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# Introduction

*Education, at best, is ecstatic. At its best, its most effective, its most unfettered, the moment of learning is a moment of delight. When joy is absent, the effectiveness of the learning process falls and falls until the human being is operating hesitantly, grudgingly, fearfully at only a tiny fraction of his potential.*

George Leonard, *Education and Ecstasy*

Those moments of learning, those moments of delight . . . that's what it's all about. The impact of a positive, safe, respectful learning environment on students' academic achievement is visible, and it's a joy to behold.

When kids are happy at school, they learn more. You've seen this. And while the challenges you face every day are all too real, STAND TALL offers the tools to implement a social and emotional classroom dynamic that helps students achieve at full potential.

With seven quick chapters and four evocative videos, STAND TALL builds three core competencies:

## **1. RESPECT for individual differences**

Everyone deserves to be treated with respect at school, and there are relevant civil rights and harassment laws that teachers must understand and implement. But even if these laws didn't exist, to quote George Leonard again, "the effectiveness of the learning process falls and falls" when kids feel disrespected.

## **2. DISCUSSION to further understanding**

Listening and learning from others with different perspectives is a critical 21st-century skill that kids need to learn. STAND TALL is structured to build teamwork, conflict resolution skills, and a strong learning community.

### 3. ACTION that transforms behavior

Speaking up when offended or disrespected is an important skill, and children in Grades 4–6 are at the most teachable age to develop it. Kids need to learn how to respond in constructive, effective, and safe ways when they experience or observe disrespect.

STAND TALL is based on sage advice from leading experts and my more than 30 years of teaching people about diversity, harassment, equal employment opportunity, and workforce change—developing techniques first used in front of fifth and sixth graders at Edward Jenner Elementary School, in Chicago. My students since then have been Fortune 500 business executives and folks who work in steel mills. My “classrooms” have been in Troy, Alabama; New York City; Oak Brook, Illinois; Monroe, Louisiana; Cincinnati, Ohio; Los Angeles, California; and just about everywhere in between. Some learning took place in perfectly outfitted conference rooms, and some in trailers that doubled as employee break rooms. The topics we covered are very close to what you’ll see in STAND TALL.

One of the skills I’ve *always* emphasized is how and when to speak up if offended. On thousands of postsession evaluation sheets, the most frequent comment by far has been about the value of learning how to handle disrespect: “I wish I would’ve learned this a long time ago.” “Using this skill could’ve helped me avoid a couple of really major fiascos.” “They should teach this to kids when they’re young.” That last one really got me.

We shouldn’t need national headlines about deadly bullying and student suicides to focus on respect for differences. But this truly has been a wake-up call. STAND TALL is a reply to violence . . . the violence of bullying and harassment.

*This will be our reply to violence: to make music more intensely,  
more beautifully, more devotedly than ever before.*

Leonard Bernstein

You can use STAND TALL to prevent harassment *and* strengthen the learning environment. Your students will enjoy the videos and classroom exercises, while building skills and tools that are critical for creating a strong classroom community.

This book includes a short and sweet summary of the legal responsibility to maintain a classroom environment free of harassment based on race, color, national origin, sex, religion, gender stereotype, or disability. Very few teachers have had any instruction

regarding hostile environment, protected classes, prompt corrective action, or liability issues. This is must-know information for all teachers. But even if it were not the law, teachers know that when kids are hurt or angry about name-calling, harassment, and bullying, they don't focus on schoolwork.

STAND TALL is devotedly positive. Teachers create amazing learning environments, often despite humongous challenges. Woven throughout this book are wonderful stories that inspire action, best practices, and practical suggestions to link STAND TALL lessons to curriculum standards for social studies, health, language arts, math, and art.

We know that kids achieve more academically in a positive learning environment. And, as Bill Gates reminds us, "We know that kids can change by the way teachers act." One of the most critical factors that impact students' academic achievement is whether they've had a good teacher. STAND TALL is a tool you can use to build a skill your students will use throughout their lives.

So it's my hope that STAND TALL will help you create a powerfully positive learning environment in which all students feel respected—and know how to handle disrespect when it rears its ugly head.