Issue Brief
Not in Our School
Case management enables better responses to school bullying, safety and security issues

Getting the Right Information, Taking the Right Actions

Walking on campus between class periods, something doesn't seem right. Is the jostling within that group of students just horseplay or could it be bullying? Isn't that kid in the middle the one who's been absent a lot lately? The one who's changed from outgoing to quiet and timid? Hmm... maybe this is something to report to the assistant principal. What was that reporting procedure again? Wait, there's the bell...

Whether it's an incident between students in the hall or on the playground, noticeable changes in behavior or occurrences of graffiti and vandalism, an important concern for K-12 schools is monitoring and addressing security and safety incidents. Today, most districts and schools have one or more ways to receive reports of student bullying or other issues. However, once a report has come in, what happens to it?

Documenting and managing incidents from initial report through resolution can be a challenge. A school may not have a single tracking system for incident reports, response actions and associated documentation. Instead, school staff must rely on paper files, documents stored on multiple PCs or someone's memory to obtain incident information. And coming out of hectic recess or lunch periods, teachers may forget about filing a report on suspicious activity or behaviors of concern.

Moving Beyond Simple Incident Reports

Educators know that a simple report usually isn't enough for resolving a safety issue or security incident, especially one involving a student. Instead, school personnel need to manage multiple documents and activities throughout the process of investigation and resolution.

Incident tracking. Processes that track actions taken on a reported issue are a key factor in reaching full resolution. For example, most schools don't have a formal process to verify that all appropriate notifications and referrals are made to administrators, teachers, parents, counselors, law enforcement and community services.

Secure, consolidated documentation. Schools must comply with state laws and district policies about information tracking, access and disclosure that apply to incident response and student records. Schools need a centralized place and standard forms to document an incident's resolution, follow-up and disciplinary actions, while maintaining the security of those records. The school may also need to supply complete documentation for law enforcement investigations or legal discovery in a lawsuit.

Why Track Bullying?

85%
A child is bullied every seven minutes, but 85 percent of the time no one intervenes.[1]

62%
62 percent of school staff members say they witness bullying twice a month.[3]

56%
Over half (56 percent) of all students have witnessed bullying at school.[2]

49 STATES
49 states and the District of Columbia have laws that mandate reporting of bullying incidents. (Montana is the only exception.)[4]

Ability to identify and monitor trends. Without the ability to correlate reports for a particular student or incident, it is difficult to see trends in the types of issues, people involved, location, time of day and other relevant factors.

As these needs indicate, schools benefit from a single, comprehensive system for managing the full incident case, not just the report. In fact, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services recommends establishing a bullying reporting system as an important measure for preventing incidents at school.[5]

A Case Management System for Schools: How It Works

Real security for students in the learning environment requires that someone recognizes and can act to avert bullying and other problems. New systems are now available for capturing and analyzing incidents across a school or district. These case management systems — designed to meet the workflow and records requirements of education — can dramatically change a school's ability to handle bullying and other safety and security issues.

The concept of incident case management encompasses all actions and documentation related to an incident, from receipt of the first report to final resolution of the problem. To deliver these capabilities, a school case management system provides three key functions:

1. Secure, central storage of all documents, photos, staff notes and other information for an incident.
2. Defined workflows for incident response that include automatic notifications, reminders of missing documents and scheduled tasks, and tracking of all user activity with the case record.
3. Customizable reports that show trend and correlated data for incidents as well as the school's adherence to mandates for data collection and response timeframes.

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In practice, a case begins when the system receives an incident report. Anonymous reports can be submitted by anyone via the school or district website or by using a smartphone app. The report can include attachments (e.g., photos, GPS data, email messages) that are stored in the system as part of the case documentation.

The system opens a case automatically from the report and routes it to the appropriate personnel based on defined rules and timeframes. Required actions, approvals and documents for the case are tracked automatically and stored together for easy reference.

The types of information collected, workflows and reports can be customized to meet the needs of the school or district and to comply with laws and policies. Administrators can define who can see what in order to protect data security and student privacy.

Incident reports can be integrated with a district's student information system and other relevant data to maintain complete student and school records. Related cases can be linked within the system, allowing principals and other authorized staff to see a more complete picture of a student's behavior or facility's need.

Benefits of a School Case Management System

A comprehensive, education-focused case management system offers several advantages when implemented at a school or district level.

Better incident reporting and information. Incident reports can be submitted anonymously by students, parents, staff or community members through a website or smartphone app. Easy access to an online form encourages immediate reporting when an incident occurs or a problem becomes evident. Reports are stored in a consistent, accessible manner for easy retrieval and correlation as the school determines appropriate responses and corrective actions.

Improved incident response. Principals, school resource officers, anti-bullying specialists, counselors and other staff can work more effectively through automated workflows and consistent processes for handling incidents. Prompt notification and detailed data in the case record help staff respond quickly and appropriately.

Identification of trends and root causes. Historical data and correlation capabilities allow administrators to identify problem trends and sources that might be difficult to detect when analyzing incidents in isolation. This information is extremely helpful in communicating with students and parents, as well as for adjusting staff training, response procedures and assignments.

"Full picture" insights into student behavior. The ability to integrate incident reports with other information about the student can help track behavior indicators over time and across schools. A case management system also allows tracking of positive behaviors for recognizing student role models.

Documentation to support compliance and accountability. Better incident records and recordkeeping help to maintain compliance with policies and laws that cover incident reporting and student privacy. With complete incident information stored in a consistent format and a single system, schools can also provide transparency for incident response; align processes and responses across a school or district; and show results of prevention efforts.

Easy-to-implement, pay-as-you-go solution. Case management systems that are offered as an online service mean there is no software to install or maintain on a school or district server. Authorized users can access and update case records easily and securely through a Web browser.

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DR. DEBRA KACLIK, DIRECTOR OF ARTS, HEALTH, PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND PREK-12 CURRICULUM SUPPORT PROGRAMS, CHARLOTTE-MECKLENBURG SCHOOLS, N.C.

Perspectives on School Case Management

Two school administrators and two experts on school safety share their views on the use of case management systems in K-12 education.

Neptune City School District, N.J.

A new state law that requires more reporting of bullying incidents has prompted Dr. Debra Mercora, chief school administrator, to seek a school case management system. "I need a tool that will help us save time in producing these reports so we can stay focused on investigating and resolving problems," she says.

Saving time and maximizing staff effectiveness is especially important for this single-school district. The ability to see trends and identify problems before they escalate is one benefit Mercora expects to obtain from a case management system. "It's an eye-opening experience when you see the actual numbers," says Mercora. "But the numbers allow you to see how incidents relate to what else is happening in school."

With a better, more objective understanding of the school social climate, Mercora looks forward to addressing the issues through book choices and discussion topics in the classroom. "We expect a case management system to be an important part of the systemic way we will identify, manage and solve problems," she concludes.[6]

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, N.C.

At a district level, identifying indicators for bullying behaviors is key to understanding and implementing earlier intervention with students, according to Dr. Debra Kaclik, director of Arts, Health, Physical Education and PreK-12 Curriculum Support Programs. "In a large district, it's imperative to have a common understanding of what bullying is and isn't, especially when deciding whether to report an incident as bullying," she says. "We also want to help school staff with ways to identify kids who need help before their behavior escalates into bullying."

As one way to meet information needs, this countywide district is exploring case management systems. She expects that better data on incidents and trends will help district and school staff develop more effective responses. "Our ultimate goal is keeping kids in school by giving administrators the information to turn around a student's behavior before disciplinary action becomes necessary," concludes Kaclik.[7]

School Safety Advisory Council

Through school assessments, training and related services, staff for the School Safety Advisory Council see firsthand the challenges faced by school administrators in managing and responding to incidents. "A case management system can help administrators enhance their human response, which can be an easier and less expensive change than just buying more cameras and alarms," says Curt Lavarello, executive director and former law enforcement executive. "Data also helps administrators improve their response protocols, for example by working with school resource officers to have staff in the hallways during class changes and adults at the school bus zone if these are places where problems occur frequently."

Sean Burke, SSAC president and current law enforcement executive, adds, "Obtaining good data is crucial to the development of an effective strategy, especially in bullying. The most important thing a case management system will help you do is keep your students safer."[8]

Conclusion

For the student or teacher who sees a problem in the hallway, having an easy way to report it is essential to bringing about a helpful response. And as concern about bullying grows within schools and communities, so too is support for new ways to address the problem. Case management systems are one such solution to help educators and support staff create a safer and more secure learning environment for everyone.

The School Safety Advocacy Council
advocates public policy in legislative and regulatory arenas and works to promote safe and secure school and community environments.

Endnotes

1. National Center for Education Statistics, "Indicators of School Crime and Safety 2010": http://nces.ed.gov/programs/crimeindicators/crimeindicators2010/ind_11.asp
2. Ibid.
3. National Education Association, "Findings from the National Education Association's Nationwide Study of Bullying: Teachers' and Education Support Professionals' Perspectives": www.nea.org/assets/img/content/Findings_from_NEAs_Nationwide_Study_of_Bullying.pdf
4. Cyberbullying Research Center: "State Cyberbullying Laws": www.cyberbullying.us/Bullying_and_Cyberbullying_Laws.pdf
5. Stopbullying.gov site, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: www.stopbullying.gov/prevention/at-school/index.html
6. CDE interview with Dr. Debra Mercora conducted on April 18, 2012.
7. CDE interview with Dr. Debra Kaclik conducted on April 30, 2012.
8. CDE interview with Curt Lavarello and Sean Burke conducted on March 30, 2012.

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