BULLYING THREATENS STUDENTS’ PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL SAFETY AT SCHOOL AND NEGATIVELY IMPACTS THEIR ABILITY TO LEARN. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, approximately 1 out of every 5 students report being bullied. The key to prevention is to empower student bystanders to advocate on behalf of their targeted peers. Occurrences of bullying are reduced by more than half when fellow students choose to become UpStanders. Young people find that the active support of their peers is the most helpful form of intervention.

The Holocaust Center’s UpStanders: Stand Up to Bullying initiative inspires students to stand up for their peers and transform their schools into safe places where everyone is accepted and valued. Since 2010, thousands of middle school students in Central Florida have participated in the UpStanders Program. By studying the history and lessons of the Holocaust, students discover the ultimate cost of prejudice, discrimination, and social isolation. Long before the Final Solution, the Nazis attacked Jewish people with humiliating, dehumanizing insults and accusations designed to isolate them from the surrounding community. Bullies often engage in similar behaviors on a smaller scale. UpStander students are inspired by the true stories of rescuers who took risks to support their Jewish neighbors with the assistance they needed to survive the Nazi assault. The UpStanders Program inspires students to realize that they can make a difference for good through positive influence in the lives of others, thus improving and enriching the social climate of their school.

FOR THE PAST COUPLE YEARS, THE UPSTANDER’S PROGRAM HAS BEEN AN INTEGRAL PART OF THE JACKSON MIDDLE SCHOOL CURRICULUM. Through the programming available to our 6th and 7th grade students, we truly believe they learn valuable lessons to take with them as they grow and become young adults. Our students gain a fundamental respect for human rights and the dignity of all people, and recognize that diversity does not negate the common bonds of humanity shared by all. We hope to continue this partnership for years to come, and we look forward to working with the UpStanders group to ensure character development for our students.

—Tara Engold, 6th grade guidance counselor, Stonewall Jackson Middle School, Orlando, FL
The first phase of the UpStanders initiative is a field trip to the Holocaust Memorial Resource & Education Center in Maitland, Florida. Students are introduced to Holocaust history in a way that leads to an investigation of human behavior and an understanding of what it means to be a respectful person. They also explore how bias can escalate into violence and discover the power of speaking out against bullying.

Phase two is an in-class presentation conducted by Holocaust Center staff. Students are given a toolkit for how to recognize bullying and safe ways to intervene in bullying situations. The key to empowering students is transforming bystander behavior into ‘UpStander’ behavior.

During phase three, students attend an assembly where they hear the personal testimony of renowned speaker, John Halligan, whose son took his own life after being bullied in elementary and middle school. Mr. Halligan encourages students to think about the consequences of bullying as they relate to teen depression and society as a whole. Mr. Halligan is also available to do an evening program for parents focused on cyberbullying and how parents can work with school administrators to report and prevent bullying.

Phase four is an in-class presentation on the history and lessons of the Holocaust as they relate to the UpStander concept. Thousands of lives were saved during the Holocaust because of rescuers who recognized the injustice of Nazi persecution and were willing to take risks to protect their friends and neighbors, simply because it was the right thing to do. The Holocaust Center has developed curricula that draws a clear connection between bullying, perpetrator and bystander behaviors, and the Holocaust.

To ensure that bullying prevention efforts are successful, all school staff must be trained on what bullying is, what the school's policies are, and how best to support students involved in bullying situations. UpStanders schools have access to online trainings and ongoing consultation with the Holocaust Center's bullying prevention experts. Bullied students who have a caring adult they can talk to are less likely to develop health problems as a result of being bullied. Students who bully others benefit greatly from restorative practices that help them to acknowledge their aggressive behavior and work toward positive change.

School climate refers to the quality and character of school life. Successful bullying prevention programs transform a school's climate so that students, parents, and school personnel share a common vision of respect and safety. In addition to providing the core program components of the UpStanders Program, Holocaust Center staff work with schools to promote a positive school climate by developing after-school UpStanders Clubs, hosting PSA competitions, and displaying UpStanders posters on campus.

To learn more about the UpStanders initiative, call (407) 628-0555 or send an email to UpStanders@holocaustedu.org.