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## An alliance against bullying

AS I SEE IT

By **Linda Cavaioli**

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Talk of bullying is everywhere recently — from the extensive media coverage afforded the South Hadley case; to the sad first year anniversary of the suicide of Carl Joseph Walker Hoover in Springfield; to a pending bill in the state legislature aimed at curtailing bullying in our schools imminently moving to the governor's desk for signature into law.

To those of us who work every day with young people, this is not a new issue, but one that we have been aware of and worked to address for years. Yes, the technology available to young people exacerbates the problem as it provides new avenues for cyber-bullying to take place, and this requires new approaches in response. However, the realities of bullying among young people are perennial. While new policies mandating clear reporting processes and concrete consequences are welcome, we know it will not be the sole solution to this complex social, family and school setting problem.

The good news is Worcester has several mechanisms in place to both prevent and address bullying behavior. As a community, we are clearly ahead of the curve in our approach to bullying and student safety in relation to our peers across the state and nation. In a cyber-bullying "Train the Trainers" workshop for Worcester area teachers with Elizabeth Englander of the Massachusetts Aggression Reduction Center (Telegram & Gazette, April 7), Ms. Englander pointed to the Worcester Public School Safety Center as a unique and innovative resource for addressing youth bullying and other youth violence issues.

Worcester is the only school district in the state to have such a center, which provides a key link between a child identified as being at-risk for school violence, and a comprehensive network of community-based, follow-up and case management services. The safety



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**The good news is Worcester has several mechanisms in place to both prevent and address bullying behavior.**

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center brings together multiple law enforcement and juvenile justice agencies as well as community providers of youth programs and mental health services, and embodies the comprehensive approach needed to respond to a complex problem such as bullying.

One of these key linkages between school and community takes place through the Investing in Girls Alliance, where I serve as co-chair.

Investing in Girls, with a mission to improve services for middle-school girls in Central Massachusetts through research, education, advocacy, and collaboration, provides easy access to out of school programs where a comprehensive approach to bullying prevention can take root. This connection is particularly important, as cyber-bullying tends to be a more serious "girl" issue, due to girls' attraction to the whole new world of social networking.

At a recent Alliance meeting, training on cyber-bullying was offered to all Alliance members, which include Big Brothers Big Sisters, the Boys & Girls Club, Girls Inc, Girl Scouts and the YWCA, to name only a few. This kind of school/community partnership is not new in the Worcester community, and it's something we should be proud of.

Worcester Public Schools' in-school Advancement Via Individual Determination program is also being delivered, via the Investing In Girls Alliance and throughout after-school programs in the city — assuring evidence-based academic support is integrated into after-school environments.

Investing In Girls has also introduced Girls Circle, an evidence-based model proven to increase girls' self-efficacy and body image, and which provides social support throughout Alliance member agencies. By sharing common strategies for effective prevention of risk behaviors and promotion of youth assets in environments both in and out of school, we build a comprehensive safety net across multiple environments for the youth of Worcester.

As a result of Ms. Englander's Train The Trainer workshop, the Worcester Public Schools now have several trained staff able to share important information and resources with parents, community programs, other educators, and school administrators as well as youth groups on best practices in preventing and addressing the causes and response to bullying. For more information on cyber-bullying, contact the Worcester Public Schools Safety Center. We have posted important information for parents on how to prevent bullying on our website, <http://worcesterschools.org>, and linked to the Massachusetts Aggression Reduction Center for even more information for parents, schools, youth programs and other providers. For more information on Investing in Girls, visit our website at [www.investingingirls.org](http://www.investingingirls.org).

Become part of the solution today; join us in creating a healthy and safe environment for youth in our city where they can achieve high standards in school and become productive members of the community.

Linda Cavaioli is executive director of the YWCA of Central Massachusetts and co-chair of the Investing in Girls Alliance.

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