



Kent State University, Team Blue
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Executive Summary

Bullying has been an issue since the days of the one-room country schoolhouse, but with the increase of technology and a cultural change among students, it's more prevalent now than ever before. An estimated 77 percent of students nationwide have recently been bullied. Kent State University's 2013 Bateman Blue team found a similar bullying rate at a local middle school where it implemented an anti-bullying campaign as part of the Public Relations Student Society of America's Bateman competition.

In its research, the team found that time and time again, bullying prevention programs had been widely unsuccessful in local schools. Those programs shared a few of the same characteristics: They usually lasted only one day, they were sometimes expensive, and they focused on telling children not to bully. With this knowledge, Kent State's Bateman Blue team designed its *Pledge to Prevent: Bullying Stops Here* campaign to tackle bullying from a different perspective. The campaign featured an entire week of face-to-face interaction with the students. *Pledge to Prevent*, which carried few costs, focused on teaching children to stand up to bullies as bystanders.

The objectives of Kent State University's *Pledge to Prevent: Bullying Stops Here* campaign were to increase student understanding of bystander techniques and bullying prevalence by 15 percent, to educate 60 parents about the role they play in preventing bullying from home, and to inform 10 teachers how they can help stop bullying in the classroom.

During the campaign's 28-day implementation period, Kent's Bateman Blue team motivated more than 70 percent of the students at Rootstown Middle School to sign anti-bullying pledge cards. Additionally, 84 parents and 18 teachers took a pledge to be proactive against bullying.

Kent State University's Bateman Blue team invites you to read on to learn more about its *Pledge to Prevent* campaign.





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Situational Analysis

Bullying is defined in a number of ways. Merriam Webster's dictionary defines bullying as "treating abrasively or affecting by means of force or coercion." A local teacher from Poland Seminary High School in Ohio defines bullying as anything said or done to put someone else down or make them feel inferior. Even with hundreds of possible definitions, bullying is more than words can define.

The act of bullying may consist of physical assault, verbal abuse, or psychological and emotionally based attacks. Bullying's long-term effects on targets include decreased self-image, emotional instability, and trust issues. It's not just the bullying victims who suffer long-term effects; later in life, bullies are likely to experience depression, aggression issues, and more frequent criminal misconduct.

Through research, Bateman Blue found that middle school students are most likely to experience bullying regularly. Additionally, children ages 10-14 are at an age when they've likely been involved in bullying, either as a bully, victim, or bystander.

Kent's Bateman Blue team chose to target students at Rootstown Middle School, a public school in Rootstown, Ohio, where 72 percent of the students reported recently experiencing bullying.

American schools house 2.7 million bullies; with that, the problem of childhood bullying is far-reaching. Various characteristics of Rootstown Middle School, such as a strong presence of economic diversity and students with disabilities, as well as a low level of racial diversity, make the school susceptible to a high bullying rate.

Secondary Research

Before the team began primary research at Rootstown Middle School, it first defined the different types of bullying to better understand the problem:

- **Bullying:** a highly prevalent form of aggression in youth that involves the repeated use of power and aggression
- **Cyberbullying:** the electronic posting of mean-spirited messages about a person, often done anonymously
- **Physical Bullying:** using one's body and physical acts to exert power over peers. Punching, kicking, and other physical attacks are all types of physical bullying
- **Relational (Social) Bullying:** involves hurting someone's reputation or relationships
- **Verbal Bullying:** any form of bullying that is done by speaking

Bateman Blue's demographic research at Rootstown Middle School and the surrounding community helped the team to better understand what types of bullying may be prevalent in the school. Rootstown Middle School houses 294 students in grades six through eight. The student population is predominantly white, with only four percent of students identifying with a race other than Caucasian.

Among the student population, about 31 percent of students were classified as being "economically disadvantaged" and qualify for the school's free or reduced-lunch program. Additionally, 16.7 percent of students are classified as having some sort of physical or mental disability.

"I've never forgotten the things people have said. That's something you'll always carry with you. That fear will always be there."

Brittany Williams, 21
Kent State University



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Primary Research

In order to better understand the effects of bullying on students and the prevalence of bullying, Kent's Bateman Blue team conducted one-on-one interviews with members of the key publics. The team met with a total of 26 teachers, mental health professionals, parents of bullied children, children who have been bullied, and students currently learning about bullying. Through these interviews, the team learned that bystanders in bullying situations can impact whether the bullying will continue. Additionally, the research found that bullying can have long-term negative effects.

Survey of Adults

Kent's Bateman Blue team conducted an online survey of 100 adults to better understand how they define bullying and how serious of an issue they feel bullying is in schools (A42). Our findings included:

- Fifty-five percent believed bullying happened most often in middle schools.
- Thirty-five percent of respondents agreed that emotional bullying, such as purposely excluding someone or spreading rumors about them, is the most common type of bullying in middle school.
- Forty-five percent of our respondents said they were bullied in school, but another 12 percent said they're not sure if they were bullied. Of those who said they were bullied, most agreed that the bullying was the worst in middle school.

Focus Group

In order to gain a better understanding of how current middle school students feel about bullying, Kent's Bateman Blue team hosted a focus group of five eighth-grade girls from Stow, Ohio, (A45). Key findings from the focus group included the following:

- Four of the five students agreed that they saw bullying as an issue in their school every day. They said the most common type was verbal bullying.
- When asked to differentiate between teasing and bullying, they said teasing comes from friends, doesn't make you uncomfortable, doesn't happen too often, and the offender makes it obvious, possibly through an apology, that they were just kidding. Bullying, on the other hand, is meant to hurt the person in some way.
- The girls thought that sometimes teachers bullied. They said they had teachers who referred to bullying as "a part of life" and did not take bullying seriously.

45%

of adults said they have been bullied.

4 of 5

students said they see bullying happen daily in their school.

Teasing doesn't make you feel uncomfortable.

72%

of students have witnessed bullying and not intervened.



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Benchmark Survey

Our team conducted a benchmark survey of 265 students at Rootstown Middle School to determine to what degree they considered bullying to be an issue (A43). The survey also addressed the students' understanding of how to act as a bystander in a bullying situation. Our key findings included:

- Seventy-two percent of children from all grades said they've been bullied.
- Forty-seven percent of students admitted to being a bully.
- Seventy-two percent of students said they've seen a bullying situation and not intervened.

Publics

Key Publics

1. Students in grades six, seven, and eight who are bullied at Rootstown Middle School: This group of preteens and teenagers is on the receiving end of bullying. Children can be bullied because of many factors, such as weight, disabilities, and social status. They may experience trauma brought on by verbal, relational, and physical bullying, as well as cyberbullying. It's important for them to understand the options available for guidance and assistance.

2. Bullies in grades six, seven, and eight at Rootstown Middle School: Students who express repeated use of aggression and power create the problem for other students. These bullies continue the cycle until a proper solution can be implemented. If no solution is discovered, the problem continues.

3. Students in grades six, seven, and eight who witness bullying at Rootstown Middle School: Witnesses to bullying may be afraid to offer help or alert an authority figure. They may fear being taunted by their peers or upsetting the bully further. Any refusal to report the bullying to a teacher or administrator only gives the bully more power.

4. Teachers of grades six, seven, and eight at Rootstown Middle School: As the heads of the classroom, teachers can witness bullying more often than other district employees. They spend more time alone with students than the school's administrative staff. The actions teachers take when they witness bullying can often determine its duration. Teachers must not trivialize bullying. They must know how to spot it and initiate appropriate actions to terminate bullying.

5. Parents of students in grades six, seven, and eight at Rootstown Middle School: Mothers, fathers, and legal guardians do not always know how to address the situation when their child is being bullied. Initially, they may not know how to spot key signs of bullying. If they are uneducated on how to handle the problem, then the bullying may continue or escalate. Parents who are educated about bullying act as opinion leaders to their children.

Additional Publics

1. Administration at Rootstown Middle School: Principal Rob Campbell and guidance counselor Corry Knopick possess a high level of authority in the school. They are not often aware of bullying until it reaches a certain degree of urgency.

2. Local Media, including the Record-Courier, Kent Patch, and the Akron Beacon Journal: Local media will be key opinion leaders to reach parents and community members in the Rootstown School District.



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Key Messaging

Students

1. Bystanders can make a difference.
2. There's a difference between bullying and teasing.
3. Your friends. Your classmates. Your responsibility.

Parents, Teachers, and Administrators

1. Bullying is a far-reaching issue that affects children of all ages, races, and locations.
2. Though no program can be 100 percent effective in preventing bullying, a good program can increase the role of bystanders in bullying situations and help teachers and administrators learn to spot bullying.
3. Parents of bullied children have a high level of control over the long-term effects of bullying on their children.

Goals, Objectives, Strategies, Tactics, and Outcomes

OBJECTIVE ONE: To increase understanding among sixth, seventh, and eighth graders at Rootstown Middle School about the options they have as bystanders to bullying by 15 percent within one month.

Strategy: Electronic communication to students

Rationale: In a 21st century classroom, students are accustomed to using technology in and out of the classroom. Using electronic communication is more appealing than traditional communication for these technologically-driven learners.

Tactic: The Bateman Blue team created a series of short anti-bullying videos to play during lunch periods at Rootstown Middle School (A3). The videos were posted on the *Pledge to Prevent* Facebook and Twitter pages for additional reach. Videos featured common bullying scenarios, such as bus stop bullying, hallway bullying, and cyberbullying. Each video delivered a statistic about bullying at the end to elevate its emotional impact. One video was released each day during *Pledge to Prevent* week.

Result: According to statistics from the host site, Vimeo, the videos received 59 total views throughout the campaign. Additionally, the children looked forward to the videos, commonly asking if Bateman Blue was "playing a movie" each day.

Strategy: Printed educational materials for students

Rationale: Team members were available to students in the school for three hours a day throughout *Pledge to Prevent* week. The printed educational materials, however, were left at the school to serve as a constant reminder for the students to be proactive bystanders to bullying.

Tactic: The team designed two posters to hang in the halls at Rootstown Middle School (A4). One of the posters portrayed a cartoon drawing of a bus with a "BULLYING STOPS HERE" stop sign. In the corner of the poster, there was a cartoon of two kids in a physical fight. A second poster was designed featuring the logo "Your friends. Your classmates. Your responsibility." To play off of "Your responsibility," the poster included techniques for acting as a proactive bystander and highlighted that 72 percent of students at the middle school say they have recently been bullied.

Result: A total of 85 posters were hung in the halls of the school.

Tactic: Kent's Bateman team sponsored a poster drawing contest for the students on the first day of *Pledge to Prevent* week. The team gave students a sheet of paper and encouraged the students to create a poster



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portraying how a bystander could stand up and diffuse bullying situation. Designs for the contest were due on Friday, Feb. 25, and the Bateman Blue team announced a winner from each grade the following Monday. For incentive, the winning students received a free ticket to any movie at a local theater.

Result: Eight students received prizes for submitting drawings.

Tactic: The team handed out stickers featuring a list of seven bystander techniques (A8). The students were instructed to place the sticker on a folder, notebook, or textbook cover of their choice.

Result: Bateman Blue created and passed out bystander technique stickers to every student who attended their lunch period on Friday, Feb. 22.

Tactic: Bateman Blue created a large 24" x 24" anti-bullying stop sign to hang in the main entrance at Rootstown Middle School (A4). The large red stop sign mirrors the one in the cartoon poster previously discussed and reads "BULLYING STOPS HERE."

Strategy: Face-to-face communication with students

Rationale: Face-to-face interaction is crucial when it comes to influencing children. The team spent an average of three hours a day in the school interacting with students during *Pledge to Prevent* week. Additionally, the use of prizes encouraged students to participate in the daily activities.

Tactic: Bateman Blue team members were present in the lunchroom at Rootstown Middle School from Feb. 19 - 22 and Feb. 25. Each day, the team showed one of its anti-bullying videos over a projector and played games to interact with the students (A3). The students were encouraged to play the games because prizes were available for winners.

Result: Bateman Blue conducted post-implementation surveys to determine the effectiveness of its lunchroom presence at Rootstown Middle School (A47).

Strategy: Face-to-face communication with students from opinion leaders

Rationale: During *Pledge to Prevent* week, the students were constantly exposed to anti-bullying and bystander information. Face-to-face communication from opinion leaders will serve to reinforce the campaign's messaging.

Tactic: Bateman Blue created a basic anti-bullying lesson plan to leave with teachers to use at their convenience. The lesson plan included handouts for students and a take-home sheet for parents. The lesson focuses on how students can act as a bystander.

OBJECTIVE ONE EVALUATION-- EXCEEDED

When compared to the benchmark survey, post-implementation survey results found that sixty-five percent of students said they felt "more aware" of what to do as a bystander. Additionally, testimonials (A49) reassured that the students had taken away valuable tips from the presentations.

OBJECTIVE TWO: To educate 60 parents and community members with information about how to talk to a child about bullying.

Strategy: Written communication sent home to parents

Rationale: Students spend an average of seven hours a day at school, but once they go home, it's important that the same positive, anti-bullying messages continue.



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Tactic: During the campaign, parents received three letters from Kent's Bateman Blue team (A14). The first letter explained the campaign and included statistics about bullying to appeal emotionally to parents. Parents were asked to sign and return the first letter. The grade with the highest number of returned, signed letters would win a pizza party. The second letter served as a mid-week update during *Pledge to Prevent* week and talked about what the team did at the school. The final letter gave parents an evaluation of the campaign.

Result: Forty-one parents returned the first letter to the school, pledging to talk to their child about bullying.

Strategy: Face-to-face communication with parents

Rationale: Letters to parents don't always make it home, so having a way to reach parents face-to-face was necessary.

Tactic: Bateman Blue hosted information tables at two parent and community events to directly reach parents. The first event was the Parent and Community Meeting on Bullying and School Safety Feb. 26 at Rootstown High School. The second was at Rootstown Middle School's parent-teacher conferences Feb. 28. The table included a display with Rootstown-specific bullying statistics and information about how parents can talk to children about bullying. When parents approached the table, Kent's Bateman Blue team was able to interact with them, encouraging them to sign pledge cards and discussing the recent anti-bullying initiatives in the school.

Result: Eighteen of the estimated 50 parents who visited the table signed pledge cards.

Strategy: Social media communication for parents

Rationale: Most of the targeted students for the *Pledge to Prevent* campaign were too young to legally use social media. Instead, Bateman Blue focused on reaching parents and community members who could talk to children about bullying

Tactic: For the *Pledge to Prevent* Campaign, Facebook and Twitter pages for parents and community members were created (A19). The page hosted links to bullying information and tips, the team's press coverage, and the short anti-bullying videos the team created.

Result: The *Pledge to Prevent* Facebook page received 160 likes, and the Twitter page received 13 followers. Additionally, a Facebook pledge on Feb. 27 had 25 people agree to talk to a child about bullying.

OBJECTIVE TWO EVALUATION-- EXCEEDED

Kent's Bateman Blue team reached parents in multiple ways. The first was through parent letters, which went home with every child at the school. A total of 41 parents signed and returned the letters to the middle school. Second, parents and community members could learn about *Pledge to Prevent* by visiting the Facebook and Twitter pages. Twenty-five parents and community members pledged to talk to their children about bullying through Facebook. Additionally, 18 parents signed physical pledge cards agreeing to talk to their children about bullying. Combining each tactic, the team reached a total of 84 parents, which is a 40 percent better reach than expected.

OBJECTIVE THREE: To inform 10 teachers and school administrators at Rootstown Middle School about how to spot bullying and what to do to stop or prevent bullying situations within one month.

Strategy: Electronic communication to teachers and administrators

Rationale: Teachers who were aware of what was going on during *Pledge to Prevent* week could use the opportunity to talk about bullying in their classrooms and reinforce the campaign's messaging.



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Tactic: Before *Pledge to Prevent* week began, an email message was sent from the administration to all teachers at Rootstown Middle School to explain the upcoming program.

Result: The email was sent to every teacher and administrator at Rootstown Middle School.

Strategy: Face-to-face communication with teachers

Rationale: Teachers are very busy and often receive many emails from their school and students' parents. A face-to-face meeting was a good way to guarantee they were exposed to the *Pledge to Prevent* messaging.

Tactic: Members of the Bateman Blue team attended a scheduled staff meeting at Rootstown Middle School on Feb. 26 to encourage teachers to sign pledge cards, reinforce the messages of the campaign, and introduce the lesson plans (A10).

Result: Eighteen teachers signed pledge cards at the staff meeting.

OBJECTIVE THREE EVALUATION-- EXCEEDED

Kent's Bateman Blue team successfully inspired 18 teachers to sign pledge cards. At a staff meeting on Feb. 26, more than 20 faculty members heard a presentation about *Pledge to Prevent*. The presentation provided teachers and faculty with insight about how to spot if children are being bullied and the correct actions to take. The team also explained the bystander lessons it taught to students. Once the team was finished implementing during lunches, it presented Rootstown teachers with an anti-bullying lesson plan. The plan incorporated aspects like cyberbullying and bystander techniques. When Rootstown teachers conduct the lesson, Bateman Blue's efforts will continue to make a positive difference in the school.

OBJECTIVE FOUR: To earn media coverage about the campaign from at least three separate media outlets within six weeks.

Strategy: Press releases for local and in-school media

Rationale: Media coverage was effective in building awareness of the campaign among students, parents, and community members.

Tactic: Bateman Blue created a pre-implementation press release about plans for *Pledge to Prevent* week. The team submitted the press release to local media outlets, including the Record-Courier, the Akron Beacon Journal, and Kent Patch (A23).

Result: The press release was published verbatim by all three media outlets. The release was highlighted on the front page of Kent Patch.

Tactic: The team created a post-implementation press release about *Pledge to Prevent* week and pitched the release directly to reporters who have covered similar events (A24).

Result: The press release and pitch letters resulted in a front-page, above-the-fold story on Bateman Blue's campaign in the Record-Courier.

Tactic: Kent's Bateman Blue team created a radio press release for the Horizontal View, a radio show on Kent State University's Black Squirrel Radio (A25).

Result: The press release generated a 60-second story about the *Pledge to Prevent* campaign.



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OBJECTIVE FOUR EVALUATION-- EXCEEDED

Kent's Bateman Blue team surpassed its goal and received coverage in five local media outlets. The team pitched a story to the Record-Courier, resulting in a front-page weekday article. This newspaper has a reach of nearly 100,000 readers in the greater Portage County area. The Daily Kent Stater also published an article about the campaign. The team's press release ran on the front page of Kent Patch as well.

Additionally, the team received coverage in the following media outlets:

- The Akron Beacon Journal (Online)
- The Record-Courier (Online)
- KentWired.com
- TV2 at Kent State University
- The Horizontal View on Black Squirrel Radio

Kent State's College of Communication and Information published an article about the team's campaign on its website. Information about the Pledge to Prevent campaign was also featured in the Kent PRSSA newsletter, as well as a listserv email to all current public relations majors and university alumni.

Obstacles

Obstacle One

The team chose to implement its campaign primarily during student lunch periods so as to not interrupt the learning process; however, students only had 30 minutes for lunch. By the time all students bought their lunches, the team had approximately 15 minutes at most to interact with the students. The short interaction time was an issue, especially when students weren't receptive. The students were energetic, and the team didn't receive much administrative support to quiet the students.

The team used its first day with the students to introduce the Pledge to Prevent campaign. For lunch periods, the students are split by grade level, which allowed the team to adapt its tactics to fit the different ages. The team planned its lessons based on how much time it had with the students the first day. Each lesson had a different theme, including bystanders and cyberbullying.

Obstacle Two

Rootstown Middle School lacked an online presence. Not only was its website difficult to navigate, but it was not updated. The school also didn't have any social media accounts, so the team had no way to infer which social media platform would be best for its campaign. Also, because most middle schoolers are under 13, the legal age to use social media websites, the team did not want to rely on social media to reach children.

While the team couldn't update the school website or ask the administrators to make a Facebook post promoting the campaign, Kent's Bateman Blue team created its own Facebook and Twitter pages for the *Pledge to Prevent* campaign to reach parents and community members in Rootstown.

Obstacle Three

Rootstown Middle School is located approximately 20 minutes away from Kent State University's campus. While it's not far, it was a slight problem because only two of Bateman Blue's five group members had cars.

To overcome this obstacle, the team made sure to plan transportation as far in advance as possible. Bateman Blue team members compared schedules for the week prior to implementation and found student volunteers to drive when neither of the two team members with cars was available.



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Budget Summary

Expenses

Bateman Blue used \$287 of its \$300 budget. A majority of the funds went to purchase supplies for tactics, including card stock, stickers, display boards, and construction paper. The team also spent money to print posters and casebooks at FedEx Office. The money also paid for a portion of the pizza party the eighth graders received for turning in the most parent pledges. From the start, Bateman Blue set aside \$50 in case it ran into an emergency that required extra money.

In-Kind Donations

Bateman Blue used \$498 of the \$1,000 in-kind donation budget. Most of the budget went toward prizes for student participation and paper copies for evaluation purposes and student participation. The team also kept \$150 of its in-kind donations aside in case of emergency.

Conclusion

Kent State University's Bateman Blue team arrived at Rootstown Middle School with the challenge to decrease bullying. To implement its strategies, the team came up with 15 tactics, including informational videos and games, posters, lesson plans, social media outreach, and media coverage, to help the school meet the challenge.

The team's objectives were to increase awareness of bystander techniques by 15 percent, to encourage 10 teachers to address bullying in the classroom, to educate 60 parents about how to deal with bullying and to receive three unique pieces of media coverage. In all cases, Bateman Blue exceeded its goal.

The *Pledge to Prevent* campaign empowered students, parents, teachers, and community members to take a stand against bullying. By the end of implementation, Bateman Blue received pledges from 209 students, 18 teachers, and 84 parents and community members. That means that more than 70 percent of the students and 75 percent of the teachers will proactively try to stop bullying in the school. Additionally, 72 percent of the students said they learned more bystander techniques and would now be comfortable preventing bullying as a bystander.

Rootstown Middle School is part of the Rootstown School District, which has one campus with separate buildings for high school, middle school, and elementary school students. Kent's Bateman Blue team left middle school administrators with posters, lesson plans, and information about the campaign for future reference, as well as statistics from the benchmark and post-implementation surveys. Because the campaign was successful at the middle school, administrators could easily adapt and implement Pledge to Prevent at the high school or elementary school.