

SHOULD MIAMI-DADE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS INCLUDE  
SELF-DEFENSE INSTRUCTION FOR K-12 CURRICULUM  
TO COMBAT BULLYING?

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As a parent of a victim of bullying, I am truly grateful for the opportunity to bring awareness to the importance of an anti-bullying message that included personal stories, community support, and resources to combat bullying. Words cannot express my gratitude and appreciation for my daughter Jessica, who encouraged me to develop and promote an anti-bullying project, designed to encourage others to take a stand against bullying. I would like to thank my brave students, Brielle Archellus, and Jamari Bell, for sharing their personal stories which created a sense of synergy to the story. Next, I would like to thank the professional experts, Antony Harris, Lynda Roberts, and Garry Graham. They provided valuable information and credible interviews in support of this project.

I am eternally grateful for my family members, special friends, social media followers, Conversations with Charito, LLC, Excitement Radio Station, United Teachers of Dade, and Miami-Dade County Public Schools for assisting with the promotion of the story. I would also like to thank my Full Sail University classmates, technical support team, and alumni for endless Full Sailor support. I would like to extend my sincere gratitude and appreciation to my professors, Jeff Sharon, Dr. James Carstens and Dr. Greig Powers. They provided insightful feedback, constructive criticism, patience, and professional encouragement in support of a graduate level project.

Finally, I want to give a self-congratulatory message in loving memory of my father, Robert L. Henley, Sr., my guardian angel, and my inspiration. Daddy I did it!

## ABSTRACT

Throughout the United States bullying is known as a serious problem for school districts, communities, and community organizations, serving youth populations in low socioeconomic communities serving Miami-Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS). This project provided actual stories of two middle school victims of bullying that chose to defy the odds of victimization and turn tragedy into triumph.

A detailed multimedia project used videos, photos, infographics and a print article designed to reveal personal stories, reactions, and best practices in support of the need for a revised curriculum to combat bullying in a South Florida school district. The story was presented by using personal stories from victims and experts, inclusive of data and statistics in support of efforts to combat bullying in middle-school aged youth. Analysis of traffic to the host website showed a high degree of interest from United Teachers of Dade (UTD), the largest teacher's union in the State of Florida.

## CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

### **Problem Statement**

Bullying and peer victimization in Miami-Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS) are serious concerns for students, parents, educators, and school officials in South Florida. Bullying has been an issue of concern to many educators for several decades in the United States (Gage, Lee, et, al 2019). Bullying involves millions of people without regard to race, sex, or demographics, and occurs at any school setting either on campus or off campus. The use of technology as a means of communication during the current pandemic has led to an increase in verbal, social, physical, and cyber bullying. (Englander, 2021).

Self-defense classes, such as martial arts or karate, are usually offered by private companies or provided through an advocate diversion program after a person becomes a victim of bullying or the aggressor is charged with the criminal act of bullying. Fees and costs associated with participation and certification of professional self-defense classes may pose a problem for minorities receiving public assistance with a fixed incomes residing in low socioeconomic areas of urban school districts, like Miami-Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS). M-DCPS is the largest school district in Florida, and the fourth largest district in the nation. A diverse population of minorities, from low-income to middle income, with more than 35,000 employees, 340,000 K-12 students, inclusive of Title I Schools; whereas Title I provides federal funding to support effective, evidence-based educational strategies that close the achievement gap and enable the students to meet the state's challenging academic standards. (M-DCPS *Statistical Highlights 2019-2021*).

## **Purpose of the Project**

The purpose of the project is to promote a public policy issue to include a self-defense curriculum for K-12 instruction at MDCPS, in an effort to deter youth from bullying, becoming a victim of bullying, or victims of suicide as a result of bullying. The purpose of the development of a PSA (Public Service Announcement) utilizing a victim of bullying, and an interview with a victim of bullying sharing their personal stories and suggestions provided awareness and attention to the need for an alternative method of bullying prevention via school-aged children enrolled in the local school district.

According to the U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, School Crime Supplement (SCS) to the National Crime Victimization Survey (2019) "In 2019, about 22 percent of students ages 12–18 reported being bullied at school during the school year, which was lower than the percentage reported in 2009 (28 percent). In 2019, about 16 percent of students in grades 9–12 reported being electronically bullied during the previous 12 months."

## Conceptual Framework

Information provided by the Centers for Disease Control in the research pamphlet *The Relationship Between Bullying and Suicide: What We Know and What it Means*, 2014 responds to problems of bullying and suicide-related behavior concluded the following: “The bottom-line of the most current research findings is that being involved in bullying in any way—as a person who bullies, a person who is bullied, or a person who both bullies and is bullied (bully-victim)—is ONE of several important risk factors that appears to increase the risk of suicide among youth.” According to the CDC Bullying Fast Facts (2019), “Students who experience bullying are at an increased risk for depression, anxiety, sleep difficulties, lower academic achievement, and dropping out of school. When students are subjected to bullying, the impacts are usually varied and can create numerous challenges not only to the affected children but to the parents as well.

## Significance of the Project

The current Florida Statute 1006.147, adopted due to a bullying suicide, became law, known as *Jeffrey Johnston Stand Up for All Students Act* requires school districts in Florida to adopt an official policy prohibiting bullying and harassment of students. “Providing evidence-based instruction that promotes preventive self-defense while incorporating character building, conflict resolution, and social-emotional skills, will decrease the number of victims affected by bullying and deter bullying in K-12 educational settings in Florida.” (Gage, Lee, et, al 2019) explained that utilizing the School Wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports program solely may not have a long-term effect, but by integrating evidence-based bullying prevention and intervention programs has the probability of producing positive outcomes with anti-bullying and behavioral bullying. According to the phone interview, Lynda Roberts, North Miami Beach Police Department Athletic League (PAL) and Florida State-Wide PAL Coordinator explained that “Our job is to protect and serve as law enforcement officials, but we also have to consider the fact that some bullying incidents end in school shootings and homicides. We have to ensure that the youth served in our programs receive bullying prevention education to prevent incidents from occurring in our schools. An innocent life lost to senseless gun violence is never acceptable to any family member. No one ever reaches a level of understanding, they only seek closure and someone to be convicted or take responsibility in the loss of their loved one, especially if it was caused by bullying, which can be prevented” (Henley, 2022).



## CHAPTER TWO LITERATURE REVIEW

### **Introduction to the Literature**

While most sources for this project were personal interviews, the majority of the literature from which the information is based are statistics, resources, and information on bullying from the U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, Center for Disease Control, and Miami-Dade County Public Schools. These not only include bullying statistics, facts, and resources from Miami-Dade County Public Schools, but also from across the state.

### **Review of the Literature**

#### **Interviews**

Several individuals were interviewed in an effort to capture the importance of bullying prevention and intervention. It is the sole responsibility of school administration, staff, social workers, and school resource officers to maintain a safe learning environment for students during academic and recreational activities throughout the school day. The experiences of best practices coupled with resilience shared by the two victims of bullying, local school administrator, law enforcement program official, and certified mental health counselor were invaluable examples related to the effects of bullying on middle school-aged children:

Brielle Archellus, a middle school aged youth whom was a victim of bullying shared her personal story of her unfortunate incident, but changed her perspective by fighting back to protect herself from the bully.

Jamari Bell, middle school aged student, felt uncomfortable sharing his bullying

incident. However, his self-esteem was boosted by making his first video debut with a message about bullying utilizing a PSA.

Anthony Harris, retired professional football player, shared his personal account of being a bully during his adolescent years by way of sporting activities. Due to a change in careers and life-changing events led him to channeling positive resources, discipline and activities designed to deter at-risk youth, from becoming the aggressor or victim of bullying as a Dean of Students responsible for discipline at a local school in South Florida.

Lynda Roberts, North Miami Beach Police Department Athletic League (PAL) and Florida State-Wide PAL Coordinator explained the importance of law enforcement officials' duty to protect and serve as well as being cognizant of how bullying incidents, school shootings and homicides affect children in urban and rural settings.

Garry Graham, Mental Health Counselor, discussed the effects on childhood bullying and how it is affecting adults that experienced bullying during their adolescent years.

## **Articles**

According to the U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, School Crime Supplement (SCS) to the National Crime Victimization Survey (2019) "In 2019, about 22 percent of students ages 12–18 reported being bullied at school during the school year, which was lower than the percentage reported in 2009 (28 percent). Similarly, according to the CDC (2019), "1 in 5 youth ages 12-18 reported being bullied in the past year". Victims of bullying may endure name calling, threats, and intimidation over an extended period, while many incidents go unreported out of fear or embarrassment.

The article “How to Handle the Adult Bully in Your Life” by Sandee LaMotte of CNN, supports the mental health counselors summation that adults serving as bullies, are the likely victims of childhood bullying, troubling childhood experiences, and adolescent bullying.

### **EBSCO**

The research article by Ellen DeLara of Syracuse University *Consequences of Childhood Bullying on Mental Health and Relationships for Young Adults* in the Journal of Child and Family Studies, discussed the need for expanded research by health care providers, supporting the impact of childhood bullying, and the effects of behaviors lasting into adult life is essential.

Information provided by the CDC in the research pamphlet *The Relationship Between Bullying and Suicide: What We Know and What it Means* developed in 2014 to respond to problems of bullying and suicide-related behavior concluded the following: “The bottom-line of the most current research findings is that being involved in bullying in any way—as a person who bullies, a person who is bullied, or a person who both bullies and is bullied (bully-victim)—is ONE of several important risk factors that appears to increase the risk of suicide among youth.”

Further, the CDC (2019) reports that, “Students who experience bullying are at an increased risk for depression, anxiety, sleep difficulties, lower academic achievement, and dropping

## **Summary**

Bullying has been a problem for decades in urban and rural communities whereas school districts, law enforcement officials, community-based, and non-profit organizations have mastered the art of providing bullying prevention workshops and curriculums (Gage, Lee, et, al 2019). Although anti-bullying systems are available at no cost to the participants, self-defense classes and curriculums designed to combat bullying are available for nominal fees. “Providing evidence-based instruction that promotes preventive self-defense while incorporating character building, conflict resolution, and social-emotional skills, will decrease the number of victims affected by bullying and deter bullying in K-12 educational settings in Florida.” (Gage, Lee, et, al 2019) explained that utilizing the School Wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports program solely may not have a long-term effect, but by integrating evidence-based bullying prevention and intervention programs has the probability of producing positive outcomes with anti-bullying and behavioral bullying.

## CHAPTER THREE METHODOLOGY AND RESULTS

### **Project Development**

After a horrifying bullying incident experienced by a quiet, shy, and impressionable young student, I was compelled to assist her in sharing her personal story in *Should Miami-Dade County Public Schools include Self-Defense Instruction for K-12 Curriculum to Combat Bullying?* (Henley, 2022) When stories related to a victim fighting back against bully are posted on social media platforms, many of the comments, if not all, display confirmations, words of encouragement, and more often than not, jargons of karma memes or congratulatory messages of triumph.

Why would this horrible experience spark celebratory responses? Because, in 1978, the first research on bullying in the United States was conducted by Dr. Dan Olweus, a research professor of psychology, recognized as the founding father and pioneer of bullying research. His earliest work with the Research Center for Health Promotion (HEMIL) at the University of Bergen in Norway highlighted his research on bullying in the book titled *Aggression in the Schools: Bullies and Whipping Boys*.

Nearly forty-four years later, issues of bullying still exist, proof of its four decades of lingering effects on individuals. As a parent, after hearing her story, I began to relive the grief and agony of my child being bullied during her adolescent years. Nearly ten years later, my daughter continues to express the importance of how a student can benefit from being taught the tactics of defending themselves against bullying.

The purpose of this capstone project is to promote a public policy issue to include self-defense instruction for K-12 instruction in Miami-Dade County Public Schools, in an effort to deter youth from bullying or youth becoming victims of bullying, or victims of suicide due to bullying.

### **Project Execution**

The story contains multimedia elements that feature two videos, one photo, one infographic, and a podcast. The story begins with a personal interview of a female victim of bullying. Brielle Archellus is an honor roll student, student residing in a low socioeconomic community who attends a local middle school in the fourth largest school district in the United States, Miami-Dade County Public schools. The story continues with an interview of another victim's personal story of being a victim of bullying.



Image 1. Screen Shot of Interview with Brielle Archellus posted on February 20 at [www.cwcnews.org](http://www.cwcnews.org)

The story transitions with an interview of another victim's personal story of being a victim of bullying. The male student, Jamari Bell, did not want to discuss his story in a video, instead, he preferred to talk about how it can be stopped. The idea of a public service announcement, as it related to his experience, boosted his self-esteem and gave him a sense of inclusion as a solution to the issue of bullying in schools.



Image 2. Screen Shot of Interview with Anthony Harris posted on February 20 at [www.cwcnews.org](http://www.cwcnews.org)

The story continues with an interview from Anthony Harris, a retired professional athlete, serving as a dean of students responsible for the safety and discipline at a local school in South Florida. According to Harris, as a former athlete, he reluctantly recalled using bullying tactics, which was a common practice during his adolescent years, to members of the opposing team in high school. This interview unveiled the realities of bullying, as it relates to adolescent bullying (Henley, 2022).

During the interview, Harris was quoted, “Students should be able to come to school without worrying about bullying, gangs or illegal drugs on campus.”

The infographic developed with eye-catching colors and facts on bullying provided the readers with statistics and definitions related to the project inclusive of resources, designed to help potential victims of bullying.



Figure 1. Screenshot of infographic posted on February 20 at [www.cwcnews.org](http://www.cwcnews.org)

Next, the story is followed by a phone interview with Lynda Roberts, Police Athletic League director and local coordinator of law enforcement led programs designed for at-risk middle-school aged youth. In the phone interview with Roberts, she



professed that, “Our job is to protect and serve as law enforcement officials, but we also have to consider the fact that some bullying incidents end in school shootings and homicides. We have to ensure that the youth served in our programs receive bullying prevention education to prevent incidents from occurring in our schools. An innocent life lost to senseless gun violence is never acceptable to any family member. No one ever reaches a level of understanding, they only seek closure and someone to be convicted or take responsibility in the loss of their loved one, especially if it was caused by bullying, which can be prevented (Henley, 2022).

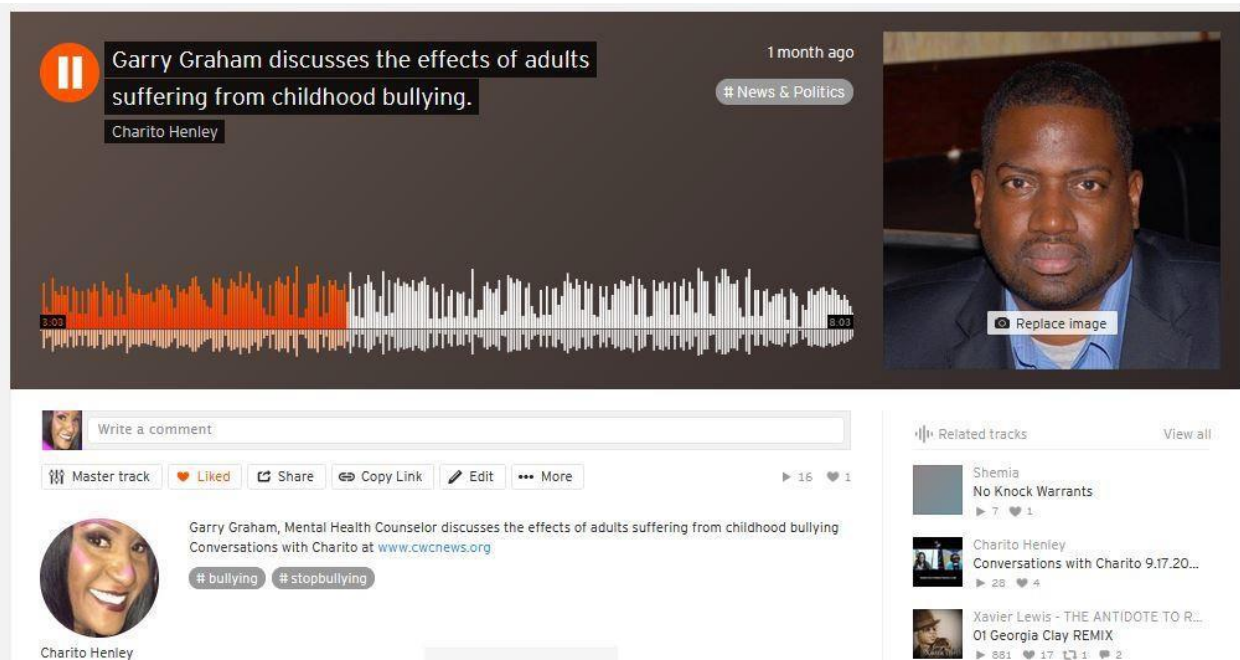


Figure 2. Screenshot of interview with Garry Graham and Conversations With Charito Podcast on SoundCloud.

The project concluded with a podcast interview with Garry Graham, mental health counselor at Graham Counseling & Consulting, LLC in New York, who discussed counseling services and the long-term effects of bullying in adults who were victims of bullying. (Quinn, 2015)

## Project Distribution

This project was promoted on Twitter, LinkedIn, and Facebook, with the initial post promotion in February 2022. Twitter was used as the primary social media platform for the initial launch and distribution, by utilizing two surveys, and a PSA on Bullying. I created a sense of synergy on the topic of bullying, by developing a survey that posed a question utilizing the title of the capstone project. Although the surveys did not generate the desired outcomes of engagement, the launch post exceeded the expectations of impressions, and likes, well into the month of March 2022.






	<b>Charito</b> @Charito305_ · Feb 22 Brielle, sixth-grade honor student, from #LibertyCity faced a classroom bully and fought back! Click on the link for more details to her story. @StopBullyingGov #bullying #StopBullying cwcnews.org/2022/02/21/sho...	6,372	321	5.0%
	<b>Charito</b> @Charito305_ · Feb 22 #TuesdayFeeling #PiscesSeason #Pisces #Peace 🌸 #6FtQueen #plussizefashion #AmazonQueen 🍷 Swimwear: @Walmart pic.twitter.com/E0lunCtROX	164	8	4.9%
	<b>Charito</b> @Charito305_ · Feb 19 PSA: Stop Bullying youtu.be/6zV1H_xL7SI via @YouTube #bullying #BullyingIsCrime #StopBullying	153	5	3.3%
	<b>Charito</b> @Charito305_ · Feb 17 Should Miami-Dade County Public Schools include a self-defense #K-12 curriculum designed to combat #bullying? #StopBullying #teacher	218	15	6.9%
	<b>Charito</b> @Charito305_ · Feb 17 Should Miami-Dade County Public Schools include self-defense instruction for #K-12 Curriculum to combat #bullying? #StopBullying	107	6	5.6%

Image 3. Screen Shot Twitter Analytics from February 2022.

## Project Promotion

The story was published on CWCNews.org website. Prior to the release of the project, the PSA on Bullying was published on YouTube, then promoted on Twitter, in an effort to promote the project by utilizing the trending bullying prevention hashtags. The YouTube views totaled 27 during the month of February 2022, then slightly increased to 55 views during the month of March 2022. As Twitter was identified as the most effective way to promote stories, based on the analytics, the impressions during the initial launch reaching nearly 4,000 impressions, then increased dramatically to within 7 days to 6,372.

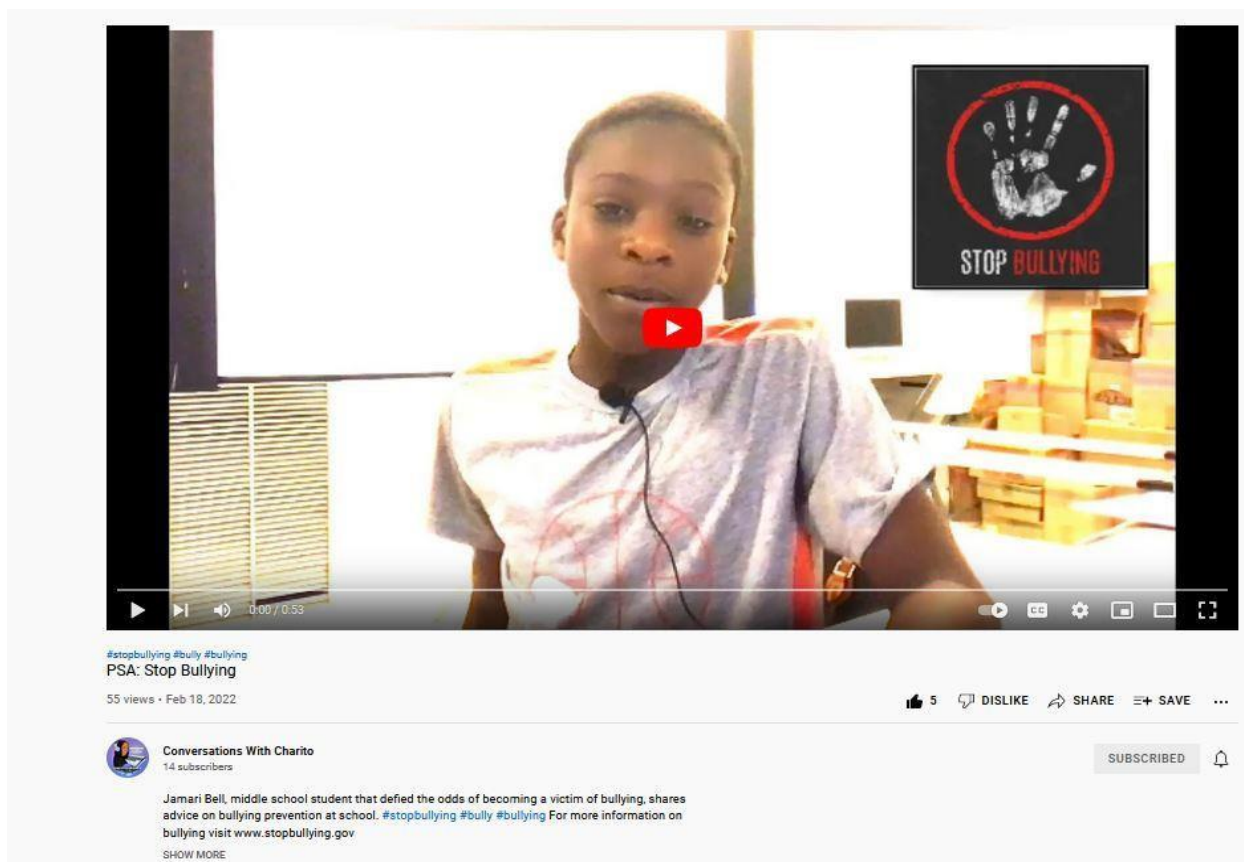


Image 4. Screen Shot You Tube PSA on Conversations With Charito February 18, 2022.

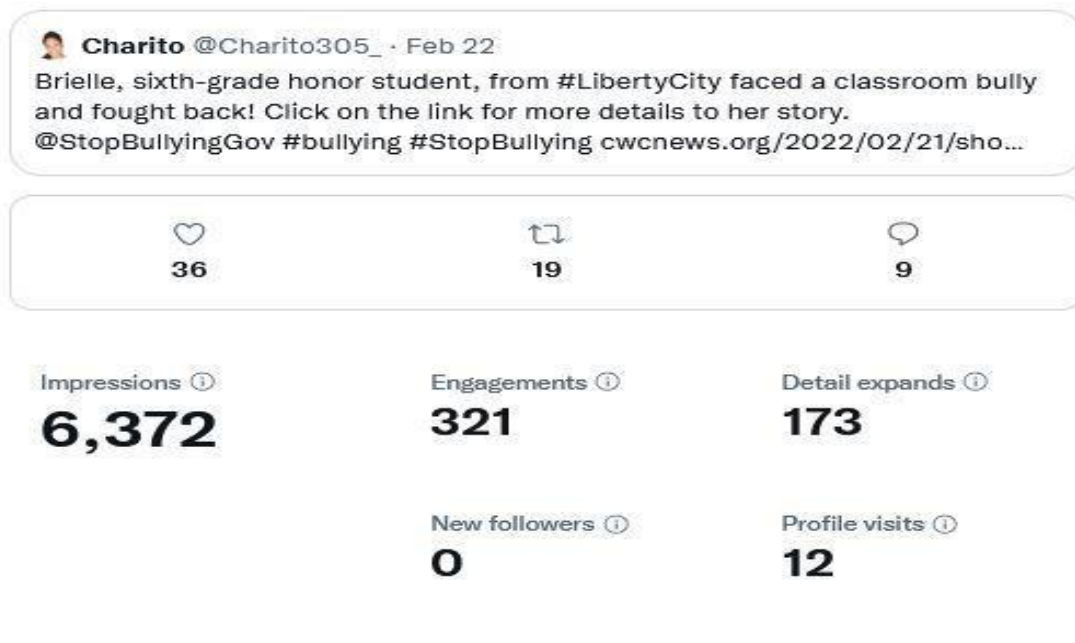


Image 5. Screen Shot Twitter Analytics February 2022.



Image6. Screen Shot of Launch Post on Twitter February 22, 2022.

## Project Results

The target audience for this story were members of the Miami-Dade County community of District 2, serving low socioeconomic areas of Miami-Dade County Public Schools. According to Word Press Stats and Insights, *Should Miami-Dade County Public Schools include self-defense instruction for K-12 Curriculum to Combat Bullying?* story has generated 168 views in February 2022 and 58 views in March 2022, with a combined total of 226 views.

The task of the thesis project involved a revision and update of the current website to appeal to the target audience: before creating a hyperlink post to the author's Twitter Page. The author also being the administrator of the page developed a PSA on bullying that enhanced the project by promoting a call to action via a victim's personal story of triumph. The capstone project was published on February 21, 2022.

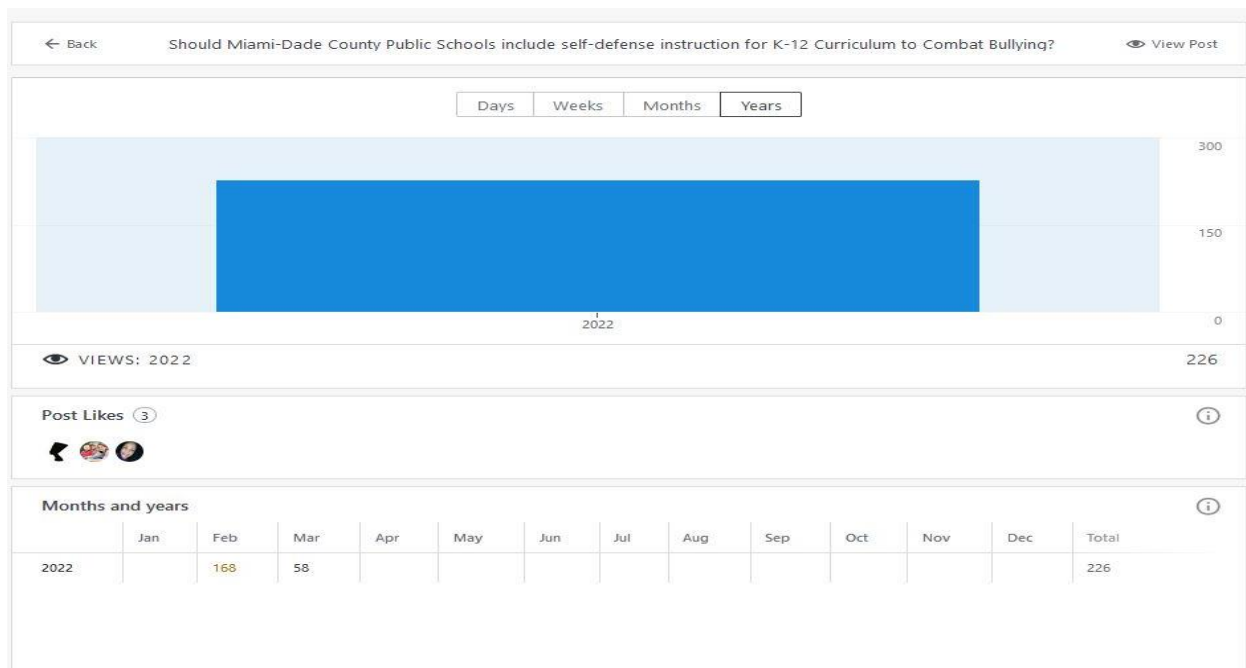


Image7. Screen Shot: Word Press Stats and Insights of Capstone Project published February 21, 2022.

## CHAPTER FOUR DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

### **Project Summary**

“Should Miami-Dade County Public Schools include self-defense instruction for K-12 Curriculum to Combat Bullying?” is a multimedia project consisting of videos and interviews that highlight victims of bullying, advocates of bullying prevention, and a counselor that specializes in mental health, inclusive of an infographic that captures facts on bullying.

The Twitter insights revealed that the story had 6,424 impressions, 321 engagements, 173 digital expands, and 12 profile visits on the first day of the release, inclusive of 35 likes, 19 retweets, and 9 comments. Although the analytics suggested that LinkedIn was the least visited social media site, the post received 8,559 views, 310 reactions and 35 comments. The post proved to be an interesting yet credible topic, evident by the retweets and comments, as well as 228 views to post via the website.

### **Reflection**

The process to develop the project was developed based on a student's unfortunate situation of becoming a victim of bullying during school hours. While the initial focus was to cover the stories of both victims, the male victim wanted to share his views on how he overcame the incident. As a result of this request, a PSA on Bullying was developed to allow the male victim the ability to express his views on bullying. Allowing the victims to share their personal views and stories gave them a sense of empowerment and inclusion which added credibility and value to the story. The studio

interviews with the local law enforcement official and dean of students, were conducted by utilizing questions developed prior to the interview sessions. As a result of this preparation, the interviews reached the desired outcome as the agenda was designed to stay on the topic of bullying and bullying prevention.

The biggest obstacle was the lighting used during the interviews. Ensuring that your equipment is working properly, and having a secondary or portable lighting is encouraged. The most effective strategy was to encourage parental involvement in the permission of each student to share their story, by obtaining release forms and including the views or concerns of the parents.

Prior to the release of the story, the PSA and surveys were posted to Twitter to promote some synergy on the topic of bullying. Although the surveys had minimal interaction, the popular and trending hashtags on bullying promoted the story on the day of the release.

### **Recommendations**

The first course of action is to identify a story based on a trending topic, historical event, or person. Next, research references that support the topic or current event, in order to provide credibility and clarity to a subject. Then, ensure videos, photos, and audio recordings are identified as your work or credit to the author responsible for the information.

Finally, select experts related to the topic, or individuals that have been affected by the topic or that could respond to the subject matter. Always conduct interviews with prepared questions and ensure to have an increased knowledge on the topic in the event the interviewee asks questions or the statistics provided lack credibility.

Prior to conducting analytics with various social media sites, post variations of topics and sample trending topics in an effort to gauge the variance of interaction and activity between suggested sites.



## **Conclusion**

Self-defense classes, such as martial arts or karate, are usually offered by private companies or provided through an advocate diversion program after a person becomes a victim of bullying or the aggressor.

However, fees and costs associated with participation or certification of the classes mentioned above may pose a problem for minorities residing in low socio-economic areas in urban school districts, like Miami-Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS). They have limited incomes or are receiving public assistance on a fixed income.

“Providing evidence-based instruction that promotes preventive self-defense while incorporating character building, conflict resolution, and social-emotional skills, will decrease the number of victims affected by bullying and deter bullying in K-12 educational settings in Florida.” (Gage, Lee, et, al 2019) explained that utilizing the School Wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports program solely may not have a long-term effect, but by integrating evidence-based bullying prevention and intervention programs has the probability of producing positive outcomes with anti-bullying and behavioral bullying.

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