

Cost of speaker is 'drop in the bucket'

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No matter which way you look at it, there's a cost to dealing with bullying in Austin.

Whether it's the pro-active \$20,000 goal of Community Against Bullying to bring the motivational speaker The Scary Guy to town or the various costs that add up on the reactive side when the school district has to deal with the aftermath of bullying.

"Our \$20,000 investment is going to be something that we can't even put a price tag on," said Danielle Borgerson-Nesvold of the anti-bullying group. "This could ultimately save some children's lives.

"The long-term effects of bullying is far more than \$20,000."

It's hard to determine a set amount for how much it costs for Austin Public Schools to deal with just one bully; the process is "incredibly complicated," said Dewey Schara, principal at Neveln Elementary School. Schara was also a middle school assistant principal for four years.

"It's a little more complicated than just saying, 'Boom, here's what happens,'" Schara said.

It depends on such factors as age of a student or if the student is in special education.

If a student bullies to the point of expulsion, that doesn't mean the cost to the district ends. It's usually when the price tag can start to rise because the district is still responsible for providing an education for students who are expelled.

"So expulsion isn't, you're kicked out of school," Schara said. "Expulsion means you can't go to school with everybody else.

"Expulsion means we send them to an alternative learning environment. That's very costly."

A personal tutor or a teacher could be hired to work with a student after hours. Another option is alternative programming for expelled students that Austin offers. The main cost for these options is salaries.

There can also be a toll on the legal system if student actions result in criminal acts. Many times teachers or other school personnel will have to take time out of the day to wait to get into court to deal with a situation.

The cost of bullying also can result in emotional and medical issues for those who are bullied. Schara has dealt with that in his job as an administrator.

"I'm the guy who gets the phone call when kids are cutting themselves," Schara said. "When parents are absolutely distraught and don't know what to do. And their child has just tried to commit suicide because their child is so picked on at school.

"When you have dealt with that, and I'm not talking about once or twice, I'm talking about Austin, when you are the one that has to deal with that and look at bullying in that light and the damage that it does, \$20,000 is a drop in the bucket."

Schara has also been active with Community Against Bullying.

The Scary Guy, who will be here Oct. 31-Nov. 11, was born in Minneapolis and grew up in New Hope, Minn. He stands 6 feet tall and has tattoos all over his face and body, a testament to his life experience and his personal journey, according to his website.

After legally changing his name to The Scary Guy in 1998, he started speaking to people about his mission: "The total elimination of hate, violence and prejudice worldwide." Since he started, he's worked with more than 7 million people around the world, teaching them how to create world peace.

"We have to change the way people think and change the culture," Schara said. "When the word bullying is said it needs to have the same negative connotations as a term like drunk driving."