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Bullying in real life

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Students spend the majority of their days in school for the first 18 years of their life. Their time spent in school ends up shaping much of who they become later in life. It is imperative that we as a society promote positive school climates for all students across the country. Bullying prevention is one major aspect that contributes to maintaining a welcoming atmosphere in schools. October is National Bullying Prevention Month. It is a time where we can brainstorm ideas about the next steps in preventing bullying across the nation. Schools have a responsibility to ensure that all of their students are considerate and respectful to one another. This is often addressed through the use of bullying awareness programs throughout the school year. These programs help students understand that bullying is not tolerated, and often promote courses of action for students who are bullied. Bullying awareness programs are essential in combatting bullying in our schools because they start a discussion and allow students to consider the consequences of their hurtful actions.

Throughout my many years in Vermont's public school system, I have experienced several bullying awareness programs, and all of them succeeded in making me and my peers think about bullying. As young children, many people do not fully think about how their actions toward others will be perceived. Not many bullies, especially at a young age, would actually consider themselves to be bullies. They may see their actions in a different light, or believe that they are just participating in harmless teasing.

Many bullying awareness programs define what a bully is and force

students to analyze their actions towards other kids. I have never considered myself to be a bully, but often after listening to my elementary school's bullying awareness programs, I have thought about ways I treated people in the past. I realized that sometimes I could have been unintentionally mean or rude to some of my peers. In addition to my own experiences, a study conducted by the Congressional Research Service found that bullying could be decreased as much as 25 percent in schools that used bullying prevention programs.

These bullying awareness programs not only reduce bullying; they also help contribute to making students kinder in general to one another. One of the best ways to stop bullying in schools is to support a school climate where students can monitor themselves, and teach them about the effects of bullying through awareness programs.

Bullying awareness programs are a great way to promote discussion and spread knowledge about bullying, but often students can feel that they are boring or useless. Looking back at my elementary school times, I can remember feeling annoyed with the prevalence of anti-bullying programs at my school. I understood that bullying was terrible, but I didn't really comprehend how serious its effects could be. Around this time I heard about a man named John Halligan, who was speaking at schools around the country to show the serious consequences of bullying. Halligan had a son named Ryan who went to school in Essex Junction and committed suicide after being profusely bullied by his peers at school.

Mr. Halligan's story made me realize the dire consequences that bullying could have on a student, his family and their community. Stories like this one are heart-wrenching to hear, but they help kids to understand why their schools even have bullying awareness programs. A real story has more impact on students than a statistic or a general anti-bullying campaign. By sharing real-life accounts of bullying, schools can give more meaning to their awareness programs and have a real impact on students' understanding of the issue.

The primary purpose of school is to foster an environment where students can learn and flourish, and in order to fully accomplish this goal, bullying must be stopped.

Connor Solimano, a junior at Rutland High School, is the student member of the state board of education.

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