



NYSIR

New York Schools Insurance Reciprocal News

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In this issue, a review of lead pollution in schools and what is covered by NYSIR insurance policies; the case of a student injured on a school playground because of a simple misstep; interviews with Board member, Meredith Brosnan and NYSIR Senior Loss Control Specialist, Bob Blaisdell; and instructions for filing student incident reports.

Bystanders and Hazing

by Donald McPherson

In 1994 the Mentors in Violence Prevention Project (MVP), a program created by Jackson Katz to encourage positive and proactive bystander behavior to prevent all forms of men's violence against women, was introduced nationally. The bystander model was supported by the research of Ron Slaby of the Educational Development Center in Newton Massachusetts and advisor to the MVP organization. MVP combined Katz's knowledge and perspective on gender-based violence with the pedagogical approach of bystander behavior as an intervention strategy.

The Bystander Approach

Today, the bystander approach is a widely used tool for prevention programs seeking alternative strategies. The idea behind the approach is to educate and empower people to become engaged and proactive bystanders when they witness precipitating factors to violence (e.g. aggressive attitudes, abusive language, threats, etc.). With greater awareness and public outrage about harassment, bullying and other forms of youth violence, empowering bystanders is a logical and powerful tool.

Insights to Hazing

When it comes to hazing, the strategies are less clear. First we must identify the perpetrators, victims and bystanders of hazing. In March of 2008, Dr. Elizabeth Allan and Dr. Mary Madden, both faculty members at the University of Maine, published *Hazing in*



View: College Students at Risk, the Initial Findings from the National Study of Student Hazing. Allan and Madden provide tremendous insight to hazing behavior and the individuals and organizations involved.

Chief among the challenges to prevention is the unique nature of hazing where there is (assumed) consensual participation of the victim. In the case of harassment, when the victim is clearly an unwilling participant, creating empathy with bystanders is more easily achieved. Hazing, according to Allan and Madden, often involved "victims" who are not only willing participants, but consider the "ritual" to be a rite of passage and a necessary event to produce organizational unity and trust. This concept is among the most troubling aspects of their findings; that perpetrators, victims and bystanders all have something at stake when it comes to hazing. There is little to indicate that they are willing to give it up.

When asked why they didn't report incidents of hazing to proper authorities, 37% of those surveyed replied they did not want to get their team or teammates in trouble.

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This response indicates that they do recognize that hazing is a problem. But what is more troubling is that 54% replied there was some “other” reason for not reporting. To explain this phenomenon, Allan and Madden talked of the many interviews in which respondents would refer to the positive aspects of hazing (team unity, building trust, etc.) and how it’s normalized behavior that is ‘really no big deal.’ How do we develop a prevention strategy to hazing when those involved understand that it’s a problem, yet view it positively and with the intent of positive outcomes?



Bystanders to Hazing

In this environment, the role of bystanders is much more complicated. Once again, in the case of harassment, the bystanders stand as “witness” and, very often as the public eye of disapproval. Bystanders to hazing are quite different. They are necessary observers to hazing that is carried out very specifically for their approval. The notion that team unity and trust are achieved through hazing is only valid if the “team” is present to witness the behavior. Bystanders have something to gain. Further adding to this dilemma of the bystander role, many respondents cited hazing rituals that take place during the day and in public spaces including the posting of pictures on the internet.

The Prevailing Culture

The role of bystanders has been very effective in drunk driving campaigns (e.g. “Friends Don’t Let Friends Drink and Drive”) and with programs such as MVP. Yet, when bystanders are a necessary factor to the crime, empowering them to act is more challenging. Still, we must think beyond perpetrator-victim and, in the case of hazing, beyond bystanders. We must begin to address the culture that breeds the behavior.

The prevailing culture that condones the behavior and encourages the outcomes without participating and governing the process must be more closely considered. Adults who encourage team leadership to “handle” activities that build camaraderie must be mindful of the danger of such latitude. Adults who talk casually of what they “survived” need to understand that such claims not only legitimize hazing behavior, but encourage young people to seek the behavior as validation.

Positive Strategies

Allan and Madden have provided invaluable insight to the world of hazing. The question is, where do we go from here? What strategies should administrators and practitioners employ to address this complex problem? Some of the recommendations from Allan and Madden include:

- Design hazing prevention efforts to be broad and inclusive of all students involved in school organizations and athletic teams.
- Make a serious commitment to educate the school community about the dangers of hazing; send a clear message that hazing will not be tolerated and those engaging in hazing behaviors will be held accountable.
- Broaden the range of groups targeted for hazing prevention education to include all students, staff, administrators, faculty, alumni, and family members.
- Design intervention and prevention efforts that are research-based and systematically evaluate them to assess their effectiveness.
- Design prevention efforts to be more comprehensive than simply one-time presentations or a single distribution of anti-hazing policies. Focus on help for all students (with an array of strategies and resources).

According to Allan and Madden, “awareness” and policy are not enough. Research-based programs must be comprehensive and on-going and evaluated for effectiveness. Drs. Allan and Madden will provide further analysis of their findings at the American Educational Research Association’s annual meeting this April in San Diego. You can find their complete report at www.StopHazing.org

For more than 20 years, Don McPherson has used the power and appeal of sport to address complex social issues. He has created innovative programs, supported community service providers and has provided educational seminars and lectures throughout North America. He will lead NYSIR's upcoming spring seminar series on hazing and bullying. See page 8 for more information and watch for an invitation to a seminar near you this spring.