He told the educators at the symposium that on an individual level, it is a sign of failure when they have bullying reported to them. "You have an obligation to have a sense of how things are going socially at that school—who's isolated, who has no friends and who's on the outside. You want to meet with kids individually who are bullied and you want to apologize to them."

Dr. Lamar P. Miller, dean of Touro's

Graduate School of Education, said schools should be a "safe place for learning, free from bullying, with a support system of adults who will address the problem immediately. Our students will be teachers very soon, and it is very important that they have access to the tools needed to best address bullying in schools."

In concluding the symposium, Touro College Equity Assistance Center Director Dr. Velma Cobb told the participants, "You need to have a conversation with parents and the community, and with the faculty and other staff at your schools because all of these people need to know about these very serious issues of bullying and harassment. They are your eyes and ears."

She said the symposium provided practical, valuable information that teachers, administrators, and parents can use to combat bullying. "We need to give these adults who spend a lot of time with our children information that helps identify the most vulnerable students, and how to work together to stop bullying."

Additional speakers at the symposium included David Hensel, Coleen Chin, and Miriam Nunberg, attorneys from the New York Office for Civil Rights; Corrine O'Hara, RN, a health educator and LGBTQ coordinator for HiTops, a not-for-profit that promotes adolescent health and well-being, and Jason Siros, assistant project director for the Anti-Defamation League's A World of Difference Institute. ■

This article was written by Gail Schiller with contributions from Barbara Franklin and Jennifer Berkley

DGS Graduation

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 65

first official commencement ceremony in June 2009 but the graduate schools of business and Jewish studies had held their own separate commencement ceremonies that year.

The deans of the graduate schools—Dr. Michael Shmidman, Jewish Studies; Dr. Michael Williams, Business; Dr. Isaac Herskowitz, Technology; Dr. Steven Huberman, Social Work; Dr.

Louis H. Primavera, Psychology, and Dr. LaMar P. Miller, Education—also participated in the commencement ceremony. They introduced the student speakers from their schools and spoke briefly about their graduate programs before master's degrees were conferred upon all the graduates by Dr. Kadish and Touro College Chairman of the Board Dr. Mark Hasten. ■

Barbara Franklin contributed to this article