

**Are programs of The Character Network working in
schools?**

**Researchers at
Stephen F. Austin State University**

In Texas say:

YES!

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A Study of One Bully Prevention Program

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This study considered one bullying program that seeks to eliminate bullying incidences in schools through the use of story telling and by introducing a new academic language that teaches, “a bully is one who hurts others while a hero is one who helps others; therefore a bully is the opposite of a hero.” Jim Lord, (2005) relates stories about young heroes who have become heroes by simply helping other people. The stories told by Lord in his program are recorded on compact disc (CD) and are designed to be played either in the classroom or over the public address system in elementary schools. The program also has another component schools can choose to use in conjunction with the CD. Schools can have Jim Lord, the author and speaker of the *Bully Alert* program, visit their school and speak at an assembly program on the subject of bullying (hurting others) and heroism (helping others.)

This study considered 21 schools using Jim Lord’s program, *The Beginning of a Hero / Bully Alert* program. Educators responsible for implementing the program in these 21 schools were asked to complete a survey. A copy of the survey can be found in Appendix A in this report. Each of the educators responsible for implementing the program in these 21 schools went to the survey website (<http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.asp?u=94793077588>) and completed the survey. This study considered some of the salient points made by these educators about Jim Lord’s bully prevention programs used in their schools.

Review of the Literature

Bullying Defined

Bullying at school has become a growing problem; so much so, the Texas State Legislature created a working legal definition of bullying in H.B. 283 (2005):

... “bullying” means engaging in written or verbal expression or physical conduct that a school district board of trustees or the board's designee determines: (1) will have the effect of physically harming a student, damaging a student's property, or placing a student in reasonable fear of harm to the student's person or of damage to the student's property; or (2) is sufficiently severe, persistent, or pervasive enough that the action or threat creates an intimidating, threatening, or abusive educational environment for a student. (§25.0341)

The definition by the Texas Legislature offers a legitimate way for educators to begin defining similar behaviors with one term. Bullying, according to this bill is no longer considered exclusively a physical act; both written and verbal communication have now been included in the definition. Other states have followed with definitions of bullying due to the violence that no longer is anomalous.

What the Literature Says

The dialogue concerning bullying that is perpetrated by school-age children has increased among educators and other professionals in the past few years. Historically the public did not consider bullying an issue, but this began to change in the late 1990's according to United States government officials (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001).

Most state laws require local education agencies to adopt policies that prohibit bullying in their school systems. Louisiana's H.B. No. 0540 (2005) communicates the following message about bullying, "... public elementary and secondary school policies prohibiting the harassment, intimidation, and bullying of a student by another student, further defines such terms and requires all local public school boards to include such policies in student codes of conduct." http://www.doe.state.la.us/lde/finance/FN_control.asp.

Other states have enacted comparable laws due to the rising concerns among citizens and political leaders across the nation about bullying.

One national study presented in the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) reports that approximately 45% of American Students have been involved in bullying other students and 41% of the students surveyed indicated they have been bullied (Nansel et al., 2001). Nansel et al., further indicated that 29.9% of students surveyed had reported moderate or frequent involvement in bullying, either as the one committing the act or as the one on the receiving end of bullying. They concluded that bullying is a substantial problem facing children in schools in the United States. Nansel et al. includes the following definition in the survey instructions:

We say a student is being bullied when another student, or a group of students, say or do nasty and unpleasant things to him or her. It is also bullying when a student is teased repeatedly in a way he or she doesn't like... (p. 2095).

Methods and Data Sources

The data from this study were collected from an online survey offered to 21 schools across the United States using *The Character Network Programs* by Jim Lord. Teachers, counselors, and administrators participated in the surveys. Specific demographic questions and open-ended questions were designed to get a clear picture of how the program is working in the selected schools. The researcher analyzed the data. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the demographic and program-use questions on the survey. The researcher considered the open-ended question for themes.

Several questions helped to guide the study:

1. What are the educators' perceptions of Jim Lord's bullying program?
2. What are the anti-bullying programs by Jim Lord doing for students?
3. Do educators using the anti-bullying programs by Jim Lord believe the programs are having a positive impact on the climate at their schools?

E-mails were sent to the contact person for the schools chosen for this study. The emails directed the participants to a survey on Survey Monkey; an on-line survey website where data is collected. Twenty-one surveys were taken by the participants. The 11 survey questions can be found in Appendix A.

Methodology

Sample

The sample for this study was taken from across three different states; Texas, Connecticut, and New York. The 21 schools were purposefully chosen because they actively use Jim Lord’s character programs. Actively using the programs is defined as schools that used the program consistently on a weekly basis, as prescribed by Jim Lord during the past year. All schools were public schools and represented Pre-Kindergarten through 6th grade as indicated in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Grade levels included in the 21 participating schools:

Grade Level	% of Schools	Number of Schools
Pre K	62.5%	15
K	75%	18
1st	75%	18
2nd	83.3%	20
3rd	83.3%	20
4th	70.8%	17
5th	54.2%	13
6th	16.7%	4

Table 1 indicates the percentage and numbers of each grade level found in the surveyed schools.

One hundred percent of the schools sampled for this research use *The Beginning of a Hero / Bully Alert* program according to Table 2, and Table 2 also indicates 50 % use the *Live Assembly Program* by

Jim Lord. The programs are all designed to work in conjunction with each other to bring about positive changes in school climate.

Table 2. The Character Network programs used in the schools:

Program Used	Response:	Percent	Total
The Beginning of Little Heroes		20.8 %	5
The Beginning of a Hero / Bully Alert		100.0 %	24
A Reflection of Your Future		0.0 %	0
Mr. Delaney's Mirror / The Guided Journal		4.2 %	1
Live Assembly Program by Jim Lord		50.0 %	12

Table 2 indicates the programs offered by Jim Lord along with the percentage and numbers of each school that uses the different programs

Data Collection

An email was sent directing the participants to the Survey Monkey web site (<http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.asp?u=94793077588>). Participants were asked to complete the survey, which contained two sections. The first section contained nine questions, which were designed to determine demographic information and educators' beliefs of the impact of the programs. The second section of the survey instrument was used to encourage the participants to speak about the programs using their own words, thus offering a deep and rich reflection of the value placed on the program by the participants in this study. Plans are in place for future conversations with these educators.

Findings

Themes

This study is the second in a series of studies conducted. The data thus far indicates *The Beginning of a Hero / Bully Alert* program is working as designed. Respondents are offering information that speaks volumes about the necessity of this type of program. Statements made by participants in previous surveys piloted at nine schools prior to the survey for this study include the following:

- “Children in my class will now identify bullies both in the reality of interaction among students here at school, as well as in reading material.”
- “I have noticed on several occasions that children will verbalize recognizing someone else behaving as a bully would. It is something they will discuss even from a story we read together when a character is being a bully. This was not terminology or attitudes they recognized specifically before the use of the program.”
- “It has precipitated good dialogue in the classroom when it is finished being played. The students are freely discussing the ideas that are presented.”
- “The restroom is one of our problem areas. Since we have been using this program students have chosen to spend less time playing around in the restroom. Older students are more respectful of younger students and don't do acts to scare them.”
- “The children have commented on their surprise at how young the heroes began to use their gift to affect...”
- “In my guidance time with the students in the classrooms I sometimes hear students refer to a segment they heard on the Beginning of a Hero.”

The researcher has added these statements because they mirror the findings found in this study of 21 schools. Comments made by the participants in this study harmonize with the statements found in the previous study. Note what the educators in this study are saying when asked to offer examples of how the program has helped in their school.

- “There are virtually no fights this year in comparison to previous years.”
- “It helps children understand the different forms of bullies.”
- “Last year, our 6th grade class ran a donation drive for a little girl with cancer. The theme of their program was ‘Be a hero’.”
- “It has opened a dialogue about issues related to bullying and good character.”
- “When the CD was being played, if any students were in the hallway, they would stop, stick their heads in the main office or just stand in front of the door and listen to what was being said. They really took in the information. I think it helped them identify what a bully is.”
- “Students discuss and use the examples when trying to talk to each other about inappropriate behavior.”
- “A teacher told me that a kindergarten student made a good choice and said, I was a hero, not a bully.”
- “The terms bully and hero are used with familiarity and understanding in my classroom now. My students are quick to point out even the bullies/heroes in stories we read. One day recently, I passed another class lined up at a water fountain just as the teacher was reminding them not to act like bullies. I know that our principals and counselor are pleased with the programs and play them faithfully.”

When asked if these educators believed *The Beginning of a Hero / Bully Alert* program was working to reduce bullying activities in their school, 100 % of the respondents said yes. The *Bully Alert Program* was designed to eliminate bullying; the data suggests the program is successful in preventing undesirable behavior. A longitudinal study is being conducted using information gathered from the Public Education

Information Management System (PEIMS) to ascertain if these data will be reflected over time.

When asked about the effectiveness of *The Beginning of a Hero / Bully Alert* program in terms of positive student behavior, which would include fewer office referrals and/or a noticeable difference in unacceptable student behavior, 100 % of the respondents said it is effective to highly effective. All of the educators responded yes when asked if they would recommend the program to other schools. As one can see by the data, educators who are using this system believe the program is successful in making positive changes in the behaviors of students.

Results and Conclusions

The data clearly indicate *The Beginning of a Hero / Bully Alert* program is working to promote a positive climate in the schools where the program is consistently implemented. The comments made by the participants in both studies thus far harmonize with the quantitative data to indicate a positive change in student behaviors. One educator said, “Students discuss and use the examples when trying to talk to each other about inappropriate behavior”. This indicates the students are listening and beginning to act on the information found in the program. One kindergarten student suggested that he was a hero, not a bully. The kindergarten student’s statement indicates an understanding of the difference between a bully and a hero. Beginning to understand this at this early age is important if we are going to make a difference in bullying activities in public schools.

Bullying at school has become a growing problem according to the research and the data collected by states. Necessity dictates we find an answer to the growing problem. The data in this research suggests *The Beginning of a Hero / Bully Alert* program is one more answer to be used in battling this growing problem.

Appendix A

The Character Network Survey by Dr. Lee Stewart

1. Please describe your school.

Public Charter Private

2. Please describe your school by marking all the grade levels in your school.

Pre K K 1st 2nd 3rd 4th 5th 6th 7th 8th

3. Please indicate your job title.

Principal

Assistant Principal

Counselor

Teacher

Other

4. Please indicate how long you have been an educator.

< 5 5-10 11-15 16-20 21-25 > 25

5. Please check all The Character Network programs you use in your school.

The Beginning of Little Heroes

The Beginning of a Hero / Bully Alert

A Reflection of Your Future

Mr. Delaney's Mirror / The Guided Journal

Live Assembly Program by Jim Lord

6. Please rate the effectiveness of the following programs in terms of positive student behavior. This would be indicated by fewer office referrals and or a noticeable difference in unacceptable student behavior on your campus. The program is:

1 not effective

2 somewhat effective

3 effective

4 highly effective

5 do not use this program

The Beginning of Little Heroes

The Beginning of a Hero / Bully Alert

A Reflection of Your Future

Mr. Delaney's Mirror / The Guided Journal

The Live Assembly Program by Jim Lord

7. Do you believe The Beginning of a Hero / Bully Alert program is working to reduce bullying activities in your school?

Yes No

8. On a scale from 1 to 5, how much impact is The Beginning of a Hero / Bully Alert program having on the overall environment at your school?

- 1 no impact at all
- 2 slight impact
- 4 noticeable impact
- 3 a significant impact
- 4 do not use the program

9. Would you recommend The Beginning of a Hero / Bully Alert program to other schools?

Yes No

10. Please offer any specific examples where The Beginning of a Hero / Bully Alert program has helped in your school. (Do not use real names.)

11. Please offer any comments on your use of The Beginning of a Hero / Bully Alert program.

Thank you for participating in this survey.

I will be using your answers for a research project to determine the effectiveness of The Character Network Programs.

Your information will remain completely confidential.

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