

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF “CHALLENGE DAY” PROGRAMS IN
PROMOTING POSITIVE CHANGES IN SCHOOL CLIMATE,
STUDENT ATTITUDES, AND STUDENT BEHAVIORS

by

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The Problem

On March 5, 2001 at 9:20 a.m., 15-year-old Charles Andrew Williams pulled a .22 caliber pistol from his book bag at Santana High School in Santee, California and fired more than 30 shots into a crowd of students in and around the boys' restroom. Gunshot wounds inflicted by Williams killed Brian Zuckor, 14, and Randy Gordon, 17, and wounded 13 others. Some classmates interviewed after the incident described Williams as the target of constant harassment (Fox, 2001). They said he was teased and bullied because of his small stature, big ears, and inability to fit in (Ritter, 2001), and he was often called names such as "freak", "dork", or "nerd" (Fox, 2001). After the shooting Williams' father commented to reporters that "[they] accused him of being gay . . . they made fun of him for being a country boy, for his big ears. It didn't matter what he did, they made fun of him" (Booth & Snyder, 2001).

In a prior incident on December 1, 1997 just outside of Paducah, Kentucky, 14-year-old Michael Carneal fired shots from a .22 caliber pistol into a prayer group gathered in the lobby of Heath High School, killing three students and wounding five others. Killed in the incident were 17-year-old senior Jessica James, 15-year-old sophomore Kayce Steger, and 14-year-old freshman Nicole Hadley. After firing eight shots, Carneal laid his weapon on the floor and surrendered to principal Bill Bond. In interviews following the incident, Carneal indicated that his motivation in the shooting was that he was tired of being picked on. He detailed several incidents of bullying, the less serious ones including having water flicked on him in the bathroom and being called "four eyes" for wearing glasses. More serious incidents included

being hit in the back of the head, once being “noogied” until his head bled, and another incident on a band trip in which he was wrapped up in a blanket and hit with sock balls until chaperones intervened. Following a report in the “Rumor Has It” column of a student newsletter that Carneal liked another boy, he was repeatedly called “gay” and “faggot” (Harding, Mehta, & Newman, 2003).

In May of 2002, the United States Secret Service and United States Department of Education released *The Final Report and Findings of the Safe School Initiative: Implications for the Prevention of School Attacks in the United States*. This initiative was a three-year long collaborative effort between these two agencies motivated by the attacks culminating with the deadly assault at Columbine High School on April 20, 1999. The report is a summary of the examination of 37 separate school shooting and attack incidents that occurred in the United States between 1974 and June of 2000. The focus of the project was an examination and identification of the behaviors and communications of students that carried out the attacks in the hopes that this information would be helpful in preventing future attacks.

The *Safe School Initiative* study produced the following 10 key findings that suggest there are certain strategies school and law enforcement officials can implement that might be productive in preventing school attacks:

1. Incidents of targeted violence at school rarely were sudden, impulsive acts.
2. Prior to most incidents, other people knew about the attacker’s idea and/or plan to attack.
3. Most attackers did not threaten their targets directly prior to advancing the attack.
4. There is no accurate or useful “profile” of students who engaged in

targeted school violence.

5. Most attackers engaged in some behavior prior to the incident that caused others concern or indicated a need for help.
6. Most attackers had difficulty coping with significant losses or personal failures. Moreover, many had considered or attempted suicide.
7. Many attackers felt bullied, persecuted or injured by others prior to the attack.
8. Most attackers had access to and used weapons prior to the attack.
9. In many cases, other students were involved in some capacity.
10. Despite prompt law enforcement responses, most shooting incidents were stopped by means other than law enforcement intervention. (Vossekuil, Fein, Reddy, Borum, & Modzeleski, 2002)

The documented prevalence of bullying in American schools (Batsche & Knoff, 1994; Espelage, 2004; Nansel, et. al., 2001; Pellegrini, 2001) has opened the eyes of school administrators, scholars, and parents to the potential damage peer victimization can inflict upon our nation's youth. Some rare incidents of bullying have contributed to horrific acts of violence at schools such as those investigated in the *Safe School Initiative Study*. More commonly, bullying can and does have other damaging and lasting effects upon victims. These effects have been documented in numerous studies, most of which have been conducted in the last ten years.

Avoidance and withdrawal behaviors have been associated with students that are chronic victims of bullying behavior. These students may avoid certain areas of the school where they feel most vulnerable to being victimized or may avoid school altogether by skipping. Children who are repeatedly victimized are more likely to say that they dislike school (Rigby, 2002). School can become a place to be feared for

these students, which most certainly creates a hindrance to their educational progress (Batsch & Knoff, 1994). Victimization and exposure to violence at school has also been linked to anxiety, self-destructive behaviors, anger, and aggression in students (Flannery & Singer, 1999). Students that are being bullied are three times more likely to bring a weapon to school than other students (Batsch & Knoff, 1994).

Antisocial intimidation in the form of physical bullying, verbal bullying, and property damage has a debilitating effect upon the self-esteem and happiness of many secondary students (Glover, Gough, & Johnson, 2000; Rigby, 2002). Depending on age and gender, bully victims have been shown to be more likely to feel lonely, consume alcohol, have difficulty making friends (Nansel, et. al., 2001), or think about ending their lives than other students (Rigby & Slee, 1999). The effects of being bullied have also been shown to carry over into adulthood. One study found that adults who were bullied as teens were found to have elevated levels of depression and lower levels of self-esteem at the age of 23 relative to their adult counterparts, even though they were not harassed or socially isolated any more than the comparison adults (Nansel, et. al., 2001). Another study found that adults 18 to 22 years of age who reported being victimized in school also felt significantly lonelier than other adults (Tritt & Duncan, 1997).

Children may experience physical, emotional, and academic difficulties as a result of being victimized by bullies. Victims of bullies have reported having more frequent stomachaches and headaches than their peers that were not bullied. They have also reported higher levels of irritability, inability to concentrate and feelings of nervousness. In some cases, chronic bullying has motivated students to commit suicide (Limber, Flerx, Nation, & Melton, 1998).

Hirofumi Shikagawa, a 13-year-old student that attended a public junior high

school in Tokyo, committed suicide on February 1, 1986. His suicide note identified two students in particular that took part in tormenting and humiliating him to the point where he felt he could no longer go on living. In one incident that took place in the days immediately preceding his death, his classmates and some teachers took part in performing Hirofumi's mock funeral. A funeral card was circulated on which memorial wishes were written as if he were already dead. This incident was reported to be one of the key triggers of his suicide. His suicide note, titled "The Last Request", contained the following (translated):

I am sorry for disappearing so suddenly . . . I do not want to die yet, but if I keep on living, it will be a living hell. However, if other pupils also become victims, my death won't make sense. So I really want you [the bullies] to stop such stupid things. This is my last request.
(Sugimori, 1998)

On February 20, 2001, 13 days prior to Charles Williams' shooting rampage in Santana, California, 12-year-old Tempest Smith woke up, showered, and got dressed as she would have on any other morning prior to attending classes at Lincoln Park Middle School in Lincoln Park, Michigan. After breakfast she watched some television and went to her bedroom, at which time she tied a scarf around her neck and hung herself from her bunk bed. Tempest's journal that was found under her bed following her death offered evidence of the feelings of torment and despair that led her to end her life. She wrote about the continual teasing that she faced every day from classmates regarding her shy demeanor, choice of clothing, and religious beliefs. She wrote about the pain caused by this teasing that eventually made her life unbearable (Hunter, 2001).

Addressing Bullying at Bangor High School

The Bangor Public School district, located in Bangor, Michigan, is a district

of approximately 1600 K-12 students located in rural southwest Michigan. The region has a large agricultural base. Approximately 60% of the district's students qualify for free or reduced price lunches. The racial breakdown of students is approximately 70% Caucasian, 10% African American, and 20% Hispanic. Buildings in the district include a pre-kindergarten through 2nd grade primary school, a 3rd through 5th grade elementary school, a 6th through 8th grade middle school, a 9th through 12th grade high school, and a community education building housing an alternative education program for secondary students. Enrollments in the middle school and high school hover around 385 and 440 respectively.

The 2001-02 school year marked the beginning of a district-wide effort in Bangor to address the topic of bullying in school. A Parent Action Committee (PAC) at the high school level provided the spark to ignite this effort. Members of the committee were genuinely concerned about the negative influence teasing and bullying were having on the district's students. In hand were data from the Search Institute's *Profiles of Student Life* survey given to Bangor's 8th through 12th graders in the spring of 2001 indicating that the school climate was not perceived as safe, supportive, and welcoming by a large percentage of students (see Table 1). The PAC members began researching information that would help them develop a district bullying policy and strategies aimed at reducing incidents of bullying in school. As the year progressed, PACs from the other district buildings joined together with the high school PAC in this effort. By the summer of 2002, the group had written and proposed a district bullying policy to the school board, which was subsequently adopted. They had also secured funding and made arrangements to have a nationally known motivational speaker come to Bangor to address students and parents about the problems caused by bullying to kick off the 2002-03 school year.

Table 1

Percent of Bangor Youth Reporting Each Asset (Search Institute, 2000).

Asset Name	Definition	Percent
Other Adult Relationships	Young person receives support from three or more non-parent adults	41
Caring School Climate	School provides a caring, encouraging environment	22
Safety	Young person feels safe at home, at school, and in the neighborhood	50

The Bangor district’s anti-bullying efforts were publicized through some local newspaper articles that caught the attention of staff members at the nearby Kalamazoo Community Foundation (KCF). KCF was at that time collaborating with another local organization, called the Arcus Foundation, on an effort called the Changemakers’ Leadership Project. The focus of this project was to bring a program called “Challenge Day” to southwest Michigan schools as a means of supporting anti-bullying efforts in the schools. KCF’s staff was introduced to Challenge Day when it learned of the significant impact the program had on schools and youth in Jackson and Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Members of KCF and the Arcus Foundation contacted administrators at Bangor High School and made arrangements to visit them and present information about the Changemakers’ Leadership Project and Challenge Day. Much of the presentation consisted of video clips from a documentary produced by Arnold

Shapiro in 2000 entitle *Teen Files: Surviving High School*. The Challenge Day program is featured in the documentary. The foundation members proposed that their organizations would provide the funding to pilot the Challenge Day program at Bangor High School in the spring of 2003. After sharing the information with staff members at Bangor High School, the administration agreed to take part in this project and bring Challenge Day to the high school.

What is Challenge Day?

The Challenge Day Organization was formed in January of 2001 by husband and wife team Yvonne and Rich St. John-Dutra as a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. The mission of this organization is to “provide youth and their communities with experiential workshops and programs that demonstrate the possibility of love and connection through the celebration of diversity, truth and full expression” (Challenge Day Mission Website, 2005). The cornerstone program of the organization, “Challenge Day”, has been experienced by hundreds of thousands of young people since Yvonne and Rich introduced it in 1987 (Challenge Day History Website, 2005). The couple developed the Challenge Day program with the idea that drug and alcohol use, bullying, teasing, and violence are merely symptoms of a greater problem among young people. They believed loneliness and oppression are the true source of teens’ “acting out” behaviors (Challenge Day Organization, 2004).

The daylong “Challenge Day” program consists of a series of games, activities, group discussions, icebreakers, and trust-building activities. The program is designed so that parents, teachers, administrators, other school staff, and community members participate fully with high school and middle school youth throughout the day. The activities are geared toward creating new levels of respect and

communication among all participants by tearing down walls of separation and creating connection and support among participants (Challenge Day Programs Website, 2005). Through Challenge Day, students' eyes are opened to the possibility of creating a school environment in which compassion and acceptance replace indifference and alienation. For many students, Challenge Day marks the first day in a very long time in which they have not felt alone.

Although the format remains the same, every Challenge Day is different because the day's participants are strongly encouraged and given several opportunities to discuss personal issues and feelings that shape their lives. The Challenge Day trainers model this sharing by opening up to the large group and sharing their own experiences and feelings that have affected them greatly. All participants then communicate in pairs and small groups their own personal feelings that they may typically keep bottled up inside. This sharing allows participants to connect in a meaningful way.

Perhaps the most powerful experience during Challenge Day for many students and adults occurs during the second half of the day. During this activity, which is called the Power Shuffle, participants' eyes are opened to the oppression and pain that is part of the daily lives of people in their school and community, and they begin to build empathy and feel compassion for others that previously was not there. Following the Power Shuffle, the opportunity for individuals to speak to the large group brings many to apologize for hurts they may have caused in the past. At this point it is common for individual participants to issue challenges to the entire group to commit to reversing the common practices of oppression, bullying, and teasing in their school.

Since the inception of Challenge Day, Rich and Yvonne have developed

several other programs to support their vision of having every child feel safe, celebrated, and loved. The intent of Challenge Day is to have participants leave inspired to make a change in their schools, communities, and lives. Additional programs through the Challenge Day organization aim to support students and schools in this regard. Currently the organization provides Leadership Training, Challenger Program Training, Mentorship Program Training, a Bridging the Gap workshop, Faculty Training, and two community workshops in addition to the root Challenge Day program. Descriptions of each of these programs can be found on the Challenge Day Website at www.challengeday.org. The two programs described in the following sections are those relative to this study that were implemented in the Bangor Schools.

Challenger Training

The Challenger Program provides interested young people with training to bring Challenge Day's "Be the Change" movement to their schools and communities. "Be the Change" is a movement inspired by the words of Mohandas K. Gandhi: "We must be the change we wish to see in the world." (Challenge Day Be The Change Website, 2005). Challenger training emphasizes to students that they have the power to live and make the changes they would like to see. Participants are taught to *notice* things in their environment that they would like to change, *choose* from a number of options for promoting that change, and then *act* on that choice. The training allows participants to develop and practice the skills of notice, choose, and act. Students who take part in the training are asked to commit to performing one "act of change" every day as a means of promoting the changes they would like to see in their schools and communities. The students record these acts of change on a daily log sheet.

Mentorship Training

The Mentorship Program trains older students to be effective mentors to younger students. The participants are taught skills specific to serving as a mentor, including planning, implementing, and tracking mentorship activities throughout the school year. Though a follow-up Challenge Day in which mentors serve as group leaders for the younger students, mentor-mentee teams are formed. The teams connect through the Challenge Day activities, building a foundation for ongoing mentor-mentee relationships throughout the ensuing school year. (Challenge Day Programs Website, 2005).

Challenge Day Meets Bangor High School

In May of 2003, two trainers from the Challenge Day Organization came to Bangor to lead three Challenge Days and one day of Challenger Program Training for high school students. Individual Challenge Days were held for the junior, sophomore, and freshman classes. A total of 288 students and 74 adults took part in one of these three workshops. 64 of the 288 students were invited back to take part in Challenger Program Training on day four. These 64 students, called “Challengers”, would serve as the basis for an ongoing group of leaders in the school promoting positive change. All adults and students that took part in the Challenge Days were given the opportunity to complete a program evaluation survey at the conclusion of their day of participation. Members of the Changemakers’ Leadership Project developed the survey and later summarized the results. 59 adults and 125 students responded to the survey, which is included as Appendix A.

The results of the program evaluation survey indicated that participants had

strong positive feelings about their Challenge Day experience. Those who responded seemed to believe that the program had the potential to change attitudes and motivate others to work collectively to change the school climate to be more accepting and friendly. 100% of respondents answered “yes” to the two questions: (a) Do you think the activities for Challenge Day were successful in tearing down some of the walls of separation between students?, and (b) Would you recommend Challenge Day to other friends and family members? A sample of the summary of results of the program evaluation survey is included in the two sections that follow in order to give a clearer description of the responses of students and adults to participation in Challenge Day. These data are not complete, nor were they used to address the research question posed in this study regarding the effectiveness of Challenge Day programs.

Adult Feedback

50 adults responded to the open-ended survey question asking how they thought the Challenge Day activities were successful in tearing down walls of separation. Some responses are included below:

- It helped them realize some of the hurtful things they’ve done and said and gave them the power to change it.
- It got the students talking to each other.
- The students could see the hurting that they have done in the past.
- Students who would never talk now seem like they can become friends.
- It allowed them to empathize with others and examine their own feelings.
- Students actually pointed out their problems and where they had hurt others.
- Kids were allowed to share feelings they normally keep inside.

- It allowed all of us to see that there were others that shared the same problems.
- How freely students apologized and showed genuine compassion and change.
- Created a relaxed open environment. Allowed the young people to feel safe, and the adults also entered the atmosphere of sharing and caring.

47 adults responded to the open-ended survey question asking what role they felt they and students could play in continuing the awareness and compassion that was generated by the day's activities. Some responses to this question are included below:

- Practice what we've learned. Start with ourselves.
- Open your heart, smile at each other, be there if needed, and keep it alive.
- Encourage safety in the classroom and squelch putdowns.
- Continuing the activities in our daily lives and routines.
- I will certainly watch more carefully how I react to all situations and what I say, even in a joking manner.
- Make kind reminders if I see students or adults being mean to someone, and be a leader in reaching out to others.
- Make sure I follow up on students I connected with.
- I believe that by being open to other people's values and showing respect will help continue the awareness and compassion that was generated.
- Making my classroom safe! I want to catch students and make it a teaching moment. And I want them to catch me if I hurt them.
- Maintain and reconfirm commitment to challenges we were issued today.
- Passing the love, tolerance, and hugs!

Student Feedback

78 students responded to the open-ended survey question asking what participants liked most about Challenge Day. Several responses are included below:

- I liked how horribly wonderful it was (a mix between laughter and tears).
- Communicating with others and being able to relate.
- People got to say “sorry”.
- We all got along.
- The hugs.
- The unity.
- The fact that we all connected.
- The fact that boundaries were torn down and everyone got along.
- That you got to express your feelings without being afraid.
- We got real.
- It brought me so close to everyone.
- How this made me wake up.
- Getting to know other kids and what other kids have went through.
- It made me want to be a better person.
- The unity and safeness – I’ve never seen us like this before!
- I saw people who never talk to each other or make fun of each other come together.
- The openness and respect.

75 students responded to the open-ended survey question asking about the role they and other students could play in continuing the awareness and compassion that was generated by the day’s activities. Some of the responses are included below:

- Listen and always be open.

- We could always remember today and not gossip, hate, start rumors or pick on each other.
- Go though with the plans we set for ourselves.
- Change the way we act.
- We could bring the safe levels and friendliness to our school.
- Have more respect for others and stop teasing.
- Remember we affect everyone around us and not judge.
- Help other students.
- Pass the knowledge we learned to others at school and our siblings.
- Forget the differences and just chill together.
- Keep the love going.
- Talking and listening to others.
- Just think about what you say and how it makes other people feel.

The Community and School Response

Following Bangor High School's Challenge Days, word of the program's powerful effect upon student and adult participants spread quickly. Many parents noticed an immediate change in their children that attended Challenge Day and began to forge stronger relationships with more meaningful communication with their children. Some of these parents called the school, thanking school personnel for allowing their children to participate in the program. Community members who participated in Challenge Day attended school board meetings praising the program and urged board members to support future Challenge Days. Staff members at school were excited to have taken part in the program and as a result felt much closer to their students. They were also encouraged to see students acting with more compassion

and treating one another with more respect. Students verbalized great appreciation for all those that worked to bring Challenge Day to them and immediately began talking about ways to make sure that the changes brought about by the program didn't quickly fade away.

The general feeling among school administrators and personnel was that the Challenge Day programs were a positive and valuable experience for all that participated, and efforts needed to be made to continue to bring these programs to Bangor's students. One of the top priorities was to have middle school students participate in the Challenge Day experience early in the following school year. Funding was soon thereafter secured to bring Challenge Day programs back to Bangor for high school and middle school students during the 2003-04 school year. Another priority was to make sure that feelings, revelations, and commitments generated at Challenge Day were kept alive at school. The Challengers group was charged with this task and immediately started meeting on a regular basis to generate ideas for keeping Challenge Day alive.

Goals

The 2003-04 school year brought Challenge Day trainers back to Bangor on three separate occasions. In September, the new freshman class took part in a Challenge Day, and 80 high school students that had previously attended a Challenge Day took part in a second day of Challenger Program Training. These 80 students became new members of the Challengers group. In October, a Challenge Day was held for each of the sixth, seventh, and eighth grade classes. Then, in early May of 2004, approximately 50 tenth and eleventh graders joined together with the eighth grade class to experience Challenge Day's Mentorship Program. Through this

program, all incoming freshmen for the following school year would have a mentor with which they had already connected during the Mentor-Mentee Challenge Day.

Administrators from the high school and middle school developed a set of goals for their schools that the Challenge Day, Challenger, and Mentorship programs would address. Associated with each goal is a means of evaluating the effectiveness of the Challenge Day programs in achieving the goal. Pre-program and post-program surveys and discipline referral data provided the means of evaluating these goals. The goals and descriptions of the associated evaluations are as follows:

1. Improve school climate by eliminating the acceptability of teasing, oppression, and violence. Evidence of improved school climate will come from items on the pre-program and post-program Challenge Day Survey assessing students' attitudes, observations, and behaviors regarding teasing, violence, and oppressive behaviors.
2. Have students feel more welcomed in school. Evidence of improved feelings of being welcomed at school will come from items on the pre-program and post-program Challenge Day Survey assessing students' attitudes and feelings about their school experience.
3. Reduce incidents of bullying, teasing, and violence in school. Discipline records indicating the number of discipline referrals for bullying, teasing, and violence-related offenses will serve as evidence in this category.
4. Reduce anxiety levels for freshman entering high school. Evidence of reduced anxiety levels for incoming freshman students will come from items on the pre-program and post-program Incoming Freshman Survey assessing students' attitudes and feelings regarding their expectations when entering high school.

Method

Surveys and Participants

Two surveys were used to assess the effectiveness of the Challenge Day programs in helping Bangor High School and Bangor Middle School achieve their goals. All freshman students present in school on the survey date were given the Challenge Day Survey (Appendix B) in September of 2003, prior to attending a Challenge Day. The survey consisted of 34 statements, each of which participants had to rate using a Likert scale. Possible responses to each item were “Always”, “Almost Always”, “Sometimes”, and “Never”. The survey statements addressed students’ attitudes, behaviors, and experiences in and out of school. An identical post-program Challenge Day Survey was given to every freshman student present on the survey date in January of 2004, following Challenge Day participation and Challenger activities being implemented throughout the semester. All eighth grade students present on the survey date were given the Incoming Freshman Survey (Appendix C) in May of 2004, prior to attending Mentor-Mentee Challenge Day training. This survey consisted of six Likert-type items and one open-ended statement asking that students give one word describing their thoughts about high school. The six Likert items addressed students’ feelings and concerns about moving into the high school the following year. Response choices on the Likert items were “Strongly Agree”, “Agree”, “Undecided”, “Disagree”, and “Strongly Disagree”. In June of 2004, two weeks after participating in the Mentor-Mentee Challenge Day training, the eighth graders were surveyed again using the same instrument.

Survey Data Analysis

17 of the 34 items on the Challenge Day Survey were categorized as addressing Goal #1 or Goal #2. For each goal, each item was evaluated based upon the percentage of students that responded “Always” or “Almost Always” on the survey. Two additional items related to family relationships of the 34 survey items are summarized and discussed at the end of the Results and Discussion section. The remaining 15 survey items were viewed as not being relevant to the goals of the program at Bangor Schools and therefore were not included as part of this report.

Four items on the Incoming Freshman Survey items addressed Goal #4. Evaluation of these items was based upon the percentage of students that responded “Strongly Agree” or “Agree”. Two of the remaining items on this survey were viewed as irrelevant to this goal and therefore were not analyzed as part of this report. The last item on the survey, which was a free response item, was also not analyzed in this study because of this researcher’s inability to find a method for analyzing and summarizing the data in a meaningful way.

Discipline Data

Each student behavior infraction that results in a discipline referral at Bangor High School gets classified into one out of sixty possible categories of infractions. A few examples of categories include fighting, use of profanity, class disruption, and use of tobacco. In order to evaluate the effectiveness of Challenge Day programs in addressing Goal #3, categories related to bullying, teasing, and violence were singled out for the 2002-03 (pre-Challenge Day) and 2003-04 (post-Challenge Day) school years. Numbers of infractions in each of these categories were counted and compared for the two years. A time chart indicating Challenge Day activities at Bangor Schools

and the associated data collected for each is included as Figure 1.

<i>May 2003</i>	<i>Sept./Oct. 2003</i>	<i>May 2004</i>
<p><i>Challenge Day Activities:</i> Challenge Days for ninth, tenth, and eleventh grade classes; Challenger Training for mixture of students from all three grade levels</p> <p><i>Data Collected:</i> 125 of 288 students and 59 of 74 adults completed program evaluation surveys immediately following the programs. *</p> <p>Pre-program discipline data from 2002-03 and post-program discipline data from 2003-04</p>	<p><i>Challenge Day Activities:</i> Challenge Days for sixth through ninth grade classes; Challenger Training for mixture of ninth through twelfth grade students</p> <p><i>Data Collected:</i> Ninth grade students completed pre-program Challenge Day Survey in September and identical post-program survey in January 2004.</p> <p>Pre-program discipline data from 2002-03 and post-program discipline data from 2003-04</p>	<p><i>Challenge Day Activities:</i> Mentorship Program for all eighth graders (mentees) and approximately 50 tenth and eleventh graders (mentors)</p> <p><i>Data Collected:</i> Eighth graders completed pre-program Incoming Freshman Survey prior to attending Mentorship Program and identical post-program survey two weeks after attending.</p>
<p>*Data partially presented in this study but not used to evaluate the effectiveness of Challenge Day programs</p>		

Figure 1. Challenge Day activities at Bangor schools during the 2002-03 and 2003-04 school years and associated data collected

Results and Discussion

Goal #1 – Improved School Climate

The first goal is to improve school climate by eliminating the acceptability of teasing, oppression, and violence. Results of freshman responses to items related to this goal on the pre-program and post-program Challenge Day Surveys are

summarized in Table 2. The greatest improvements in the four month period between the pre- and post- surveys were in the percentages of students that confront peers making hurtful comments or choices (+6.9%), get along with others from different backgrounds (+8.9%), stop gossip when they hear it (+10.5%), and witness teasing at school (-6.1%). Smaller improvements were in the percentages of students that feel the school is free of violence (+2.4%) and that indicate they volunteer to help people (+2.3%). No improvement was shown in the percentage of students who avoid fights when confronted. The percentage of freshman students who indicate that they stand up for others decreased by 3.5%.

Table 2

Percent of Students Responding “Always” or “Almost Always” on Challenge Day Survey Items Related to School Climate

Statement	Sept. '03 (N=99)	Jan. '04 (N=91)	% Change
I stop gossip when I hear it	29.3	39.8	+10.5
I get along with people from different cultural and social groups	78.8	87.8	+9.0
I confront peers who are making hurtful comments or choices	39.2	46.1	+6.9
I witness teasing at school	50.5	44.4	-6.1
I stand up for others	55.7	52.2	+3.5
My school is free of violence and physical fights	30.9	33.3	+2.4
I volunteer to help people	51.0	53.3	+2.3
I avoid fights when confronted	57.7	57.7	0

Goal #2 –Students Feel Welcomed at School

The second goal is to have more students feel welcomed at school. Table 3 contains the results of survey items related to this goal. The largest increases were in the percentages of students that indicated they get along with their teachers (+11.5%), receive great citizenship marks (+10%), and ask questions when they need help (+8.7%). Smaller improvements were shown in the percentages of students signifying that they feel safe and supported at school (+1.9%), have fun at school (+3.4%), attend all their classes (+4.9%), and arrive to class on time (+2.4%). There was no change in the percentage of students that feel accepted by their peers at school. One negative change was that the percentage of freshmen students indicating that they like school decreased by 7.9%.

Table 3

Percent of Students Responding “Always” or “Almost Always” on Challenge Day Survey Items Related to Feeling Welcome at School

Statement	Sept. '03 (N=99)	Jan. '04 (N=91)	% Change
I get along with my teachers	70.1	81.6	+11.5
I receive great citizenship marks in school	59.2	69.2	+10.0
I ask questions when I need help	72.4	81.1	+8.7
I attend all my classes	90.7	95.6	+4.9
I have fun at school	52.6	56.0	+3.4
I am on time for class	88.8	91.2	+2.4
I feel safe and supported at school	71.7	73.6	+1.9
I feel accepted by my peers at school	69.7	69.7	0
I like school	56.8	48.9	-7.9

Goal #3 – Reduce Bullying, Teasing, and Violence

Discipline data for incidents related to bullying, teasing, and violence for Bangor High School from the 2002-03 and 2003-04 school years are summarized in Table 4. Students were introduced to Challenge Day programs at the very end of the 2002-03 school year when Challenge Days were held for freshman through juniors and selected students participated in Challenger Program Training. Therefore the 2002-03 discipline data represents pre-Challenge Day information. These programs in combination with a Challenge Day for freshmen and a second Challenger Program

Training at the beginning of the 2003-04 school year signifies the 2003-04 discipline data as post-Challenge Day information.

Table 4

Number of Discipline Incidents Resulting in a Discipline Referral for Bangor High School Students

Incident	2002-03	2003-04	Increase/Decrease
Fighting	21	5	-16
Stealing	15	12	-3
Assaulting a student	9	6	-3
Verbal harassment	2	0	-2
Aggressive behavior	12	10	-2
Threatening a student	6	5	-1
Verbal confrontation	9	8	-1
Assaulting a staff member	1	0	-1
Sexual harassment	0	5	+5
Bullying	4	9	+5
Total	79	60	-19

A decrease in the number of disciplinary incidents is shown in all categories except sexual harassment and bullying. In the category of fighting, incidents were reduced by more than 75%. Overall, there were 19 less discipline referrals for bullying, teasing, or violence-related incidents, which represents a 24.1% decrease. One possible explanation for the increase in referrals for sexual harassment and bullying may stem from the fact that these types of offenses often go unreported.

With students participating in Challenge Day, awareness of these types of behaviors has been heightened. Students and staff have most likely become more sensitive and less tolerant of these behaviors, which would lead to incidents getting reported that may have gone unreported in the past. The increase in number of referrals does not necessarily mean that there was an increase in number of incidents.

Goal #4 – Reduced Anxiety Levels for Entering Freshmen

Table 5 summarizes responses of eighth graders to items on the Incoming Freshman Survey administered prior to attending Mentor-Mentee Challenge Day Training and following the training in the spring of 2004. All item analyses indicate an increase in positive feelings or a decrease in negative feelings about the students' upcoming high school experience.

Table 5

Percent of 8th Graders Responding “Agree” or “Strongly Agree” to Items on the Incoming Freshman Survey

Statement	May '04 (N=101)	June '04 (N=91)	% Change
I am concerned that I will be picked on by upperclassmen	29.3	19.8	-9.5
I feel comfortable about being in high school next year	69.3	76.1	+6.8
I am looking forward to going to high school next year	75.5	79.1	+3.6
I believe that I will have a good relationship with upperclassmen	56.8	58.2	+1.4

Students and Their Families

Although they are not directly related to the written goals for Challenge Day programs at Bangor Schools, some items on the Challenge Day Survey related to areas of students' lives outside of school. One such area of great importance is family. The two items on the survey dealing with family are summarized in Table 6. One of the most impressive statistics is the increase in percentage of students that reported that they get along with their family following Challenge Day (+14.3%). Similarly, 5.1% more students reported that they communicate love and appreciation to family members after Challenge Day.

Table 6

Percent of Students Responding "Always" or "Almost Always" on Challenge Day Survey Items Related to Family Relationships

Statement	Sept. '03 (N=99)	Jan. '04 (N=91)	% Change
I get along with my family	55.7	70.0	+14.3
I tell my family I love and appreciate them	66.0	71.1	+5.1

Conclusion

Comparing data collected prior to Bangor High School students participating in Challenge Day programs and data collected after their participation indicates

progress toward the goals of (1) improved school climate; (2) students feeling more welcomed in school; and (3) reduced incidents of teasing, bullying, and violence in school. Furthermore, the data show that eighth grade students demonstrated improved comfort levels about entering high school following participation in Challenge Day's Mentor-Mentee training. Student relationships with family members also improved following participation in Challenge Day programs. Overwhelmingly positive feedback was also obtained from students and adults immediately following their participation in Challenge Day activities. Responses indicated a strong satisfaction with the program and high motivation levels for building on their experience and promoting needed changes in their school environment and lives.

One drawback to bringing Challenge Day to a school system might be the price tag. At this time, the cost for Challenge Day programs is \$2700 per day plus travel, lodging, and other lesser expenses. In the wake of current budgetary concerns and cutbacks, bringing a program such as Challenge Day to a school may seem irresponsible or even impossible. After all, shouldn't our top priorities in education be teaching reading, math, science, etc.? Shouldn't strategies addressing goals of improved student performance in the core subject areas be the focus of spending? How can schools afford such an expense when they are most likely struggling to pay to maintain their current programs? School administrators must be prepared to address these issues when considering paying for programs such as Challenge Day that are not necessarily directly related to curriculum. But maybe more pressing questions focus on students' capabilities of learning in an uncomfortable environment. Can we expect students to learn reading, math, and science when they are burdened by feelings of alienation and depression? Will adjustments to curriculum be the answer for improving students' performance in school when the

pain associated with being teased and bullied makes school a place to be feared for some students?

Dan Olweus, a Professor of Psychology at the University of Bergen, Norway, is credited as being the first researcher to systematically study peer victimization. In Juvonen and Graham's *Peer Harassment in School: The Plight of the Vulnerable and Victimized*, Olweus (2001) states:

I have for a long time argued that it is a fundamental democratic or human right for a child to feel safe in school and to be spared the oppression and repeated, intentional humiliation implied in peer victimization or bullying. No student should be afraid of going to school for fear of being harassed or degraded, and no parent should need to worry about such things happening to his or her child. (p.11)

If Olweus is correct in his argument, then school administrators have a duty and an obligation to take steps to remove the obstacles of peer victimization and bullying from schools. Challenge Day cofounders Yvonne and Rich St. John-Dutra believe that this vision can become a reality, and they are committed to providing schools with programs that will help them achieve this reality. Maybe the most pressing question is: Can we really afford to not implement these programs?

Bangor Schools continues to provide Challenge Day programs for students and staff. In December of 2004, high school and middle school staff took part in Challenge Day's Faculty Training, two additional Challenge Days were held for high school and sixth grade students, and a new mix of high school students took part in Challenger Program Training. Plans for the immediate future include maintaining the Mentorship Program for the freshman class in 2005. Besides the original funding provided by the KCF and Arcus Foundation, monetary support for Challenge Day programs has been provided by a federal MERC Gear-Up grant through Western Michigan University, the Safe and Drug Free Schools Grant, and a local Bangor Schools Alumni Association Grant. Survey and discipline data continue to be

collected by administrators in order to monitor the effects of the programs on students' attitudes, behaviors, and school climate. Comparing future data to that which has already been collected will give administrators more information regarding the longer-term effects of Challenge Day programs.

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Appendix A
Changemakers' Leadership Project Survey

Changemakers' Leadership Project

EVALUATION OF CHALLENGE DAY PROGRAMS AT BANGOR HIGH SCHOOL

MAY 2003

Thank for taking part in this Challenge Day program. Please take a few moments to respond to the following items in order to provide information regarding your Challenge Day experience.

1. Sex: M F (circle one)

2. Please indicate your race (circle one below or describe):

African-American Caucasian Native American Hispanic

Asian Other (describe) _____

3. Age: _____

4. What did you like most about Challenge Day? _____

5. Do you think the activities for Challenge Day were successful in tearing down some of the walls between students?

Yes No (circle one)

6. If you circled yes to #5, describe how the activities were successful. _____

7. During the day's activities, did you feel "safe" in sharing personal experiences with others?

Yes No (circle one)

8. Circle the number that best describes how safe you felt in sharing (1 = Not safe, 2 = Somewhat safe, 3 = Safe, 4 = Extremely Safe).

1 2 3 4

9. Circle the number (1 being the lowest, 4 being the highest) that best describes your awareness and compassion level for people who are different in:

Race or Ethnicity	1	2	3	4	Don't know
Physical Appearance	1	2	3	4	Don't know
Sexual Orientation	1	2	3	4	Don't know
Family Make-up	1	2	3	4	Don't know
Income Level	1	2	3	4	Don't know
Background	1	2	3	4	Don't know

10. What role do you think you and other students could play in continuing the awareness and compassion that was generated by today's activities?

11. What suggestions would you make for future Challenge Days? _____

12. Would you recommend Challenge Day to other friends and family members?

Yes No (Circle one)

Appendix B
Challenge Day Survey

PRE-PROGRAM SURVEY

Date: _____

Please circle the number that best describes you in each of the following categories.

Rating Scale:	Never	Sometimes	Almost Always	Always
1. I feel safe and supported at school.	1	2	3	4
2. I feel proud of myself.	1	2	3	4
3. People describe me as helpful and friendly.	1	2	3	4
4. I confront peers who are making hurtful comments or choices.	1	2	3	4
5. I get involved with service activities.	1	2	3	4
6. I get along with my teachers.	1	2	3	4
7. I like school.	1	2	3	4
8. I get along with people from different cultural and social groups.	1	2	3	4
9. I believe I will be successful.	1	2	3	4
10. I stand up for myself.	1	2	3	4
11. I stop gossip when I hear it.	1	2	3	4
12. I receive great citizenship marks in school.	1	2	3	4
13. I have fun at school.	1	2	3	4
14. I get along with my family.	1	2	3	4
15. I share my feelings and concerns with others.	1	2	3	4
16. I am on time to school.	1	2	3	4
17. I stand up for others.	1	2	3	4
18. I witness teasing at school.	1	2	3	4
19. I feel accepted by my peers at school.	1	2	3	4
20. I get along well with members of the opposite sex.	1	2	3	4
21. I am on time for class.	1	2	3	4
22. I attend all my classes.	1	2	3	4
23. I ask questions when I need help.	1	2	3	4
24. I love my life.	1	2	3	4
25. I volunteer to help people.	1	2	3	4
26. I avoid fights when confronted.	1	2	3	4
27. I treat all people with equal love and respect.	1	2	3	4
28. I don't give into peer pressure to drink alcohol.	1	2	3	4
29. I don't give into peer pressure to use illegal drugs.	1	2	3	4
30. I don't give into peer pressure to smoke cigarettes.	1	2	3	4
31. I eat lunch with new people.	1	2	3	4
32. My school is free of violence and physical fights.	1	2	3	4
33. I love myself and my body.	1	2	3	4
34. I tell my family I love and appreciate them.	1	2	3	4

Appendix C

Incoming Freshman Survey

Incoming Freshman Survey

Please circle the corresponding number that best describes your true feeling about the following statements.

1. Strongly agree, 2. Agree, 3. Undecided, 4. Disagree, 5. Strongly disagree

1. I generally feel safe at school...

1. 2. 3. 4. 5.

2. I feel comfortable about being in the high school next year. . .

1. 2. 3. 4. 5.

3. I believe I will have a good relationship with upperclassmen...

1. 2. 3. 4. 5.

4. I am concerned that I will be picked on by upperclassmen. . .

1. 2. 3. 4. 5.

5. I am looking forward to going to high school next year...

1. 2. 3. 4. 5.

6. I feel that I will be able to effectively maintain or exceed my present level of academic achievement...

1. 2. 3. 4. 5.

7. Please give one word that describes your thoughts about high school.