## Finland found a proven way to combat bullying. Here's what it'll take to make it work in the US

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By Dakin Andone, CNN

Medicine said young people were staring down a "serious public health problem." But it wasn't drugs they were worried about, or alcohol. It was bullying. Researchers have long looked for a way to prevent bullying in American schools, but the problem persists, and no one can seem to agree on a surefire way to address it.

(CNN) — In May, a report by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and

But Finland has piloted a program that has seen widespread success in combating bullying in schools. It's been translated and licensed to countries across Europe. But some

researchers say it wouldn't work in the US. **ADVERTISING** 

"The United States is a different beast," said Dorothy Espelage, a psychology professor at

Replay

The program is called KiVa - short for "kiusaamista vastaan," which means "against bullying." The Finnish government helped fund its development and it's now being used in schools throughout the country.

the University of Florida who studies bullying and harassment.

bullying.

others didn't.

What it is

It was developed by educators and researchers at the University of Turku, and multiple studies show it effectively curbs bullying by focusing on classes as a whole, instead of addressing individual bullies and their victims.

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"The idea is that kids bully to gain status and power," said Julie Hubbard, a psychology professor at the University of Delaware who's studying KiVa's effectiveness with American students.

According to its website, KiVa's curriculum uses lessons

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"If you can get the bystanders to focus on the victim and not the bully, then bullying isn't a

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and computer games to change that dynamic by focusing on bystanders who witness the

very rewarding thing to do," Hubbard said. The hope is that this fosters a culture where bullying is socially unacceptable. How effective is it

A 2016 study conducted by researchers at the University of California Los Angeles

surveyed more than 7,000 students between the 4th through 6th grades in nearly 80

Researchers found the program significantly helps victims of bullying, and data even

suggested KiVa could decrease depression in the victims and raise their self-esteem.

Finnish elementary schools. About half the schools received KiVa intervention while the

Schools in the US are too diverse

Why it falls short for US schools

diverse as the US public school system. "Finnish students are homogeneous economically, racially and culturally," Espelage, the University of Florida professor, said, "whereas US schools are distinctly diverse on socioeconomic status, ethnicity and religious background."

One of the reasons KiVa wouldn't work is because it wasn't developed for an audience as

According to Espelage, the social inequalities these students face - whether it be race or class - increase the risks of bullying. If kids have different races and different socioeconomic backgrounds, other kids are more likely to bully them

victims of bullying," Espelage said.

around those issues.

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white Finnish students.

similar cultures)," he said in an email.

The teachers are focused on other things

Schools in the US are resource-challenged

According to the National Center of Educational Statistics, the average racial make-up of American students in 2014 was 50 percent white, 25 percent Hispanic and 16 percent African American. The remaining nine percent consisted of Asians and Pacific Islanders,

"Kids that are in the minority of the school tend to be

Schools in the United States also have varying levels of funding and access to resources, and the problem is even more evident in predominantly African American and Hispanic neighborhoods where students are more likely to attend poorer schools, Espelage said. "Education is local," she said. "There's not going to be one program that fits all. It's going

to have to be tailored to the context." Todd Little, a psychology professor at Texas Tech University, helped conduct an early study of KiVa in Finland, back in 2011. He agreed with Espelage's assessment of the program, he

told CNN. "It worked in Finland but that is specific to the Finnish culture (and perhaps

Compare that to UCLA's study of KiVa, where all but 2.1 percent of the participants were

Hubbard, the University of Delaware professor who has completed her trial of KiVa in Delaware, said her data suggests the program can work, even across a variety of races and ethnicities. But the roadblocks to implementing a program like KiVa don't lie with the kids, she said. It's with the teachers. Her study has not been published yet, but she shared the racial breakdown of her sample.

The children in her study were 49 percent European American, 20 percent Hispanic American and 18 percent African American. Seven percent were of mixed race and six percent were Asian. She and her colleagues looked at KiVa's effectiveness across the board to see if they

differed by race. "Largely," she said, "the answer was no, we really did not see differences

Finnish teachers and American teachers. "Our data suggests that if teachers really implement KiVa it works well in the US for our children," Hubbard said. "But we had a lot more difficulty getting teachers to do it." **RELATED ARTICLE** 

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teachers to conduct 10 lessons over 20 hours - a huge time commitment many US teachers can't justify when they are teaching to prepare their students for standardized tests.

way."

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bullied by their own friends

by child or race ethnicity."

Another big difference is the value Finnish society places on teachers, Hubbard said. The "best and brightest" become teachers, and they're placed on the same level as doctors and lawyers, she said. "They value their teachers that way and they pay their teachers that

According to the National Institute of Justice, KiVa requires

She's more concerned with the differences between

2015 report by the Paris-based Organisation for Economic and Co-operation Development. Finnish students also face no national standardized tests, the OECD report said.

Finland has one of the best school systems in the world. It requires its teachers to have

children of varying socioeconomic backgrounds get equal opportunities, according to a

master degrees and the government provides free access to all levels of education so

Bullied kids suffer supposed to do so many things, and bullying prevention is academically, too, study says just another thing that's on the list." In Finland, schools placed high value on bullying prevention, and spent a lot of time and energy on it, she said.

What needs to change Change the focus of how we teach For bullying prevention programs to work, school districts and administrators need to see

that same value, and recognize it takes time and effort to work. "It's not a 30-minute

assembly at the beginning of the school year and then you check that box," Hubbard said.

They also need to recognize the advantage bullying prevention programs have not just for

"There is such a push on improving academic standards and test scores for our kids," Hubbard said. "But I think that then these initiatives that have to do with sort of social and

the well-being of children, but their academics as well.

Hubbard said. Move away from zero-tolerance policies **RESOURCES FOR HELP**  National Suicide Prevention Experts have long recommended moving away from zero-

She suggests anti-bullying advocates focus on funding research that takes into account the issues of our educational system and the diversity in our schools. she told CNN.

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"We know these programs are good if kids can see themselves reflected in the program,"

"school climate," she said, instead of individuals.

tolerance policies and towards evidence-based programs

what she's found in her research; it's important to focus on

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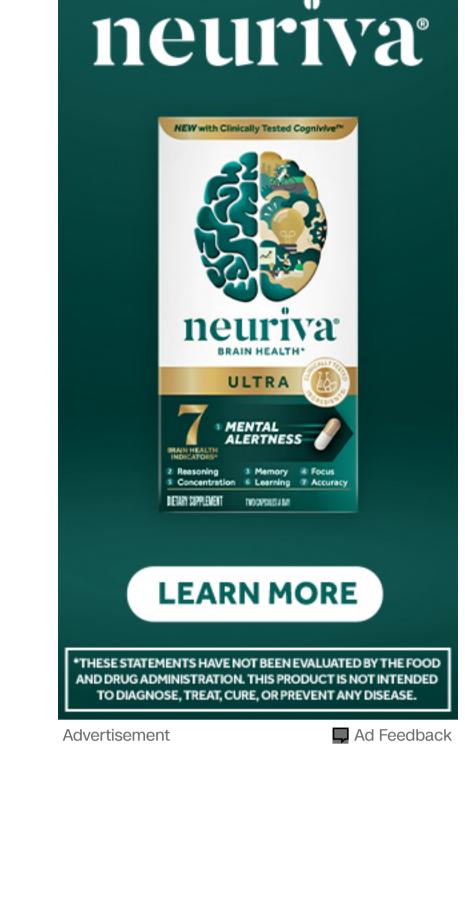
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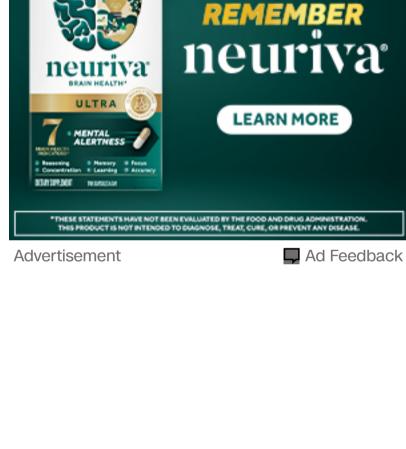
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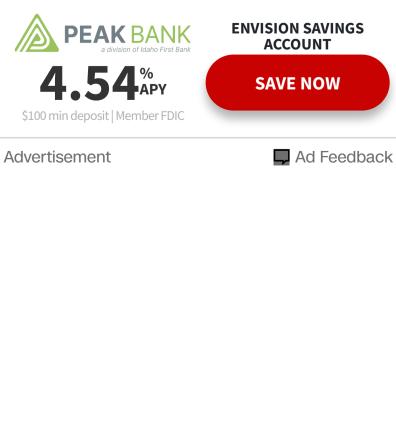


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Teachers in the United States are "bombarded" with expectations, Hubbard said. "They're supposed to do drug prevention, they're supposed to do sex education, they're

emotional learning and developing don't get as much attention." In order to convince school administrators to see the benefit of these programs, we need to emphasize that decreasing bullying helps academic performance and test scores,

"Remaining evidence-based is really important," Hubbard Trans Lifeline US: 1-877-565-8860 said. Canada: 1-877-330-6366 Crisis Text Line Espelage agreed teachers in the US simply aren't able to Text "741741" implement a program like KiVa, but agrees that it addresses

like KiVa.

Both Espelage and Hubbard agreed the burden of solving the issue of bullying in US schools is on researchers and advocates. CNN's Jamie Gumbrecht contributed to this report. **Paid Content Recommendations** 

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