A Youth-Positive Approach to Bullying
An Approach to a Complex Issue
November 2012 Policy Statement

Creating a safe, inclusive environment is an important aspect of promoting positive youth development and ensuring that youth are able to reach their goals. Within the past few years there has been a national focus to create safe spaces for youth, in specific schools, and topic has been centered upon the issue of Bullying. With nearly 30% of students nationally facing being bullied, engaging in bullying behavior themselves, or both; the outcomes and effects of Bullying are pervasive and readily visible as increased suicidality and youth-on-youth violence like that which is portrayed in the Media.

In particular, Bullying is an issue which disproportionately affects some groups of young people. LGBTQ+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, Pansexual, Two Spirit, Gender Non-Confirming/Gender Expansive) Youth, with over 8 out of 10 experiencing harassment due to their identity/expression.

What is Bullying?
Commonly thought of, Bullying is a set of intentional aggressive behaviors that persist over time, perpetrated by one youth to another. These behaviors are most readily visible in the form of "physical bullying" such as pushing and hitting, or "verbal bullying" in the form of teasing and name-calling, but extend to acts of intimidation such as gestures and social exclusion with what is deemed "emotional or nonverbal bullying" as well as "cyber-bullying."

We understand Bullying to implicate more than individual interactions between youth, as research on bullying demonstrates that youth engaging in bullying behavior are themselves most often struggling with environmentally induced insecurities and social messaging. With this definition, **Bullying is an environment** in which *hostility* and *alienation* are viable means to gain and assert power, the **most visible symptom** being aggression between youth. This environment extends to the way that staff interact with youth, and is a significant contributor not only to violence, acting out, and self-harm; but to the decrease in academic achievement and increase in dropout rates, higher incarceration rates, and increase in mental health issues.

What doesn't work?
Policy, via the structure and culture that it creates, is a major contributor to the ways that youth interact with and perceive their school/program environment, of particular importance being their sense of connectedness, with punitive policies diminishing youth's feeling of connectedness and safety. The primary body of research on punitive policies focuses upon the approach made de-facto as a response to Columbine: "Zero-Tolerance." Despite their intent **Zero-Tolerance Policies do not** meet their intended outcome of making school safer, and **instead criminalize and traumatize youth**, taking from them the ability to receive the education and services they need, and the opportunity to learn better ways to interact with their peers and navigate society.

What Works?

Social Emotional Learning (SEL)
Social Emotional Learning is a School-Wide approach that emphasizes the usage of social skills to create a positive developmental environment, and addresses bullying through the implementation of a culture of respect, in which adult modeling is partnered with a framework to teach students skills in the areas of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationships, and responsible decision-making.

"Home" Spaces (Identity/Affinity Groups e.g. GSAs)
Prejudices are difficult things to erase from a culture, and while it is ideal to try and make our environments as accepting as possible, it is extremely important to provide spaces for social minorities to gather and be around their peers so that they can recuperate and support one another in similar struggles and issues. These are of particular import for lgbtq youth, who may experience prejudice, discrimination and violence from their families as well. These spaces' impacts are far reaching and often lifesaving. Their effectiveness is increased when coupled with a similarly-identified or ally-identified staff person, who would have the ability to advocate and provide support for the youth who may not have another adult willing/able to do so.

Educated, Trained, and Accountable Staff
Staff inaction when confronted with a situation of bullying is a pervasive problem, as often staff lack the training to effectively handle matters directly (or under Zero-Tolerance are told instead to rely upon a Police Officer to handle the situation, leading some staff to not report incidents for fear of harsh consequences for the youth); they do not understand how to identify bullying or the identities that are often bullied (especially around constantly evolving LGBTQ terminology and identities); or they do not feel compelled to do anything, sometimes due to their own prejudices. Schools/programs need to develop comprehensive and explicit trainings and mandates that ensure that staff intervene in ways that are developmentally appropriate for the youth they are serving and ensure safety and well-being.

Peer Educators/Mediators
Youth have a powerful influence upon each other, and whereas often bullying is used to gain/exert power within the peer group, it is expected often that it is the responsibility of adults/staff to manage those interactions. This takes from youth the opportunity to develop much needed social navigation and conflict resolution skills, where these are teachable moments that can empower and build empathy amongst them. A program in which interested youth are supported, educated, and trained to act as Peer Mediators and Educators provides an opportunity for youth that are bullied to gain power and create a better environment for themselves and give youth that bully the opportunity to work to repair the harm they have done by preventing/intervening bullying, while facilitating cross-peer group relationships and skill-building.

Restorative Justice
The effectiveness of Restorative Justice to create meaningful change within the lives and communities of people that commit harm is well researched, and provides ample opportunities to meet youth that bully at their developmental level, repair and grow relationships, and build

skills for their future. In contrast to punitive forms of Justice, it allows those who have been harmed to participate and have their concerns and needs addressed meaningfully.

Source documents, research, and notes:
https://humboldtgov.org/DocumentCenter/View/90296/Bullying-Policy-Statement-Research-and-Links

JUNE 2019 ADDENDUM:

This policy statement was created specifically for the 2012 Stop the Violence Start the Healing Breakfast. The National, State, and Local conversation regarding this topic was specifically surrounding LGBTQ+ youth bullying and HCTAYC was invited to speak on such.

HCTAYC recognizes that unaddressed in this document is the issue of bullying of Youth of Color and Youth with Disabilities. As we have learned in the years between our creation of this document and now, bullying against Indigenous and African American young people has been well documented as being endemic in Humboldt County. It is HCTAYC's mission to ensure that justice for all youth is served, particularly those impacted by interlocking systems of oppression, and that public service systems are transformed to best support these young people.

The HCTAYC Youth Advisory Board & Youth Organizers plan to continue our conversations, advocacy, and strategizing around this topic and the emergent issues impacting our community. Possible revision of this document, or the publishing of a subsequent document, may occur.