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Taking a STAND: Anti-bullying programs are finding success at Oakland schools districts

Tuesday, March 2, 2010

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Special to The Oakland Press

From the moment students walk into Our Lady of Sorrows Catholic Elementary School in Farmington Hills, they witness teachers and students using the anti-bullying language that permeates the school.

Soon enough, even a young kindergartener begins to partake in it.

Like other schools across Oakland County, Our Lady of Sorrows has included protocols and programs to address bullying and harassment in school. And, for this catholic elementary school with 800 students, the 10-second intervention helps empower children and maintain a safe learning environment.

Starting with children in preschool and kindergarten, teachers take advantage of teachable moments and walk students through the process of sharing their feelings and confronting situations that may be disturbing a child's ability to learn comfortably.

"We encourage them to use their feelings and to tell them "I saw" or "when you did this," said Melissa Lambrecht, associate principal in Our Lady of Sorrows' Early Childhood Center, explaining the language students use with the 10-second intervention.

"By the end of the year they certainly have the language down and are definitely able, with very little assistance, to advocate for themselves, to share their feelings and how that makes them feel."

One of the most important aspects of the 10-second intervention is that it allows those in the school to identify the negative behavior immediately, said Mariann Lupinacci, the principal at Our Lady of Sorrows. Children who may have acted rashly have a chance to think about what they've done, while victims and bystanders have a structured way to voice their concerns.

Most importantly, all parties have a chance to tell their side of the story.

"I would say the number one thing is they're thinking about what their actions have been and they're accountable for those actions," Lupinacci said. "They're responsible. They hold a responsibility to act in a certain way. They're held accountable for those actions. And they understand there are consequences for that."

Students, teachers and even parents support and participate in the 10-second intervention, Lupinacci said. And with practically the entire Our Lady of Sorrows school community taking part in the protocol, it creates a consistent environment.

"It gives kids a secure feeling to come to school," Lupinacci said. "They know that they have opportunity to feel protected to feel secure to feel safe and to be heard."

When students become active bystanders, they tell their peers what's really on their mind instead of shying away and hoping they don't get picked on, Lupinacci said.

As a means to teach students to be active bystanders at Baker Middle School in Troy, counselors talk to sixth graders at the beginning of the fall semester about victims, bullies and bystanders.

"It's all geared around how to identify and how to see the victim, the bully and the bystander through each of their eyes and what role a caring community takes in order to prevent bullying," said Marcia Gagnon, a teacher at Baker Middle School.

Students can write down incidents that they witnessed or have been victim to and put these notices in the bully boxes posted around the school, which are checked frequently by counselors who then follow up with the kids.

Every year, the middle school's students attend and put on an anti-bullying assembly where students write and perform skits that feature bullying scenarios. The school also brings in presentations from outside organizations that are specifically geared to addressing issues pertinent to the different grade levels.

"The role-playing they do gives them a chance to try on each characteristic, play a little short skit with their classmates and, for a moment, feel what it's like to be in one of those roles," Gagnon said.

The school's program has been going on for about 10 years, and it's helped cut down bullying, Gagnon said.

For the Arts and Technology Academy of Pontiac, a charter public school, finding ways for students to talk about the issues they have with one another has helped decrease bullying. Peer mediation is one way the teachers can have students confront each other before the situation escalates, said Michael Pettigrew, the school's behavioral intervention specialist.

“It causes those two parties to deal with each other directly,” Pettigrew said. “We have found out that some of the things they were dealing with, some of the thoughts that came to them, it wasn’t as bad as they thought because we were able to cut out the middle man and deal with them directly.”

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